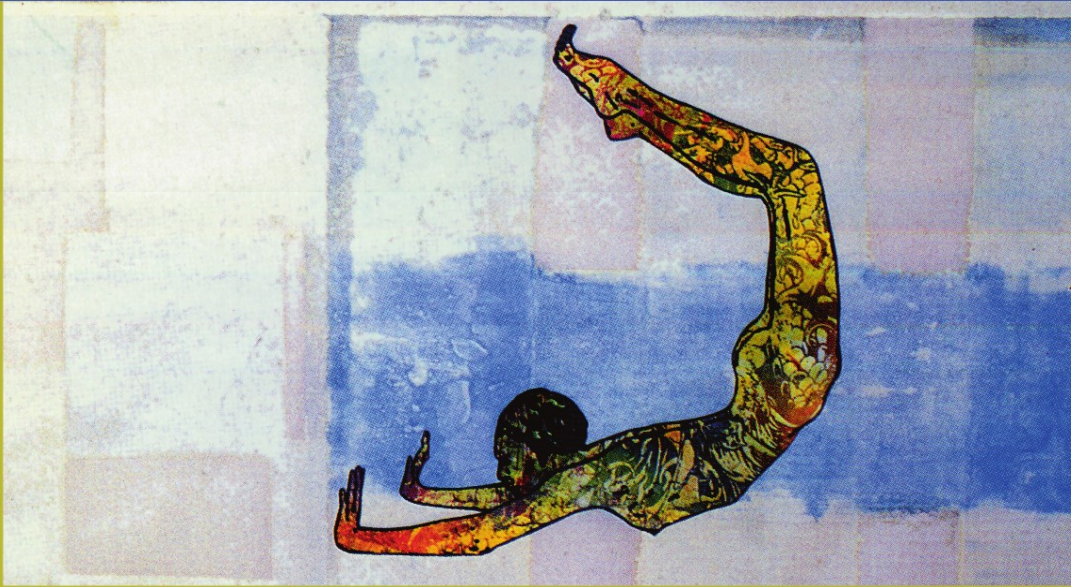


FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY COLLECTION

Pamela Sue Anderson
Editor

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion

Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate



Springer

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion

Feminist Philosophy Collection

Editor

Elizabeth Potter

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Oakland, USA

Over the past 40 years, philosophy has become a vital arena for feminists. Recent feminist work has challenged canonical claims about the role of women and has developed new methods of analysis and critique, and in doing so has reinvigorated central areas of philosophy. *The Feminist Philosophy Collection* presents new work representative of feminist contributions to the six most significant areas of philosophy: Feminist Ethics and Political and Social Philosophy; Feminist Philosophy of Religion; Feminist Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art; Feminist Metaphysics; Feminist History of Philosophy; and Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. Feminist work in some fields, notably ethics and social theory, has been going on for four decades, while feminist philosophy of art and aesthetics, as well as feminist metaphysics, are still young. Thus, some volumes will contain essays that build upon established feminist work as they explore new territory, while others break exciting new ground.

Pamela Sue Anderson
Editor

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion

Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate

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ISBN 978-1-4020-6832-4 e-ISBN 978-1-4020-6833-1
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-6833-1
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009938883

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Cover illustration: Nancy Spero, "Black and the Red III", 1994 (detail). Handprinted and printed collage on paper. 22 panels, 50×245 cm each. Installation view, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden. Private collection. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York. Photo by David Reynolds. The work of Nancy Spero (b.1926), artist, activist and feminist, has focused on diverse historical, mythical and contemporary cultural representations of women since the 1970's.

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To Michèle Le Doeuff

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Introduction

Pamela Sue Anderson

In the 1970s Mary Daly makes two provocative claims:

Exclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of ‘incarnation’ in human nature, and for the human relationship to God reinforce sexual hierarchy.¹
[T]he women’s revolution... is an ontological, spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence.²

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, feminists continue to contest “exclusively masculine symbolism” which “reinforce[s] sexual hierarchy,” or hierarchies in contemporary sexist societies. In addition, as will be seen in Part Two of this collection of twenty essays, insofar as they inspire “creative action in and toward transcendence” feminist philosophers are central to feminist philosophy of religion today. However, these essays will also demonstrate that a revolution in philosophy of religion has yet to come about. Sexism, idolatries and oppressive forms of spiritual practice are still deeply entrenched in world religions, but also in the narrowly and rigorously conceived field of philosophy of religion which determines the highly problematic gender-formations of human and divine subjects. In particular, traditional theism and its conception of a wholly transcendent God dominates the field of Anglo-American philosophy of religion as much in 2009 as in 1973 when Daly published her ground-breaking critique of theism in *Beyond God the Father*.³

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion is inspired and shaped by feminist philosophy broadly construed. Nevertheless, I propose that its spirit has a strong affinity to what Daly meant by revolution. In fact, as will be demonstrated in Part One of this collection, new forms of sexism and new contestations of gendered concepts as categories of classification are simultaneously at the heart of contemporary

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¹Daly (1973, p. 4).

²Daly (1973, p. 6).

³Ibid.

(feminist) philosophy of religion. Feminists in this branch of philosophy have not always been as explicit as Daly in claiming “an ontological, spiritual revolution.” Yet, as evident in the list of contributors here to feminist philosophy of religion, each author seeks change from her or his own spiritual (or, possibly non-spiritual) perspective. Feminist “philosophers” of religion exist; but due to social and institutional resistance, many of these feminists work for change at the margins of philosophy, in interdisciplinary locations bridging philosophy and theology, philosophy and literature, philosophy and women studies, philosophy and religious studies, philosophy and gender theory, philosophy and politics, philosophy and the social sciences (including anthropology), and philosophy and education (e.g., critical pedagogy).

In the last decade of the twentieth-century, ontological and spiritual questions remain implicit in the writings of the feminist philosophers of religion Grace M. Jantzen and Pamela Sue Anderson. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, ontology becomes an explicit focus of feminist debates with such non-feminist philosophers as, in this collection, Kant, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Arendt, Weil, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Ricoeur and Deleuze. A spirit of secularism also comes into feminist dialogues with a range of European philosophers and, centrally with feminist philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff,⁴ but also in different ways with feminist psycholinguists Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. As in other branches of philosophy, the arguments and disagreements of previous philosophers are taken up and further critically developed in feminist philosophy of religion: feminist philosophers Anderson and Jantzen are engaged by Marije Altorf, Morny Joy, Jessica Frazier, Roxana Baiasu, Patrice Haynes and Laurie Anderson Sathe. This process of ongoing argumentation and critical engagement generates the new topics which have become evident in the contestations of feminist philosophers of religion, expanding into an ever-wider range of religions and of cultural locations.

The core topic in Part Two is the conception of “transcendence incarnate”. Instead of a wholly transcendent divine, the women and men who contribute their work and ideas here seek to understand the incarnation of transcendence in everyday life. This means that as incarnate in sexed/gendered bodies we each can and should become self-reflexively aware of being given life, being born, loving, creating and dying—with all the implications of this ontological awareness. Daly’s creative action in and toward transcendence is not part of an explicit request, by this editor, for a critical focus. However unwittingly, the contributors are creative in writing about transcendence: they bring together theory and practice. In this way, they advance the revolution by which feminist philosophers are changing the worlds of women and men.

Crucially, this change requires that “religion” as a general category and in its specific manifestations no longer excludes women and non-intellectual men from its critical-normative debates. Religion is not only a topic of philosophical debate for the few, e.g. elite intellectuals. Almost forty years after Daly’s groundbreaking claims (quoted at the outset), philosophers and non-philosophers together continue

⁴Le Doeuff (2006b). cf. Anderson (2008, pp. 204–209, 220n1, 221n15, 222–225).

to uncover the ways in which the sexism and idolatries of religions damage lives, especially by reproducing the suffering of “symbolic violence.”⁵ This violence is a generally unperceived form of domination which is effective and efficient insofar as members of a dominant class, or a dominant religion, need—in exercising it—to exert no energy in order to maintain their dominance; that is, it takes little or no effort to maintain systems of classification, such as the exclusive categories of a sexual hierarchy, when these are the unseen categories of religion which have ordered our social worlds in the first place. Political struggle appears when efforts have to be made to legitimate these systems of classification; but symbolic violence results when we misrecognize, as natural, those religious systems of classification which are in fact cultural and arbitrary.

Such violence takes an insidious form which, as Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates, is the form of social-material domination most resistant to change. Thus change, let alone revolution, is not easy as long as “religion” is at the heart of symbolic violence; in order to overcome the suffering of this violence feminist philosophers of religion must gain a significant degree of social awareness as well as self-other understanding.⁶ Bourdieu has become a figure in feminist philosophy of religion precisely because he helps us to recognize the crucial significance of both the anthropology and sociology of religions for philosophers who seek to expose and so eradicate pernicious forms of symbolic violence, including sexism, racism, class and other material hierarchies which both determine and are determined by spiritual (bodily) practices.⁷

In conclusion, I would like to give one example of such violence which will be elucidated here by Dorota Filipczak in her chapter, “Is Literature Any Help in Liberating Eve and Mary?” Symbolic violence legitimates, in this case, a dominant form of practice which inhibits and prohibits the intellectual effort of women. Implicit is a hierarchy of sex and, in particular, the suffering of women whose nature is misrecognised, reinforcing an unperceived form of violence. Once recognized as un-natural, classifications of sex/gender, which have generated sexist violence, homophobia, transgender-phobia and transsexual-phobia, no longer function as symbolic violence.⁸ Recognition in this sense leads to liberation. Filipczak turns to Le Doeuff’s recognition of symbolic violence in stating, “the myth of original sin survives in texts prescribing that women’s existence be uncontaminated by intellectual effort.”⁹ The philosophy of Le Doeuff is given a privileged place in this collection for two reasons. First, Le Doeuff’s writings on women, philosophy, etc. (Le Doeuff 2006a) inspire and inform the thinking of many of the contributors.

⁵Bourdieu (1990, p. 133). Also see Moi (1999, pp. 269–273): “Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture (1990)”.

⁶See Schubert (2008, pp. 183–199). cf. Bourdieu (1999).

⁷Hollywood (2004, pp. 229–233).

⁸Moi, “Appropriating Bourdieu” (1999, p. 272).

⁹Le Doeuff (2003, p. 33); also see Filipczak (2009, Chapter 8 below).

Second, Le Doeuff herself wisely, and with subtle wit, exposes “the sex of knowing” as a category of the philosophical imaginary (Le Doeuff 2003, pp. 27–44; also, 2002); this category is legitimated by the myth of original sin, perpetuating the suffering of women both in the history of philosophy and in the concepts and practices of everyday life.

I am pleased to introduce readers to the feminist contributors in this collection as they follow Daly, Le Doeuff and the other philosophers who play their parts in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*. My most sincere gratitude goes to each contributor.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express special thanks to Kate Kirkpatrick for her expert help in the preparation of the original manuscript and to Daniel Whistler for his generous support, especially at the stage of proofreading.

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Part I
Contestations: Concepts and Practices

Chapter 1

Feminists and Fools: Imagination and Philosophy of Religion

Marije Altorf

Abstract The year 1998 saw the publication of two works of feminist philosophy of religion: Pamela Sue Anderson's *Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell) and Grace M. Jantzen's *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press). Both of these works attribute great significance to the notions of imagination and the imaginary, yet these notions are understood in significantly different ways. Jantzen's imaginary is primarily inspired by the work of Irigaray, while Le Doeuff's *philosophical* imaginary has been the main inspiration for Anderson.

This chapter revisits these notions of the imaginary, in particular, the philosophical imaginary in order to reconsider the position of a feminist philosopher of religion. Noting limitations in both Jantzen's and Anderson's use of the term, it then turns the question around, asking whether philosophical reflection on imagination, and on religion as an act of imagination, can become part of philosophy of religion.

Keywords Imaginary · Imagination · Grace Jantzen · Pamela Sue Anderson · Elaine Scarry · Make-believe

Introduction

A novice to philosophy of religion may be forgiven for believing that imagination will be an important object of study. His or her own experience, or observations, may suggest that religion perceives what is not—or what could have been—in what

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is.¹ In other words, religion requires an act of imagination.² Religious people will imagine a different reality while considering the present one. They can find themselves with Moses in the desert, or standing with Mary at the cross, or at the last meal with the disciples, or still in Egypt, but next year in Jerusalem. Philosophy of religion, the novice assumes, will offer philosophical reflection on such acts of imagination.

To say that religion requires an act of imagination does not necessarily render it futile. Surely, while it will reduce religion to mere make-believe for some, it will emphasize for others the significance of imagination.³ To live a religious life is to realize that you cannot live your life but by imagining. It is not necessary to be always aware of the imaginary nature of faith, and imaginative re-enactments can be more or less creative. One may gratefully ask for a blessing over dinner, or rush through the words in order to start eating. Whatever the case, it is deemed crucial to perceive the meal *also* as what it is not: a gift of God, a confirmation of a promise to look after you.

And yet, when starting the module in traditional analytical philosophy of religion, the novice will find very little about imagination. Instead, it will become clear that the main concern of analytical philosophy of religion is rationally justifying beliefs. Religion is understood as a list of statements, which ask for explanation and justification. The novice will learn different proofs for the existence of God (the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from design, etc.). The nature of miracles will be explained, as well as religious language. Perhaps, a last class will consider alternative approaches.⁴ Imagination will not be mentioned, except perhaps when considering talking about God and the use of metaphor. Yet, even that class is more likely to present a refutation of verificationist claims about the impossibility of talking about God, than an exploration of artlessly seeing what

¹The novice can be more or less aware of the limitations of this starting-point. The examples provided are all taken from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and probably emphasize one practice within that tradition. While this is unavoidable it is important to be aware of such particularities. (Compare the criticism of Jantzen and Anderson outlined below.)

²Compare the understanding of imagination by Iris Murdoch (“a type of reflection on people, events, etc., which builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities in ways which go beyond what could be said to be strictly factual” (Murdoch 1997, p. 198)) and Mary Warnock (“there is a power in the human mind which is at work in our everyday perception of the world, and is also at work in our thoughts about what is absent; which enables us to see the world, whether present or absent as significant, and also to present this vision to others, for them to share or reject” (Warnock 1976, p. 196)).

³The notion of religion as mere illusion has often been attributed to Freud. Beverley Clack argues against this view that Freud can also be understood to provide a different notion of religion, in which creativity and imagination play a significant role (Clack 2008, p. 216). Clack thus provides yet another possible route for the novice to take. However, as the main argument of my text was formed before Clack’s article was published, comparison between her text and mine has to wait for another article.

⁴This description does not of course apply to all modules of philosophy of religion. It is based on the criticism of traditional analytical philosophy of religion put by Jantzen and Anderson, outlined below. see especially note 7 for further literature.

is in what is not, and what is not in what is. Traditional analytical philosophy of religion has little interest in imagination. What is more, it does not even allow the novice to test his or her initial intuition. The novice, then, faces a considerable task. He or she does not only need to start from scratch, but also to question the practice of traditional philosophy of religion. Most novices will probably abandon their intuition, feeling a fool for asking the wrong questions all the time. Yet there may be a novice daring or stubborn enough to pursue the intuition. Perhaps, he or she takes heart from the various fools philosophy of religion has learned to embrace over time: Anselm's fool, or Nietzsche's *toller Mensch*. These fools are not that different from novices to philosophy of religion asking the wrong questions. Perhaps the novice has even heard of Michèle Le Doeuff's suggestion, that feminists with their dissenting voices can also be such fools.⁵

So, it is to the feminist philosophers of religion, that the novice first turns. The two feminist philosophies of religion published in 1998 pay ample attention to imagination and the imaginary, albeit in significantly different ways. Grace Jantzen's *Becoming Divine* is primarily inspired by the work of Irigaray, while Le Doeuff's "philosophical imaginary" has been the main inspiration for Pamela Sue Anderson's *Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. These works, then, provide a first opportunity to consider the supposition that religion is an act of imagination and as such an object of study for philosophy of religion (§ 2). Yet, it will be argued, their understandings have their limitations. The question will then be turned around and it will be considered whether philosophical reflection on imagination, and on religion as an act of imagination, can become part of philosophy of religion (§ 3).

Two Feminist Philosophies of Religion: Imagination in Jantzen and Anderson

Both Jantzen and Anderson develop their feminist philosophy of religion as a critique of the existing analytical philosophy of religion. Indeed, as I argue here, their philosophies are still noticeably shaped by this tradition, in particular when considering imagination and the imaginary. So, in order to understand their feminist philosophies of religion, as well as to substantiate the claim that analytical philosophy of religion is not interested in imagination, the critique will be considered first.

Becoming Divine in particular meticulously provides its readers with a list of criticisms.⁶ In the introduction Jantzen notes how "[f]or the most part, all these philosophers of religion have written with scant reference to issues of gender, race, or sexuality, assuming a universalizing tone which is meant to indicate that what they say applies equally to all human beings, typically designated as 'rational

⁵Le Doeuff (1991, p. 9). Compare Anderson (1998, p. xiii) and Jantzen's reminiscence of incidents throughout her work (see for instance Jantzen 2001, p. 103).

⁶Yet, compare Anderson (1998), especially Chapter One.

agents', irrespective of their social location."⁷ Moreover, the emphasis on "logical rigour" coincides with a singular focus on the attempt to justify beliefs. Analytical philosophers of religion show curiously little interest in changing the world. They argue from the position of status quo—which is not even recognized as *a* position among possible others. Analytical philosophy of religion expresses great interest in science and mathematics—yet disregards the more sceptical philosophy of science—while "literature, psychoanalysis, and social or political theory are largely ignored or treated with contempt" (Jantzen 1998, p. 23). With few exceptions, it focuses on "creedal statements and assumptions of western Christianity" (Jantzen 1998, p. 24).

Thus, put very briefly, philosophy of religion is not so much a philosophical *investigation*, or *questioning* of religion, as a philosophical *justification* of religion, where religion is understood as the "creedal statements and assumptions of western Christianity." Philosophers of religion, arguing from a supposedly neutral position, prove religion's rationality, as if giving their philosophical blessing. It is already decided what religion is, or more precisely, what religion is when considered philosophically. As to most other understandings of religion, in particular religion as imagination, it is hard to envisage how they could be rationally justified and, thus, be of concern to philosophy of religion. It should not be surprising, then, that this philosophy of religion has little concern for imagination or the imaginary, though Jantzen does not address this issue here.

Jantzen's work is very well documented and general criticism is always followed by extended discussion of prominent individual works. Davies (1993), for instance, is discussed to exemplify how easily introductions to philosophy of religion glide over the aim, nature or purpose of their work, and instead stay with those presented by tradition. Indeed, if any justification for doing so is given, it is that of tradition, Jantzen notes, "as though the fact that at present it is usually done in this way is sufficient reason to continue" (Jantzen 1998, p. 19). Swinburne (1979), when explaining the purpose of his work, claims to take away the worries of "ordinary men. . . whether the evidence of human experience shows that the claim [of the existence of God] is true or that it is false."⁸ Jantzen wonders whether this is indeed the worry of ordinary men. Ever since it was decided to tell noble lies in the perfect state, ordinary people should be wary once philosophers show their concern. Jantzen's criticism is not limited to the usual suspects. She notes that even the "much more progressive" Clack and Clack (1998) "still operates without much question almost exclusively within the realm of truth-claims and beliefs" (Jantzen 1998, p. 20).

In response, a feminist philosophy of religion should begin to show these partialities, and broaden the concepts used. However, for Jantzen this does not suffice.

⁷Jantzen (1998, p. 3). Jantzen has just mentioned Swinburne (1977, 1979), Helm (1993), Plantinga (1986), Adams (1987), Phillips (1986), Alston (1991), Pike (1992), Hick (1989), and Wainwright (1995).

⁸Swinburne (1979, p. 1) as quoted in Jantzen (1998, p. 19).

Jantzen's work opens by emphasizing its own radical nature. She explains that the original aim of producing "a feminist critique of traditional Anglo-American philosophy of religion" failed to be written after several attempts. She courageously discarded "hundreds of pages of manuscript several times over in different ways", because the book as first intended would remain within "ground already chosen on masculinist principles and hardened by well-trodden patriarchal debates" (Jantzen 1998, p. 1). In contrast, the book which is eventually published promises to answer what a *feminist* philosophy of religion would look like, what its aims would be, and its strategies. Quoting the seventeenth-century "feisty champion of Quakers," Margaret Fell, Jantzen asks "You will say, Christ said this, and the apostle say this, but *what canst thou say?*"⁹ *Becoming Divine* endeavours to find its own voice within philosophy of religion.

Jantzen's radically different feminist philosophy of religion has the quest of becoming divine at its heart, rather than rationally justifying beliefs. She juxtaposes the analytical tradition with continental philosophy, in particular the work of Irigaray, and her "fundamental moral obligation" of becoming divine (Jantzen 1998, p. 6). Merely the word "becoming" shows that this ideal will not reinforce the status quo. Her background in psychoanalysis sets Irigaray apart from the analytical tradition in assuming that "human subjectivity is not a simple given" (Jantzen 1998, pp. 8–9). Yet as Freud and Lacan were concerned with male subjectivity only, Jantzen maintains, Irigaray has to ask "Can women be subjects? And how can women achieve subjectivity *as women*, not by becoming 'one of the boys' or trying to be 'equal' to men. . . , but by becoming who *we* are in our own right. . . ?"¹⁰ Becoming divine is what women need to become subjects "in their own right."

However, Irigaray also holds that religion in the Judeo-Christian West has promised little inspiration for women to become divine, as "the only gods that have existed up to now. . . are male gods" (Jantzen 1998, p. 14). Consequently, her project becomes twofold, as she argues that the "masculinist religious symbolic must be disrupted and space made for the female divine. . . . What Irigaray advocates—a shocking position to those brought up on the view of Feuerbach as a master of suspicion—is that women begin deliberately to project the divine according to our gender, as men have always done according to theirs" (Jantzen 1998, p. 15). This is where the notions of symbolic and imagination and imagery become prominent. A feminist philosophy of religion, according to Jantzen, following Irigaray, needs to disrupt the existing symbolic and develop new imagery—most significantly that of human beings as *natales*, not just mortals.¹¹ Philosophy of religion thus becomes a reflection on imaginings, as well as an act of imagination.

In the discussion that followed the publication of *Becoming Divine*—with mainly two readers (Harriet Harris and Anderson)—Jantzen was praised for the radical

⁹Fell (1995 [1694], p. 20) as quoted in Jantzen (1998, p. 1).

¹⁰Jantzen (1998, p. 9); emphasis original.

¹¹The notions of *natales* is inspired by the work of Hannah Arendt and discussed by Jantzen in Chapters Six and Seven in particular.

nature of her critique, and criticized most of all for her use of psychoanalysis and the deep binaries her reading of Irigaray creates: between men and women, reason and imagination, mortality and natality, traditional analytical philosophy of religion and feminist philosophy of religion.¹² In response to Harris, Jantzen explains that her “strategy of double reading” should warrant against any such binary, as its aim is to first analyze a text in order to find what is repressed and next to emphasize the repressed, “thus beginning to correct the imbalance. . . . This, however, is not in order to construct a new binary, but rather to open the chiasmus, the gap between the standard reading and its repressed other so that a new way of thinking can develop” (Jantzen 2000, pp. 119–120). In response to Anderson she similarly maintains that the “whole point is to get beyond such oppositional thinking” (Jantzen 2001, p. 108). Yet, the question remains whether Jantzen has succeeded in doing so. Despite her intentions Jantzen’s use of psychoanalysis seems to strengthen the division between masculine and feminine, men and women, and reason and imagination. Psychoanalysis—especially Lacan—may enable Jantzen to critique analytical philosophy of religion and what she calls masculinist culture, but it leaves imagination in the margin, especially when exercised by women.

For Jantzen, Lacan’s analysis of becoming a subject through the two stages of Mirror and the Name or Law of the Father¹³ shows against analytical philosophy of religion, that “we are not straightforward, rational, autonomous Cartesian egos, but are embodied, sexuate persons in a web of life, caught up in unconscious desires and fears” (Jantzen 1998, p. 42). Yet, it also introduces a framework of divisive, gendered terms. A child needs to “sacrifice its desire for the mother” in order to enter the realm of language, of society, which Lacan calls “the Name” or “Law of the Father”, and Jantzen describes as “the masculinist social order” (Jantzen 1998, p. 39). These gendered terms become problematic because—as Jantzen points out—against his stated intention Lacan’s use of “woman” does related to actual women.¹⁴ In contrast to thinkers like Kristeva, Jantzen challenges “Lacan’s account of the necessary maleness of language and subjectivity.” She wittily adds: “The problem is not that women do not/cannot have language, but that men, Lacan foremost among them, refuse to listen” (Jantzen 1998, p. 51). Yet, even though Jantzen refuses to accept total silence for woman, her voice cannot but be confined to the margins (Jantzen 1998, p. 57).

To one who is not too familiar with psychoanalysis the readily acceptance of Lacan’s stages of Mirror and Name of the Father is puzzling. The development of a child as described by Lacan reads as any narrative of a particular childhood: some of it may seem recognizable, and while there must be elements of truth in it, the structure is created by the older person, not the child. Could one, for instance,

¹²Harris (2000a, p. 369), Harris (2000b, pp. 113 ff.), Anderson (2000a, p. 122), and Anderson (2000b, pp. 114–116).

¹³Jantzen (1998, pp. 34–43).

¹⁴Jantzen (1998, p. 40 n. 1) refers to sources which make this argument: D. Macey, *Lacan in Context* (1988), M. Bowie, *Lacan* (1991), E. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (1990).

read “parent” for “mother”, or is it necessary to consider dependency in purely negative terms?¹⁵ It is puzzling that Jantzen, who provides such criticism of analytical philosophy of religion, and who places her own work in sharp opposition to any masculinist order, would not apply the same radical rejection of this other masculinist order. Admittedly, in Jantzen’s reading, psychoanalysis recognizes the presence of imagination in analytical philosophy of religion, yet it does so only as its “repressed (female, maternal) basis” (Jantzen 1998, p. 95). When using psychoanalysis as Jantzen does, imagination is doomed to remain in the margins. Moreover, if the distinction between woman and women is not made clearly, any woman who emphasizes the imagination will be marginalized in an order which is characterized as patriarchal or masculinist. Especially when criticizing masculinism, Jantzen does not always make this distinction.¹⁶ By placing herself in such sharp opposition to this order, Jantzen forfeits the possibility that her imaginings of natalis will be anything but marginal.

Jantzen retains this divisive understanding of masculinism in her letter to Anderson. When Anderson describes the central theme of her work as equal to the traditional “rationality of religious belief” (1998, p. 20), she is presented with sharp criticism of Jantzen: “what I wonder is why you—or any feminist—should want to play this boys’ game of rationality at all, even if you modify the rules so that girls can play too?”¹⁷ Yet, for Anderson the starting-point of retaining rationality, though in a different form, is presented as one of general agreement: “. . . most of us tend to think that rational beliefs are more likely to be true than either irrational beliefs or beliefs that are neither rational nor irrational” (Anderson 1998, p. 39). In her reply to Jantzen Anderson maintains that her aim is not “the justification of belief,” but “scrutinizing the construction of belief.”¹⁸

While Anderson retains the theme of rationality of religious belief, she also proposes a radical change to the understanding of rationality. Rationality should be understood in a much broader sense than it is traditionally. In particular, it should include a notion of desire. A variety of approaches, including standpoint epistemology, postmodernism, as well as reflection and myth and yearning, are invoked to create such an understanding. It is not always easy to fully follow Anderson in connecting these different approaches.¹⁹ Yet a unifying theme may be discerned in the notion of the *philosophical imaginary*, which, as Anderson argues in her last chapter, is central to her main objective of questioning and extending philosophical reason.²⁰

¹⁵For a much less authoritative and more creative reading of Lacan’s Mirror stage see, for instance, Winnicott (2005).

¹⁶See for instance Jantzen (1998, p. 16): does Jesus’ maleness make him necessarily part of the masculinist order? Compare also Jantzen (1998, p. 89).

¹⁷Jantzen (2001, p. 103); compare Harris (2000b, p. 106).

¹⁸Anderson (2000b, p. 118); compare O’Grady (1999, p. 101).

¹⁹Compare O’Grady (1999, p. 106).

²⁰Anderson (1998, pp. 9–10, 209ff).

The *philosophical imaginary* is a term coined by Doeuff. It denotes a method—if it can be called that—of reading philosophy through its imagery. Philosophical writing, Le Doeuff argues, is full of imagery—ranging from islands to lions, virtuous peasants, and, of course, women (Le Doeuff 2002, p. 1). Particular images can return throughout a philosophical text, an oeuvre or even a tradition. This imagery specific to philosophy is no mere illustration, but forms part of the argument. Indeed, Le Doeuff maintains, “imagery is inseparable from the difficulties, the sensitive points of an intellectual venture” (Le Doeuff 2002, p. 3). The *philosophical imaginary* thus encourages reading philosophy with keen attention to the images used.²¹ Thus, when reconsidering reason in the different approaches used Anderson questions in particular those images presenting anything as female and irrational (desire, intuition, etc.). Against such imagery, Anderson argues for the rationality of such characteristics, and of desire specifically.

The philosophical imaginary thus enables Anderson to develop a philosophy of religion which has a much broader understanding of rationality. Her understanding of reason, and in particular the notion of yearning, receives the general approval of her readers.²² It would, moreover, allow for the rationality of imagination, as it already does for the rationality of desire. Yet, even if one does not want to accept Jantzen’s divisive accusation of ‘boys’ game,’ it is not entirely clear whether for Anderson the rational provides final justification for belief. Of course, the book starts out to question the reconciliation of faith and reason in rationally justifying beliefs, and later promises “a change from strictly assessing the justification of true belief to rationally assessing the construction and refiguration of religious belief.”²³ Her aim is, as she explained to Jantzen, “scrutinizing the construction of belief.” And yet, towards the end of the book the notion of rationality operates at times as a foremost rhetorical term, in particular in the returning expression “*rational* passion for justice.”²⁴ Anderson here criticizes a notion of rationality which excludes passion. However, introducing passion into rationality does not necessarily make passion rational, even if it makes rationality passionate. Do we all agree, and should we all agree that a rational passion for justice is to be desired over an irrational one? Is it rationality that endorses the passion, or is it the vehemence of the passion, or the justice to be sought?

Both Jantzen and Anderson thus introduce imagination and the imaginary into philosophy of religion, and yet these notions are still shaped considerably by the tradition they criticize. For Jantzen, imagination and the imaginary are central to the aim of becoming divine. Yet, in placing her philosophy fully in opposition to a masculinist order, Jantzen reinforces dualities between men and women, and reason

²¹Le Doeuff (2002, p. 1) and Anderson (1998, p. 10).

²²Harris calls it Anderson’s “trump card”, though she does not discuss it any further (Harris 1998, p. 120). O’Grady provides a more lengthy discussion (O’Grady 1999, p. 106–107). Compare also Jantzen (2001, pp. 102–103).

²³See respectively Anderson (1998, pp. 20, 120–121). Compare pp. 39, 130, 135, 174, 175.

²⁴See for instance Anderson (1998, pp. 200, 213) (emphasis added). The notion of rational passion is introduced after a quote from bell hooks (Anderson 1998, p. 174).

and imagination. So, women using their imagination are marginalized. Moreover, having to choose for or against masculinism, or playing with the boys, women seem to have no choice but to be marginalized. Anderson, in contrast, does not argue from such definite oppositions. Using the rhetorical philosophical imaginary enables her instead to overcome oppositions and to redefine reason as a much more inclusive concept. The imaginary and imagination are thus not in opposition to reason, and not marginalized. Yet, it is not clear to what extent reason and rationality—even in a new form—provide for Anderson the final justification. Thus, the question remains whether philosophy of religion can consider imagination only so far as it is rational.

Imagination and Philosophy of Religion

In these two feminist philosophies of religion, the novice has found confirmation of his or her intuition that religion requires acts of imagination, as well as ways in which philosophy of religion may contemplate this intuition. Yet both have their limitations. Imagination is either marginalized or subject to the approval of reason. And so, the novice may decide to turn the question around, and ask whether it is possible to develop a philosophical understanding of imagination, and of religion as imagination, which can be introduced into philosophy of religion.²⁵ This approach is suggested by a growing interest in imagination in a variety of disciplines, featuring a surprising amount of works written by female scholars.²⁶ These works on imagination often start as a defence or praise of imagination, where it is argued that the notion has not received the attention it deserves. Some have gone even as far as to claim that human beings are imaginative rather than rational animals (Murdoch 1993, p. 323).

Imagination, it may be recalled, was understood as perceiving what is not in what is.²⁷ As such, it characterizes not just religion. On the contrary, it is possible and inspiring to conceive of imagination as practically ubiquitous. Objects suddenly seem imbued with imagination. A cup of coffee, for instance, is rarely just that. It is also comfort, a sign of a deadline coming near, of meeting with friends, etc. Yet, it is rarely consciously perceived as an object of imagination. The *coffee* is considered comforting, not its *perception*.

Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* (1985) explains this lack of recognition by arguing that acts of imagination often have the following structure. Imagination first

²⁵Of course, the novice could have tried other approaches, and turn for instance to philosophical theology, or religious studies. As he or she is at the beginning of the investigation, other approaches may still be pursued in future (Compare note 3.)

²⁶See for instance Mary Warnock's *Imagination* (1976), Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1993), Hannah Arendt's posthumously published *Lectures on Kant* (1982), Martha Nussbaum's *The Poetic Imagination* (1996), Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), Paula M. Cooney's *Religious Imagination and the Body* (1994), and Eva Brann's overarching *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (1991).

²⁷See above, Introduction. See also note 2.

creates its object, when for instance the cup of coffee is imbued with the characteristic of comfort. The coffee then reflects the human condition out of which it was created. Next, the imagined object is no longer recognized as such, when it is the coffee which provides comfort, not our perception of it. Scarry argues: “The imagination first ‘makes a fictional object’ and then ‘makes a fictional object into a nonfictional object’”; or, the imagination first remakes objectlessness (pure sentience) into an object, and then remakes the fictional object into a real one, one containing its own freestanding source of substantiation.’²⁸ Throughout the second part of *The Body in Pain* Scarry convincingly argues, that the world is full of imagination, both in objects created and in their being perceived.

I have called this understanding of reality inspiring, as even the simplest objects are imbued with significance and life. Yet, being inspiring may be not enough to accept this understanding, for it can also seem chaotic or even dangerous, when imagination is conceived as a boundless faculty, reminding of the Romantic understanding.²⁹ What would prevent anyone from imagining just anything? To imagine coffee as comfort or poison may not seem all that significant, but it would be clearly dangerous, if there were to be no safeguard against imagining whole peoples as enemies or terrorists. It is for this reason that philosophers have thought it important to place imagination within the bounds of reason, and reduce the comfort to coffee and the terrorists to people.

Yet it should be noted that imagination is rarely that boundless faculty the Romantics considered it to be. Indeed, it is remarkable how limited imagination often is. Imagination is first constrained by material as well as social conditions. Cigarettes, for instance, are no longer just stylish, but have become a sign of disease, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to think differently. Moreover, imagination knows limitations of yet a different kind. Iris Murdoch’s now famous distinction between imagination and fantasy designates a *moral* difference between what she considers “two active faculties, one somewhat mechanically generating narrowly banal false pictures (the ego as all-powerful), and the other freely and creatively exploring the world, moving towards the expression and elucidation (and in art celebration) of what is true and deep” (Murdoch 1993, p. 321). In her earlier work the distinction between imagination and fantasy is typically explained by means of examples and commands: look at the paintings of Velásquez or Titian, at the plays of Shakespeare, and you know what imagination is about.³⁰ Imagination is found everywhere, but most clearly expressed in a few pieces of art. These are the exceptions, because most of the time, people use their fantasy rather than their imagination, “mechanically generating narrowly banal false pictures.” The failure of

²⁸Scarry (1985), Chapters Three, Four and Five. See also p. 280.

²⁹Imagination as boundless is a Romantic notion. Compare Murdoch (1993, p. 316) and Kearney (1988, pp. 181 ff.).

³⁰See for example Murdoch (1997, p. 353).

imagination, fantasy, is for Murdoch almost synonymous with human nature. Thus, imagination is bound, even if the boundaries are only known through contemplating art.

Imagination is thus just not a boundless faculty. It can be limited by reason, empirical realism, social or materials conditions, but also by a moral imperative. It is this last possibility that suggests an understanding of religion as imagination. Imagination is not just an inspiring way in which humans happen to look at the world, but it is a response to fundamental experiences in human existence. For Murdoch, it is what makes “a man act unselfishly in a concentration camp” (Murdoch 1997, p. 346). For Scarry, imagination responds to what she calls “objectlessness”, “pure sentience” or “the body in pain.” A body in pain can be a cold body on a rainy day, to which the comfort in coffee responds. It can also and more importantly be a body experiencing extreme pain. For Scarry the destruction of a body by means of inflicting pain in torture and war *is and must be* opposed to the creative power of imagination.³¹ Human life is geared between these two extremes, of unmaking and making.

Religion as an act of imagination is thus defined by these two extremes. Belief, Scarry argues, is close to “imagining”. It is “to perpetuate the imagined object across a succession of days, weeks, and years; ‘belief’ is the capacity to sustain the imagined (or apprehended) object in one’s own psyche, even when there is no sensorially available confirmation that that object has any existence independent of one’s own interior mental activity” (Scarry 1985, p. 180). It can do so, because the object of belief is credited with more reality than oneself, following the structure outlined above: imagination provides a first response to an experience of pain. The created object then reflects the experience and is finally given more reality than the original creator.

Belief is then not just a form of imagination, but it is a defining form of imagination. Religious imagination provides believers with objects which sustain the believers, even if there is very little other support. Through war or disease, they may be deprived of their house and health. The deprivation of a house, of proper clothing, or of food threatens to reduce them to mere bodies in need, or bodies in pain. Religious imagery can provide opposition to such reduction, when the shelter becomes a manger, and the little food left is shared as if it was *seder* or the last supper.³² The deprivation may lessen in an act of sharing. The religious imagery imbued with so much reality can thus provide very forceful opposition to destruction. Yet, it

³¹It is for her influential analysis of torture that Scarry’s work is best known. Scarry challenges the accepted understanding that the primary goal of torture is gaining information. By providing chilling examples from witnesses of torture and reports from Amnesty International, she maintains that the information asked for is usually already known and that, moreover, torture is a very ineffective way of gathering information (Scarry 1985, pp. 28–29, 329–330 n. 7).

³²Compare Cooley (1994, pp. 3–4) on a text by Alicia Portnoy on sharing bread in an Argentinean concentration camp. See also the discussion later in the book.

may be objected, by perceiving the shelter and the food as religious objects believers are fooling themselves. The shelter is no idyllic Christmas scene, and the food is far from enough. Would it not be better to face the facts? This objection is not without ground. The religious lives of others especially may seem foolish, and while there have been many occasions where religious imagery was lifesaving, there are others where it was not.

Do humans need this religious imagery, and if so, which religious imagery is hurtful and which lifesaving? It seems that only tradition would prevent philosophy of religion from considering these questions. To consider them, it would indeed need to change its aim. Traditional philosophy of religion cannot consider these questions. It ignores most religious imagery and reduces a few to creeds and assumptions. "Lifesaving" or "hurtful," moreover, are translated into "rationally justified," or not. For Jantzen, in contrast, the questions become central. The aim of her philosophy of religion is becoming divine, and her answer would come in terms of opposition to a repressive masculinist symbolic. Anderson, in turn, would acknowledge the presence of imagery and consider its rationality. Scarry's answer to the last question would be given by what takes the pain away. Yet, it would be difficult to *decide* what act of imagination takes the pain away, and impossible to *justify* this decision by words and images, precisely because pain is without words and without images. The aim of such reflection on religion as imagination is distant from "rationally justifying beliefs." It does not give its philosophical blessing to creeds and assumptions, but instead acknowledges the limitations of philosophical reason, especially when considering religion.

Coda

The daring, foolish novice, having braved the traditional analytical philosophy of religion, may feel strengthened not to abandon the intuition that religion can be understood as an act of imagination. Imagination turns out to be essential in Jantzen's aim of becoming divine. Anderson would judge the attempt rational. For Murdoch or Scarry, imagination provides a response to the most fundamental experiences in human life, and religion is concerned with exactly such experiences. Religion thus understood can be an object of study for philosophy of religion, though it has been necessary to change the original aim of philosophy of religion, from rationally justifying belief to becoming divine, and "scrutinising the construction of belief".

And yet, religion is not just an act of imagination, just as it is more than a set of beliefs. It is also a story, a social and political force, a "binding identity" (Anderson 1998, p. 166). These understandings of religion too should be considered by philosophy of religion. They do not only bring about a fuller understanding of the complex notion of religion, but also show the limitations of any one understanding of religion. Its fools and feminists are a reminder that it is impossible for philosophical understanding to ever fully grasp religion's mysteries.

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Chapter 2

Rethinking the “Problem of Evil” with Hannah Arendt and Grace Jantzen

Morny Joy

Abstract Discussions of the “problem of evil” in mainstream philosophy of religion publications have been loath to engage with Auschwitz as a symbol of the betrayal of human dignity. At the same time they have not investigated the problem of violence against women. In this chapter I propose to investigate initially, with reference to the work of Hannah Arendt and also of Grace Jantzen, the vital subject of unmerited violence and its relation to the “problem of evil.” Then, in an even more concentrated mode, with a specific focus on the work of Jantzen alone, I will examine the issue of violence against women. In so doing, I hope to challenge the extremely restricted nature of the traditional conceptions of evil and its treatment.

Keywords Theodicy · Problem of evil · Auschwitz · Unmerited violence · Violence against women

The problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe

(Arendt 1994 [1945], p. 134).

In 1945 Arendt wrote that the problem of evil would be the fundamental problem of postwar intellectual life in Europe, but even there her prediction was not quite right. No major philosophical work but Arendt’s own appeared on the subject in English and French texts were remarkably oblique. Historical reports and eyewitness testimony appeared in unprecedented volume, but conceptual reflection has been slow in coming

(Neiman 2002, p. 2).

Introduction

Theodicy—the apologetically motivated attempt to justify the ways of god(s) to humanity so that life remains meaningful—has existed as long as religion itself, if not always expressed in philosophical categories. A glance at contemporary

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textbooks in philosophy of religion presents a varied selection of examples of this genre, mainly from the Christian viewpoint. Yet there is one glaring omission—there is virtually no mention of Auschwitz and the sense of utter betrayal of human dignity, let alone of justice and human rights, that this word represents. As an exemplar of human beings' inhumanity to fellow beings, Auschwitz—with its final solution of the deliberate extermination of people, because of their purported "ethnic" identity, regardless of their actual religious affiliation—must stand as a symbol of the ultimate horror. Initially silence, as an indication of the sheer incomprehension it produced, might have been an admissible reaction. But seventy years on, this should no longer be the case. Why is there such a lack of reflection in the area of philosophy of religion? Such want of acknowledgement is startling both for its absence and for what it signals about the state of this discipline (or rather sub-discipline) that is sorely in need of revision.

It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to address this mammoth topic in one short essay. It is also far beyond my competence. Instead, as an introduction to a much needed revision, I propose to investigate, with reference to the work of Hannah Arendt and also of Grace Jantzen, the smaller but no less vital subject of unmerited violence and its relation to the "problem of evil." Then, in an even more concentrated mode, with a specific focus on the work of Jantzen alone, I will examine the issue of violence against women. Discussions of the "problem of evil" in mainstream philosophy of religion publications have never specifically referred to the on-going scandal of violence against women. This omission is symptomatic of another troublesome failure—whether from benign neglect or conscious suppression—of the disregard by most philosophers of religion of the exclusion of women that has pervaded the field until quite recently. In part, this neglect can be traced to a religiously based suspicion of women as being particularly prone to aberrant sexuality. As such, women in this religious tradition became representative of the failings of the flesh, where the body represents a mode of shamefulness, even pollution, if not actual evil. The link between women's inferior status, because of this alleged propensity to immorality, and the violence that continues to be inflicted on them is not difficult to document. From certain early church fathers—by way of the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*, the handbook of the Inquisitors—to contemporary manifestations in the aptly named sex trade, women's bodies have been vilified, tortured, commodified, and otherwise degraded.

The Problem of Evil

Inevitably the question arises as to what exactly is represented by the phrase "problem of evil." Its meaning is symptomatic of a specific western dilemma in that it signifies the difficulty of reconciling the ideal of an omnipotent and benevolent god with the fact that good people suffer. A certain lack of divine concern becomes apparent and requires justification. A feminist philosopher of religion could observe

that the problem lies more with the nature of the divine thus depicted than his purported unpredictability. As Grace Jantzen has stated:

A feminist approach to the “problem of evil” is first of all outrage and bewilderment at the suffering and evil itself: how can the world be like this? How dare some people make others suffer in the way that they do? What sort of divinity could we possibly be talking about if such suffering is allowed to continue? (1999, p. 263).

Jantzen portrays the traditional western notion of god as an authoritarian male figure who appears to intervene in his creation in a capricious and even negative manner. She finds it puzzling that Christian philosophers still attempt to reconcile this inconsistent figure with a concept of a God who has the best interests of his creatures in his omniscient mind. In his place Jantzen proposes another mode of human and divine relations whereby the parameters of the “problem” are reset. Instead of reacting with abstract arguments, she proposes that philosophy of religion needs to deal with occurrences of evil in much more concrete ways. As she states:

The question of what religion has to do with evil and suffering is thus posed . . . with a refusal to distract attention from specific acts of evil that some specific human beings inflict on other specific human beings (264).

While Jantzen’s approach may not satisfy traditionalists, and in fact she does not deal with certain aspects in a comprehensive or satisfactory manner (of which more later), her intention is to initiate a distinctly this-worldly philosophy of religion. This would emphasize an attitude of love and respect for all other persons. Jantzen was influenced strongly by the ideas of both Michel Foucault (Jantzen 1999, pp. 54–55) and Emmanuel Levinas (Jantzen 1999, p. 234) in the task of critically dismantling western philosophical hubris, which has presumed to designate certain others as not meeting the requirements of rational rectitude, i.e. human integrity, and has henceforth deemed them as unworthy of respect or ethical treatment.

At the same time, on the positive side, Jantzen has been even more substantially affected by the work of Hannah Arendt, especially by her postulate of *natality*. Jantzen basically understands Arendt’s use of this term not as an endorsement of maternity per se but as an affirmation of life, as supporting the possibility of an ongoing potentiality to begin anew. For Jantzen, it bespeaks a human ability to create continuously in a way that never forecloses on the wonders of corporeal existence or of the beauty of this world.

The possibility of beginning which is rooted in our own beginning, is always material, embodied: there is no disembodied natality. . . thus the freedom of natality is not the putative freedom of a disembodied mind, a mind made as free as possible from bodily shackles, as Plato would have it, but rather a freedom that emerges from and takes place within bodily existence (1999, p. 145).

Jantzen also understands Arendt’s invocation of natality as a refutation of Heidegger’s postulate of a human being (in the mode of *Dasein*) as predominately “a being-unto-death.” Heidegger proposes that it is only by acknowledging one’s mortality that one can live authentically (1999, p. 133). Jantzen expands on this preoccupation with death on the part of one male philosopher to include most Christian philosophers’ seeming obsession with an other-worldly salvation rather

than a “redemption” that is both *of* and *in* this world. One facet of this morbid concern that particularly disturbs her is the fixation on this idea of women as emblematic of the evils of this world. Her whole *oeuvre* is devoted to an attempt to change this perspective and to allow women to take their place as rightful co-inheritors of a creative divine orientation. This change in perspective in turn supports a revitalized ethical responsibility that encourages the flourishing of all humanity. Jantzen explains her position:

It is the shift of Gestalt that recognizes that the weaving of the web of life which each person enters in virtue of our natality means that we are connected to all other persons, female and male. Our sexuate selves, born of women, are the basis of our similarity and difference from other sexuate selves, the foundation both of empathy and of respect for alterity. This connectedness with all others, while allowing for great diversity, can therefore be recognized as the material basis of ethical responsiveness (p. 150).

Subsequently to *Becoming Divine* (1999), where she had voiced these opinions, Jantzen published *The Foundations of Violence* (2004). This was the first of an intended four-volume series that was to study the roots of a necrophilic mode of violence that she believed has reigned supreme in the western mindset and culture during the history of western philosophy and religion. For Jantzen this preoccupation with death and violence was indeed a manifestation of a malignant undercurrent of evil. Yet she believed, similarly to Arendt, that it was not endemic to humanity and that its seemingly normative inculcation could be altered. But Jantzen did not live to complete this project. Thus, unfortunately, while she had begun to propose beauty as the basis of an antidote to violence, her full depiction of an alternative response to the problem of evil did not have the time to mature philosophically. Perhaps, however, some light can be shed on the route she might have taken by comparing and contrasting her work on the topic of natality with that of Hannah Arendt. Building on her own conception of this term, Arendt did define a different mode of theodicy in light of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, which I believe has explicit implications for the work of philosophy of religion today.

Hannah Arendt on Evil and Natality

Hannah Arendt identified herself as a Jew, though she was not an observant one.¹ She barely escaped being a victim of the Holocaust herself and was devastated when, as a refugee in America, she learned of the extermination camps.² She became involved with trying to understand why the controls of civilization had failed, and also to identify the specific elements that had contributed to this unprecedented

¹For further insights into Arendt’s relationship to Judaism see Arendt, *The Jewish Writings* (2006), Ring (1998) and Bernstein (2000).

²Arendt relates her own reaction: “That was in 1943. And at first we didn’t believe it. . . . But we didn’t believe it because militarily it was unnecessary and uncalled for. . . . And then half a year later we believed it after all, because we had proof. That was the real shock. . . . It was really as if an abyss had opened” (1994, pp. 13–14).

event. She presents certain conclusions in her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), where she describes her notion of radical evil. These insights need to be supplemented by Arendt’s later analysis of the Adolf Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), where she explains her controversial idea of the banality of evil as exemplified in the unreflective conduct of Eichmann. Undergirding all of her work, however, is the affirmative ideal of natality.

In *The Human Condition* (1959), Arendt presents her understanding of natality as intrinsic to creative human activity. It designates the possibility of new beginnings, of constant initiatives in thought and action that result in constructive forms of productivity.

The new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activity (1959, pp. 10–11).

In its metaphorical mode, natality also implies a second more conscious mode of birth, as the potential for ever new beginnings. Arendt adapted this term from the work of Augustine, on whom she wrote the equivalent of her M.A. thesis.³ She enlarged its meaning, however, from its particular religious setting to align it with a vision of human beings acting and speaking together for the common good. Such communal activity characterized for Arendt the life of a genuine *polis*—a public space for all concerned people, as distinct from the limited version of ancient Greece.⁴ Totalitarian regimes, in contrast, deprive individuals not merely of such public participation but systematically reduce them to a state of dehumanization. This was the horror of radical evil, which was not confined to the Holocaust alone, but also referred to the Communist regime in Russia. Arendt decries this development: “The danger of the corpse factories and the holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous” (1951, p. 433).

This mass-production of evil was later distinguished from the conduct of those individuals such as Eichmann, who were the cogs in the wheel of its implementation. Such people, with their claims of simply following orders, were representative of a type of evil that stemmed from a distinct lack of consideration of the consequences of their actions. It was thoughtless activity, often without deliberate malice—an efficacy without intention—that established evil for Arendt as an everyday or banal occurrence. The Holocaust could only have occurred by the accumulation of the discrete actions of numerous individuals behaving in this unthinking way. Former theodicies that associated definitions of moral evil with specific intentionality no

³ Arendt’s thesis: *Der Leibesbegriff bei Augustin* (1929) was undertaken mainly under the supervision of Martin Heidegger. She revised a translation of it later in America in the late 50 s and early 60 s but it was only published posthumously in 1996. See *Love and St. Augustine*, edited by Scott and Stark.

⁴ In an interview Arendt defines the polis as: “The space in which things become public as the space in which one lives and which must look presentable” (1994, p. 20).

longer apply, as banal evil does not coincide with a definite decision to break the moral law. Susan Neiman, in her book *Evil in Modern Thought* (2002), aptly expresses her understanding of Arendt's conclusion and its implications.

Arendt's account was crucial in revealing what makes Auschwitz emblematic for contemporary evil. It showed that today, even crimes so immense that the earth itself cries out for retribution are committed by people with motives no worse than banal . . . the most unprecedented crimes can be committed by the most ordinary people (2002, p. 273).

This, of course, does not imply the perpetrators are any less guilty, but new grounds for conviction, other than deliberate malice, have to be sought. And yet what sort of theodicy, if any, can now be written? It must be one that takes into account the devastation of the Holocaust and the new manifestations of evil that thus came into existence. Such a perspective also implies that the origin of evil itself has to be reconceived. It is no longer simply a lack or privation of the good, as depicted by Augustine. On the other hand, Arendt, though strongly influenced by Kant in many ways, did not ultimately agree with his description of a seemingly indwelling mode of radical evil, and the resultant mysterious battle that takes place in the will between a person's predisposition to the good and a propensity to evil.⁵ In contrast, Arendt will finally define evil as similar to a fungus. "It [Evil] has no depth, and therefore has nothing demonic about it. Evil can lay waste the entire world, like a fungus growing rampant on the surface" (Arendt in Scholem 2002, p. 400).⁶ Such a description acknowledges evil as something that can grow without a definite purpose. It is superficial, spreads slowly, yet in small incremental steps that can have deadly and pervasive effects.

Continuing with this figurative comparison, Arendt wanted to imply that, though human beings could be susceptible to this malignant growth, evil was neither innate nor inevitable. Humanity would not, of necessity, succumb to the insidious effects of evil. It could be understood, and thus it could be resisted. Neiman succinctly summarized Arendt's resolutions:

To claim that evil is comprehensible in general is not to claim that any instance of it is transparent. It is, rather, to deny that supernatural forces, divine or demonic, are required to account for it. It is also to say that while natural processes are responsible for it, natural processes can be used to prevent it. . . . By providing a framework that shows how the greatest crimes may be carried out by men with none of the marks of the criminal, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* argued that evil is not a threat to reason itself. Rather, crimes like Eichmann's depend on thoughtlessness, the refusal to use reason as we should (2002, p. 303).

Eichmann's own failure and also, on Arendt's account, the potential failure of any human being, was to neglect to think self-critically in a way that questions received habits, definitions, or orders. Such an act of critical thinking has a specific

⁵Such a depiction of radical evil can be found in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

⁶It was in this same letter that Arendt expressed her changed understanding of radical evil since her earlier writings on totalitarianism. She now refused to see it as innate and therefore irredeemable. "Evil in every instance is only extreme, never radical" (Scholem 2002, p. 400.)

connotation for Arendt.⁷ It belongs to the domain of the *polis*. “[Thinking] needs the presence of others ‘in whose place’ it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all” (1977, pp. 220–221). Arendt posits that such conduct can counter the tendencies to self-preoccupation that permit totalitarian regimes to insinuate their ideologies and seduce gullible minds with their tempting slogans. Thinking, in this sense, is intimately related to constructive action. In addition, both are also intimately related to natality.

Yet evil is never far from Arendt’s thoughts and philosophy. Natality should never be taken as a naïve celebration of the joys of being alive. Natality is tempered by Arendt’s constant awareness of human frailty—not only the temptation to complacency, but the ineluctable fact that all human efforts fall short of their aspirations. And yet this is not a pessimistic outlook. It is a drastic realism that concedes the infinite ambitions of humanity will always far exceed their actual abilities. In such a finite world, however, it is natality that marks the possibility that unexpected effects can nevertheless occur. This is because, for Arendt, the notion of natality as *initium* can instigate the unforeseeable and the unpredictable.

History in contradistinction to nature, is full of events; here the miracle of accident and infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all. But the reason for this frequency is merely that historical processes are created and constantly interrupted by human initiative, by the *initium* man is, insofar as he is an acting being (Arendt 1977, p. 170).

Obviously Arendt’s whole vision presupposes a notion of free will, but it cannot automatically be assumed or left to develop on its own.⁸ An education in thinking, as opposed to merely teaching, provides the foundation without which her hopes for humanity cannot be realized.

And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (1977, p. 196).

It is this muted optimism, embodied in natality, which attracted Grace Jantzen.

⁷Thinking, for Arendt, is not the same as knowledge or the search for certainty. As Bernstein describes it: “Thinking is the faculty by which we ask unanswerable questions, but questions that we cannot help asking. It is the faculty by which we seem to understand the *meaning* of whatever we encounter. And in the quest for meaning there is no finality. The search for knowledge and truth, and the quest for meaning are by no means totally unrelated. On the contrary, although we must not identify or confuse thinking with knowing, genuine knowing would be *impossible* without thinking, and thinking itself presupposes knowing” (2000, p. 283).

⁸Freedom of the will, however, is not to be confused with Arendt’s own appreciation of political freedom. This is “the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given not even as an object of cognition or imagination. Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as predictable on the other” (1977, p. 151).

Jantzen's Adaptation of Arendt

Jantzen was aware that, in Arendt's view, the notion of natality did not have a distinctly religious orientation as its inspiration or goal. Nor, in Arendt's designation, could it be considered as having any explicitly stated convictions of a religious nature—specifically in relation to philosophy of religion. But it certainly had resonances that Jantzen was only too happy to amend. As she states:

Taking a symbolic of natality seriously has direct and immediate consequences for a philosophy of religion. It affirms the concreteness and embodied nature of human lives and experience, the material and discursive conditions within which subjects are formed and out of which a religious symbolic must emerge (1999, pp. 110–111).

She then continues with specific reference to the “problem of evil”: “The philosophy of religion has often treated the suffering of human beings and animals as though the main concern is not putting a stop to suffering, but instead working out intellectually how a good God could permit it to happen” (p. 111).

Both Arendt and Jantzen are vitally concerned with “putting an end to suffering” Whereas Arendt's purpose was to reanimate the world of political thought and action—in the widest sense of these terms—as a safeguard against disasters such as the Holocaust, Jantzen worried about all manifestations of violence—particularly those inflicted on others who had been unjustly deemed inferior and unworthy of due respect. More importantly, Jantzen proposed that the “problem of evil” should be addressed in its concrete manifestations, specifically by “paying attention to who actually are the perpetrators of suffering, considering both the individual and the structures within which they are embedded” (1999, p. 263). As a feminist philosopher, Jantzen was specifically engaged with issues of injustice and mistreatment. One vital concern of hers was that of violence against women. She was not at all interested in promoting victimhood, but rather in promoting a philosophy of natality. She appreciated that “[a] symbolic of natality is at fundamental variance with misogyny” (1999, p. 114). Jantzen believed that the western social imaginary had been saturated, since its origins, with a marked tendency towards violence, even necrophilia, on which she elaborated in *The Foundations of Violence* (2004).

In its place, it was Jantzen's intention to promote a “moral imagination of natality.” Such an orientation is “one that takes up the tough fragility of life, its hopelessness and its possibilities, its inter-connectedness and the dependence of its flourishing on the whole web of life around it, not excluding the earth” (1999, p. 229). Jantzen, however, did not live to complete this vision, and it remained basically at a programmatic stage. Its powerful invocation, however, has inspired me to at least try to apply it to the situation of women, particularly as depicted in the Western religious and philosophical traditions.

Jantzen was well aware that Arendt was no feminist,⁹ yet she recognized in Arendt's work, as have other contemporary feminists, certain valuable insights that

⁹Jantzen notes that her “appropriation and expansion, while grounded in Arendt's writing, goes in directions which she herself did not, and of which she perhaps would not have approved, though it

could be applied to analyzing the condition of women and to providing possible constructive solutions that did not distort Arendt’s philosophy. At the same time, Jantzen did not want either to polarize men and women or to present women as a specific idealized category. Men and women had both strengths and failings, but when it came to violence being apportioned in relationships between the sexes, Jantzen felt that women had received a disproportionate share.

In Jantzen’s analysis, such violence tended to emerge when “difference is treated as a danger, rather than as a resource, so that hostility rather than mutuality characterizes the interaction” (unpublished papers, forthcoming, Routledge). Yet Jantzen wondered how women’s difference had come to be constructed in this hostile way. For an explanation of such a development, Jantzen initially appealed to Freudian psychoanalysis with its diagnosis that women are feared because of their association with sex and death.¹⁰

The cultural portrayals of death show how closely death and gender are intertwined. This is, of course, nothing new to modernity, although it is given different emphasis. The womb and the tomb of Plato’s cave or the anchorite’s cell; the Christian insistence on a new birth not of flesh and blood as a prerequisite for eternal life; the fear of female sexuality in medieval monastic writings and early modern witch hunts; the linkage of sexual love with death so that women are regularly described in poetry as diverse as Donne’s and Blake’s as bearing children (not for life but) for death; ejaculation is a ‘little death;’ the interweaving of death and the female in the writings of psychoanalytic theory from Freud onwards: all these show that the genealogy of death in the West is a gendered genealogy, and one that has had disastrous consequences for women (2001, pp. 227–228).

From Jantzen’s perspective, these illustrations of a male preoccupation with death have a direct link to a displaced anxiety of death and repressed anger that is acted out on women.

In one of her final essays, Jantzen stated: “Burgeoning domestic violence, safe and sexual and physical assault by men on women and children is partly an expression of centuries of patriarchy sustained by a Christendom which taught men were superior to women and had a right to dominance and mastery, by force if necessary” (unpublished papers, forthcoming, Routledge). It is unfortunate that Jantzen did not live to develop such claims in a substantive way or in a developed argument. In the following section, I will attempt to apply her insights with specific reference to women and violence.

is arguably a response to her call for renewed political thoughtfulness. Be that as it may, my purpose is to explore the dimensions of a symbolic of natality for a feminist philosophy of religion; and for this project I shall help myself to aspects of Arendt’s thought without pretending that she herself sanctioned such usage of her ideas” (1998, pp. 109–110).

¹⁰Jantzen summarized her understanding of this linkage as it came to be expressed by psychoanalytic theory: “The conceptual linkage of death with women . . . is exposed especially in psychoanalytic writings beginning with Freud and continuing with Julia Kristeva. . . . [I]n ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ Freud connects the desire of a child to control his mother’s absence with *thanatos*, the death-drive. . . . The western obsession with death is therefore connected with the obsession with female bodies, and the denial of death and efforts to master it are connected with a deep-seated misogyny” (1999, p. 132).

Women, Violence, and Evil

The basic question is, of course, why and how violence against women can be considered as an action that is evil. Perhaps it is just a question of semantics and a more appropriate word could be found. My intention in making this claim, however, is more to question the traditional approaches to the problem of evil that have been conducted using only abstract arguments. In keeping with the work of Grace Jantzen, I want to undertake a more concrete engagement with the fact of evil as its enactment has an indelible impact on the lives of women. At the same time, however, I also want to enquire into the reasons that such a topic has not been addressed in any discussions concerning the problem of evil. Though this may not be an approach that other women philosophers of religion might approve of, I think that it may be the only strategy that will draw attention to this omission in the area of philosophy of religion where reflection and writing has been largely dominated by men.

There are indeed women writing today, in what has been labeled a “post-feminist” era, who state that women scholars should not continue to wallow in claims of victimhood. This is certainly not my intention. What I want to emphasize, nonetheless, is the continuing manifestations of violence against women, from organized rape as a weapon in contemporary conflicts, such as in Darfur and the Congo, to the undiminished rates of assault and murder in less strife-torn areas of the world. Contemporary Christian women commentators have no hesitation in labeling these types of violence against women as “sin.” The term “sin,” of course, is used within a religious jurisdiction. Evil, as distinct from sin, is acknowledged as a more general term that may or may not have a religious reference. Even in this qualified sense, however, there is a need to justify the usage of the word “sin.”

In *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, Marie Fortune introduces her own appeal to this term with a necessary qualification:

The use of the word ‘sin’ to describe sexual violence may be initially unfamiliar or misleading. . . . Too often ‘sin’ is based on an ethical system that emphasizes rules and regulations about specific acts. It often describes the focus of pietistic and moralistic religious beliefs; it may be the bedrock of condemnation. This is not the concept of ‘sin’ used here (2005, p. 13).

She then continues and defines her own understanding of the word:

Within the theological notion of sin as a dimension of human experience, we must consider the ethical notion of ‘sins’ as the individual or collective acts of those who bring suffering to others. The sinful person strikes out at others in hostility and anger, denying the demands of relationship and violating the personhood of others by treating them as objects or by intentionally inflicting injury. The wages of sin are violence, and the consequences are suffering for all involved (p. 14).

Such a definition decisively attributes the word “sin” mainly to individual acts, though a communal mode is acknowledged. I believe, however, that this structural or communal form needs to be given special scrutiny. Christine Gudorf, in her call for a restructuring of Christian ethics, eloquently elaborates on this wider frame of reference and its influence.

The churches today are still teaching theological conclusions originally based in ignorance of women’s genetic contribution to offspring, ignorance of the process of gender identity and of sexual orientation, and of the difference between them, and ignorance of the learned basis of most gender differences—ignorance which has allowed and supported patriarchy, misogyny and heterosexism, the assumption that heterosexuality is normal (1994, p. 2).

A number of books and articles on this topic have also been published by women. These include a comprehensive study by a *Concilium* collective, *Violence against Women* (1994), *The Cry of Tamar*, by Pamela Cooper-White (1995) and *A Troubling in My Soul* (1993), an impressive collection of essays by womanist scholars, edited by Emilie M. Townes. It is a telling mark of the lack of attention paid by many male philosophers of religion to women’s scholarship, however, that these works by women cited above have rarely been mentioned in any philosophical discussions conducted by men on the subject of evil.

In one sense, it could be said that traditional religion has quite literally focused on a very restricted understanding of natality as birth, rather than honoring the figurative aspect of flourishing that Jantzen stresses. Gudorf would appear to recognize the need for a change of perception on this matter:

We must shift from an emphasis on the generation of life to an emphasis on the sustaining of life. Sex has symbolized both; most societies have explicitly emphasized the generation, and subsumed the maintaining of life under generation, as Christianity has done. We must now differentiate the two meanings, and stress sex as symbolic of maintaining life (1994, p. 129).

Jantzen would further extend this idea of maintaining and preserving life to one of fostering and encouraging a dimension of natality that promotes creativity and wonder. The cultivation of such natal values would seem particularly timely in contemporary western society. This is because today there is an obvious disconnect between a virtually puritanical insistence, on one extreme, on heterosexuality and virginity, and the prurient interest, fed by an obsessive media, in celebrities’ sex lives, on the other. This is not in any way a moralistic statement, but a phenomenological observation along the lines of Foucault’s comments on the omnipresence of sex—even in seemingly repressive settings—in divergent guises.

It is in the wider frame of sexuality within a social context, that the notion of original, or social, sin—as also defined by Gudorf—becomes pertinent. Her description of it echoes Jantzen’s earlier explication of the social imaginary. “Original sin, sometimes called social sin, or sin in the world, is socialized into us. . . .Born into a society permeated with racism, sexism, poverty, violence, we learn varying degrees of complacency toward, and come to accept these realities” (1994, p. 17). Gudorf then relates this form of sin to specific manifestations in sexuality: “Patriarchy, misogyny, the related evils of homophobia and heterosexism, and alienation from and disdain for the body and sexuality are forms which original sin takes in the sexual context” (p. 17).

For Gudorf, however, it seems that the only category available for determining blame in such instances of systemic sin—whether it involves the decrees of established structures, the henchmen who carry out the orders, or the violent actions of the unthinking socialized masses—is those natural and impersonal disasters that in

pre-Enlightenment times used to be termed natural evil.¹¹ It is in this connection that the work of Arendt, rather than that of Jantzen, can prove particularly helpful. While Jantzen promotes the idea of natality that she adapted from Arendt, and she abhors violence, she does not address the relationship between the two in a way that discerns the contours of evil as they constitute an impediment to natality. For Jantzen, the promotion of natality will provide a direct counteraction for violence, the roots of which she seeks in the cultural patrimony and resultant entrenched prejudices of western civilization itself. Arendt, in contrast, was struck by the unprecedented problem of systemic or structural evil as it was manifested in the anonymity of the brutal yet mindless conduct of the administrators of the Holocaust. It was their unquestioning implementation of orders that she named banal evil and sought to rectify.

I believe that Arendt's concept of the banality of evil could have widespread application in analyzing many instances of what today appears as structural or systemic evil. It refers to the faceless form of exploitation that takes cover behind the labyrinthine conglomerates of either government or multinational corporations, where catchwords such as: "serving its citizens or customers better," are simply euphemisms for downsizing, job termination, and denial of benefits.

It is also my contention that a parallel can be drawn in certain instances of behavior by male functionaries—whether operating in the various echelons of religious organizations or universities—when they resort to perfunctory repetition of antiquated regulations and attitudes that exhibit a bias against women. While there may not be physical violence or blatant discrimination involved, what is all too obvious in situations where women are excluded is either a benign indifference to the circumstances or an invocation of precedents that amounts to condoning tradition. There is no plausible excuse for the continuation of such conventions, given the wealth of material that has been written by women in the past forty years on the causes and conditions of the denigration and subsequent mistreatment of women. It is in this context of the banality of evil that I would like to examine the manner in which philosophy of religion is conducted today.

Philosophy of Religion, Women, and the Problem of Evil

The conventional approach to engaging with the "problem of evil" concerns itself with justifying God's seemingly indifferent disposition towards his faithful followers. The intention has never been to explain away evil but to defend its existence

¹¹Neiman gives an overview of this development: "If Enlightenment is the courage to think for oneself, it's also the courage to assume responsibility for the world into which one is thrown. Radically separating what earlier ages called natural from moral evils was thus part of the meaning of modernity. If Auschwitz can be said to mark its ending, it is for the way it marks our terror. Modern conceptions of evil were developed in the attempt to stop blaming God for the state of the world, and to take responsibility for it on our own" (2002, p. 4). Neiman then states the new "problem of evil" that was posed by Auschwitz: "how can human beings behave in ways that so thoroughly violate both reasonable and rational norms?" (2002, p. 3).

in such a way that a certain coherence in one’s philosophical worldview can be maintained. As such, this is a very rational enterprise. The most recent publication that takes this approach is Peter van Inwagen’s *The Problem of Evil* (2006). Van Inwagen comes at the problem from a different direction than is customary. He wonders whether the manifold and arbitrary occurrences of evil in the world, especially those of pain and suffering, could amount to a “proof for the non-existence of God”. In his rebuttal of such a position, van Inwagen states that most philosophical arguments that start from the existence of evil, so as to deny the existence of a (good) God, have failed. Basically his defense depends on an argument that declares that even if God wanted to prevent evil, human beings have no inklings of his motives to start with. As a result, why should they even bother to second-guess whether or not God should intervene, or to determine what would be an acceptable number of interventions (to remain a good God) if God were to do so? This defense depends on specific postulates such as those of a “faulty moral principle” and “no minimum amount”. They are used to illustrate van Inwagen’s rejection of the plausibility of expecting divine mitigation, according to any specific ideal of designated degrees in the alleviation of evil. This seems a particularly specious approach—if not casuistry at its most abstruse and irrelevant—in the service of demonstrating that God’s non-existence has not been proved, and that God’s unpredictability is thus acceptable as part of divine providence.

Arendt and Jantzen have chosen to take another route. Jantzen in fact states her reasons for deciding not to adopt any abstract position that would amount to taking the God’s-eye view. Her preference is to deal with human suffering in all its rawness. She observes, “By refusing to engage with the question of the human distribution of evil and focusing instead on theodicy, it is possible to evade questions of domination and victimization while still appearing to ‘deal with’ the problem of the evil” (1999, p. 262). Jantzen does concede that the analytic philosophical approach often begins by posing an intellectual difficulty which is then related to actual instances of human behavior that illustrate the problem to be resolved. Yet she still finds this inadequate. She would start instead from an encounter with a concrete example of a person or persons suffering and then work towards the building of a theory that is responsive to this particular situation.

Jantzen is more preoccupied with how one can respond to the suffering of others, rather than worrying about whether one can achieve a satisfactory intellectual solution to a problem, such as that of evil, that has been constructed in a theoretical vacuum. For Jantzen, “The issue is not so much ‘how can a good god permit evil?’ as it is ‘how are the resources of religion, particularly Christendom, used by those who inflict evil on others? How are they used by those who resist? And above all, what does the face of the other require of me, and how can I best respond for love of the world?’” (1999, p. 264). Yet such a starting point is not without its own theoretical consequences. This requires nothing less than an investigation into the way that the discipline itself has constructed a system of enquiry that simply reflects the ways of the world rather than questioning, let alone challenging them. “It means also considering both how traditional theistic doctrines of power, mastery, and hierarchical patterns of domination feed into ideologies propping up the structures of domination and reinforce racism, sexism, poverty, and homophobia. The question

of what religion has to do with evil and suffering is thus posed in much more concrete ways” (1999, 264). Such a concreteness begins with a concern for all creatures and an enquiry into the ways that evils which arise from acts of deceit, abuse of power and hatred, manifested towards fellow creatures, can begin to be alleviated. In Jantzen’s telling, this reorientation finds its grounding in love.

It is the theme of “love of the world” that resonates in the work of both Arendt and Jantzen. For Arendt, it is natality that sustains this hope and love for this world, despite the horrors both she and the Jewish people experienced at the hands of other human beings. Abstract reasoning is never the final arbiter. Instead there is a deeply felt commitment to thinking anew, so that a person is free to reflect and make judgments not based on precedents with a predetermined answer. Such thinking, in the mode of natality, allows that there can always be a regeneration that changes one’s perspective or unsettles ingrained or dogmatic views.

Both Arendt and Jantzen believed that evil was not innate, but acquired—though their explanations for its insidious presence differed. Nevertheless, both believed that by coming to an awareness of its origins and dynamics, there were strategies that could be adopted to help to counteract its devastating effects. While paying tribute to their tireless attempts to help many others come to this same awareness, I am only too cognizant that natality, of itself, cannot change the world. It can, however, furnish a basic approach that serves to highlight, only too dramatically, the deficiencies in the present paradigm, both theoretical and practical, in the philosophical study of evil.

Conclusion

Grace Jantzen’s expression of natality and love of this world reoriented her own Christian allegiance in the direction of pantheism. Such a move would not necessarily vindicate the ways of God, as pantheism is notoriously difficult to reconcile with a harmful universe. It may, however, as Jantzen hoped, help to provide an antidote to evil in the guise of violence, because of its emphasis on harmony and integration. Such a pantheistic strategy, where God is understood as indwelling in creation, could also prove a beneficial counter-measure against one contemporary form of Christianity, which promotes visions of Armageddon accompanied by war cries of “evil empire” and the “clash of civilizations.” This is because pantheism, as Jantzen envisages it, both fosters a particularly life-affirming mode of appreciating the beauty of creation and encourages human flourishing. In other words, it is connected to a philosophy and theology that promotes natality. Pantheism has often been found unacceptable by proponents of orthodox Christian theology because it is regarded as ambiguous as to whether God actually indwells in the created world, or simply participates in its continual creation. Jantzen acknowledges the difficult technicalities that need to be negotiated in this debate (1999, p. 271). She leaves them to one side for later treatment, however, since her more immediate goal is to propose a hypothesis of the changes that would ensue if its tenets, as she appreciates them, were taken seriously.

If we took for granted that divinity—that which is most to be respected and valued—*means* mutuality, bodiliness, diversity and materiality, then whether or not we believed that such a concept of God was instantiated, or whether or not we clung to a realist stance, the implications for our thought and life would be incalculable (1999, p. 269).

Jantzen expands on the meaning of the ideals of mutuality, bodiliness, diversity, and materiality—all of which she connects with natality—in Chapter Four of *The Foundations of Violence* (2004, pp. 35–43). Here she lays out an agenda for a later volume in the series that would have explored these various dimensions of natality in more detail, including that of pantheism. While her ideas on this subject are not developed, Jantzen provides a forecast of the direction her thought might have gone.

Our embodied, gendered selfhood, situated in the social and cultural web of relationships, delineates our natality; and it is out of this natality that creativity emerges. If violence is linked with death-dealing and destruction, creativity is linked with natality. If we wish to seriously pursue alternatives to necrophilia, then the greatest resource is that it is birth, at least as much as death, which characterizes what it means to be human, natality that signifies a future and a hope (2004, p. 38).

It was also Jantzen’s intention to develop further the link of natality to beauty, which she believed had been displaced from serious consideration in the western philosophical and theological tradition and banished to the realm of aesthetics. It is in one of her later essays that Jantzen portrays most eloquently her understanding of this intimate relationship of beauty to natality.

[B]eauty evokes longing; desire is ignited by loveliness, and responds creatively. It is engaged with natality, the making of the new, not out of preoccupation with death but as a mimetic response to creative response to overflowing resources. This is a responsive desire, not self-generated; but it is a desire premised on plenitude rather than on lack, an overflowing generosity rather than scarcity, on creativity rather than exclusionary violence and death (2002, p. 43).

Grace Jantzen believed that, as an academic, she had been endowed with certain abilities—including a disposition that resonated with wonder at the beauty of the world. She understood it as her task to try and create a way of doing philosophy that reflected her gratitude for this abundance and thus redeemed this world. This involved a strong criticism of the way that philosophy of religion has been preoccupied with a death-bound existence. As such, it sought to support God’s ways rather than ease suffering. Specifically, Jantzen’s critique focused on philosophy of religion’s defensive treatment of evil and its neglect of examining its presuppositions concerning women. Her intent was to transform this approach. It is regrettable that she died prematurely, at the height of her powers, with her agenda incomplete. Jantzen favored the option of natality rather than becoming concerned with vistas of otherworldly punishments and rewards that were based solely on a notion of personal salvation. It is to be hoped that other women philosophers will be inspired by her efforts and continue with the project of reform she envisioned.

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Chapter 3

Horizons and Limitations of Muslim Feminist Hermeneutics: Reflections on the Menstruation Verse

Shuruq Naguib

Abstract The aim of this paper is to “converse” with recent feminist readings of the Qur’an in the light of traditional Qur’an exegesis. In the course of the paper, I will first reflect on the horizons opened up by these new readings of the Qur’an. Then, against the backcloth of an aspect of the law of purity concerning menstruation as outlined in traditional exegesis, I will go on to examine the limitations which arise from constructing Qur’anic hermeneutics on the basis of binary oppositions in which interpretations of gender in the Qur’an are either modern feminist and egalitarian, on the one hand, or traditional, male and misogynistic on the other hand. In the end, a third possibility is advocated for a Muslim feminist hermeneutics which affirms the original purity of humanity as a horizon for the divine.

Keywords Egalitarian · Exegesis · Muslim feminist hermeneutics · Menstruation · Purity · Qur’an

I

When Muslim women stand before the Qur’an to hear the divine discourse they also hear the voices of male interpreters, who for centuries defined its hermeneutic boundaries by affirming allegiance to past authority and drawing on available repositories of meaning. To hear the Qur’an without the mediation of men, some Muslim feminists choose to suppress the male voices in order to recover what they perceive to be an originally liberating and egalitarian divine message. Beyond this position, the choice is often represented as either one of acquiescence toward a misogynistic tradition or denunciation of the Qur’an itself as being constitutive of that tradition—in short, a choice between subordination and loss of identity.

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The first scholarly effort by a Muslim woman to dissociate the Qur'an from its established interpretation is the work of Bint al-Shati' (1913–1998).¹ Though never proclaiming feminism, her approach subverted the authority of the hermeneutic tradition by demonstrating how (male) exegetes often deflected Qur'anic meaning because of sectarian interests and flawed methods (Bint al-Shati' 1968, p. 16). To legitimate her own authority as a woman interpreter, she read the reiteration of the unitary origin of women and men in the Qur'an's creation account as an assertion of the sameness of their ethical responsibility, and hence of their equal right to hear and interpret divine discourse (Bint al-Shati' 1967, pp. 7–9).

This reading has become a habitual point of beginning within a new hermeneutic which Anne Sofie Roald describes as the "Muslim feminist tradition" (Roald 1996, pp. 17–44). It represents the potential egalitarianism of the Qur'an and its recovery by feminist interpreters.² In contrast, traditional interpretations of the creation account have come to exemplify male appropriation of the Qur'an: when the Qur'an speaks of God creating humankind "*from a single soul*" (Q. 4:1), the male interpreters have always read it as "*the single (male) soul of Adam.*"³ In feminist hermeneutic critiques, the constant and unchallenged occurrence of this interpretation in traditional Muslim exegesis ultimately indicates a transposition of patriarchal ideology onto divine discourse that is facilitated, in this case, by a defunct hermeneutic reliance on the biblical story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib.⁴

Primarily premised on the relevance of the Qur'an to Muslim women, the feminist hermeneutic endeavour is still quite far from a call to reconfigure the doctrinal view of the Qur'an as the literal word of God such as, for example, the one we can hear in the work of Judith Plaskow who considers the rejection of the Torah as a male text necessary for constructing a feminist Judaism (1990, p. 25). For Muslim feminists like Riffat Hassan, there is no horizon beyond the Qur'an for "self-actualisation in Muslim societies" (2001, pp. 55–68). The unreading of patriarchy is therefore undertaken from the perspective of "believing women" for whom the Qur'an, as Asma Barlas maintains, "is both the source of Truth and the means of realising it in action" (2002, p. 32). To defend the consistency of this theological underpinning with their feminist methodology, Muslim feminists interpreting the Qur'an hold traditional Muslim hermeneutics (*tafsir*) solely liable for the imbalanced gender configurations within Islam. Thus, in order to salvage the Qur'an from conflation with a poor interpretation of it, they bracket the entire *tafsir* tradition on

¹Bint al-Shati' (the daughter of the beach) is the penname chosen by the Egyptian exegete Aisha Abd al-Rahman in her early writings to avoid her family's disapproval.

²Feminist interpretations of the Qur'an are emerging from a small group of Muslim women scholars, whose readings may be regarded as theologically and theoretically 'comprising a single body of work' according to Asma Barlas, a member of this group (Barlas 2006, p. 259).

³Ibn Kathir (d.1373) dates back this reading to the earliest Muslim exegetes, see *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim*, Vol. 1, Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d., 424.

⁴For a full critique see Barlas (2002, pp. 38–40) and Wadud (1992, p. 20). Cf. Hassan (1987, pp. 2–4).

the grounds that it legitimated the exclusionary paradigms which rendered women voiceless and forestalled their contribution to Islam's development in the formative and classical periods.

Muslim Feminist hermeneutics is therefore secondarily premised on the exclusion of the *tafsir* tradition from which they have been excluded over many centuries. Yet despite the centrality of this exclusion for producing a reading which liberates the Qur'an and women, it is often hastily carried out. This quick dismissal reflects an assumption that the dislodging of traditional interpretations is textual in the first place, substituting a corpus of patriarchal readings with another feminist one. But the meanings given to divine discourse throughout Islam's first millennium are not confined to the *tafsir* corpus. They are inscribed in the language, the imaginary, and the living practice of Muslims.

However, the main problematic of Muslim feminist hermeneutics lies not in the eschewal of a critical engagement with a tradition from which many Muslims derive a sense of continuity and identity. Nor is it in the doubt it inadvertently casts on the meaningfulness of a divine discourse whose "original" message could not be heard for almost fourteen centuries; nor in the philosophical difficulty it poses by presuming that a feminist reading is not at risk of "transposing onto the Qur'an" a privileged western liberal paradigm. The main problematic lies in the uncompromising construction of a set of binary oppositions whereby the interpretation of the Qur'an is either modern/feminist/egalitarian on the one hand, or traditional/male/misogynistic on the other. This oppositional logic reflects an intrinsic aversion toward the classical Muslim tradition in the vision of reform espoused by the Muslim (male) intellectuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a vision arising from a negative evaluation of the Muslim tradition as methodologically deficient because it encouraged imitation and permitted prejudice to the detriment of rational enquiry.⁵

This negative evaluation indicates, above all, the internalization in Muslim reform discourses—and subsequently in Muslim feminist hermeneutics—of modernity's general aversion toward the authority of transmitted knowledge and its espousal of an idea of progress as essentially premised on the dislocation of tradition.⁶ In what follows, by closely reading the Qur'an's only statement on menstruation in the light of traditional interpretations, I hope to problematize the feminist hermeneutic position on the necessity of excluding the *tafsir* tradition on the basis that it is theologically misogynistic and methodologically irrational in order to explore alternative hermeneutic choices.

One of the main reasons for choosing the theme of menstruation is that the Qur'an's reference to it can be taken as inviting a misogynistic reading. Moreover, it is often argued within feminist theology that at the heart of the prejudice against

⁵Wadud-Muhsin and Barlas, for example, unchallengingly accept the theory of *tafsir's* atomism and failure to treat the Qur'an thematically proposed by a number of Muslim modernist interpreters of the Qur'an such as Fazlur Rahman, Mustansir Mir and Hasan Hanafi (see Wadud 1992, p. 2 and Barlas 2002, p. 41).

⁶See Hans-Georg Gadamer on the discrediting of tradition and prejudice in modernity (Gadamer 2004, pp. 267–305).

women in the three Abrahamic religions lies a religious androcentrism which has assigned to women invisibility at the time of the covenant in Judaism, a second place in the creation story in Christianity and a status of defilement in Islam. Stringent praxis of the menstrual taboo has been conventionally interpreted within anthropology as representative of the lower status of women (du Toit 1998, pp. 395–396). A purity system where women are marked as impure and capable of transmitting dangerous defilement often operates as means of subjugation and control.⁷ Anthropologists who studied the position of Islam on menstruation have read its purity laws in the light of this theory, translating the impurity of menstruation in Islam as denoting the defiling female nature, and hence as the cause and marker of Islam's rigidity against women.⁸ In "Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve," Denise Spellberg considers the only Qur'anic reference to menstruation (Q. 2:222) to be the undeniable proof of the biological indictment of all women in Islam, as in Judaism and Zoroastrianism, on the basis that it describes menstruation as "hurt" and enjoins men to "*keep away from women in menstruation.*" Although Spellberg's negative reading of the Qur'an's reference to menstruation could be warranted, her conclusion that this reading grounds the purity system, and ultimately women's position in Islam, is not—as will be argued in what follows.⁹

Within Muslim feminist hermeneutics, the Qur'an is exonerated and the charge of androcentrism is shifted onto the *tafsir* tradition. Muslim women's defilement, argues Barlas, has been inscribed not through the Qur'an but through traditional interpretations of the menstruation verse (Barlas 2002, p. 161). Given that these interpretations were formulated and propagated through the classical exegetical literature of Islam, I will focus on some of the core works of *tafsir* spanning the classical period from the tenth to the fourteenth century.¹⁰

⁷This notion comes from the work of Mary Douglas (1984) where she argues that purity laws reflect the processes of socio-political control and subjugation.

⁸For example Marcus (1984, pp. 204–218), and Spellberg (1996, pp. 305–324).

⁹Spellberg finds what she presupposes; the myth of menstruation as divine punishment. She considers the inclusion of this account in the History of al-Tabari evidence that 'in menstruation as in motherhood, Eve's example explained female biology as sacred punishment for all women' (p. 320). However, Spellberg takes no notice of the fact that al-Tabari's History was a mostly a compilation of narratives in circulation, regardless of their value to religious discourse. The polyvalence of his Qur'an commentary is generated by a different principle; the collection of religiously authoritative ranges of meaning. As such, al-Tabari's omission of the biblical account of Eve's punishment, when commenting on Q. 2:222, indicates that it was deemed irrelevant to understanding the Qur'anic discourse on menstruation. All exegetes discussed above omit it too, which is indicative of the often expressed caution in the Muslim tradition regarding the reliability of biblical accounts. For further discussion of Muslim narratives displacing the biblical motif of menstruation as punishment in Islam, see Katz (2002, pp. 197–198).

¹⁰Classical commentaries deal with the Qur'anic verses seriatim. Opinions and traditions transmitted from the Prophet and early Muslim authorities. Islamic disciplines of law, language, and theology are also employed to varying degrees to support the interpretations which Muslim exegetes discuss.

II

And they ask you concerning menstruation (al-maḥīd). Say: “It is a hurt (adha^{an}), so keep away from women in menstruation and do not approach them until they are pure” (yathurna) (Surat al-Baqarah Q. 2:222).

Contextual Themes

In its immediate Qur’anic context, this verse is one of successive divine responses to questions posed by the early Muslim community to the Prophet Muhammad concerning spending in charity (Q. 2:215), fighting in the prohibited months (Q. 2:217), wine-drinking and gambling (Q. 2:19), treatment and guardianship of orphans (Q. 2:220), and finally menstruation (Q. 2:222). The context indicates considerable communal concern regarding these matters, since it is only on very few occasions that the Qur’an represents its commands as actively solicited by the Muslim community of the revelatory period.¹¹ Some of the issues, particularly wine-drinking and the guardianship of orphans, are represented in the exegetical sources as the cause of concern prior to this piece of revelation. The Qur’an’s reference to menstruation, therefore, is part of divine guidance in the face of anxiety and uncertainty. In the larger context of *Surat Al-Baqarah* (Q. 2), this divine guidance, including the instruction on menstruation, is tightly couched between two key thematic motifs: the affirmation of the authority of the Qur’an and Muhammad as an extension of the Abrahamic tradition,¹² and the failure of the children of Israel to uphold that tradition.¹³

Exegetical Problems

A preliminary examination of the classical exegesis of this verse tells us that all exegetes initially apply themselves to the problem of harmonizing the command in Q. 2:222—“*keep away from women in menstruation*”—with a reading of it that had been consolidated in the formative period of Islam as doing exactly the opposite. Al-Tabari, the tenth-century exegete, author of the earliest extant classical commentary on the Qur’an, resorts to extra-Qur’anic reports on the circumstances occasioning the revelation of this divine statement. The narrative he introduces describes a pre-revelation situation prompting the earthly query and the divine response:

¹¹The formula “*they ask you concerning. . .*” occurs nine times in the Qur’an in connection with religious practice. Seven out of nine occur in the passage ending with the menstruation verse. The remaining two occur in Q. 2:185 and Q. 5:4 and deal with the sighting of the new moon and dietary matters consecutively.

¹²Cf. Q. 2: 2–39, 119–167, and 246–252.

¹³Cf. Q. 2: 40–118, 211–214, 253.

They (men) never stayed in the same house with a menstruant, nor ate from the same plate with her, nor shared her drink. So God clarified to them, in this verse, that during the days of their women's menstrual periods, they only had to avoid sexual intercourse (*jīmā'*); all else such as sharing bed, food and drink (is permitted).¹⁴

The verse, al-Tabari affirms, was not revealed to isolate menstruating women from the household. Rather, it was intended to put an end to customary social stringency against menstruating women, described by the earlier authorities he cites as the "practice of *Jahiliyya* (the age of pre-Islamic Ignorance)". God, in the light of this reading, is perceived as intervening to alleviate menstrual restrictions which disadvantage women. This narrative about the occasion of revelation, however, creates a paradox since the literal meaning of the verse suggests the stipulation of a restriction rather than the alleviation of it. Aware of this, al-Tabari gives us the solution provided by the earlier exegete Qatada (d. 736), that is to read the verse as prohibiting sexual intercourse only and permitting, by implication, all other social and physical contact with menstruants. Further, in his efforts to maintain an understanding of the verse as alleviating restrictions on menstruants, he cites an earlier opinion (circa 722) that associates the verse with a very different query, one on the permissibility of anal sex during menstruation. Although in the end al-Tabari marginalizes this opinion and corroborates Qatada's interpretation with that of al-Rabi' b. Anas (d. 756), its mention serves to confirm that the divine answer is about sexual contact during menstruation. What this divine revelation did, according to these early Qur'an exegetes, was to exchange an institution of social and sexual isolation with a relatively minor restriction on sexual intercourse.

Nevertheless, reports on the occasion of revelation as well as earlier exegetical opinions cannot by themselves sustain a reading that is at odds with the obvious sense of this Qur'anic verse. Later exegetes are more acutely conscious of the problem. So while they continue to incorporate the socio-historical explanation which al-Tabari and his predecessors favor, they often supplement it with narrative elements that enhance the authority of their reading of the verse as minimum restriction on contact with menstruants. For example, in an important narrative supplement discussed below, the Prophet himself will substantiate this reading.

The narrative supplement appears in the twelfth-century in al-Zamakhshari, who admits that some early Muslims, on receiving the verse, were confused as to its correct meaning and, as a result, secluded menstruant women. Al-Zamakhshari recounts the incident as follows:

Some Arabian nomads said: 'O Messenger of God, the cold is harsh and the garments are few. If we favour them (menstruants) with the garments, all others in the household will perish, and if we favour ourselves, the menstruants will perish'. So he (the Prophet) clarified, peace be upon him: 'You were only commanded to avoid sexual intercourse when they (women) menstruate. He has not commanded you to send them away from their houses as the Persians did'.¹⁵

¹⁴al-Tabari (d. 922) pp. 380–381.

¹⁵al-Zamakhshari (1966, Vol 1, p. 361).

Here we can see how the reception history of the verse, functioning to enhance the authority of a more lenient reading, becomes entwined with an effort to differentiate Muslims from other communities and emphasize, at the same time, the complementarity of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition without which this piece of revelation seems at risk of 'misapplication'. The theme of community differentiation is taken forward by al-Zamakhshari who suggests that a secondary function of the verse might be to contrast the moderation and reasonableness of Islam with the Christian laxity toward sexual intercourse during menstruation and Jewish stringency regarding any contact with menstruants.¹⁶

This theme is significantly accentuated by a further narrative supplement reported by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in the thirteenth century: "On hearing the Prophet's comment on the verse, the Jews said: This man (the Prophet) wants to spare none of our (religious) matters without diverging from us concerning it."¹⁷ The comment is then conveyed to the Prophet by two companions who seek permission to have sexual intercourse with their menstruating wives so as to further diverge from the practice of the Jews. The Prophet is annoyed by their insolence and the position of Islam regarding the restriction of intercourse is represented as fixed. In this narrative supplement, the question of religious identity comes to the foreground. However, the primary function is to confirm that the Prophet's reassurance to the Arabian nomads that Muslims should only practice abstention from sexual intercourse during menstruation is neither motivated by identity politics nor the desires of his male followers, but only arises from his correct understanding of the Qur'an's meaning.

Although reading the verse of menstruation as only prohibiting sexual intercourse had been consolidated by the early exegetes of the formative period, the retelling of the verse's history continues to evolve throughout the classical tradition. In the post thirteenth-century *tafsir* works of the Andalusian exegete al-Qurtubi and the Syrian exegete Ibn Kathir, there is an edited and more stable version which collapses the occasion of revelation account with that of the Prophet's explication and its reception by the Jews.¹⁸ In its final version, the narrative about this verse describes a Jewish (and not a pre-Islamic or a Persian) practice of total isolation of a menstruant in Medina, the city of the Prophet which, according to al-Qurtubi, is adopted by the Arab inhabitants. Uncertain about the practice, the Prophet's companions present him with the question. The verse is then revealed upon which the Prophet *immediately* comments "*do everything except sexual intercourse*". On hearing this explication, the Jews express their resentment for the demise of their religious authority in Medina.

In this way, the disjointed narrative elements are fused into one larger narrative, only editing out the story about the Arabian nomads' misinterpretation, subsequent misapplication of the verse, and their pleading with the Prophet to ease the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 361.

¹⁷al-Razi, p. 768.

¹⁸al-Qurtubi, p. 81; and ibn Kathir, p. 245.

restriction it imposed on contact with menstruants. Perhaps later exegetes were theologically alarmed that the misinterpretation-misapplication sequence highlights a wide gap between the divine text and its meaning. Instead, in the revised version, there is no time lapse between revelation (*keep away from women in menstruation*) and prophetic explication (*do everything except sexual intercourse*), during which misunderstanding could have taken place.

Yet editing out the event of misinterpretation does not remove the discrepancy between the wording of the verse and the meaning that exegetes insist is intended. Nor does it obviate the possibility of a literal reading supporting a larger degree of isolation for women during menstruation. Indeed, there is evidence in al-Tabari that a minority of early jurists ignored the extra-Qur'anic narratives about the intended meaning and upheld the letter of the Qur'an, thus prohibiting any physical contact between men and menstruating women as the verse suggests.¹⁹ And although in later exegetes this opinion becomes regarded as "deviant", there is no denial that "the general sense of the verse suggests it" and that its rejection is often based on the fact that "the established prophetic tradition (*sunnah*) denies it."²⁰

The only relief of this hermeneutic tension between text and interpretation is to be found in al-Razi who argues that precarious hermeneutic strategies which fall back on the narratives of the Prophet's explication or his personal practice to limit or abrogate the application of a verse should not be tolerated here. He maintains that the form and content of divine speech cannot be in contradiction. Relying on linguistic evidence, al-Razi illustrates that the word form of *maḥīd* derived from the Arabic root *HYD*, may be used to signify nouns of place as well as verbal nouns. If *maḥīd* is a *nomina loci*, then the verse should not be read as "keep away from women in menstruation" but as "keep away from women at the site of menstrual blood". This Qur'anic text is hence aligned with its established interpretation as prohibiting sexual intercourse with menstruants and permitting all other forms of contact.

As to those who might object that *maḥīd* is more commonly used as a verbal noun for the condition and period of menstruation, al-Razi entreats them to reconsider in order to avoid recourse to strategies which potentially undermine the authority of the Qur'an:

(If) the preference of one meaning leads to the employment of a precarious hermeneutic procedure . . . then the other meaning not necessitating such a procedure should be accorded priority. This would be [required] only if we consider that the word *maḥīd* could both be a *nomina loci* (site of menstrual blood) as well as a verbal noun (menstruation) but, in fact, we know it is more commonly and prevailingly used as the former.²¹

So what do we make of this history of exegetical determination to defuse, as much as possible, the negative implications of a literal reading of this piece of revelation on women? It would be anachronistic of course to think it derives from

¹⁹al-Tabari, Part 2, p. 387.

²⁰al-Qurtubi, Part 3, p. 87.

²¹al-Razi, Vol. 1, p. 768.

gender sensibilities comparable to modern notions of gender equality. As the exegetical efforts on this verse become clearly embroiled at several points in defining Muslim identity as distinct from other religions, it may be inferred that identity definition is the underlying hermeneutic concern. This might be evidenced in the way the early exegetical distinction between Muslim and ignorant practice becomes more specifically cast as a distinction between Muslim and Jewish or Zoroastrian practice, perhaps as a result of the exegetes' developing appreciation of the broader Qur'anic context of this verse where the failure of the children of Israel to uphold the Abrahamic tradition is recurrently evoked.²² Yet again the construction of a distinct religious identity cannot be the sole explanation, primarily because it finds its full expression in the late exegetical formulations of the verse's reception history and only to affirm the Qur'an as a corrective discourse. Also, the narrative report representing as impertinent the two companions' proposal to grant men full sexual licence during menstruation in order to further aggravate the Jews suggests that the politics of identity differentiation are secondary rather than primary.

Could then the exegetical determination to least advantage women by this verse be a result of male resistance to a full restriction of physical contact with menstruating women? Was it sexual desire that motivated the narrative and linguistic creativity of male exegetes—a desire glimpsed in that very same report on the two companions who wanted to seize the opportunity to lift all restriction on sexual access to menstruating wives? Though plausible, a reading of the exegetical controversy over the precise boundaries of sexual contact during menstruation does not support this explanation either.

In this controversy, a large number of reports are recorded from the Prophet's wives 'A'isha, Maymuna, and Umm Salama.²³ In most of these reports, they are responding in the post-prophetic period to mostly male enquirers uncertain about the extent of permissible sexual contact during menstruation by either clarifying that all contact is permissible except with the pudendum, or that it is permissible provided the woman wears a protective undergarment. Of significance here is that these reports permitting skin contact were employed as evidence early on in the Muslim hermeneutic tradition for arguing that women are neither defiled by menstruation nor defiling to others.²⁴ In one such report, 'A'isha, the Prophet's wife, recounts that the Prophet recited the Qur'an while resting his head on her lap and that, at the time, she was in a state of menstruation.²⁵

²²There is a similar and important linkage in the Qur'an between purity law and the failure of the Children of Israel in Q. 5 where outline of the rudiments of the Islamic purity system (Q. 5:1–11) is juxtaposed with the violation of the divine covenant by the Children of Israel (Q. 5:12–13).

²³For example, see al-Tabari, Part 2, pp. 381–385.

²⁴The lack of a notion of contagion and human defilement in Muslim purity law has been extensively dealt with in Reinhart (1990, pp. 1–24), Maghen (1999, pp. 348–392), and Katz (2002).

²⁵Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 245–246.

But despite the exegetes' insistence that "*keep away from women*" was revealed to lift rather than impose a restriction, they do not appear keen on permitting all skin contact with menstruating women. In fact, the majority argue that out of precaution, and despite the authority of reports transmitted from the Prophet's wives, the general opinion is that only skin contact with the upper half of the female body is permissible. This inclination toward caution appears to have been an early and dominant line of thinking, and did not prevail without some resistance ascribed to the Prophet's wives. On one occasion, either Maymuna or Hafsa reprimands Ibn 'Abbas (d. 687), a cousin and a companion of the Prophet and the earliest authoritative exegete of the Qur'an, for sleeping separately from his menstruating wife.²⁶ On another occasion, commenting on the separate sleeping recommended by some contemporary male authorities who had no recollection of the austere life which the Prophet and his family lived, 'A'isha asked resentfully: "Where then was one who owned two beds and two blankets?"²⁷

The adoption of caution is based on a particular interpretation of the word *izār*, occurring in some reports as covering the body from the naval to the knee: "'A'isha said that when one of us was menstruating, he (the Prophet) would ask her to wrap the *izār* then he would approach her.'²⁸ The occurrence of the word *izār*, in this report as in others, serves above all to confirm the need for covering the site of blood during sexual contact. Further, we know from other sources that this traditional undergarment could be anything from a loincloth to a large mantle.²⁹ It is only in relation to the debate on skin contact during menstruation that it becomes so precisely defined in order to validate the prohibition of skin contact with the lower part of the female body as prophetic practice. Yet this strained interpretation of *izār* contradicts other clear statements of the Prophet and, later, his wife 'A'isha which specify the prohibition of intercourse or skin contact with the pudendum only.

Time and again exegetes and jurists offer their apology for diverging from the "correct meaning" of the prophetic tradition as al-Qurtubi admits. He justifies it as a measure of precaution: if the thighs were permitted, this would allow contact too close to the site of menstrual blood which is prohibited by consensus, and could be used as an excuse for accidental contact with the prohibited part itself.³⁰ Apparently, the hermeneutic principle at work is one which Muslim jurists have employed to sustain a general tendency for precaution whereby the prohibition/protection of a part of the body or a place is extended to its surroundings because of proximity.³¹

In this way, the total restriction on contact with menstruating women which was mitigated out of moderation by the license given in the prophetic tradition to only

²⁶al-Tabari, Part 2, p. 382.

²⁷Ibid., p. 383.

²⁸Ibid., p. 385.

²⁹Cf. references to different *izār* lengths in Bukhari (d. 870), Hadith Number 675, 'The Book of Dress' (Book 72) in Khan, Vol. 7.

³⁰al-Qurtubi, Part 3, p. 87.

³¹Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 245–246.

avoid intercourse is mitigated yet again, this time as a precaution, by a tenuous reliance on references to menstruating women's undergarments in order to restrict skin contact to the upper part of their bodies. Does this hermeneutic balancing between license and precaution reveal a sense of anxiety, or perhaps even danger—regarding menstrual blood? At the end of the day, does not the Qur'an refer to (the site of) menstruation as “a hurt (*adha*)” which men should keep away from?

Again, we find the exegetes mitigating what may seem to be an indictment of women as potentially dangerous to men. Rather than interpreting “hurt” in gender-specific terms; it becomes a generic trope for that which is loathsome: dirt, impure substances (e.g. human excrement), and bad smells, as well as bad words and deeds.³² In relation to menstruation, it signifies the smell which menstruating women themselves, affirms al-Qurtubi, might find offensive. This is substantiated by the concurrence that it is not designated as hurt because of where it comes from (the vagina) but because of certain substantive qualities inherent in it (e.g. smell). Accordingly, vaginal bleeding which does not have the physical characteristics of menses or which does not occur during regular menstrual periods does not invoke the restriction upon sexual intercourse.³³ The anxiety, therefore, is not directly associated with women's bodies but seems to be related to the substance of menses itself as in the case of bodily excrement.³⁴

Without doubt, there is a call for a comprehensive study of menstruation in the Qur'anic and legal hermeneutic traditions before we can further speculate on underlying principles or concerns. For now, it may be argued that traditional interpretations of menstruation suggest that this apparent anxiety has more to do with the correctness of delineating the ideal norm than with the correctness of actual practice since, in the end, if the temporary prohibition of sexual intercourse is violated by a couple during menstruation, no special cleansing rituals are required. A simple prayer asking for forgiveness of the disobedience will do in the opinion of the majority. For others, giving in charity one or half a *dinar* is the recommended penance. But nothing is owed if this penance is not observed according to another opinion.³⁵

³²Cf. al-Tabari, Part 2, pp. 381–382, al-Zamakhshari, Vol. 1, p. 361, al-Razi, Vol. 1, p. 269 and al-Qurtubi, Part 3, p. 85.

³³Non-menstrual vaginal bleeding is known as *istihāda*. See the discussion in al-Razi, Vol. 1, pp. 769–772 and al-Qurtubi, Part 3, p. 86.

³⁴Bodily wastes, menstrual blood, and blood in general are considered substantive impurities. However, they cannot defile anyone in his or her person, and are only considered impurities on exiting the body (for a review of impurities see Katz 2002, pp. 2–5).

³⁵Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, p. 246 and al-Qurtubi, Part 3, p. 87.

III

Where does reading traditional interpretations of the menstruation verse leave us? Or, actually where does not reading *tafsir* leave us? If the tradition is to be written off to open up a space for a feminist hermeneutic, what would constitute the basis of a positive interpretation of the Qur'anic command to *keep away from women in menstruation*? In *Believing Women*, Barlas attempts to counter patriarchal interpretations of the menstruation verse (Q. 2:222). She begins by contesting the claim that the reference to menstruation denotes women's uncleanness:

They also take the reference to menstruation to mean that women themselves are unclean. As the last claim is the easiest to contest, let me address it first. The root meanings of *adan* [*adhan*] are "damage, harm, injury, trouble, annoyance, and grievance" (Cowan 1976, p.12). Menstruation, therefore, is hurt, injury, and so on, not pollution. Even if we view menstrual blood as polluting, it does not follow that the woman and her body are polluting since there is no statement to that effect in the Qur'an. Moreover, in the Qur'an the menstrual taboo extends only to intercourse; it does not extend to sexual intimacy, nor does it call for social ostracisation or confinement (Badawi, 1995). There are *Ahadiith* [prophetic traditions] to the effect that menstruating women may go to mosques, participate in *Haj*, *jihad*, and *du'a'*, and even have the Qur'an read on their laps, following the Prophet's example (Siddique 1990, p.17) [Barlas 2002, pp. 161–162]

But where is the claim about women's uncleanness made? And who are "they" who make it? If *they* are the male interpreters of the Muslim *tafsir* tradition, this is unsubstantiated since, as our reading of the tradition reveals, the idea that menstruants are polluting or that their bodies become substantively unclean by menstruation has been consistently rejected. Despite her a priori exclusion of *tafsir*, Barlas' counter-reading does, in fact, strongly echo the traditional interpretation that the taboo extends to intercourse only. By recourse to an etymological argument on the meaning of "hurt", the tradition returns through the back door of the Arabic lexicon which was constituted fundamentally by the religious linguistics arising from classical Qur'an hermeneutics. However, she presents her reading as one suggested by the Qur'an even though, if read literally, the text could be taken as instructing a broader and harsher restriction. Her further recourse to prophetic material is itself a procedure which the classical tradition had argued for and legitimated in its formative period. Yet there is a total failure to acknowledge that it is through the hermeneutic tradition and its supplementation of the Qur'an with prophetic and lexical material, that the scope of the menstrual taboo was reduced in Islam. Rather, this genealogy is further obscured by reliance on contemporary Muslim sources—possibly because acknowledging it undermines the postulation that the tradition was consistently biased against women.

What emerges from reading these various interpretations of the menstruation verse is that the Muslim *tafsir* tradition cannot be neatly consigned to the position of oppressor. Though its concerns and motives are evidently multifaceted, and its objectification of the female body to delineate the law is undeniable, it has not seized the textual opportunity in Q. 2:222 to subjugate women as defiling or defiled.

In the case of menstruation,³⁶ creative readings within the *tafsir* tradition result in a less restricting view of the menstrual taboo rather than in the subversion of what feminists interpreters describe as the “egalitarian impulse” of the Qur’an. The division between tradition as oppressor and the Qur’an as liberator is constructed, and the history of its construction is entangled with reformist self-critiques which were largely configured by the encounter with modernity and colonization in the nineteenth century. Since those early constitutive moments,³⁷ intellectual reform discourses internalized modernity’s privileging of a certain definition of rationality that is opposed to tradition. This found expression in the reformist assertion of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) against traditional approaches to religious knowledge as the process by which Muslims enter into modernity.³⁸ Even where Islamic reformism has developed counter discourses of authenticity and resistance, it has never seriously challenged its own fixation with the problematic of rationality and tradition (Brown 1996, p. 2).

In modern Qur’an interpretation *ijtihad*, in the work of scholars like Fazlur Rahman, evolves beyond its early reformist retrieval as an Islamic concept of rational agency. It becomes a systematic and empirical method enabling the modern interpreter of the Qur’an to master its themes and order its ethical content into a coherent theory, and hence to compensate for centuries of oblivion to the unity of the Qur’an’s message resulting from the tradition’s “atomistic” verse by verse approach (Saeed 2004, p. 43). Ontologically, *ijtihad* becomes the means by which Muslim rational subjectivity is achieved, privileged, and justified in discarding a “deficient” tradition that lacks and hinders such mastery. The call for *ijtihad* is carried on in Muslim feminist hermeneutics.³⁹ In *Qur’an and Woman*, for example, Wadud-Muhsin, a former student of Fazlur Rahman, embraces his method to recover the Qur’anic perspective on sex and gender which the tradition has failed to recognize because of its “piecemeal” approach.⁴⁰ The historical and intellectual lineage to reformist critiques and methodologies is not denied in feminist readings of the Qur’an (Barlas 2006, p. 258). But the repressed question is: to what extent and in what ways have the concerns and strategies of these readings been configured

³⁶Other case-based studies also illustrate the refusal of classical Muslim scholars to argue for women’s biological deficiency on the basis of certain Qur’anic instructions. One such study is Mohamed Fadel (1997, pp. 185–204).

³⁷A noteworthy example is the exchange during 1883 between Ernest Renan, the prominent Orientalist at the College de France and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, one of the founding figures of Islamic reform. In response to Renan’s assessment of Islam as inimical to rationality in his paper ‘L’Islamisme et La Science’, al-Afghani conceded that Muslims should break their bonds and follow the path of Western civilization to be saved from condemnation to ‘barbarism and ignorance’ (Al-Afghani cited in Keddie 1968, p. 87).

³⁸For a survey of reformist ideology, see Nafi (2004, pp. 28–60).

³⁹Badran (2002, p. 201). For a discussion of the centrality of *ijtihad* for a feminist hermeneutic, see Barlas (2002, pp. 60–62).

⁴⁰Wadud-Muhsin 1992, pp. 3–4. This connection between Rahman and Wadud-Muhsin is discussed by Asma Barlas (2004, p. 101).

by colonizing discourses which privileged Western modernity and legitimized its domination by a certain definition of rationality?⁴¹

To confront this question, it is vital to rethink which dominant modes of knowledge construction a feminist hermeneutic of the Qur'an should challenge. In other words, if this new hermeneutic is advancing a feminist project that broadly draws upon feminist critiques of the masculinity of the Judeo-Christian traditions, why does it ignore, on the other hand, the feminist challenge to the masculinity of modernity itself? As feminist philosophy demonstrates, dominant discourses of modernity have propagated a masculine ethic of "mastery" and "domination" over nature, knowledge and the world, the core of which is sustained by a binary oppositional logic that is beset with possibilities of exclusion and violence.⁴² One can see this masculine logic of mastery at work in modern Islamic reform discourses including new hermeneutics of the Qur'an where "the best meaning"⁴³ is engendered by positing modern/reformist/feminist interpretations as superior to and in opposition with the communal tradition. The tradition, therefore, can only be severed to clear the way for the individual interpreter to "master" the text and reorder its meaning in spite of and, possibly, altogether outside of the community.

By embracing severing as a beginning, a feminist hermeneutic of the Qur'an is deafening itself to the earlier voices of Muslim women. For women had not been silent before the advent of modernity. Not only the prestigious and revered like 'A'isha and Umm Salama, whose voices on menstruation have survived in tension with those of the men, but other women too who were important figures, if not always central, in shaping religious knowledge and identity in medieval Islam.⁴⁴ To devalue and exclude their voices because they were "interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs of woman" (Wadud 1992, p. 2) is to thwart the possibility of recuperating voices which could inspire and invigorate women's readings of the Qur'an today.

Further, in contenting itself with a counter-position against this Muslim tradition, a Muslim feminist hermeneutic becomes complacent in reinforcing the binary of rationality/tradition which continues to be much exploited within contemporary Muslim thought to guard established configurations of authority by maintaining certain choices and positions mutually exclusive. Ultimately, in rejecting the *tafsir* tradition to reciprocate the exclusion, this new hermeneutic is premising an "egalitarian" reading on an act of violence—a rupture that only strengthens suspicion

⁴¹For detailed case studies on the relation between colonialism and early reformist discourse see for example Keddie (1968) and Ahmed (1992).

⁴²The work of continental philosophers in general has been of great significance to this critique of modernity. On a personal level, however, my exploration of this area of Western thought has greatly benefited from Grace Jantzen's work, particularly Jantzen (1998).

⁴³A phrase borrowed from the Qur'an and employed by some Muslim feminist interpreters to argue for the exclusion of past interpretations as lesser meanings (Barlas 2006, p. 107).

⁴⁴Much light has been shed by Ruth Roded on women's significant role in the medieval system of Islamic religious education in her study *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections* (Roded 1993).

and resistance within a tradition that is perceived by its practitioners as intellectually, politically, and even militarily threatened. Yet must we exclude or be excluded? Silence or be silenced? Or, as Grace Jantzen puts it: “*Must we either destroy or be destroyed?*”⁴⁵

The question is neither polemic nor nostalgic. That is, it is neither raised to invalidate the value of new ways of reading the Qur’an per se nor to reinstate or valorize the authority of the methods and concerns of the past but to ask for more from a Muslim feminist hermeneutic: for a hermeneutic that, first of all, liberates itself from the limitations of a counter-position which more often than not renders it outside, at least from the communal perspective; for readings that address the complicatedness of speaking today from the position of a Muslim woman; and, above all, to ask for a hermeneutic that can be both seriously critical and creatively inclusive by pursuing a double reading that:

...neither ignores the traditional ways nor contents itself with the critique, but engages with it in such a way that even its practitioners can come to recognize the blind spots, the assumptions, the fulcrum for the second moment of reading (Jantzen 1998, p. 75).

In other words, excluding *tafsir* may be an enticing shortcut but, as Grace Jantzen emphasizes, ‘one cannot jump out of one’s language, culture and tradition to some external Archimedean point’ (Jantzen 1998, p. 72). Without a painstaking engagement with this complex tradition, there is a danger that the whole endeavour could turn into a self-assuring exercise for the believing Muslim feminists, an exercise that is perhaps more attentive to the western gaze than to the Muslim condition,⁴⁶ and which despite placing them in a niche position within Western modernity, eventually wastes the moment of a second reading from within the tradition.

Alternatively, the double reading allows for positioning women’s readings of the Qur’an in the Muslim hermeneutic tradition and, consequently, for displacing the operative binaries that subvert opening it up. By critically and creatively engaging with this tradition, perhaps not only the blind spots and sites of repression may come to be revealed but also the sites therein, such as its affirmation of the original purity of humanity (Naguib 2003), where a new reading could be grounded. Perhaps its “atomism” too can be re-evaluated in terms of a conscious choice not to subdue the text to a (masculinist) quest for a totalizing order of reading; a choice that is sensitive to the Qur’an’s resistance, due to its subversive textual nature, to remolding and enclosure by discourse, and that is responsive to its self-referential description of its most basic constituent, the *aya* (verse), as a divine sign—a universe of signification in itself, the horizon of which can only be the divine. Does not every work of *tafsir*

⁴⁵In *Becoming Divine*, Grace Jantzen asks this question of a Western feminist philosophy of religion (p. 241). But the question is overarching and can be asked of all those who shelter themselves in modernity’s self-privileging and exclusionary discourses.

⁴⁶For example, in her preface to *Believing Women in Islam*, Barlas’s attentiveness to the western gaze is apparent in her appeal to her non-Muslim and feminist Western readers not to find it inconceivable that Islam may share some of the liberatory and anti-patriarchal principles of the Judeo-Christian West in light of the common Middle Eastern origin of all three religions (Barlas 2002, p. xii).

recognize this horizon when it reopens the text again at the closing of every interpretation by declaring that ‘God knows better’? In this tradition of reconnecting the Qur’an with its divine horizon, can a Muslim feminist hermeneutic find a site of beginning?

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Chapter 4

Is Unconditional Forgiveness Ever Good?

Anca Gheaus

Abstract Forgiveness is a compelling Christian ideal. By contrast, to many philosophers it is not clear that forgiveness should be endorsed as a moral requirement; some argue that unconditional forgiveness is morally wrong. Those who are required to exercise forgiveness can feel that their own dignity and moral worthiness is diminished by such requirement if insignificant recognition was given to the harms they suffered as victims.

This is particularly significant when thinking about women's lives. Forgiveness and justice occasion particularly painful quandaries in *feminist* ethics. However, an important stream of feminist ethics—namely the ethics of care—can make a convincing case in favor of forgiveness. A main goal of an ethics of care is preserving relationships for which, in the less than ideal conditions of human life, forgiveness is essential. Thus, the ethics of care casts additional light on the tension between pursuing forgiveness and justice.

By spelling out these various dilemmas, I illustrate how a feminist ethics and a feminist philosophy of religion can be fruitful intellectual allies. A feminist ethics will benefit from cautious reliance on religious wisdom, concomitantly acknowledging the need for forgiveness and qualifying the requirements of forgiveness such that this ideal does not become, once again, oppressive for women. And a feminist philosophy of religion should be to some extent informed by feminist ethical goals, helping to unveil religious resources that give credit to our ongoing need for forgiveness, without however overlooking the importance of (gender) justice.

Keywords Forgiveness · Fairness · Anger · Gender justice

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Introduction

Forgiveness is a central value of Christian ethics and philosophy of religion, and it should also have a central place in feminist theory, at least to the extent to which it is necessary for preserving relationships. Does it follow that feminists should openly embrace the part of Christian theology that praises and teaches forgiveness? In this chapter I argue for a qualified negative answer, and much of my reasoning relies on the various tensions that philosophers have already noted between forgiveness and justice.

What is forgiveness? I agree with the argument that forgiveness is a family of inter-related but diverse kinds of processes, and thus it is unlikely to find a single set of characteristics that define it.¹ It seems presumptuous for the philosopher to “decide” what counts as genuine forgiveness for the sake of a clear definition, and thus to exclude from analysis what most people consider significant instances of forgiveness. However, for the purpose of this chapter I shall stick with the familiar—in philosophy—understanding of forgiveness as including an intentional, and conscious, overcoming of morally justified “negative” emotions towards an offender. These include anger, resentment, and vengefulness. Forgiveness may or may not come together with the restoration of the relationship between the offender and the one who forgives. Some authors and understandings of forgiveness (mostly in forgiveness therapy) however assume that “real” forgiveness involves the restoration of some kind of relationship with the offender. While in the end of the chapter I give reasons for resisting this position, much of the forgiveness I discuss here is closely connected with relationships restoration.

In talking about forgiveness I shall limit myself to cases of more or less everyday harm: failing to keep promises, dishonesty, betrayal—the various kinds of hurt that people in close relationships are likely to inflict on each other, perpetrating physical, emotional, and moral violence at a “human scale.” I do not have in mind cases of extreme evil, starting with homicide and torture and going all the way to atrocious war crimes, for which the moral case of forgiveness is—I believe—much harder to make. Incidentally, I believe that the Christian view on forgiveness I address (and criticize) in this chapter is easier to advance in the case of “human scale” kinds of harms.

There are several reasons why a universal endorsement of forgiveness is at odds with justice. Here I concentrate on the likely conflict between many instances of forgiveness, especially in cases which I describe as “unconditional forgiveness” and upholding a sense of self-respect.²

¹For an elaboration of this argument see Walker (2006, pp. 151–175).

²There are other justice-related worries with respect to forgiveness, on which I cannot elaborate in this chapter. One is the acknowledgement of the fact that we cannot be equally forgiving to all—not even to all those whom we love and with whom we have valued relationships—which puts forgiveness at odds with procedural justice. Another one is that an understanding which stresses the debt erasing aspect involved in forgiveness will raise questions about its coherence with retributive justice.

I start with a critical analysis of a relationships-centered Christian endorsement of forgiveness offered by theologian Paul Fiddes. According to this view we should forgive as a way to “win the offender back into relationship” (Fiddes 2000, p. 192). The attractiveness of starting from this particular Christian conception of forgiveness is its striking similarity to a possible endorsement of forgiveness from a feminist ethics of care. I then move on to look at what is troubling with this conception, perhaps in general, but in any case for a feminist sensitivity. In the third section I make use of Robert Solomon’s discussion of the “emotions of justice,” of Alison Jaggar’s concept of “outlaw emotions,” and then of Elisabeth Spelman’s claim that anger can be a feminist emotion. The moral value of anger, and perhaps of other difficult emotions that need to be addressed in the process of forgiving have already been discussed by many of the secular authors on forgiveness, feminist or not.

That anger, resentment, and vengefulness can be morally appropriate emotions and hence should not be dismissed as evil does not however entail that overcoming these emotions—and thus, forgiving—is never valuable. The fourth section looks at the reasons for forgiving put forward by Jean Hampton and Trudy Govier, which, I show, are strengthened by the general moral outlook offered by an ethics of care. But is this the same forgiveness as the one endorsed by the Christian approach offered by Fiddes? It need not be, I argue, if first we acknowledge a necessary “emotional dialectics” of resentment and forgiveness and, second, we remain aware of the emotional limitations and vulnerability of human beings which often renders the Christian imitation of God an inadequate ideal.

I end with a brief discussion of the so-far under-analyzed issue of what exactly forgiveness can do for relationships, and on the possible virtues of withholding it, at least temporarily.

Unconditional Forgiveness: A Christian View

The important place of forgiveness, as well as its role in Christian theology, is easily understandable in the light of divine history.³ Christians believe that God was born as a human being in order to redeem humanity; thus, in Christian ethics forgiveness is largely justified as part of human beings’ attempt of imitate the life of Christ. Fiddes’ interpretation of the Christian God is that of being a God of love, and of Christianity as a way of creating and maintaining love-based relationships not only between God and human beings but also amongst human beings who are, in Fiddes’ terms, “in God.” In this view, the highest aim of human forgiveness is—as already mentioned—to preserve the relationship between the offender and the one who has been wronged.

³This is equally the case with the Christian approach to forgiveness proposed by Fiddes, as he makes it clear throughout the sixth chapter, *The God of Love and the Practice of Forgiveness* in Fiddes (2000, pp. 191–223), in which the issue of forgiveness is addressed.

In this respect, Fiddes' Christian approach to forgiveness seems to fit well with the general desiderata of a feminist ethics of care. One of the ways of defining the aims of an ethics of care, is, in Joan Tronto's words "to maintain, continue, and repair the world" (Tronto 1993, p. 145). Since relationships are a part of the world—and one that is in particular morally significant—forgiveness as a step towards repairing them seems to fall neatly in line with an ethics of care.

What is striking about Fiddes' view of forgiveness is its unconditional nature⁴: he argues that it is the victim, not the offender, who has to take the first step towards forgiveness, by granting it even before it is asked for and before any repentance is sown and any atonement takes place. This argument is of course justified if the deepest reason for forgiveness is indeed the imitation of God—which, for Fiddes at least, is being in God as Christ is. Through Christ, forgiveness has been given to humankind unsolicited and without repentance and atonement. As we shall see in the next sections, this raises a serious conflict between Christian forgiveness and a general concern for justice in human relationships—and, in particular, between Christian forgiveness and feminist concerns with justice.

The first worries about whether this view is indeed feminist and/or women-friendly emerges when Fiddes presents what he believes makes forgiveness so compelling: "the forgiver may have been the one mainly injured, but in human relationships no one is an entirely 'innocent party'" (Fiddes 2000, p. 193).

Fiddes' insistence that there are no "innocent victims" as an argument for endorsing forgiveness brings to mind the long history of blaming women—for example for their fate at the hands of rapists or violent husbands. This argument for forgiveness, whether true or false in particular cases, carries the risk of blaming the victim when analyzing conflicts. Often the blamed victims are coming from some kind of marginalized minority in terms of power and social recognition, who have both less visibility and less voice to defend their case. Thus, starting from the assumption that there are no innocent parties is likely to add an extra layer of injustice to the initial injury, by introducing a bias against the possible blameworthiness of the victim.

Apart from the moral danger it carries, Fiddes' is arguably weak as a general argument. While it is true that in all relationships, especially when close and long-lasting, all parties are prone to offend each other, is it also true that all offenses are similarly serious? (For example, is the constant complaint and nagging of a spouse as serious as battering or humiliating her?) Or that individuals take turns in committing the more serious offenses? (Is it true that in most cases of domestic violence spouses take turns in battering and humiliating each other?)

Moreover, suppose that the description is appropriate for some cases and that, indeed, we all err towards each other over time in comparable ways. Would this entail that one should be more inclined to give unconditional forgiveness based on

⁴Fiddes himself does not call the forgiveness he defends "unconditional." Some authors refer to forgiveness that is given without prior repentance, such as that advocated by Christians, unilateral forgiveness. I prefer however to use the term "unconditional" to stress that nothing is required from the offender in order to be forgiven, instead of using the term "unilateral" which might misleadingly suggest that in all cases of conflict both parties have something to forgive.

the mere fact that one will probably need forgiveness in the future (or has been offered it in the past)? Or does this more likely mean that, when the time comes, both parties have to take the necessary steps towards repairing the moral or emotional damage they have done, by acknowledging them and asking for forgiveness and, perhaps, by attempting to offer more (symbolic) reparation?

The second line of reasoning is however not what is envisaged by Fiddes' view on how forgiveness should happen. Rather, in his account, it is the forgiver who should take the first step towards repairing the relationship. She⁵ has to initiate the dialog about the harm done, which presumably involves a coming to terms with the past and the overcoming of anger, resentment and vindictiveness. The forgiver, in Fiddes' own words "must make an agonising and costly journey in experience" (Fiddes 2000, p. 193).

But why would she do so, unless she is asked for forgiveness? Asking for forgiveness implies at least some repentance and a tacit promise from the part of the offender of trying one's best not to repeat the harm. Why would the forgiver initiate reconciliation, if she is not given this minimum reparation and reassurance?

Fiddes does not address this issue directly, but his approach may be justified by an interest in psychological realism. Many instances of everyday, "human scale" harm—especially those that are either less extreme or less physical—are often differently perceived to the extent that the offender is often unable to acknowledge fully the seriousness of harm and his role in inflicting it. Writing from the perspective of a victim who obviously cares more about preserving the relationship than about having her point of view acknowledged, Fiddes notes that "There is a brokenness in relationship that has to be faced up to if it is going to be healed, and so the forgiver needs to bring the injury done to her back to mind, and has to live again through the pain of it" (Fiddes 2000, p. 194). The effort to understand the other's perspective and situation is what presumably makes forgiveness both difficult and possible and thus: "only when the forgiver has made this costly journey of sympathy into the experience of the other can she go to him and say 'I forgive you'" (Fiddes 2000, p. 194).

This unconditional offering of forgiveness will, hopefully, bring the offense out into the open, make it a matter of mutual recognition and thus give the offender an opportunity to make his own contribution to the forgiveness process, by acknowledging in his turn the harm that has been done and his role in it (and, presumably, attempting some reparation.)

⁵Here I stick with Fiddes' choice of pronouns. He refers to the forgiver as "she" and the offender as "he", which gives an interesting illustration of how moral imagination works and of how difficult it is to undo, even symbolically, the many-faceted injustice in-built in gender. In Fiddes' account the forgiver is the central moral agent of the forgiveness process. What would normally be a welcome use of the feminine is, in this context, prone to elicit an ambivalent response from the gender sensitive reader. Fiddes' forgiver is one that first suffers the injury and then has to go through the pain of initiating forgiveness for the sake of preserving a relationship which is, in all likelihood, less than just.

Fiddes' point may be that the process of forgiveness often cannot be started by the offender, when the offender is not conscious of the harm done—and hence the need for “provocation.” But should such “provocation” be a full offering of unconditional forgiveness? The same interest in psychological realism which I take to be so valuable in moral reasoning can however work against Fiddes' approach: first, by wondering whether it is truly possible to overcome anger, resentment, and vindictiveness before the offender has at least acknowledged his fault *and* at the same time remain in a relationship with him. (The overcoming of such feelings, whether one calls it “forgiveness” or not may happen anyway given enough time in a context in which the relationship cannot be continued, at least not at the same level of trust and intimacy.) Second, by wondering if an offender who is in denial can accept unsolicited forgiveness.

If it is not usually possible to go through the emotional work of forgiveness without some sort of reparation (which necessarily presupposes the acknowledgment of guilt) then Fiddes' solution is at best an unrealistic moral ideal. A generally accepted rule for setting normative standards to guide action is that “ought” implies “can”. At worst, it is no moral ideal at all; if fairness means anything for personal relationships, then it is very unjust to ask the one who has already suffered from no fault of her own to do the work.

When the fault is not acknowledged, the emotional burden of giving unconditional forgiveness appears illegitimately high. And if the fault is acknowledged, but no apology made, volunteered forgiveness may sit uneasy with a sense of self-respect (as we shall see at greater length in the next section).

Switching to the perspective of the one who receives forgiveness, being offered forgiveness for a fault one does not acknowledge is offending rather than winning back into a relationship. Fiddes implicitly acknowledges this, since, in his view, the forgiver's trial does not end with offering forgiveness but must continue until the possible hostility of the offender is overcome. The forgiver “has acted to bring the matter out into the open in the first place; now she must neutralise the hostility by submissively bearing with the other in love. . . . Through the twofold journey of action and submission, provoking and absorbing, the forgiver is actually discovering how to win the offender back into relationship” (Fiddes 2000, p. 195).

How desirable and possible one will find this process will depend respectively on how important the relationship is to the one who forgives, and on the limits of what the forgiver can do. But admitting that a relationship—even a damaged one—is very important, is not enough. Arguably, there are relationships that are (or are perceived as) extremely important to those who are part of them but that appear, at least to outsiders, as morally unacceptable—for example because they contain (too much) humiliation, violence or unfairness. Fiddes' account of forgiveness takes us into the gray zone in which it is unclear whether relationships are worth preserving.

The forgiveness defended by Fiddes is in many cases both unrealistic and difficult to commend morally because it discusses forgiveness outside a context of justice. Unconditional forgiveness is unjust because it puts too heavy a burden on the forgiver. Additionally, it is dangerous. One of its dangers is that injustice will be perpetuated (by maintaining unfair or cruel or demeaning or violent relationships)

while the other danger is that forgiveness itself will appear more difficult to achieve (because the standards for the forgiver are so high.)

While there may be other reasons for overcoming anger, resentment, and vindictiveness in the absence of apology and atonement (such as one's own peace of mind) it is hard to see how and why this should be done for the sake of preserving a relationship. So, maybe what is really meant is that the forgiver should prevent herself from experiencing at all emotions such as anger, resentment, and vindictiveness? Or at least should repress them independently to what this does for repairing the relationship with the offender? While some will deny that such overcoming is the same as forgiveness,⁶ it would fit well with Christian morality in general, which depicts these emotions as "sinful," or, in secular vocabulary, morally wrong. But are they really so?

Emotions of Justice, "Outlaw" Emotions and Feminist Ethics

Aristotle has famously argued that anger is a morally valuable emotion, and that the complete inability to experience it when one is treated unjustly indicates failures of character: insensitivity, inability to defend oneself, and, ultimately, slavishness.⁷ More recently, the argument that feelings such as anger, resentment, and even vindictiveness—together with an entire array of so-called "negative emotions"—have a legitimate place in our moral life has been elaborated at length in the work of Robert Solomon.⁸ Central to his (cognitivist) argument is the assumption that our ability to endorse justice presupposes an ability to experience the "negative emotions" (as well as the emotions of empathy and sympathy and compassion whose moral value has been traditionally accepted⁹). Resentment figures prominently amongst one's initial, legitimate response to unjust harm: "Justice begins. . . with the promptings of some basic emotions, not only sympathy and compassion but also such negative emotions as envy, jealousy, and resentment, a keen sense of having been personally cheated or neglected and the desire to get even" (Solomon 1989, p. 359).

According to Solomon, the genealogy of our individual sense of justice is intimately connected with experiencing the abovementioned emotions, since only in the light of these emotions does the abstract concept of "justice" acquire meaning.

⁶Philosophers usually emphasize that forgiveness should not be confused with forgetting the wrong, with denying one's anger or with overcoming it by excusing or condoning the wrong.

⁷See Aristotle (1980, p. 98,1126a).

⁸Solomon (1989, pp. 345–374). See also Solomon (1991).

⁹And which, according to Solomon, are themselves dependent on the capacity for "negative" emotions of justice: "But could one have sympathy (much less empathy) with one's fellows if one did not know what it was to be envious, humiliated, or embittered? Could one be resentful without at least the capacity to be sympathetic as well? What both conceptual analysis and empirical research will show, I anticipate, is that the emotions of justice essentially come in a 'package'" (Solomon 1989, p. 359).

Anger has a significant role here, as an emotionally sound reaction to undeserved harm. Finally, vindictiveness, or the desire to get even is meaningful as an emotional yearning to put “the world back in balance” (Solomon 1991, p. 41).

To sum up, together with the empirical claim that human beings are the kind of creatures who, when treated badly, react with anger and harbor a desire to get even, there is a conceptual claim that, to make “justice” comprehensible we need to understand what it is to (desire to) get even. Without a capacity for rightful anger, there can be no sense of justice. Solomon’s argument is that the very ability to comprehend what justice depends on the ability to experience the “negative” emotions of justice.¹⁰

Thus, far from being all evil, emotions like anger, resentment and even the desire to revenge are morally valuable elements of our emotional life. (Which, of course, is not to say that we have license to act on them arbitrarily—as Solomon himself makes clear—or that we never have moral reasons to overcome these emotions.)

Moreover, these emotions have *epistemic* value as they help us identify potential sources of injustice: “Loathing, contempt, scorn, disgust, disdain, dislike, hatred, and the like, disclose to us the occasional awfulness of the world. ... Anger and outrage are, at their very core, emotions that accuse someone (on occasion, and with a good mix of metaphor, some thing) of an offense” (Solomon 1991, p. 365).

Building on personal emotional reactions to perceived harm, one can move on to understand the source of harm as a form of injustice. Indignation, which goes beyond anger, paves the way towards such understanding:

Indignation goes one step further. The offense in anger and outrage may yet be purely personal – an insult or a slight, but the offense involved in indignation breaches some larger practice or principle. It is, in other words, not just a personal offense but something more. (We sometimes refer to this emotion as moral indignation to make this point clear.) Anger and outrage do not have to have self-interest or a personal slight as their object, but it is necessary that one take the offense personally, that one in some sense identify with the offended person or party... Emotions of outrage and offense are, by their very nature, attributions (accusations) of responsibility. They involve blame. This is especially obvious in such emotions as anger, indignation, and outrage. It is also evident in the various emotions that give rise to our sense of vengeance (Solomon 1991, pp. 365–366).

If Solomon is right, the “negative” emotions of justice are essential ingredients of our sense of justice because they make it possible for us to have a *concept* of justice in the first place. One may not concede that much to Solomon’s argument, but still see the moral value of these emotions in their contribution to our *motivation* to pursue justice and in their cognitive contribution to uncovering sources of injustice. Adequately “read” and “managed,” these emotions can be useful tools for self-development and for social development (when they are used as signals for new, or so far ignored, injustices).

¹⁰This is a strong claim, and the argument of this chapter is, I hope, independent of its truth.

The latter hypothesis has been advanced by feminist philosophers who theorized the specifically feminist value and emancipatory potential of “negative” emotions—anger in particular. Writing on what she calls “outlaw emotions,” or conventionally unacceptable emotions, Alison Jaggar argued that, when they are experienced by subordinated and marginalized people—as it is often the case—these emotions have the potential of unveiling forms of injustice to which one has been previously blind. To take her example, women who have direct experience with violence may be likely to feel anger or resentment, rather than amusement, to jokes about battered wives. This in turn may trigger awareness that something is wrong with, for example, the trivialization of women’s suffering, which makes domestic violence a socially acceptable subject of jokes. Thus, in Jaggar’s own words: “The most obvious way in which feminism and other outlaw emotions can help in developing alternatives to prevailing conceptions of reality is by motivating new investigations” (Jaggar 1989, p. 145). Going back to a relevant example, anger can motivate investigation—be it only at the level of individual reflection—of injustices and other harms done to the one experiencing anger.

The benefits of acknowledging and giving credit to one’s feelings of anger can go beyond individual reflection and help the building of common knowledge and, sometimes, group solidarity. In the spirit of Solomon’s and Jaggar’s approach, I argue that individual anger may be necessary as an adequate response not only to forms of justice suffered by oneself, but also as a step towards the creation of a feminist consciousness. Following Solomon, one can see anger as a relative of rightful outrage, which in turn goes beyond a personal reaction to harm: it represents a moral reaction to injustice. Individual anger is *feminist* only if there is already a sense of the injustices suffered by women *qua* women, and this perhaps requires latent feminist outrage.¹¹ Feminist outrage, in turn, stems from the exploration of individual anger and using the epistemic, investigation-motivating force of this emotion. One may call this a virtuous cycle of unveiling injustice starting from individual experiences and then creating a common, feminist reaction to it.

Elisabeth Spelman showed why anger is a very difficult emotion to acknowledge for women (due to a historical tradition of incrimination) and, at the same time, particularly important as a feminist emotion (Spelman 1989, pp. 236–273). In line with the cognitivism embraced by Solomon and Jaggar, Spelman believes that the judgment involved in (certain) cases of anger is that some wrong or injustice has been done. Therefore women have a moral need to be aware of their anger, find ways of expressing it and explore its implications. However, these things are especially difficult to achieve for women because anger has traditionally been portrayed as a “non-feminine” emotion, often denigrated as (unreasonable) rage or “hysteria” (Spelman 1989, p. 264).

¹¹For clues of what it means for emotions such as anger to be feminist see Jaggar (1989, p. 144).

The likely price for constantly repressing one's anger and thus denying oneself the opportunity to express outrage at unfair treatment is diminished self-respect.¹² Thus, as a general point, it is important for women to find ways of expressing righteous anger. Spelman's conclusion is obviously prone to raise worries related to the particular form in which anger is expressed, and to the risks of conflict escalation and stirring up violence and further injustice. Socially acceptable forms of expressing one's righteous anger are not easy to establish.

For groups of people whose self-respect has been constantly undermined by traditions of oppression and marginalization, the question of anger may raise especially important and difficult issues. First, expressing anger is arguably more important for those whose self-respect is socially harder to sustain. Second, the acceptability of expressing anger is crucial as a means of uncovering injustice, an aim which is especially urgent in the case of marginalized individuals. But, third, it might be more difficult to accept anger for the one experiencing it when its object is not clear (i.e. when more investigation is needed in order to understand what exactly is unjust in a certain situation.)

The value of the "negative" emotions of justice, or of "outlaw emotions" such as anger, resentment, and vindictiveness raises a particularly hard conclusion for any view that endorses the moral value of unconditional forgiveness. Philosophers who give a prominent role to justice in people's relationships are at best ambivalent about the value of forgiveness.¹³ Much of the reason for this ambivalence is the uneasy alliance between self-respect and a moral requirement that people should forgive unconditionally. Many will not endorse Solomon's view of morality in general, and of justice in particular, as necessarily rooted in the emotions, even less that it needs to be embedded in "negative" emotions. Even so, one can accept as highly plausible the claim that emotions are essential in forming an individual sense of morality and justice and that they are necessary elements of our motivational dispositions to uphold moral values. Independent from the general picture of morality proposed by Solomon, one can see the compelling connections between a sense of self-worth and resenting the wrongdoer, and between yearning for justice and vindictiveness as a desire to restore balance.¹⁴

In addition, for feminist ethics it is particularly important to uphold women's sense of self-worth at the face of moralizing pressure to grant unconditional forgiveness. In this context one is reminded of feminists' recurrent warning that many of the traditional "womanly" virtues (that might well include forgiveness) were actually

¹²A point which has been developed at length by Jeffrie Murphy, both in the book he co-wrote together with Jean Hampton *Forgiveness and Mercy* (1988) and in his own *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (2003).

¹³A clear example is, again, Murphy.

¹⁴For a way of connecting self-respect and rightful resentment in the context of endorsing a feminist ethics of forgiveness, see Anderson (2001, pp. 145–155).

formed under oppressive conditions and should not, therefore, be unconditionally endorsed.¹⁵

The Need for Forgiveness: A Feminist Secular Argument

I have, so far, argued that unconditional forgiveness can be psychologically untenable and morally problematic, and that the so-called “negative” emotions which one tries to overcome or repress in order to make such forgiveness possible are important elements of our morality, especially valuable in the lives of people who are socially marginalized.

At the same time I noted, in the beginning of this chapter, that Fiddes’ version of Christian forgiving is so appealing because of its kinship with a feminist ethics of care, the goal of which is to maintain or restore relationships. What are we to do with the belief—shared by (some) feminists and Christians—that relationships are morally essential and hence worth protecting, even at the cost of making sacrifices with respect to other values?

In this section I offer a brief exploration of the argument, sometimes made from a specifically feminist stance, that forgiveness is valuable because it is necessary for maintaining the web of relationships outside of which morality, meaning and even individual selves are unthinkable. In turn, this will allow me to lay out, in the next section, a moral conflict involved in forgiveness and offer my own solution to it.

In her dialogue with Jeffrie Murphy on justice and forgiveness, Jean Hampton noted, while painfully aware that forgiveness sometimes involves morally inappropriate elements, that it is nonetheless necessary if we are to keep our relationships: “Life with relatives, roommates, spouses and colleagues may demand of us this ‘moral compromise’ on occasion, because insisting on our rights in the face of moral injury on every occasion can itself be harmful to maintaining good relationships with them” (Hampton 1988, p. 40).

Hampton seems to claim here several things: that forgiveness is necessary for maintaining relationships; that forgiveness is sometimes morally problematic because it goes against the requirements of justice; and that maintaining relationships is itself a moral value, whose importance may override (always? only at times?) other moral values, such as rights. Philosophers who have argued against unconditional forgiveness—for instance Murphy—accept the first two claims while denying the third.¹⁶ Here I would like to point out an argument that will add support to the third claim, and thus to endorsing forgiveness for the sake of relationships, against justice at all costs.

One will remember that Solomon’s defense of the so-called negative “emotions of justice” raised several practical worries—for example, that acting on them can

¹⁵This view, historically rooted in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, has been developed by Claudia Card. See, for example, Card (1996).

¹⁶Such as Murphy (1988, p. 17).

easily lead to violence, destruction, and to further injustice. Another worry is that, even if violent outbursts can be avoided, acting on anger, resentment, and vindictiveness with enough frequency can ruin compassion and loving relationships. But why would we want to maintain relationships if they fuel righteous anger? One answer could be, that, after weighing advantages and disadvantages, particular individuals find it better that way. Another answer could be simply that some individuals find it impossible to let go of relationships even when fraught with injustice. (And so relationships would appear similar to habits, respectively vices, which are not entirely good for those who have them.) Whether or not convincing in particular situations, these answers remain at the level of instrumental, as opposed to moral, reasons.

A further answer I propose that the existence of loving relationships between individuals is the foundation of our sense justice. (This view complements, rather than contradicts, Solomon's view on the "emotions of justice.") We love some people, this argument goes, whose well-being and dignity are important to us. This can hopefully make us see that other people, strangers to us but in many respects like us and our beloved, are also connected by the bounds of love. The recognition of strangers as similar to those we love paves the way towards seeing them as appropriate objects of concern, including moral concern.¹⁷

If loving relationships *in general* are a source of moral inclusiveness, then relatedness as such is morally valuable and deserves protection (although, of course, this need not be true for *every* instance of relatedness). But then, what about the reverse: could hate for individual people become a source of misanthropy and slowly erode one's conviction that human beings are appropriate objects of moral concern? The scope of this chapter does not allow a lengthier exploration of this hypothesis; but it seems plausible to say that perpetual acting on anger, resentment, and vindictiveness, even if righteous, can, *via* the destruction of relationships, eventually undermine the very sense that justice is a worthy ideal.

A general commitment to forgiveness is valuable not only for instrumental reasons, or for reasons that are moral but unrelated to justice. The very upholding of a sense of justice might require that we protect relationships in general, and hence that we give due weight to forgiveness.

A feminist ethics of care, which places relationships high on the priority list, and in particular an ethics that integrates, rather than opposes, care and justice, will welcome forgiveness as necessary in advancing its goals. The reasons for upholding forgiveness from an ethics of care perspective are manifold. The first one, exposed above, is that forgiveness is necessary for maintaining relatedness, which is in turn necessary for sustaining a sense of justice. And there are, of course, less indirect moral reasons for protecting relatedness, and thus for advocating forgiveness, explored at length by care ethicists.¹⁸ Finally, many advocates of forgiveness,

¹⁷For an illustration of how this approach can work in the context of moral reasoning, see Gaita (2000).

¹⁸For the moral value of relationships, and particularly of mothering and parenting see work of Sara Ruddick, Joan Tronto and Virginia Held. For a feminist exploration of why friendship is morally valuable, see Marilyn Friedman.

whether feminist or not, stress the value that forgiving has for oneself in terms of healing wounds and letting go of the past.¹⁹ An ethics of care has the necessary resources for making *moral* sense of these arguments (which critics are too quick to call “merely instrumental”) when they can be convincingly interpreted as taking care of oneself.

However, the ethics of care arguments in favor of forgiveness are not saying much for the unconditional kind of forgiveness advocated by Fiddes. Even if an ethics of care will uphold forgiveness as a general value, there will still be cases when the harm is so serious that insisting on unconditional forgiveness is adding insult to injury. In such cases it can be more caring—for oneself, for others who are affected—to end relationships and thus one of the main grounds for forgiving disappears.

Beyond Conflict: The “Emotional Dialectics” of Resentment and Forgiveness

One of the hardest dilemmas raised by forgiveness is that its universal endorsement is, at best, placing justice in a subordinated position, while presenting forgiveness as a matter of choice (or even criticizing it in certain situations) leaves open the way towards a world of solitude, emotional pain, and, ultimately, unsustainable moral relationships. As already discussed, on the one hand forgiveness is morally good because it is needed for self-healing and to preserve relationships.

On the other hand, the ability to feel resentment, anger, and even vengefulness—as well as the freedom to express these emotions and retain them in the face of unrepentant wrongdoers—are important as affirmations of self respect and maybe even as necessary foundations of a sense of justice. If forgiveness involves the suppression of resentment it seems that advocating universal forgiveness is both morally essential and morally harmful. While Christian moralists such as Fiddes have approached the problem of forgiveness by claiming that it should be offered unconditionally, and thus implying that resentment is always bad, philosophers such as Murphy take the opposite view, that forgiveness is morally bad when its condition is renouncing self-respect. While Fiddes sacrifices justice, Murphy’s solution seems too quick in sacrificing the values of relatedness. His is a solution that would work well in a world where people agree easily with respect to what and who is wrong or right, and who find it relatively easy to show repentance and make reparation. In such a world it may be possible to maintain most relationships without any cost to self-respect.

¹⁹For a good illustration of this see Govier (2002). However, philosophers have also pointed out likely weaknesses of the universal preaching of forgiveness for therapy purposes. In some cases forgiving too quickly can be not only morally dubious but also detrimental to one’s psychological well-being. See the volume of essays collected by Lamb and Murphy (2002).

One way of thinking about forgiveness that eases this dilemma somewhat, and looks for a middle ground between the abovementioned solutions, is to see it as a process, by introducing the factor of time, as suggested by both Hampton and Trudy Govier (Hampton 1988, p. 42; Govier 2002, p. 54).

I propose an interpretation of the process of forgiving in which we pursue an “emotional dialectics” between resentment and forgiveness, as we need them both and as it is likely that they are both important at different times. The ability to feel resentment and to avoid easy denial is most valuable in the first instance (because it may be one foundation of our sense of justice, as argued by Solomon; it can be an epistemically important emotion by indicating injustices, as argued by Jaggard; and because it sustains self esteem, as argued by Murphy and others). At the same time, overcoming resentment is valuable at a later stage, since we need forgiveness for self-healing and (sometimes) in order to keep relationships. Given that people disagree on moral issues more often than not, the repentance and reparation necessary for fully overcoming resentment are unlikely to come at once. Often it is important for the harmed people to take *small* leaps of faith in forgiveness, and to allow themselves to oscillate for a while between resenting and forgiving, while engaging in a process of negotiating forgiveness—the outcome of which can never be fully guaranteed.

Equally, I argue that it is sometimes important *not* to give full forgiveness as long as it is unclear to the wronged person whether the relationship is worth continuing. Withheld forgiveness can work in these cases in favor, rather than against, preserving the relationships on the long run. Too easily forgiving, particularly if the forgiveness is based on denying one’s rightful emotions, can in the long run lead to the erosion rather than preservation of relationships. (Similarly, in a case in which there is no relationship with another person anymore, due to separation or death, it may be valuable to withhold forgiveness as long as one has not yet decided what is the place of the other in one’s life and history, i.e. as long as the ideatic relationship is still open to transformation.) Postponing full forgiveness and standing, for a while, the strain of an uncertain future of the relationship can increase the chances for better understanding one’s anger, and reaching together with the other a common understanding of facts and acceptance of emotions. In turn, this can be seen as a step towards reconciling forgiveness and justice in personal relationships. The moral value of forgiveness, and of its timing is in these cases derivative from the value of caring for oneself and the value of preserving relationships.

There is an additional reason for attempting a “dialectics” between resentment and forgiveness rather than complete elimination of one of them. This is the importance of retaining the ability to feel occasional resentment at past injuries even after we have fully forgiven the particular people who caused them. (At limit, one might say this is a challenge of the very definition of forgiveness as *full* overcoming of resentment and anger.) Even if relationships survive, and even if they are strengthened by conflict, once people have experienced injury they are unlikely to return to the phase of enchanted illusions about the all-goodness of those who harmed them. This need not be seen as a pessimistic conclusion, if one believes that relationships can survive and perhaps achieve full maturity in the wake of such disenchantment.

Is it possible to maintain, or to restore, a loving relationship with somebody whom one sees as partially bad and against whose deeds one feels some left-over anger or resentment? Are these feelings not too similar to hate, which is one of the negations of love? I argue for a philosophical approach to forgiveness that heartily relies on the Kleinian assumption that emotional ambivalence may co-exist with moral, and even loving, relationships. According to an influential strand in object-relation theory influenced by Melanie Klein's work, the emotionally mature, properly integrated self can stand ambivalence. Love usually wins over hatred, without entirely eliminating it, and this can lead to compassion and the desire to make appropriate reparation.²⁰ This conception is less comfortable but more realistic than a conception in which people either get due repentance and reparation and thus find forgiveness acceptable and the restoration of relationships fully compatible with justice, or do not and hence feel morally entitled, or even compelled, to abandon relationships. At the same time, it is less idealizing, and thus contains less crushing moral demands, than Fiddes' endorsement of unconditional forgiveness. It is a position where the alliance of forgiveness and justice is ambiguous, messy and unstable, but not impossible.

Moreover, this conception allows that in certain cases we resume—or at least give another try to—relationships that we have given up in the past. If what we mean by forgiveness does not have to include *complete* overcoming of anger and resentment, and if we think it possible to have relationships with people we believe to be partially (or at times) bad, without a loss of self-esteem and sense of justice, relationships with a history or wrongdoing have more chance of being—at some point—restored.

The hypothesis I advance in this chapter is that a good moment to withhold forgiveness is when one is not sure whether a relationship should continue or stop. In the end, withholding forgiveness may do something not only for preserving justice by validating our sense of self-dignity, but also for preserving relatedness, by leaving open an opportunity to restore relationships by engaging in reparation.

Endorsing Forgiveness

What happens when the process of forgiveness cannot even take off, for example, because there is *no* remorse, no step towards making an apology, no atonement, and perhaps no way to achieve a shared understanding of what happened, of the harm and of the responsibilities involved? Then, most likely the appropriate response is to withdraw from a relationship, especially if it continues to be harmful.

So far I have considered forgiveness in the context of continuing or restoring relationships, which I took to be an important reason for engaging in forgiveness.

²⁰For a clear and brief explanation of Klein's theory about ambivalence and its role in achieving psychological maturity see Rozsika Parker's article in Holloway and Featherstone (1997). Parker is specifically interesting in maternal ambivalence, however, her analysis is generally useful for understanding the value of standing ambivalence for psychological and moral life.

When the continuation of relationships becomes morally impossible forgiveness may be necessary as a way of letting go of the relationship. The denial of one's anger, resentfulness, and vengefulness is inimical to one's sense of justice if one continues a relationship with the wrongdoer. But when the relationship is permanently destroyed, there is no reason not to let go of these feelings in due time, and welcome indifference and even forgetfulness as their replacement. For those who would call this change of heart "forgiveness" (which many philosophers would not), unconditional forgiveness can sometimes be morally acceptable. This may be a forgiveness that includes, or at least invites, a certain amount of forgetfulness, which is advancing the forgiver's own well-being and which has moral value as an act of caring for oneself.

In the introduction of this chapter I said I would argue for a qualified negative answer to the question of whether feminists should embrace Fiddes' Christian approach to forgiveness. Most of the paper has been spent explaining why the answer is negative. In which way do I want to qualify it?

According to Fiddes, the forgiver—whether she manages to win the offender back into the relationship or not—is morally gaining because in the process of giving unconditional forgiveness she is becoming morally better person, or "closer to God" by acting as God would. (And if she is successful in her attempt to repair the relationship, the one who is forgiven also has a chance to become a better person.)

The Christian divine history contains several parables in which those who receive unconditional forgiveness turn their hearts to Christ. Similarly, according to Fiddes, the power of forgiveness between human beings is that of transforming the reality (of the relationship) by appealing to the emotions of love rather than to anger, resentment, and vindictiveness. Fiddes connects his approach to forgiveness with an endorsement of power as power to transform oneself and others in the sense of moral improvement: "We must abandon worldly ideas of power—the power to make other people do what we want. Divine power is the ability to transform human hearts, to re-create human society" (Fiddes 2000, p. 207).

This way of giving "power" a different meaning than in "power over" may strike again a chord of feminist sensitivity. To the concept of "power over," meaning the ability to make others do what one wants, feminists have opposed "power-with," meaning the ability of people to achieve common goals by acting together and empowerment, which is using one's power in order to increase the other's resourcefulness. How close is Fiddes' ideal to the feminist ideals of "power with" and empowering? A feminist-friendly reading of Fiddes' approach to forgiveness would perhaps find unconditional forgiveness worth considering when the potential forgivers are those in the position of power, a position from which they can afford to, and should be, be generous. (How exactly should the relevant individuals adopt this stance without appearing condescending and patronizing is indeed an important and difficult question.)

In these case, endorsing unconditional forgiveness would be less likely to violate the "ought implies can" rule, since it is presumably more possible for the one who is already in a better off situation to display the kind of extreme generosity involved in unconditional forgiveness, and to do so without having her or his sense

of self-worth diminished. Examples could include parents' unconditional forgiveness of their children, or the unconditional forgiveness given by a spouse who grew up in a well to do family when the other spouse's offenses obviously originated in that spouse having grown up in a disadvantaged context such as poverty. Against a background of structural inequalities or past injustices which render one party more powerful or more resourceful than the other, unconditional forgiveness of the second by the first could be warranted.

Where does this leave us with respect to gender justice? One will remember when applying the high standards of unconditional forgiveness to real life that very often women are not in the most powerful positions—economically, politically, in terms of epistemic status, and even, very often, emotionally. In those situations in which feminists will want to endorse unconditional forgiveness, an adequate choice of pronouns might appear rather traditional.

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Chapter 5

Simone Weil's Social Philosophy: Toward a Post-Colonial Ethic

Inese Radzins

Abstract In 1943, at the request of the Free French Committee in London, Simone Weil wrote "*The Need for Roots*," a manuscript outlining the possibilities for renewing France after the war. In it, Weil outlines the primary needs of the human being for *rootedness* and the (im)possibilities of the state in accommodating these needs. The state of France was unable to do so because it was engaged in colonialism.

I will argue that Weil makes three important points as regards the possibilities of politics. First, she locates European (and specifically French) colonialism historically in the collusion of Christianity and the Roman Empire in the fourth century. It was this collusion, she argues, that created the dominant ideology of the west, that of progress. Second, she shows how this ideology functioned (and, I will argue, still functions) in the destruction and uprooting of countless *other* peoples and cultures. She then tries to expose this ideology as producing the uprooting, violent and totalizing tendencies of Europe (whether that be fascism, communism, colonialism or even present day democracy). Third, I show how Weil's critique of this ideology is rooted in two unlikely sources: (1) a rigorous materialism, grounded in a reading of Marx, and (2) the ideal of *justice* found both in the French Revolution and the Gospels. These sources allow her to offer a critique, like that of many feminists, of the omnipresence of western power. Weil undertakes her critique in the hope of minimizing some of this violence so that France and her citizens could be *properly* rooted—in work and toward her neighbors.

Keywords Simone Weil · Rootedness · Colonialism · Materialism · Marx

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In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and third World people, working-class people, older people, and women.
(Lorde 1984, p. 114).

We all live by treading on human beings, but we do not give it a thought; it takes a special effort to remember them.
(Little 2003, p. 168).

Introduction

At the height of World War II, while working for the Free French in London, Simone Weil produced several articles on the challenges her country would face after the war. Of primary import to her was colonialism. “The problem of a doctrine or a faith to inspire the French people in France, in their present resistance and in future reconstruction, cannot be separated from the colonial problem” (Little 2003, p. 106). Her conviction was that France’s “undoing” in the war was due to her “colonial greediness and ill-treatment of foreigners.”¹ She concluded that it would be impossible for France to be rooted after the war, either socially or politically, if she participated in the destruction and uprooting of others. Weil wanted to minimize these tendencies so that France could become a less oppressive society. In order to do so, she argued that France must have a firm grasp of the very real structures underlying colonialism. Without this, she predicted that her country would be consigned to reproducing this destruction, as became fatefully clear in the Algerian war.

Weil’s task became uncovering the social structures that produced and promoted colonialism. Her thinking began with the assertion that colonialism revealed a society motivated, in the words of Audre Lorde, by profit rather than need. I will use the word *profit* broadly in this chapter to signify a society motivated by what the early Marx called a “sense of having.”² As we will see later, Weil rooted this desire for profit in what she identified as a tension within collective existence. On the one hand, this desire to have more helps ensure safety and security for individuals and communities. On the other, it creates rivalries among social groups for resources. This in turn leads to suffering and oppression, as evidenced by colonialism. For Weil, it is a paradox: human beings must live together, but this living together inevitably produces various rivalries and causes oppression.

¹Weil (2001, p. 86). See also Little (2003, pp. 29–30).

²Marx (1992, p. 351). Europe, in Marx’s eyes, is contaminated by this “sense” of having. Kristeva offers another approach to this problem of “having” when she notes that even *love* has become determined by political forces. See Kristeva (1987, pp. 1–18).

This chapter suggests that Weil's analysis of colonialism offered a way to rethink this social tension by unmasking the tendency toward profit in French society. I begin by briefly discussing Weil's assessment of her contemporary situation and the uprooting it caused. Next, I turn to an exposition of her methodology, which is rooted in a unique appropriation of three seemingly unrelated sources—Marx, Greek philosophy, and Christianity. I show how this fusion of sources produced a radical conclusion: that any social production—political, religious, or economic—necessarily oppresses. Then, I move on to discuss how Weil employs this methodology to understand the particular dynamic of French colonialism. This entails unmasking an ideology that lay hidden at the heart of French society: progress. Rather than freeing society, Weil argued that *progress* increasingly pushed it towards profitability. In concluding, I will present the possibility that Weil offered French society for re-rooting itself. Her answer was rooted in what is both *unprofitable* and *unsocial*: attending to need. Throughout this chapter, I propose that this attunement to need, along with an awareness of the complex hybridity of late modern existence, and use of Marx links her work to that of later anti-colonial thinkers, feminists, and even postcolonial theorists.

Basically, I show how Weil's critique of the dominant western ideology of progress is rooted in two unlikely sources: (1) a rigorous materialism, grounded in a reading of Marx, and (2) the ideal of *justice* found both in the French Revolution and the Gospels. These sources allow her to offer a critique, like that of many feminists, of the omnipresence of western power. Weil undertakes her critique in the hope of minimizing some of this violence so that France and her citizens could be *properly* rooted—in work and in attending to her neighbors.

Uprooting

Writing a decade after Weil, the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire observed that European civilization had wrought two major problems in the world that it refused to address: the proletariat and colonialism (Césaire 2000, p. 31). To this assessment, Weil would have added a third: war. Reflecting upon French society before and during World War II she saw only impoverished workers, dead soldiers, and dehumanized people in the colonies. Whereas Marx spoke of alienation, Weil diagnosed the situation as uprooting: of worker from the means of production; of soldier from homes and families; and most significantly, of the colonized from their land, traditions, and histories. “Every time an Arab or an Indochinese is insulted without being able to answer back, beaten without being able to fight back, starved without being able to protest, killed without recourse to justice, it is France that is dishonored. And she is dishonored in this way, alas, every day” (Little 2003, p. 48). What Weil pointed to was the dual nature of France's destruction—not only in oppressing others, but also by sanctioning this destruction through various policies at home.

The most profound and violent form of uprooting was manifest in colonialism, for it denied others of their histories, cultures, and traditions—their roots.

The harm that Germany would have done to Europe if Britain had not prevented the German victory is the harm that colonization does, in that it uproots people. It would have deprived people of their past. The loss of the past is the descent into colonial enslavement. This harm that Germany tried in vain to do to us, we did to others. Through our fault, little Polynesians recite in school: “Our ancestors the Gauls had blond hair and blue eyes....” Alain Gerbault has described, in books that have been widely read but have had no influence, how we make these populations literally die of sadness, by forbidding their customs, their traditions, their celebrations, their whole enjoyment of life.... By depriving peoples of their tradition, of their past, and thus of their soul, colonization reduces them to the state of matter, but matter that is human (Little 2003, pp. 110–111).

Here Weil exposed the very real existential effects of colonialism.³ I propose that this concern with uprooting links her to anti- and post-colonial thinkers, like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.⁴ Fanon echoed her concern later, writing, “. . .every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon 1991, pp. 18, 34).

It is ironic, Weil argued, that France emphasized her own culture, history, and roots but refused to see that of others. This situation revealed that France, thinking only of its own good, produced a society that ignored the needs of others. In Weil’s thinking, rootedness occurred when societies were attuned to the needs of individuals, fostering the fulfillment of material and social needs. In a crucial caveat, however, she disassociated rootedness from nationalism. She is clear that nationalisms, especially in her time, only produced destruction, whether in the form of fascism, communism, capitalism or democratism.⁵ These nationalisms, as we will see later, were tied to specific notions of conquest that Weil rejected. Having briefly identified the destruction caused by France’s colonialism, I now turn to Weil’s analysis of the conditions that produced this destruction. And for this, we will have to look to her Marx.

A Marxist Method of Social Analysis

I suggest that Weil’s reflections on colonialism are rooted in a specific appropriation of Marx. Like many anti-colonial and postcolonial thinkers, she did not accept

³“Every one knows that there are forms of cruelty that can injure a man’s life without injuring his body. They are such as deprive him of a certain form of food necessary to the life of the soul” (Weil 2001, p. 7).

⁴See Fanon (1991, 2004). Also, Said (1994, 2003).

⁵“It is the very concept of the nation that needs to be suppressed—or rather, the manner in which the word is used. For the word national and the expressions of which it forms part are empty of all meaning; their only content is millions of corpses, and orphans, and disabled men, and tears and despair” (Weil 1962, p. 159).

Marx categorically or literally follow *what* he said about colonialism.⁶ Rather, she employed his *materialist* method to read France's situation.

Marx's truly great idea is that in human society as well as in nature nothing takes place otherwise than through material transformations. "Men make their own history, but within certain fixed conditions." To desire is nothing; we have got to know the material conditions which determine our possibilities of action; and in the social sphere these conditions are defined by the way in which man obeys material necessities in supplying his own needs, in other words, the method of production. The materialistic method—that instrument which Marx bequeathed us—is an untried instrument (Weil 1973, p. 46).

For Weil, a materialist analysis meant addressing these "certain fixed conditions." This implied asking questions about the structuring of society: why is it construed a certain way? What interests does it serve? How does it operate? Who does it benefit?

Beginning materially allowed Weil to provide some answers to these questions, by dealing with the social aspects of existence.⁷

Marx was the first and, unless I am mistaken, the only one—for his researches were not followed up—to have the twin idea of taking society as the fundamental human fact and of studying therein, as the physicist does in matter, the relationships of force. Here we have an idea of genius, in the full sense of the word. It is not a doctrine; it is an instrument of study, research, exploration and possibly construction for every doctrine that is not to risk crumbling to dust on contact with a truth.⁸

What Weil took from Marx was a desire to provide a genealogy of social forces.

In order to explain these social forces, she made a unique move and linked Marx's materialism to Greek philosophy.⁹ Because they began thinking with the *polis*, she argued that the Greeks engaged in a certain form of materialism. Her Plato, for example, is much more concerned with contemplating social relationship (as we will see in the discussion of the Great Beast below) than with any forms.¹⁰ Clearly, this is not the traditional Plato. However, the central Greek text on social force was for Weil even more ancient—Homer's *Iliad*. This work already revealed society in all its nakedness, governed by force, or might.

And as pitilessly as might crushes, so pitilessly it maddens whoever possesses, or believes he possesses it. None can every truly possess it. The human race is not divided, in the *Iliad*, between the vanquished, the slaves, the suppliants on the one hand, and conquerors and

⁶For a more detailed and complete view of Weil's Marxism, see Weil (1973) and Blum and Seidler (1989). For a more complete view of the limits of Marx's ideas about colonialism, see Young (2001, Chapter 8).

⁷Historically, she followed Marx in asserting that social relationships underwent a radical transformation when human beings were no longer subject to material forces (nature) and instead, became subject to one another. As human beings increasingly subdued nature, or material forces, Weil observed that they became more oppressive toward one another. Instead of directing force onto matter, human beings started to level it onto one another. See Weil (1973, pp. 37–56).

⁸Weil (1973, p. 171). Blum and Seidler (1989, p. 76). See also Balibar (1996).

⁹It would be interesting to explore the relationship between Weil's Plato and her Marx. How does her reading of Marx influence her Plato and how does her version of Plato affect her understanding of Marx?

¹⁰Weil (1998, p. 132). See also Weil (1973, p. 180).

masters on the other. No single man is to be found in it who is not, at some time, forced to bow beneath might (Weil 1998, p. 31).

Homer revealed might as the central force of social life, ruling over all, oppressed and oppressor alike.¹¹ From this, Weil offered a dire conclusion: “Human history is simply the history of the servitude which makes men—oppressors and oppressed alike—the plaything of the instruments of domination they themselves have manufacture, and thus reduces living humanity to being the chattel of inanimate chattels” (Weil 1973, p. 69). Weil concluded that might was foundational to society; it is a force that is outside the purview of any one person and to which all are subject.

Whereas the Greeks identified might as very real, they also designated it as mysterious, or the work of the gods. In other words, might for the Greeks was real, but not intelligible. Weil suggested that Marx’s genius lay in clarifying this seemingly mysterious might. He did so by proposing to understand social forces “as a physicist understands matter” (Weil 1973, p. 71). Although they are constantly changing and increasingly intricate, “an extraordinary tangle of guerilla forces,” these social forces could be delineated (Weil 1973, p. 180). In one essay, Weil suggested mapping them just as astronomers map the heavens. “It is useful to make an abstract diagram of this interplay of actions and reactions, rather in the same way as astronomers have had to invent an imaginary celestial sphere so as to find their way about among the movements and positions of stars” (Weil 1973, p. 71). That is, although the social relationships that determine might are incredibly complex and not self-evident, there are nevertheless *real* connections between them.

For Weil these underlying relationships of might were constituted by a very real material desire that demands expansion.

For Marx showed clearly that the true reason for the exploitation of the workers is not any desire on the part of the capitalists to enjoy and consume, but the need to expand the undertaking as rapidly as possible so as to make it more powerful than its rivals. Now not only a business undertaking, but any sort of working collectivity, no matter what it may be, has to exercise the maximum restraint on the consumption of its members so as to devote as much time as possible to forging weapons for use against rival collectivities; so that as long as there is, on the surface of the globe, a struggle for power, and as long as the decisive factor in victory is industrial production, the workers will be exploited (Weil 1973, p. 40).

What interested Weil were these rival collectivities. To her they revealed an “absurdity” at the heart of social existence: that every collective, every social group has a necessarily unlimited desire for power, or expansion.¹² That is, social forces—not any one individual—are constructed by an insatiable desire for more, for profit.

The interest of any collective is to multiply, increase, progress, or profit. The growth of *nations*, like the production of *capitalism* clearly revealed to Weil the dynamic of insatiable desire. The necessary characteristic of any society (at least in the west), however small, is profit, or expansion, or progress. Weil echoed Marx in asserting that this drive for profit does not occur simply for the sake of having

¹¹This is an idea suggested by the Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah, see Young (2001, p. 47).

¹²Weil (1973, p. 71). See also Blum and Seidler (1989, p. 73).

more, but rather because of the dynamic of rivalry. "Every power, from the mere fact that it is exercised, extends to the farthest possible limit the social relations on which it is based; thus military power multiplies wars, commercial capital multiplies exchanges" (Weil 1973, pp. 73–74). National powers must multiply their resources, so they colonize. The colonies provide new resources for the state of France to function on a larger scale.

Weil argued that this logic of profit determined all social relationships in the west. Although this appears to be a universal pronouncement, she complexified it by noting that these relationships are incredibly complicated and ever changing: social forces in France differ from England, and social forces within France within different spheres mesh with and differ from each other. I suggest that this attention to these "tangles of guerilla forces" has similarities to the notion of hybridity proposed by post-colonial thinkers, like Homi Bhabha.¹³ Their various permutations make them difficult to map, or understand and underscore the way in which all persons are enmeshed, entwined within them.

The most insidious aspect of this logic of profit in Weil's eyes was its determination of the moral sphere. To express this point she offered a provocative reading of Plato's *Republic*. She began by arguing that Plato's "Great Beast" in the *Republic* is social force and that this "beast" determines all reality. ". . . [S]ocial matter is the cultural and proliferating medium par excellence for lies and false beliefs. . . all men are absolutely incapable of having on the subject of good and evil opinions other than those dictated by the reflexes of the beast" (Weil 1973, p. 180). In an even more provocative move, she suggested that Plato's cave offered a paradigm for how social forces acted. In this myth, human beings are "chained" to a cave wall where they take reality to be the images that they see appearing on the walls. Little do they (we) know that these images are projected onto the wall by puppets. Weil surmised that the puppets represented the social forces that determined the "images" human beings take as reality. Society understands them as real, rather than projected by specific forces.

Human beings are, Weil concluded, incapable of seeing what projects/determines their reality: be it moral, religious, political, or economic forces. What is important to Weil is that no one can escape these social forces; they are beyond the control of any one individual. If this logic of profit is definitive and does indeed determine everything, Weil's conclusion is dire: colonialism and Hitler are not aberrations, but rather logical extension of western power. It is because colonialism was seen as profiting French society that it was determined as good, or just, or necessary for France. This is why there was so little opposition to it. The natural attitude became one of colonizing. Social forces projected the image of colonialism as profitable onto the screen of French society.

Having located the insatiable desire for power as the social force that defined France in her time, she asked how this desire was propagated. The answer was

¹³Weil (1973, p. 180). See also Bhabha (1994).

provided by another Marxist term—ideology. “We must pose once again the fundamental problem, namely, what constitutes the bond which seems hitherto to have united social oppression and progress in the relations between man and nature?” (Weil 1973, p. 78). Although it seems that progress should make society less oppressive, Weil argues that it has not. This is the case because the idea of progress both reflects and masks the insatiable desire for power underlying it. In order to reveal this ideology, Weil turns to an examination of French society.

Mapping French Society: An Ideology of Progress

Given the underlying forces of society described above, I suggest that Weil saw the western attitude as a colonial one from its very inception. As regards France, she observed that the nation was “brought about almost exclusively by the most brutal conquests” of “the inhabitants of Provence, Brittany, Alsace and Franche-Comté” (Weil 2001, pp. 145, 144). The defining characteristic of French society was conquest in any of its various forms—war, feudalism, slavery, capitalism, democracy, or colonialism.¹⁴ Her critique of France was rooted in what many contemporary political theorists identify as uneasiness with the idea of progress.¹⁵ This idea suggested that society, or politics was constantly improving itself and becoming better. Often this idea was attributed to Enlightenment notions of individual rights and autonomous subjects, ideas of freedom and democracy, and an emphasis on scientific discovery. However, unlike political theorists and perhaps even Marx, Weil located the problem of progress prior to the Enlightenment—in the fourth-century collusion between Rome and Christianity.

What makes Weil’s critique of colonialism unique in this respect is its positioning in a much earlier Christian and imperial logic.

The modern superstition in regard to progress is a by-product of the lie thanks to which Christianity became turned into the official Roman religion; it is bound up with the destruction of the spiritual treasures of those countries which were conquered by Rome, with the concealment of the perfect continuity existing between these treasures and Christianity, with an historical conception concerning the Redemption, making of the latter a temporal operation instead of an eternal one. Subsequently, the idea of progress became laicized; it is now the bane of our times (Weil 2001, p. 229).

For Weil, the collusion of Christianity and Rome determined the fate of western European power and France for the ensuing centuries. This union produced a marriage in which both systems benefited. The state was given a religious justification for its conquests, and the church received the tools of the state to enhance its power. This in turn provided profits in the form of money, property, and citizens/converts

¹⁴In this way she differs from Sartre, who distinguishes between annexation, colonialism, and genocide, and Young, who distinguishes between colonialism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and postcolonialism. It is not that Weil would disagree with their analysis, it is that she would place them all under the same oppressive French *system*. See Young (2001) and Sartre’s “On Genocide.”

¹⁵See Brown (2001).

(albeit forced). Locating the historic roots of colonialism was important to Weil because the *idea* of Rome continued to shape politics in her time. Césaire made a similar connection: “that colonial enterprise is to the modern world what Roman imperialism was to the ancient world: the prelude to Disaster and the forerunner of Catastrophe” (Césaire 2000, p. 74). For Weil, colonialism revealed France’s inability to extricate itself from the Roman view.

This view was shaped by what I will call an *ideology of progress* that Weil argued was rooted in a reading of Christianity that prioritized the idea of teleology. This reading advanced the notion that history was moving toward a specific goal; whether the realization of the kingdom of God, the triumph of the empire, the actualization of consciousness or in a more contemporary example, the development of global markets.¹⁶ For Weil, as we will see in the final section, this form of Christianity was a lie, contrary to the *real* Gospel message. The lie that rooted the ideology of progress was that salvation could be found in society, in this finite world, through the church and state. For Weil, this ideology materialized in two dominant forms—Christian and scientific.

The first and earlier form concerned the idea of salvation history. This was rooted in the dominant theology that developed after the fourth century: a belief that with the coming of Jesus, human history was altered in a fundamental way that would determine the future of all humanity. The salvation brought by Jesus and later bestowed by the church would help humanity progress toward the kingdom of God. Building this kingdom depended upon a clear rejection of other forms of religion (as well as states and cultures) as regressive, barbaric or primitive. This type of “exclusivist” Christianity only produced uprooting, negating what Weil saw as the very heart of the Christian message. Paradoxically, she observed that “missionary zeal has not Christianized Africa, Asia and Oceania, but has brought these territories under the cold, cruel and destructive domination of the white race, which has trodden everything.”¹⁷ This, for Weil, revealed the way the church, no less than any other institution, was dominated by the logic of profit.

The second form taken by the ideology of progress arrived with the advent of modernity when the faith once placed in Christianity became transposed onto science. Just as much as the previous religion, Weil argued that science could function as an *opiate* of the people: demanding absolute belief and promising salvation. The mission to convert was replaced by France’s mission to civilize mission (*mission civilisatrice*). Instead of promoting the cross, or Jesus, it now brought modernity through the guise of French values, education, language, science, and technology. It was no longer religion that was forced upon those conquered, but rather a language and civilization “benevolently bequeathed” to the colonized. Weil is clear that both

¹⁶This notion of teleology could be seen as culminating in Hegel’s philosophy of history.

¹⁷Weil (2003, p. 42). “. . . [In] any case Christ never said that warships should accompany, even at a distance, those who bring the good news. Their presence changes the nature of the message. It is difficult to retain the supernatural virtues attributed to the blood of the martyrs when it is avenged by force of arms. You are asking for more trumps in your hand than is allowed when you want at one and the same time Caesar and the Cross” (Little 2003, p. 108).

forms of conquest—Christian and scientific—are equally problematic. They both serve and are intimately linked with state interests to maximize the profits of those in power, be they priests, politicians, scientists, technocrats, or capitalists (all of whom assume that they govern by divine right).

Weil also emphasized one of the most insidious aspects that developed from this ideology—that of the centralized state.

The relative security we enjoy in this age, thanks to a technology which gives us a measure of control over nature, is more than cancelled out by the dangers of destruction and massacre in conflicts between groups of men... In the end, a study of modern history leads to the conclusion that the national interest of every State consists in its capacity to make war... What a country calls its vital economic interests are not the things which enable its citizens to live, but the things which enable it to make war. It is the very concept of the nation that needs to be suppressed—or rather, the manner in which the word is used. For the word national and the expressions of which it forms part are empty of all meaning; their only content is millions of corpses, and orphans, and disabled men, and tears and despair (Weil 1962, p. 154).

It is this idea of statehood—rooted in and perpetuated by Christianity and modern technology—that characterized France in Weil's time.

Having mapped the structure of this ideology of progress in France, I now turn to show how Weil described its deleterious effects in French society. The first was the emphasis on the state, or group, over the individual. As previously noted, in understanding society, Weil posed the paradox of collective existence: it is both necessary and at the same time oppressive. On the one hand, community “roots” individuals. On the other, any collective or social group demands the suppression of the individual by imposing various limits. In order to progress, the state demands sacrifices: workers forgo material needs, soldiers give their lives and colonials are stripped of their independence and roots. The power of this ideology of progress was in having convinced its citizens that this oppression is either necessary and/or normal.¹⁸ That is, society accepted that sacrifices are perceived as “necessary” for the progression of French society.

More profoundly, Weil noted the insidious character of this (and any) ideology: it permeates and determines the course of French society—without being recognized—from its inception. Ideologies are problematic because they are unseen and yet pervasive.

Marx's conception is that the moral atmosphere of a given society—an atmosphere which permeates everywhere and combines with the morality peculiar to each social group—is itself composed of a mixture of group moralities whose dosage precisely reflects the amount of power exercised by each group... Everyone will be governed by it, but no one will be conscious of the fact, for each will think that it is a question, not of some particular conception, but of a way of thinking inherent in human nature (Weil 1973, p. 183).

Given the power of ideology in shaping morality, it was no surprise to Weil that the majority of French did not oppose colonialism. Because colonialism was perceived

¹⁸What was important to Weil was that this *convincing* occurred through fixed conditions, not through conscious arguments.

as necessary to France, and to France's strength as a nation, it was sanctioned. The French *natural attitude* (in all its phenomenological resonance) accepted the necessity of force underlying French society and the ideology that perpetuated it.

The second dynamic unmasked by Weil concerned relationships between individuals. Because social forces are constantly trying to maximize their profits, they ignore the humanity of individuals. That is, people are seen and treated as objects, or things, rather than subjects. This is clear in colonialism, where human beings become "subjects" to be converted, civilized, and exploited for the benefit of the interests of the state of France. Weil observed that already with the *Iliad*, might was understood as transforming human beings into things (Weil 1998, p. 45). Because French society was concerned with its own progress as a world power, it used its individuals: workers, soldiers, and those colonized. Human beings were treated like *tools* that could be used for creating profit. Weil argued that this destructive tendency must be addressed.

However, Weil's conclusion appears dire: if French society, in the name of progress, necessarily breeds oppression, colonialism is no aberration, but rather a logical outgrowth of French society. For Weil, as for Césaire and Fanon after her, colonialism and fascism should come as no surprise, because the conditions for their possibility are embedded in the foundations of French and western society. Given the power of these ideologies, Weil realized the impossibility of any real change in France. That is, she saw French society as continuing to function under this ideology and thus perpetuating its power and progress in various forms, as may be evidenced more recently by global capitalism.

Conclusion: Risking *Good*

With a Marxist approach to history, Weil revealed French society to be structured by an ideology of progress that is characterized by a desire for power and a suppression of individual needs in favor of the collective. Although she had little hope of society transforming society, she did suggest a way to address, and perhaps even minimize, the oppressions they produced. The key was not to produce more of "the same." If society is necessarily oppressive, the tools for questioning it cannot be found within any social structure, whether political, economic or religious. That is, social forces cannot counter other social forces in hopes of producing change.

To imagine that we can switch the course of history along a different track by transforming the system through reforms or revolutions, to hope to find salvation in a defensive or offensive action against tyranny and militarism—all that is just day-dreaming (Weil 1973, p. 117).

This idea that social forces cannot transform themselves would be echoed years later by Audre Lorde when she wrote, "...the master's tools will never dismantle

the master's house."¹⁹ Adopting the tools and tactics of social forces would eventually perpetuate those same social forces, albeit in a different guise. As an example, Weil cites revolutionary movements that have overthrown an oppressive regime only to then perpetuate a similar oppression. This idea, of a different method links Weil also to other later feminists, who would propose a "third way" of approaching, or thinking, society.²⁰ However, Weil acknowledged that doing so was almost impossible.²¹

Her approach is rooted in a very specific understanding of what she terms *good*, that she found in both Greek philosophy and Christianity. Because this good cannot be achieved through social processes, it lies outside the traditional social order. Mary Dietz observed that for Weil, "Homer's gift is his ability to reject a social reality in which force is perceived in terms of 'strong versus weak' and conceive of a deeper reality in which both Greek and Trojan are recognized as equally human and equally vulnerable before force" (Dietz 1988, p. 91). Good, for Weil, could not be produced by any ideology. It always exceeded social constructions of strong/weak or good/evil. That is, Weil's *good* is situated *outside* any symbolic/social ordering.

Likewise, the good exceeds materialism. This materialism was crucial to Weil, because it provided an understanding of the very real social forces that shaped reality. However, what materialism could not account for, precisely because it was not materially located or manufactured, was the good. Whereas Marx gave her a way of accounting for social force, the Greeks and Christianity offered Weil an idea of what *exceeded* this force.²² This was not any one thing, or idea, or ideology, or morality, or even religion. Rather, it was supernatural, transcendent and beyond this world. Neither could this good be understood as some abstract Platonic form, floating above society. Weil argued that it was *beyond the world* in order to show that it exceeded the ordering of society along various ideologies. The crucial point she made was locating the good not above the world but within it: the good is known in its enactment—where it appears. In order to illustrate this, she offered numerous examples.

The first was Antigone, who in burying her brother, rejected the laws of the state in favor of unwritten laws, whose "life is not of today or yesterday but from all time and no man knows when they were put forth" (Weil 1998, p. 454). The second

¹⁹Lorde (1984, pp. 110–113, 123).

²⁰See Anzaldúa (1999), especially "La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness", and Kristeva (1984). For Weil, this "third way" was already present with the Greeks, especially Plato (see Weil 1998).

²¹Weil acknowledges the difficulty when she writes: However, events do not wait; time will not stop in order to afford us leisure; the present forces itself urgently on our attention and threatens us with calamities which would bring in their train, amongst many other harrowing misfortunes, the material impossibility of studying or writing otherwise than in the service of the oppressors. What are we to do?" (1973, p. 60).

²²In Weil's view, Marx's account of society, in which everything was determined by force, was limited. Although she agreed with Marx that relationships of force are determinative, she wanted to maintain a space for countering this force. This space, however small, was composed of what she would call *good*, or justice, or love. See the discussion in Weil (1973, p. 171).

example was from the Gospels: the Samaritan who cared for the man beaten and left for dead by the side of the road. Weil offered other models: Prometheus, Electra, Plato's "just man," Job, Jesus, Arjuna, and Joan of Arc (but not the one propagated by the State). These specific individuals and their actions are not derived from social forces. In fact, they all contradict social forces in one way or another. As such, they can be designated good, or even religious. However, when they appear, the social forces at play would rather repress them. As regards France, she noted with frustrations the case of Messali Hadj (the father of Algerian independence) who was continually imprisoned and tried by the French government (and a liberal one at that!), for demanding Algerian independence.²³

These examples provide numerous illustrations of the good, but not a systematic explanation of it. As Antigone insisted, the good is always unwritten. Thus, one cannot offer a definitive description of it. By its very nature, it defies explanation. In fact, there is no actual *nature* for good because, like God, it remains mysterious and unknowable. And here we start to get a picture of Weil's Christianity. As noted above, Weil rejected the Church's institutionalization that began in the fourth century. The problem was that the Church wanted to prescribe this mystery—of God, of good—by creating various rules, dogmas, or formulas. Weil suggested that this desire to systematize Christianity ran counter to the Gospel message, that good remains hidden, or secret. Instead, she proposed completely rethinking Christianity.²⁴ That is, Weil believed there was a powerful Christian inspiration provided in the Gospels. But the inspiration remained hidden, inaccessible to socialization. It was known in its revealing, which remained unpredictable. Of import to Weil was that this inspiration had more in common with other religions than it did with any church dogmatics.

Although one cannot systematize the good, it can be recognized and Weil's examples provide glimpses of what this involves. One definitive image is that of the singular, the individual. The good is revealed through individuals, not through any group. This is critical. If social forces tend toward oppression, by limiting individuals, the only real *resistance* can arise from individuals. And in particular, the individual that resists. This individual is primarily characterized by an attentiveness to need—rooted in an obligation to the other, that she described as universal. "So it is an eternal obligation toward the human being not to let him suffer from hunger when one has the chance of coming to his assistance. This obligation being the most obvious of all. . ." (Weil 2001, p. 6).

What characterizes this obligation and Weil's individual is a particular renunciation. That is, good involves sacrifice, but a completely different sacrifice than the one demanded by the state. The final image for the good offered by Weil is a poignant one: the Gospel passage that calls for "losing the self." Here again, she has an interpretation that differs from traditional ones. Losing the self involved giving up the fixed realities we find ourselves in. That is, rejecting the very real

²³This was the socialist led Popular Front government. See Little (2003) and Young (2001).

²⁴This rethinking is the subject of Weil (2003).

social forces that determine our existence. Losing the self implies giving something up: the socially constructed self—the self that measured itself by and acted in accordance with social norms. The trick becomes not being duped by social forces (no matter how noble their motivations). She noted that this was, for most, impossible. Even if one can come to the point where they see the power of social forces, it is impractical to renounce them or change them. Human beings do not want to give up their safety and security, the reassurances offered by religious, economic, political and social systems. However, it is only by renouncing these negative social occlusions that one has *room* to respond to the other. Antigone and the Good Samaritan, in different ways, set aside their own safety, their own good, to respond to a need. Here Weil clearly identified how painful this good could be: countering social force required risk. Often, it involved great loss, or more likely, death. Most individuals are not willing to take this risk. If it is difficult for individuals to “lose themselves,” for the sake of the good, it is practically impossible for social groups.

As regards France, Weil suggested that she risked all by renouncing her colonies. She had come to the conclusion, as Blum and Seidler observed, that “a precondition of the development of a politics adequate to human need is the institution of a voice for the oppressed at its center” (Blum and Seidler 1989, p. 192). For France to turn to those oppressed, she would have to renounce her colonies and improve working conditions at home. Doing so would most likely diminish her status in the world. This, Weil argued, was a risk for France, and one that most societies would not take, because it would be risking its very existence. Because societies are oriented around progressing and insuring their survival, they cannot afford this risk: it is always unprofitable. Although she pointed to the impossibility of this good being embodied in any social system, she does offer one counter-example, that of the Cathars. This was a unique group of Christians residing in the south of France in the fourteenth century. They were known for their tolerant and equitable faith. However, because of their heterodoxy, they were destroyed by the Albigensean crusade.

Weil’s analysis of colonialism, through Marx’s materialism, revealed the impossibility of any real change on a social level in France. However, it did open up the possibility of lessening oppression, in two ways. First, by constantly posing the question “what constitutes the bond which seems hitherto to have united social oppression and progress in the relations between man and nature?” Second, and most importantly, she offered the idea of lessening oppression through enactments of the good. These actions are rare, risky and seemingly insignificant. However, as Weil observed: “The decisive operation of the infinitely small is a paradox; the human intelligence has difficulty acknowledging it; but nature, which is a mirror of the divine truths, everywhere presents us with images of it. Catalysts, bacteria, fermenting agents are examples” (Weil 1973, p. 175). This infinitely small is the mustard seed found in the Gospels. Although rare, it is nevertheless, Weil concluded, incredibly effective and could just possibly help minimize France’s colonizing tendencies.

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Chapter 6

Bargaining with Spiritual Patriarchy: Women in the Shas¹ Movement in Israel

Henriette Dahan Kalev

Abstract In this article the strategies of gender bargaining with the spiritual and political patriarchy will be explored through the case study of the women in Shas Movement. Shas is an ultra orthodox Sephardic patriarchal community in Israel, whose community life, beliefs, and culture are rooted in the Jewish religion. Its rules and gender relations are translated into codes of behavior that are implemented by forces of patriarchy which work through social networks that function similarly to other disciplining power networks.

As the control over the observation of religious life with regard to gender relations is very rigid the women who start to make changes do so in very small steps and proceed carefully in order to loosen the restricting forces. Women's bargaining is practiced like the art of embroidery. Through examples I introduce the methods and practices in which women in Shas manage to loosen the patriarchal control. I apply Deniz Kandiyoti's methodological notion of "Bargaining With Patriarchy" for the analytical part.

Keywords Gender · Bargaining · Spiritual patriarchy

In this article I shall explore the strategies of gender bargaining with the spiritual and political patriarchy² in Shas, an ultra orthodox Sephardic patriarchal community in Israel.

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¹Shas is written in Hebrew, and it is the initials of [ספרדים שומרי תורה] Sephardic Jews Torah Observant. It is also a play with the word שישה סדרי משנה the six series of Mishnah [The sage's writings].

²Deniz Kandiyoti in a ground-breaking article developed the notion patriarchal bargain. In this article I presume that the feminist reader is familiar with the text. Kandiyoti's definition of patriarchal bargain focus on what: "... is intended to indicate the existence of set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to that both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet that may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated. Some suggested alternatives were the terms *contract*, *deal*, or *scenario*; however, none of these fully captured the fluidity and tension implied by bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988, pp. 274–290, 286, n. 1).

Shas is a community whose life, beliefs, and culture are rooted in the Jewish religion. Patriarchal codes of behavior, the legitimacy of that rests on religious legacy and the Bible, the Halakha and the writings of the Sages, are practiced according to the Mitzvoth (Jewish religious commands) as interpreted by the Sages and the contemporary spiritual leadership—the Great Sages of Torah and the Rabbis of the Shas community, headed by Rabbi Ovadya Yosseph. These codes of behavior and the legacy in that they are grounded are the source of authorization for gender relations' formation. The rules and the gender relations are translated into codes of behavior that are implemented by forces of patriarchy that work through social networks that function similarly to other disciplining power networks, although they are more condensed than in non-religious societies, in small and wide webs (Foucault 1974, pp. 229–242). Gate keepers are in charge of the conservation of the order and they are often the older conservative women, Rabbis or the “public opinion” as indoctrinated through pamphlets distributed in synagogues, educational systems,³ and informally through gossip and rumor. Every minor attempt to generate a change alerts the gatekeepers who swiftly move into action.

As the control of religious life with regard to gender relations is very rigid, the women who start to make a move towards bargaining do so in very small steps, proceeding carefully in order to loosen the restricting forces. They tend to take action when the attention of the gatekeepers is otherwise occupied, for example during moments of crisis. What is more, during such times they use all possible means: their bodies, language, personal and cultural talents, charm, reason, social ties, emotional manipulation, etc. Bargaining with patriarchy occurs across all domains of life. The methods of bargaining are very subtle, fine tuned and practiced in the private sphere with the husband, the father, or the sons, and in the public sphere with the institutional agents of Shas, politicians or school teachers. The women bargain in the intimate realms of control over sexual life, issues of pregnancy and motherhood, over relations between parents and teachers, couples and families, at the workplace and the synagogue, or on the street in the neighborhood. The bargaining tends to take the form of improvisation, although it is sometimes planned ahead of time [in general terms] as one of the illustrations below demonstrates. In short, women's bargaining is practiced like the art of embroidery. It is often an individual woman, a poor and uneducated woman who lives in the margins of the community that takes the initiative, but it can also be the beloved daughter of a revered Rabbi, who tries to bargain directly with the Chief Rabbi and the other spiritual leaders.

Because the methods of bargaining are individual and practiced as an art, it is difficult to imitate or to draw generalizations from them. As such it is also difficult to study them and elaborate theoretical generalizations as I shall explain in the following section.

³For example “Maayan Hashavua” [The Weekly Wail], a pamphlet distributed weekly by the Shas movement in the synagogues and the schools by El Hmaayan [*To The Wail*], The Educational Fund For Sephardic Jewry Legacy.

Methodological Comments

Because of its uniqueness and subtlety this study of bargaining with patriarchy in Shas is limited to a close analysis of two cases. The majority of women in Shas are subjects or agents who choose to remain in the community and look for bargaining methods.⁴ Although in Israeli society it is relatively easier than, say, in Afghanistan to “burn their bridges and leave their lives behind” in order to begin new life in one of the non-religious groups that exist in Israel.⁵ In what follows I shall focus on the contexts in which that bargaining elements are practiced and on the method developed by the women as they proceed when bargaining with the patriarchy of Shas.

Monitoring the bargaining nuances that might make a difference in the lives of women requires the inspection of things that may appear to be unimportant details. However, studies have shown that it is in the seemingly unimportant and neglected daily details that change is generated. The illustrations I shall bring touch upon many parts of women’s lives, but for reasons of analysis, I shall elaborate upon them in order to demonstrate how exactly the women generate change. Three main themes emerge from the illustration: bargaining over the bodily practices that discipline women and girls’ relations to their own body, bargaining for education, and bargaining for work and vocation opportunities.⁶

The Social and Political Context of the Gender Relations

Israeli society, in which our case study is located, is heterogenic. It is made up of diverse groups that can be divided into to five social categories according to religion, ethnicity, and nationality, economic and political issues. These categories range

⁴Like women in every other community, whether very oppressive, moderate or tolerant. Bargaining with patriarchy is perhaps a plausible answer to the more general feminist frustration regarding women’s refraining from universally uniting under liberating goals.

⁵For further discussion of the topic in a multicultural context see Dahan Kalev (2004).

⁶Parts of this study have already been presented in two different conferences: one in Israel on “Feminism, Law and Social Change” (April 3–5, 2005, Tel Aviv University) and the other at the University of Liverpool “Women and the Divine” (June 17–19, 2005). The information assembled here is based on many interviews. Sometime the “woman” in a case is a prototype that I have “constructed” from interviews and fragments of the data that repeated itself.

Data and interviews are based on three students’ field work. My wonderful students in seminars I taught on “Ethnic Politics in Israel” in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in the years 1994–1999 and in Ben Gurion University in 1998 onwards have contributed to the development of this study, especially: Ricki Tesler who continued her study in the field and in 2003, published the book *In the name of God; Shas and the Religious Revolution* (Jerusalem: Keter (*In Hebrew*)); Daniel Assulyn who interviewed the leaders of Shas and collected data on the indoctrination system of Shas in 1998; and Ela Kaner in Ben Gurion University in 2004 who conducted part of the interviews with the women. Finally, I want to thank Ahikam Farber Tzurel, who has helped me with the biblical text and the writings of the sages.

As bargaining with the spiritual leadership involves references to the holy scripts, sometimes from the Bible, when it was possible I preferred to translate from Hebrew.

from religious to non-religious groups, Jews of European origin (often referred to as Ashkenazim) to Jews of Arab and Muslim countries of origin (often referred to as Sephardic or Mizrahim), tainted by Orientalism (Said 1979), Palestinian Israelis to Israeli Jews, rich and poor, new comers and older residents, and center and periphery groups who reside away from the big cities. These divisions nourish political conflicts and social rifts. This division is even more complex as the groups are divided into subgroups due to ideological and political disagreements. Within the religious groups, for example, one might find religious, ultra orthodox religious, Ashkenazi religious, traditional Sephardic religious, etc.⁷ As the groups and the subgroups keep a certain degree of interaction, mostly for pragmatic political reasons, their boundaries are not hermetically closed and their members can sometimes transfer from one category to the other. Some of the groups are intolerant and demand full loyalty to the group members while others are liberal. Thus the boundaries are relatively open even in more intolerant groups. The implication of this is that different degrees of mutual influence cannot be prevented even when gatekeepers severely sanction the disobedient members. Thus, when a feminist breeze blows on the Israeli patriarchal order, the non-religious women are those who import and generate the ideas of liberating women—though some ultra orthodox women also feel the breeze. This is where bargaining with the patriarchy begins.

The women of Shas belong to an ultra orthodox Jewish community. The majority of its members consist of Jews who migrated to Israel, or were born to immigrants who came from Arab or Moslem countries in the late 1940s. The community's spiritual and political leadership founded a movement of this name and has first represented it in the municipality of Jerusalem after getting organized as a political party in 1981 (Tesler 2003). It became a significant political party and movement after the elections of 1984 and since then the movement as well as the community plays a visible and influential role in Israeli politics.

Long years of ethnic discrimination against the community of the Mizrahim led to the unavoidable emergence of Shas. The Shas community suffered from ultra orthodox establishment "Agudat Israel," a community and political movement of Ashkenazi origin, from economic, social and political deprivation and racism.⁸ In the early 1980s, when they realized that they formed a firm group within the larger, ultra orthodox Ashkenazi group, they separated and founded their own movement. Soon after appearing on the political map it was clear that Shas was a movement with cohesive forces that attracts members who were discriminated against—not necessarily very religious people, but people who have sentiments of loyalty and who are ready to follow the ultra orthodox leaders. The movement's representatives have displayed political competence when playing governmental roles.

The community leadership is divided into two heads, one spiritual and one political. The spiritual, superior to the political, is headed by a group of 12 Great Sages chaired by Rabbi Ovadia Yosseph, a leader who proved his greatness in Torah and

⁷Dahan-Kalev (2001); Shafir and Peled (2002).

⁸Levi (1988); see also Freedman (1989, pp. 22–36) (Hebrew).

who is respected by the Ashkenazi spiritual leadership as much as by the Sephardic. He was the Chief Rabbi of the state during the 1972–1983. The other head of leadership is political; its first leader Arie Dery, a brilliant Yeshiva student who became the political leader represented the community from 1984–1998. When he was 27, in 1986, he was already the General Director of the Ministry of the Interior, the youngest ever in this position in Israel. In 1988, again the youngest ever minister in the Israeli government, he was elected to be the Minister of the Interior after two years of laying out a condensed welfare network in the poor neighborhoods where Shas community followers lived.⁹ He showed unusual talents in reading the political parties' map of Israel; he was also a brilliant parliamentarian (Nir 1999). In 1989 he was accused of corruption and after ten years of trial, in 2000 he was sent to prison for three years. Eli Yishay, yet another bright young Yeshiva student and a virtuous politician succeeded Dery. Yishay remained in power as the political leader of Shas in the parliament and has been a cabinet minister in all governments ever since Shas became a member in the government coalition. Yishay is now the Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. This leadership is exclusively masculine; women are not given access to high rank positions in Shas institutions.

Like the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox community from that they separated, Shas leadership has also invested in keeping the community under control in order to minimize the possible invasion of non-religious influences from outside the community. But Shas also allows people who are not religious to become members of the movement. This means that the boundaries between the non-religious and the religious population are not very rigidly observed within the movement.

The structure of Shas institutions is designed to fit the special gender division of labor that largely determines the gender roles. The division runs along lines in that women are more or less responsible for the “profane” tasks in the private and the public spheres, and the men are in charge of the religious Jewish tasks. The women's tasks include breadwinning, paying the bills, taking care of the domestic roles and the negotiation with the welfare services and the state's administration and the men are expected to learn Torah, to fill the Jewish obligations as Rabbis, as Avrechim [Yeshiva and Koilels' fellow], and to be kosher practitioners in public and commercial institutions in veterinarian services based on Jewish law, or work with the politicians who represent the community in public administration.

The division of labor along gender lines is central to the community network. The institutions, including the family, education, and political and welfare institutions are all formed to fit the way of life of the community so as to enable its male members to observe their Jewish religious life according to the ultra orthodox rules.

⁹During its first years in government a community welfare and educational network was laid out to ease poverty after the long years of deprivation. Thousands of Heiders (Torah classes taught at the age as early as three onwards); kindergartens; synagogues; Koilels (an ultra orthodox school where the young people learn Torah); Yeshivas (Jewish religious higher education institutions and religious colleges); Mikvoth (purifying public baths); welfare community support system; for large families, philanthropy homes for the needy were opened. The institutionalization was made to fit the specific ultra orthodox way of life.

Although it is difficult to draw a clear profile of the typical member of Shas, whether man or woman, it is possible to discuss this group in terms of a social category that shapes the practices of Jewish religious life. These practices are modified by patterns acquired in the Jewish Yeshivas—that are open to men only—that were dominated by Ashkenazi spiritual leadership. Nevertheless, Shas members differs in many respects from their Ashkenazi peers. Their traditions and religious practices have been influenced significantly by the Jewish legacy as shaped over the years in the Arab and Muslim countries of origin. For example, during the colonial era they welcomed modernization and reacted moderately to the secularization and to the Occident, Christianity and the western world, unlike the Ashkenazim who tended to respond to changes by reinforcing separatist rules.¹⁰ Watching television and listening to the radio, living in mixed neighborhoods with non-religious residents are a few examples of relative moderation. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the issue in depth but as I intend to focus on gender and the ways it influences women's lives within the community, I also hope a rough picture of the relationship with the rest of the Israeli society shall also emerge.

The gender-based division of labor poses tremendous difficulties, both for the gatekeepers as well as for the women themselves as they are in charge of family maintenance and they are expected to maintain strict modesty when it come to the body, speech, and social relations. For example, they are not allowed to talk to men. Men are not allowed to shake hands with women. At certain locations they are not allowed to sit next to men on the public transportation. These basic restrictions confront not only the women with difficulties but also the patriarchal leadership. The women are exposed to the risk of developing undesirable networks with non-religious circles.¹¹ Therefore, women are severely inspected and as a result they are not allowed to go further than they are instructed by the family and community. For example, they are not allowed to register for vocational courses and develop professional skills. This results in women's being able to offer a very limited range

¹⁰Rabbi Shalom Mashash, from Meknes in Morocco is an example of a spiritual leader who addressed questions of Christianity and of modernity with openness and provided the community he headed with moderate solutions the tensions between tradition and modernity. See for example his 1999 vol. 4; 2007, appendix 1.

¹¹These threats sometimes come from old myths of Lilith's forces portraying women as sources of darkness that must be controlled. This results in fears of promiscuity and generates aggressive methods of discipline in the form of educating the public with blunt and populist commands aiming at the enhancement of control over women's bodies, severe restriction about girls walking in public, domestic discipline over couples' relations at home, and the like. For example the chief Rabbi Ovadya Yosseph decreed that women should not wear wigs to replace the simple cover of the heads with handkerchiefs because wigs are both made of the hair of non-Jews and therefore are not kosher and "even worse" they are made of animals. Also, wigs are a beauty item that can be used for sexual temptation. Second, Rabbi Yosseph has commanded that men should not walk between two women because women are like non-kosher animals, like walking between two female donkeys. A third example is that men should not forget that when talking to women they risk sexual temptation; therefore they should refrain from speaking with women.

of skills and professional options and therefore they are only able to work in low-income jobs. They work in domestic jobs, in kindergartens, groceries. Those who hold high school or teaching certificates—though their number is small—are offered office work in the local municipality where the male delegates of Shas are located as school principals. Often they practice teaching only before they marry, at the age of 18–20. This situation and the fact that men refrain from working for wages are two of the major reasons why the poverty of the entire community is perpetuated. The Shas community is the second poorest population (after the Israeli Palestinians) in Israel (Tesler 2003).

In this situation, with no choice and a strong desire to improve their family's economic situation, some of the daring women in Shas, occasionally, have played with the rules and practiced methods of bargaining with the patriarchy. Although the restrictions are rigid the women develop outstanding methods of crossing the lines and then re-crossing them when they are set up, time and again. They stretch the boundaries—sometimes obscuring them, thickening them, and enabling mobilization and change—as the following illustrations demonstrate.

Development of Bargaining Strategies

Shas women are functioning at the border zones of patriarchy, whether it is within the Rabbi's family or the margins of a poor neighborhood. When they challenge patriarchy it is never by direct confrontation. Opportunism, blurring boundaries and negotiation with the authorities are the strategies they employ in order to bring about subtle forms of change.

Blurring the Boundaries Strategy

Case Study 1: The Kindergarten

Shas's most successful welfare projects begin with budgets for large poor families, subsidies for early Jewish education, and kindergarten networks that provide the population with services that the welfare state fails to provide for the entire society. Thanks to its sophisticated politics Shas has control over priority-setting in the Ministry of Welfare and Industry. Hence it is capable of getting decisions that favor all parts of lower class society, including ultra orthodox, mildly religious, and non-religious basic welfare services. Shas uses this arrangement to extend its influence over larger circles in the society, not only the ultra orthodox Sephardic Jews. The curricula in the kindergartens however are supervised by the spiritual leaders and their ideological aim is to employ the system as a powerful instrument to begin the indoctrination of children for Mitzvoth practice as early as the age of three. Unlike in the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox system, Shas allows boys and girls to mix at this age, until they reach the schooling age of 6. In the evenings kindergarten spaces function as a community network where the people gather and

exchange information about community life. The activity can range from job and education information for the adults to special events like organizing travel to the prison where Arie Dery was jailed. The division of labor in the system is very much class-, gender-, and ethnicity-oriented. Men usually hold the higher rank positions of management in kindergarten administration, and well off women who have graduated from teaching seminars of the Ashkenazi religious educational network “Beit Yaakov” hold prestigious positions, supervising or training the kindergarten principals. The kindergarten principals, like their assistants and the kindergarten cleaning ladies, are often unskilled; the most skillful are selected by the supervisors during inspection visits, and trained by them for the role of principal. This promotion is possible sometimes on the basis of close personal relations and good networking or family ties. In our case, all of the actors are of Moroccan origin. The kindergarten principal is autonomous, she can hire or fire the kindergarten assistants and in collaboration with the parents she can modify the curriculum by scheduling cultural enrichment programs for the children.

The most important detail on that all of the actors insist—supervisor, parents, and manager—is that the principal should be in charge of maintaining religious practices, that includes the implementation of the formal curricula, and should personally behave according to the religious practices of Shas leadership. In other words, the principal is in charge of enforcing religious modesty—rules of dressing, hair and body language, prayer regulations, gender interaction, and speech restrictions. Her knowledge should get to details such as being updated with the most recent rules that the Rabbi has ordered, like for example the restriction of usage of cell phones.¹² In this respect, when women need to be at the workplace and simultaneously take care of domestic affairs, women’s lives become unbearable and the use of cell phones becomes a seductive possibility.

The kindergarten principal in our case study—an ambitious woman—is expected to be a saleswoman of the educational system and to encourage non-religious parents who bring their children to the subsidized kindergarten to register and stay. In other words, the kindergarten principal is expected to do missionary work for the Shas movement. At this point bargaining with patriarchy comes into play.

The principal invited the parents for an evening meeting to discuss enrichment courses for the children. The meeting opens with a confessional statement that she owns a cell phone “just for the security of the children,” she says. The parents, the non-religious, are somewhat puzzled why this is an issue for a discussion: “So. . .?,” one of them asked. On the other hand, the religious parents are embarrassed; they sense that indeed it is a non-issue, nothing about that to make a commotion. They say nothing. The principal gives a few examples to explain how important it is in emergency cases and the issue is closed with the agreement that the cell phone is used only in cases of emergency. But everybody understands that by this decision a fence was broken through. The general rule that forbade women to use cell phones no

¹²Cell phones were strictly forbidden for use by women in 1999. Talking on the phone in the street or on the bus was considered a violation of the modesty codes of girls and women, not of men.

longer existed for the principal. Will she indeed use it only for emergency matters? How long would it take until the idea will be passed on to the other principals?

In Shas today no one remembers that women's cell phone use was forbidden in 1999. It is not clear if this was the occasion on which women began to use cell phones, but as it happened the Rabbis' command did not resist and finally was given up by those who restricted it in the first place.

A second issue discussed on that evening was Jamboree—early education for body awareness. Women's body discipline in Shas begins at a very early age when girls are sent to kindergarten. They are taught to lower their gaze when looked at by a man, there are limited ways of standing and walking to achieve minimal attention and maintain modesty etc. This body discipline begins at very early age. Susan Star Sered inspected a kindergarten and found that disciplining the body includes covering sexual parts before the age of three, moving and walking humbly, choosing “quiet colors” and adopting gentle gestures. The methods are accompanied with esthetic manners. Color classification is taught as well as fabric classification. Red, for example, is forbidden for girls and boys alike, muslin is good for girls only, etc.¹³

In the meeting, the principal explains to the parents that she is interested in bringing a course of Jamboree as she knows this recent activity is popular in other kindergartens in Israel. The activity is aimed at children's development, beginning with toddlers' sensual and body motor systems. It has a significant influence on the brain's development and on social communication. The children play and use music, colorful cloths, balls, and other instruments in order to develop their creative minds, imagination, and body consciousness. Shahar Levi¹⁴ the Israeli woman who runs these classes, claimed in her research that young girls who uninterruptedly experienced spontaneous movement of the body enjoy a rich physical and cognitive repertoire. She supports her explanation with psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler's idea of “the psychological birth,” that how we move the body constructs memory, selfhood, and inward representation (Mahler 1975).

The description the principal has given seems to satisfy the parents and they approve it with the commitment to give extra payment for this enrichment course. The project of Jamboree is run exclusively by non-religious teachers; it uses very loud western pop music that is considered too radical for the ultra orthodox to listen to. During the classes the principal is “humming” the melody. The teacher comes dressed with dancer tights that emphasize her body's contours. During the class, children, boys and girls alike, are asked to lie on their backs, legs up, open and close them, roll on each other, together; something that is strictly against the disciplinary codes of comportment and the sexes' separation, even at this age. The Jamboree teacher moves across the hall, turns on the music and all of a sudden, the

¹³These codes of dressing are kept more strictly in the Ashkenazi kindergarten of Agudat Israel. There for example they forbid the girls to wear trousers whereas in Shas kindergartens it is not banned.

¹⁴Yona Shahar Levi, 2004, *From the Open Body to The Hidden Mental Story*, Personal publication. [[“מהגוף הגלוי לסיפור הנפש הסמוי”]]

kindergarten is filled with noisy sounds of laughter of happy children, busy choosing daring colors like red and purple and orange cloths, rolling on each other freely. Shyness fades away as if it never existed. A norm is violated, the disciplining of the body and strict education for modesty are broken. When the interviewer asked why this restriction was violated, the principal replied: “No, no, it is allowed only during this one class. . .”

This particular kindergarten principal who brought Jamboree class to children at the age of 3 knew very well that she was engaged in an action of subversion [as I will discuss further below] that had a very long-term, significant impact on the entire lives of the children. When the teacher lies on the floor with tights that show her body lines and stretches her legs up asking the small children to do the same, and points to the different parts of the body, including intimate parts, she makes a dramatic impact on educating the children to relate to their bodies, to hold them, to feel right or wrong about them. If the famous methods of Margaret Mahler are effective then these first steps are far more significant than what might come later on, when they are taught about the code of bodily conduct according to the religious laws.

To what extent was the principal conscious of subverting the patriarchal authorities while bringing Jamboree classes? This question needs to further contextualize the principal’s social and self-awareness. My contention is that the principal is a woman who is aware of her being located at the margins of the society, where the watching eyes of the gatekeepers hardly see her. She is interacting with non-religious people and expected to persuade them to keep their children in the kindergarten. From these margins and obscure lines between religion and non-religion people she could play with the rules and erode the restrictions a little bit. Perhaps she was not aware of the significant implications of her actions on the children’s lives. Close to the line that divides the religious and non-religious parents and most of the parents from poor families, the boundaries of right and wrong patterns were loosened, so what she was doing was just thickening the border zone, bending the rules a little more—and by doing so creating new forms, hybrid forms of behavior.

When interviewed the kindergarten principal was asked to describe her degree of religiosity and she defined herself as an observant, “traditional but not fanatic; after all we must learn how to live with each other,” she said, adding, “You see, we are all Jews. My brother is not observing the Mitzvoth but on the Sabbath he goes to the synagogue and puts on a yarmulke, he doesn’t smoke in front of our father, he respects him.” This state of religious observation is typical to approximately two thirds of the Shas’ community members; hence the question we asked the principal surprised her. She thought the Jamboree classes, “are not big deal, they cannot do any harm to the children and the curriculum is anyway not radically transformed. . .besides, what, do you expect me to, just baby-sit the children? I do for the children what is good for them.”

From this training of the children’s bodies there is no way back. This example, and that of legitimizing the use of cell phones, shows how bargaining with patriarchy is possible from the margins at the border zone where women can bend the

rules and widen the boundary lines to the satisfaction of a mixed group of parents, without being sanctioned. Whereas bargaining from the margins is practiced away from the “gatekeepers” eyes, frontal methods of bargaining are also practiced. These methods, however, are different—as the next illustration demonstrates.

Bargaining with the Spiritual Leadership

Case Study 2—Vocational and Higher Education for Girls

Shas’ relations with non-religious society are complex. On the one hand some of the (non-religious) political parties cannot construct a coalition without Shas. The political members of Shas hold a pivotal position and therefore are indispensable for the support of a coalition in parliament, but on the other hand non-religious tax payers perceive Shas as parasites that milk the state’s resources (Tesler 2003). In the midst of this tension there were many attempts to legislate a law that enabled the state to enforce people working and to recruit the religious college’s students to mandatory military service (“Tal Law”). This had no impact on the gender-based division of labor—the men are still often either unemployed or registered in one of the religious colleges, for that they receive a small living allowance, and so the women are still the main breadwinners and the housekeepers. Nevertheless, women hardly get the opportunity to purchase education or skills training.¹⁵ This situation is rooted in the Torah commands that determine that teaching Torah to girls resembles teaching her nonsense (Tesler 2003). As winds of modernity and feminism blow over the entire society they have inspired some Shas women, whose desire for education and a career grew stronger as time went by. The right to register for higher education, whenever it is allowed, means that it was authorized first by the patriarchs, that is the Chief Rabbis and the community leader, and finally by the fathers or the husbands at home. As this authorization was never formally discussed, when women attempt to make their living in the public sphere they are exposed to a variety of possible courses in academic and semi-academic institutions and slowly develop ways to purchase education. Some of them sneak out for a short course here and a short course there. Gradually, in the early 1990s, they even began to register to more systematic studies, but tend to keep it in secrete in order not to be expelled from home or even from the community. One of them, Leora, a young woman of 25 years old, married with children, said she registered for a course for kindergarten teachers. In order to be allowed to do that she had to explain to her husband how difficult it was for her to maintain the family with a very low wage. Of course, it is not that he did not know it, but still the bargaining made it possible for her to get his

¹⁵It is ordered by Maimonides that ‘A woman who learns should be paid lower than a man, as she was not commanded to learn. . . Nevertheless, the sages ordered that: He who teaches his daughter Torah it is as if he taught her nonsense.’ Quoted and translated from: <http://www.daat.ac.il/DAAT/kitveyet/hamaayan/rambam-2.htm>. See also Parush (2001), El-Or (1994).

blessing. She added: “besides, I told him [the husband] I wanted to have something in my hands, some certificate, just in case I am fired and need to look for another job. But my family, my parents don’t know about it, neither do my neighbors.” Iris, another woman, registered in the Open University—hiding the fact from the entire community. “How could you hide such a thing for such a long time?,” the interviewer asked. She could because, “In the Open University you don’t have to show up on campus every day. I correspond a lot, and my husband is the only one who knew it, but no one else knew.” “Why it is so important for you?” she was asked. “Well, I have always wanted to learn mathematics, it has always been very interesting to me but I got married, had a child every eighteen or so months, and now I have seven children, I am 38, and I have a degree in math.” The woman sounded happy and proud of herself when talking.

These examples show that the phenomenon of women sneaking out for education, hiding from the patriarchs, is a widespread phenomenon. It does not mean that the patriarchal leadership is not aware of the problem, though. This is why the idea of establishing a women’s college did not come as a surprise to the Chief Rabbi when he was approached for his blessing to found a college for girls. The question was how to justify it without breaking the religious code.

The idea of higher education for women was germinating for many years until the beginning of this century, a college for women was founded in Jerusalem. The germination nested in the head of the Chief Rabbi’s daughter Adina Bar Shalom.¹⁶ “The question was how to address the spiritual leadership,” Bar Shalom recalled. Though it was her father so it was not impossible for her as a woman to set an appointment with him, she worked a long time beforehand on how to persuade him. Bar Shalom—who grew up where males were well educated in the best Jewish colleges, but the girls graduated from high school only, or at most became teachers in Teaching Seminars before they married—is a married woman who wanted her daughters and granddaughters to get a high-quality education. She studied fashion in a non-religious school and said that she did it with her father’s blessing, but still admitted that she was an exceptional case. Bar Shalom was conscious of political games as she was exposed at home to politics from childhood: “Although I could take my daughters to Bar Ilan University, a university that emphasizes Jewish studies and the entire leadership of that consists of religious men, it would still have required the need to sneak around in order not to harm the family reputation in the community. . . as you know Bar Ilan is not approved by the Rabbi, you see. . . In order not to embarrass the family, I decided to put the demand straight on the table, as I always do, and ask for my father’s blessing.”

Bar Shalom used two arguments. First, when discussing the matter with him she brought up the community’s need to compete with the non-religious public over the prestigious and well paid jobs. She brought sages’ quotations that addressed the

¹⁶This account is based on my interview with Mrs. Bar Shalom, my visit in the college and discussion with the students in June 2003.

urgent times and the need to allow girls education by referring to it as a temporary command that comes at times of anxiety and emergency.¹⁷ The other argument she used was pragmatic: “. . .the process is already happening and the number of girls that sneak out to Bar Ilan University grows steadily and significantly, so why not found a college for girls that will train them in professions that are in demand and very practical, like computers, office work, accounting and social work, health systems management, business administration, when all shall still be under the patriarchs’ watch?” Bar Shalom admitted that she had to wrap the idea up with smoothing and calming adjectives and by indicating the benefits that it could yield for the future of the entire community. Above all she argued that this opportunity provided young women with good reasons to choose to stay within the community and not to remove themselves from it “. . .to even further non religious fields, god forbid. . .”

Before talking to her father she knew that even when he gave his blessing the road to the opening of a college would still be very long. If its certificates were to provide valuable degrees in the competing market an academic license for the college needed to be granted by the Higher Education Council at the Ministry of Education. She also knew that funds for the project needed to be raised—two things that are very challenging for anyone who wants to establish a college, let alone an entrepreneur like herself who had no previous credentials in the field.

When she first discussed it with her father she was already very busy working on three tracks, knowing that she was determined to succeed. First, using her family connections, being the chief Rabbi’s daughter, she set up meetings with the Bar Ilan University authorities, suggesting that they assemble an academic committee that would collaborate with Rabbis from Shas. Once the college was established “this group of Rabbis shall be nominated as part of the academic committee and be in charge of setting the academic standards of the college for girls.” She had also spoken with those Rabbis in the community whom she knew were more liberal and discussed the idea with them, so they were there for her as candidates for the academic-Rabbis committee when she began to put things in motion.

Secondly she began fund raising. Jews in the Diaspora, especially Jews of Sephardic origin who live in communities, mainly in France and in Canada, have

¹⁷ a. Mamrim orders ch. 2 . . . 8 and if they thought that an affirmative Mitzvah should be cancelled for a while, or violate a forbidding Mitzvah, in order to bring back many people to religion, or to rescue many people of Israel from failing to do other things—they should do what the time requires. b. Judgements of the basics of the Torah, ch. 9: 1 It is clear and evident in the Torah, that it is a Mitzva that stands for ever and ever: it cannot be changed reduced or extended, as they say ‘All this word that I command you, that shall ye observe to do; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.’ Deuteronomy 13:1 (The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:28).) You have learnt that all Torah things you are commanded to obey for ever; he says also ‘It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations’ Leviticus 3:17; ‘This is what you have learned, that no prophet is allowed to renew anything from now on.’ Translation of the biblical sections are taken from <http://www.mechon-mamre.org>

always maintained close contacts with the Chief Rabbi, as he is considered an authority in spiritual debates and questions of Halakha Judgments. The Diaspora communities donated to the welfare of the community in Israel. Bar Shalom, growing up in the Rabbi's home, witnessed the donation processes and gained some talent in lobbying and fund raising. She began to correspond and travel to meet with the community leaders abroad, preparing them for the initiative and the need for funds. They were excited. She found the wives of the donators most cooperative in helping her to persuade their husbands.

Third, she began to seek out professional womanpower. Bar Shalom wanted women as teachers at the college rather than men. But the Rabbis' restrictions and the ethnic and economic deprivation of their first years, when they were in Ashkenazi institutions, did not produce skilful Sephardic women. It was clearly very rare to find Sephardic women in Shas with higher education and academic degrees. Bar Shalom had no choice but to offer jobs requiring Ph.D. and MA qualifications to graduating women from Bar Ilan. These women were mostly of Ashkenazi origin. At this point the ethnic situation turned upside down. Mizrahi women offered prestigious jobs to Ashkenazi women. Whereas everywhere Ashkenazi women hired and fired Sephardic women from low paid jobs, Bar Shalom was now hiring, [not yet firing,] Ashkenazi women for the best well paid jobs. Most of the academic women came from a religious subgroup defined as "modern ultra orthodox." Bar Shalom had outstanding achievements—the bargain was successful. But not entirely successful—she faced unexpected obstacles from within the family, from the Rabbi's own sons [her brothers] and his close advisors. They were concerned with the initiative, pointing out to the Rabbi that the emancipating power of education is a source of conspicuousness and obtrusion. When I asked, "why would they do such a thing, was there a hidden motive?" She answered: ". . .yes, that's right; the problem was not the promiscuity but the anticipated implication that such a project might cause a cut in the funds that they have usually enjoyed from the Jews in the Diaspora". But there was yet another, more difficult obstacle. According to the Halakha Judgments "the new that is forbidden by the Torah,"¹⁸ the religion could be threatened by women being educated. This time the Rabbis' committee, with whom Bar Shalom had spoken before, came to her support and provided a "counter" Halakha Judgment, one that allows girls' education because it was an "emergency need".¹⁹ This step opened a debate among those for and against the initiative. It was at this point that Bar Shalom took the opportunity to ask the Rabbis with whom she has spoken before to become the trustees of the college and her father to become the chair of the trustees of the college. It worked, they agreed. She also promised to accept women from the community only, ". . .and they will be very serious girls. Their age will be above 18 and if possible, even married women, who are already committed and tied to their families. This way. . ." she said, "the students will not

¹⁸Leviticus 23:10–14; see also Questions and Answers Chatam Sofer section 2 (10) mark 19, mark 148.

¹⁹See above footnote 14.

be exposed to external influences and will be well watched.” During the debates she had with her brothers and sisters in law, “. . .every time the negative impact of education on girls was raised I made sure to reduce its implied risks by promising that the college would be transparent to the Great Rabbis’ Committee that lead the community. . .they can come inspect the college any time they want, without scheduling the visit, that was the agreement.”

This type of bargaining with patriarchy is exactly the opposite of the previous one. It gets to the heart of patriarchy and negotiates over one of the hardest taboos that restrict women. What enabled Bar Shalom to succeed was her knowing the ins and outs, not only of her limits but also of the possibilities in the community—how the system works, how the interrelations are weaved and how substantially religious and cultural life is run.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, whether they are at home, in the neighborhood or in an unusual event, in the center or in the margins, women in Shas are embroidering their lives with colorful and rich threads; even if they are forced to “wear a modesty belt”. These case studies demonstrate how the women in Shas manage to construct islands of autonomy. As Shas is a movement and community that lives within a larger and more liberal society this becomes possible. It begins by external feminist influence that generates dissonance, creating women’s desires for education, careers, and control over their own bodies. They find new ways and create new patterns to overcome severe restrictions.

Perhaps the traditional Sephardic way of life in Shas is an advantage for the women, as it is considered more open to technological changes. Minor and major changes are generated in bargaining methods, through that the uses of a cell phone as well as higher education for girls were finally authorized.

Nevertheless, bargaining by nature cannot bring revolutionary or radical changes. It inscribes gradual and limited goals. Its power is in the dissolution of the boundaries that render them absorbent without disappearing, in widening the border zone in creating hybrid patterns of behavior. Moments of crisis are the best opportunities for the women to practice their talents in bargaining with patriarchy, without throwing the baby out with the bath water.

It is difficult to relate to Shas members as a prototype. In the Israeli discourse they are often referred to as “Shas women” or “Shas followers” giving a definite location to their identity. One of the main reasons why this is difficult and stereotypical, too, is that Shas followers form a social category of disappointed members of groups that they belonged to before, either for reasons of ethnic, class or religious discrimination. Shas members in many senses range from completely non-observant Jews through moderate religious to ultra orthodox. But precisely these strategies of bargaining with the patriarchal authorities, that are carried out by the ultra orthodox hegemony—men and women alike, often of the older generation, and mostly of Sephardic origin—produce large border zones where hybrid

identities can be created, and the dynamic and fluid movement of members keeps community life viable. As the patriarchal authorities are in favor of extending the believing population, they open the gates wide and facilitate non-religious women meeting with ultra orthodox and traditional women. The interaction between different discourses, languages, and practices that the women bring with them creates new forms of construction of selves and identities. These new forms reflect mutual influence on how they interpret the rules of the discipline of the body, domestic life, family affairs, and child-rearing. Here the question of the nature of new identity they create or should create is secondary to their acting within restrictions as subjective agents who eventually dissolve some of the rigidity of the boundaries.

The impact of the hybrid identity or identities on the social structure of Shas is subversive in more than one sense, as the margins from that the women take action are sometimes multiplied. The women of Shas are part of a resisting group of Sephardic ultra orthodox who separated in the first instance from the Ashkenazi group. This does not make them the ultimate allies of the men in Shas, and neither are they the allies of the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox women (or men). On the contrary, they are located at the margins of the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox and on the margins of the male community in Shas. Their resistance and practices of subversion may be aimed at differing themselves from the prototype of woman that Shas patriarchs prescribe, but what they create from that margin is in fact a hybrid entity that subverts the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox woman too. In this respect they are acting in the service of the entire community, against the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox hegemony. But then again, the closer it gets to the fluid margins the more Shas' patriarchs face a complexity that forces them to take contradicting considerations into account and to provide answers for the codes of behavior according to the Halakha rules. This is why one of the women who took the liberty to wear a wig and nylon socks in the public said triumphantly and very intuitively: "The Rabbis cannot win us [in this battle, HDK]." Perhaps this is the paradigmatic expression of the feminism of Shas women.

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Chapter 7

Temptress on the Path: Women as Objects and Subjects in Buddhist Jātaka Stories

Naomi Appleton

Abstract It is undisputed in early Buddhist texts that women as well as men are capable of becoming *arahats* (awakened beings). Both men and women can act morally, attain all the advanced meditative states, and follow the teachings that lead to *nibbāna*. Despite this soteriological inclusiveness, the presentation of women in Buddhist texts is often less than egalitarian, perhaps most especially in popular narrative literature. In Pāli jātika stories, which are popular subjects for sermons, children’s books and temple illustrations throughout Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, the influence of both androcentric and misogynistic tendencies is evident. Women are portrayed as obstacles to men’s progress on the spiritual path, and few female characters are given any voice of their own. In addition, the stories are presented as relating the previous births of Gotama Buddha, who in every case is identified with a male character, leaving few role models for Buddhist women, and altering the soteriological backdrop.

Keywords Buddhism (Theravada) · Jataka · Women

Introduction

Once upon a time, a young Buddhist monk saw a beautiful woman and ceased to take pleasure in his religious path. He was taken to see the Buddha, who told him that this should be no surprise, since even very spiritually advanced beings can be stirred by passion and lose their way. To illustrate this point the Buddha told the assembled monks a story about an episode in one of his own previous births, when he was an

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Note: References to the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (JA) are to the numbers and titles in Fausbøll (ed.) 1877–1896, and Cowell (ed.) 1895–1907.

ascetic of great powers who used to take his meals each day at the king's palace. One day the king went away and placed his queen in charge of ensuring there was a meal for the ascetic. The ascetic awoke from a state of intense meditation, and, realizing he was late, used his powers to fly to the palace window, where he inadvertently saw the queen in a state of undress. As a result he "became like a crow with its wings clipped"¹ and spent 7 days consumed by lust. When the king returned and found the ascetic so tormented by lust that he was unable to move, he gave him his queen, asking her to do what she could for the ascetic. The queen deliberately played the part of a demanding, nagging wife to her new husband, helping him come to his senses. He returned her to the king, left the city, regained his power of insight, and eventually passed away to one of the heavenly realms of rebirth. After hearing this story, the young monk attained arahatship.²

This story forms part of a semi-canonical Theravāda Buddhist text called the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (henceforth JA),³ which is a collection of around 550 "jātaka stories", or stories about the many births of the person who was to become the Buddha ("Awakened One"). Such stories typically begin with an episode in the teaching career of the Buddha, which explains the reason for telling the jātaka. Next is related the jātaka proper (also known as the "story of the past"), followed by an identification of the characters: the Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be) is usually identified with the main character, and other characters with members of his family or monastic retinue. It is a common misconception—fuelled by the JA's claim that jātakas illustrate the Bodhisatta's gradual path to perfection—that the Bodhisatta is always the hero of his jātaka stories. In fact, in some jātakas he is merely a passer-by or silent witness, and he also occasionally kills, steals, lies, and commits sexual impropriety. Indeed the story just related is one of the less flattering of the jātakas, since it demonstrates his destruction by lust, which is only relieved thanks to the quick-wittedness of the queen, who, we are told, was the nun Uppalavaṇṇā in a previous birth.

The Buddha declared that Uppalavaṇṇā was the foremost nun for mystic attainments. In the *Therīgāthā*, a collection of inspired verses uttered by early Buddhist nuns, we hear he talk about her enlightenment:

The two of us, mother and daughter, were co-wives; I experienced religious excitement,
amazing, hair-raising.

Woe upon sensual pleasures, impure, evil-smelling, with many troubles, wherein we,
mother and daughter, were co-wives.

¹ *Chinnapakkho kāko viya ahoṣi.*

² *Mudulakkhaṇa-jātaka*, JA 66. For a full translation see Cowell et al. Vol. 1, pp. 161–164. See also JA 251 and 431.

³ Some of the stories in this text probably pre-date the Buddha, but the placing of the stories in a Buddhist setting happened gradually during the centuries following the Buddha's death, and the text did not reach its final form until the fifth or sixth century CE. Only the verses contained in each story are considered to be canonical, though the text as a whole has held quasi-canonical status throughout its history.

I saw the peril in sensual pleasures, and I saw renunciation of the world as firm security;
I went forth at Rājagaha from the house to the houseless state.

I know that I have lived before; I have purified the divine eye; and there is knowledge
of the state of mind of others; I have purified the ear-element; I have realised supernormal
power too; I have attained the annihilation of the āsavas [defilements]: I have realised these
six supernormal knowledges; I have done the Buddha's teaching.⁴

By identifying the helpful queen with Uppalavaṇṇā, the jātaka thus hints at her spiritual path, which is elaborated upon elsewhere. The mystic attainments for which she was famous in her final life might even be compared with those that she helped the Bodhisatta preserve. Since jātakas are said to be about the path of the Bodhisatta, however, in such stories the character of the queen only exists in relation to him. She supports his path, but we hear nothing of hers.

Although this jātaka presents women as a potential hindrance on the Buddhist path, and the queen's imitation of a nagging wife hints at certain expectations of women's behavior, there is nothing to suggest that womankind as a whole is at fault. In many other jātakas, however, women are portrayed very negatively, and demonesses also cause their fair share of trouble, while goddesses do their best to be good. The varying attitudes towards female characters in the jātakas are paralleled throughout Buddhist literature. In his influential article on early Buddhist attitudes toward women, Sponberg talks of "a rich multivocality—not a simple inconsistent ambivalence" (1992, p. 4) and distinguishes between four attitudes within the Buddhist community that was responsible for the composition, redaction, and preservation of the texts. These four attitudes he calls soteriological inclusiveness, institutional androcentrism, ascetic misogyny, and soteriological androgyny. Leaving aside the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding Sponberg's classification, I am going to use his categories as a framework for examining the place of women in jātaka stories, which themselves preserve a multitude of voices, being made up of animal fables, folktales, mini epics, comic anecdotes, and pious legends—of varying ages, origins, and provenances. Such a study will help to illuminate the role of popular literature in the development and expression of attitudes towards women in early Buddhism.

Ascetic Misogyny

Sponberg's category of ascetic misogyny is perhaps the most easily found in jātaka stories, indeed he states that jātakas are "the most blatantly misogynous texts of the Pāli literature" (1992, p. 35 n. 29). The most misogynous of all is the *Kuṇḍāla-jātaka* (JA 536), which is a collection of several stories all about the nature of women. To give a flavour of the text, I need only quote a few of the verses from Bollée's translation (1970, p. 160):

⁴Rhys-Davids and Norman (1997, p. 197). For a study of the text with a focus upon women's experience of enlightenment, and an argument for seeing the text as authored by women, see Blackstone (1998).

No man who is not possessed should trust women, for they are base, fickle, ungrateful and deceitful.

They are ungrateful and do not act as they ought to; they do not care for their parents or brother. They are mean and immoral and do only their own will.

Though a man may be their loving, kind and tender companion for a long time; though he may be dear to them as their own life, yet in time of distress or misfortune they leave him. Therefore I do not confide in women.

The mind of women is like that of a monkey, going from one place to another like the shadow of a tree. The heart of a woman is unsteady (or: revolving) like the rim of a wheel.

Women are (sticky) like gum, are all-devouring like fire; they are clever deceivers and impetuous like a river. They go both to the man they love and to him they dislike just as a boat goes to both banks of a river.

They do not belong to one man or two: they are laid out like goods in the bazaar. He who should think "they are mine" might just as well try to catch the wind in a net.

In contrast to the story we began with, such attitudes place the blame firmly on women, who are portrayed as unreliable, dishonest, insatiate, vicious, selfish, and morally bankrupt.

Sponberg explains the misogyny of texts like this in terms of the necessary preservation of celibacy among Buddhist monks. Jones (2001, p. 73) points out that 24 of the 547 stories of the JA are told to a monk who is distracted by women, as in our first example. However, while preserving Buddhist monastics, such misogyny is sometimes found at the expense of Buddhist morals. For example, in the *Aṅḍabhūta-jātaka* (JA 62) the Bodhisatta is a king with a passion for gambling. He always wins, because with every roll of his dice he repeats a verse:

All rivers wind; all forests are made of wood;
All women, given opportunity, do no good.⁵

Because this verse is true, the dice land in his favor time after time until his opponent is driven to a rather extreme response. He has a baby girl brought up in the confines of a tower, with only female servants and companions. When she is grown, he adds the line "except my girl" to the end of the Bodhisatta's verse, turning the luck his way. To switch the luck back again, the Bodhisatta pays someone to break into the lodgings of this young woman and seduce her. This is a comic story, which has at its climax the girl's keeper agreeing to be blindfolded only to be unwittingly hit on the head by her lover. The dubious morality of the Bodhisatta paying someone to seduce a woman in order to preserve his gambling streak is overlooked in favor of the message that one should fear woman, since even if you were to carry her about with you at all times you could never be sure of her. While the frame, once again, tells us that the audience for this story was originally a wayward monk, such a "moral" exposes a more popular brand of misogyny, with little concern for the values of Buddhism.

Much of this misogyny might be explained by the origins of such jātakas in popular non-Buddhist folklore, and particularly the misogynous Indian Brahmanical story-pot. Very few stories appear to have been composed as jātakas, and not many

⁵My translation from Fausbøll, Vol. 1, p. 289 (non-canonical verse).

more exhibit specifically Buddhist moral or doctrinal content. The great diversity of the stories found in the JA is hardly touched at all by the Buddhist framing in the teaching career of the Buddha, or the identification of one character with the Bodhisatta. The result is a rather motley collection of stories pulled together by a Buddhist frame that cannot quite disguise the popular Indic sentiments. Bollée, for example, argues that the *Kuṇāla-jātaka* is largely non-Buddhist in origin, and that such misogynous tales belong to “the stock-in-trade of many story-tellers in world literature” (1970, p. 117) in comparison to which Buddhism is actually very egalitarian.

One female characterization that resonates with the Indian setting is that of demonesses, who are lustful, cannibalistic, and possessed of magical powers that allow them to appear as irresistible beauties.⁶ Such creatures are typically shown seducing and devouring unsuspecting men, for example in the *Talapatta-jātaka* (JA 96) where the Bodhisatta’s five traveling companions are picked off one by one, seduced in turn by demonesses who tempt them with beauty, sweet music, fragrant perfumes, dainty foods, and luxurious couches. Only the Bodhisatta completes his journey safely, having resisted the temptations of the senses. The allegorical symbolism of this story is clear, and the demonesses here cannot be seen as representative of women. The emphasis is on the ability of some men to resist the charms of the senses, and the weakness of other men who cannot and are thus devoured by the forces of *samsāra* (the cycle of death and rebirth). Similarly in the *Valāhassa-jātaka* (JA 196), a group of merchants is shipwrecked on an island and seduced by demonesses. Some realize the danger they are in and escape on a magical horse; the rest are devoured.⁷ Here we have a reconciliation of negative female characters and the Buddhist message: that women can be obstacles on a man’s path, but only if he lets them be. Such an attitude also works for some of the characterizations of ordinary women, as in the story with which we began.

Institutional Androcentrism

Women in the jātakas are sometimes shown acting positively. They are often characterized as faithful wives and loving mothers, and the archetypes of these two roles are the Buddha’s own mother and wife, who are bound to him in birth after birth in his jātaka stories. The role of Buddha’s mother in the early tradition is shared by Mahāmāyā, who died shortly after giving birth to him, and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, his maternal aunt and stepmother, who raised him. The latter was responsible for the establishment of the order of nuns, and was a role model to the nuns and in some

⁶In Pāli *yakkhiṇī* or *rakkhasī*.

⁷For a discussion of other versions of these two jātakas, including the equation of women with the forces of *samsāra*, and the declaration found in Sanskrit versions that “all women are demonesses,” see Appleton (2005).

ways functioned as a female counterpart to the Buddha.⁸ However, in the *jātakas* the role of the Bodhisatta's mother usually falls to Mahāmāyā, though neither character has an active role in the stories. The Buddha's wife has a larger part to play in the *jātakas*, providing support and companionship to the Bodhisatta, sometimes renouncing the world with him. In the *Mañicora-jātaka* (JA 194) her virtue saves the Bodhisatta's life, and in the *Vessantara-jātaka* (JA 547) she allows him to give away their children and herself in order to perfect his generosity.⁹ In her final life she is abandoned by him when he leaves on his spiritual quest, but after he returns to his hometown she joins the community of Buddhist nuns, later achieving arāhatship.¹⁰ Another common character in the *jātakas* is Uppalavaṇṇā, who generally assists the Bodhisatta, often appearing as a goddess, though not always a reliably helpful one.¹¹

Another positive portrayal of a woman is found in the *Sambula-jātaka* (JA 519), which is told in praise of Queen Mallikā, who was the senior wife of King Pasenadi, a devout follower of the Buddha, and renowned for her wisdom. In the *jātaka* she is a woman who is accused by her husband of being dishonest (as, he says, all women are). In response she performs an "act of truth" (a declaration so powerfully honest that it can have physical effects), and through the power of this cures her husband's leprosy. However, even in this case Mallikā is held up as exceptional, and her good qualities help her husband, thus even she exists only in relation to her male companions. Similarly, in the *Ucchaṅga-jātaka* (JA 67), a woman saves her husband, brother and son from prison, demonstrating that even in the rare cases where women play an active and positive role in *jātakas*, they are merely supporting the lives and the progress of the men.

Such a view of women's roles remains prominent in contemporary Buddhist societies. Although the Buddha did establish an ordination lineage for nuns, this has long since died out in Theravāda Buddhism. Recent attempts to reintroduce full ordination for women have met with little success, and most female renunciators have had to settle for a state of lay-renunciation and little acceptance or support from the Buddhist community. Even when women were able to be fully ordained, there is evidence to suggest that nuns were given less support than the monks, probably due to the social constraints that meant they had to defer to the monks in matters of

⁸For Gotamī's story as found in the *Apadāna* see Walters (1994, 1995). In the former Walters argues at length that Gotamī is "the Buddha for women" (1994, p. 375). For a critique of this position see Wilson (1996, pp. 141ff).

⁹This very contentious episode occurs in the *Vessantara-jātaka* (JA 547) which, despite its problems, is the most popular of all *jātakas* and is believed in the Theravādin tradition to relate the Buddha's antepenultimate birth (see Cone and Gombrich 1977).

¹⁰For more on the parallel quests of the Buddha and his wife see Strong (1997).

¹¹See, for example, JA 539, in which she is a goddess of the ocean yet fails to notice the Bodhisatta floundering in the water after a shipwreck. Jones (2001 [1979], pp. 141ff.) provides more examples of the roles of goddesses.

discipline and teachings.¹² As Falk says of the situation in early Indian Buddhism: “one cannot escape the impression that the community was more comfortable with its laywomen than with its nuns and that it probably found the latter’s presence to be an embarrassment” (2001, p. 204).

The majority of Buddhist women remain lay supporters, and indeed the majority of Buddhist lay supporters are women. A woman’s role is thus to support the spiritual path of the men, giving gifts both in order to support the monks (some of whom will be members of her own family) and to gain merit for herself and those family members who remain in the lay life. She may also be expected to give a son for ordination and receives a vast store of merit as a result.¹³ She may hope that such merit will help her be reborn as a man. Such an aspiration is a long way from the aspirations of the early Buddhist nuns, whose spiritual attainments matched (and sometimes surpassed) those of their male counterparts.

Soteriological Inclusiveness?

While it is clear that women are able to become *arahats*, in the *Bahudhātuka Sutta* of the Pāli canon,¹⁴ the Buddha is recorded as saying that it is impossible for a woman to be a fully awakened one—a *buddha*. While both *buddha* and *arahat* are awakened, a *buddha* discovers the truth for himself and teaches others, whereas an *arahat* relies upon instruction.¹⁵ The latter goal is predominant in Theravāda Buddhism, in contrast to Mahāyāna where all Buddhists are encouraged to aim for buddhahood, which is portrayed as less selfish and more complete. Different Mahāyāna texts have different attitudes towards when (and whether) a woman must become a man before attaining buddhahood, with many texts sidestepping the issue by trying to demonstrate the ultimately illusory nature of gender through tales of magical sex-change.¹⁶ It is in this development of Buddhism that Sponberg sees his fourth category: “soteriological androgyny.” In Theravāda Buddhism, however, the established position is that one must be male in order to become a *bodhisatta*, and male to become a *buddha*; the implication is that one must remain male throughout the *bodhisatta*

¹²For the early Indian attitudes towards Buddhist nuns see Falk (2001), and on the history of Sri Lankan nuns see Bartholomeusz (1994). A useful review of the controversy surrounding recent attempts to reintroduce full ordination to Theravāda countries is found in Kawanami (2007).

¹³Among Thai, Burmese, and Shan Buddhists the idea prevails that the gates of hell are closed for a woman when her son becomes a novice monk (Pannyavamsa 2007, p. 6). The tradition of temporary ordination allows all sons to make this gift to their mothers, without a permanent renunciation.

¹⁴*Majjhima Nikāya* 115; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995, pp. 925–930).

¹⁵A third type of enlightenment is available: that of *paccekabuddha*, who becomes enlightened independently but does not teach.

¹⁶For examples of such texts, and their interpretations, see Paul (1985) and Peach (2002).

path, and the fact that the Bodhisatta is always male in his jātakas stories appears to support this position.¹⁷

The exclusion of women from buddhahood and the formal path to it in Theravāda Buddhism has not attracted much attention from scholars. Many simply dismiss it as unimportant, for example Sharma (1978, p. 77) is happy to conclude that:

There may be some doubt as to whether a woman could successfully resolve to become a Buddha; but there can be no doubt that a woman could successfully resolve to become a man and then as a man successfully resolve to become a Buddha. Thus the requirement of malehood, on this view, becomes a nominal requirement and ceases to be a substantive one.

Dharmasiri (1997, p. 156) also sees the exclusion as a minor one, though for a different reason:

As far as the nature of enlightenment is concerned an ordinary person enlightened is not at all different from the Buddha. The Buddha is the person who first finds it out and then teaches it to the others. In the patriarchal set up of his time where women were degraded to subhuman level, it is really inconceivable how a woman could accomplish such a task. If a woman said that she is enlightened others would just say that she is gone nuts!

The perceived unimportance of the *bodhisatta* path is echoed by Harvey (2000, p. 373) who suggests that the exclusion of women from this path “is in practice hardly a restriction, as Buddhas are seen as *extremely* rare individuals. The key goal is to become an *Arahat*, which is open to women.” However, Samuels (1997, p. 404) argues that:

Though the idea that anyone may become a buddha through following the *bodhisattva-yāna*¹⁸ is only present in seed form, it appears, nonetheless, to have been taken seriously by Theravādins. This is illustrated in the lives of numerous Theravādin kings, monks, and textual copyists who have taken the bodhisattva vow and are following the *bodhisattva-yāna* to the eventual attainment of buddhahood.

If we take the role of the *bodhisatta* ideal in Theravāda Buddhism seriously, we must also take seriously the fact that women are excluded from it, and examine the JA’s role in this development of thought.

The jātakas stories are rarely told in isolation, but form part of a large body of story literature. The other most popular collection is the *Dhammapada-atthakathā*, a long, story-filled commentary on the collection of verses known as the *Dhammapada*. Many such stories portray women in prominent (and positive) roles. Here, for example, we find the story of Visākhā, a generous, compassionate, and intelligent lay

¹⁷The idea that one must be a man in order to embark on the *bodhisatta* path is first found in the late-canonical *Buddhavamsa* and repeated in the introduction to the JA. In Southeast Asia the story of the last female birth of the Buddha-to-be is related: she made an offering to a *buddha* but was unable to receive a prediction to buddhahood because of her female form. Instead she was reborn in one of the heavenly realms until it was time to take male form as Sumedha, and make the first vow to buddhahood at the feet of Dīpaṅkara Buddha, as related in the introduction to the JA. See Jaini (2001).

¹⁸“*bodhisattva-vehicle*”. Samuels argues against the identification of the *bodhisattva-yāna* with Mahāyāna Buddhism, and urges scholars to pay more attention to the role of the *bodhisatta* path in Theravāda.

woman.¹⁹ We also find the tragic story of Kisāgotamī, who was unable to accept her baby son was dead and carried him from house to house asking for medicine. The Buddha told her that her son would be cured by a mustard seed from a house untouched by death. Realizing eventually that such a house did not exist, Kisāgotamī became a nun and achieved arahatship.²⁰ The lives of nuns and their experiences of awakening are also found in the *Therīgāthā*, and stories of their previous births are found in the *Apadāna*, alongside their male counterparts.²¹ In the *Vimānavatthu* and *Petavatthu*, we find stories of the actions of both men and women that led to their rebirth in heavenly mansions, or in the realm of the hungry ghosts.²²

These other collections of stories demonstrate that women were not excluded from good actions, any more than men were excluded from bad. There is rarely any change of gender between births, suggesting that this was not relevant to spiritual progress. Many women made offerings to past *buddhas* and resolved to become prominent nuns or laywomen (*not* monks or laymen) in the retinue of Gotama Buddha. It is clearly demonstrated that both men and women are able to attain arahatship, and so there is no need to aspire to a change in gender. Similarly, the Bodhisatta keeps his male-ness throughout his *jātaka* stories, even when identified with an animal or god. Some feminist scholars, such as Gross (1993, p. 43), see this as a negative comment on women:

To see more affinity between male humans and male animals than between female and male human beings must be an extreme of androcentric consciousness in which, more than is usually the case even for androcentrism, women are seen as outside the norm, as a foreign object but not a human subject.

Seeing the JA in relation to other collections of rebirth narratives suggests an alternative position: it is possible that the *jātakas* of the JA originally reflected the soteriological equality that automatically assumes a fixed gender. Only later did *jātakas* become identified as stories that demonstrate the *bodhisatta* path from an initial vow that made rebirth as a female impossible to a buddhahood that excludes women.

A few stories in the JA and elsewhere demonstrate the idea that being a woman is the result of bad actions in previous births. For example, in the *Mahānāradakassapa-jātaka* (JA 544) a woman who teaches the king about karma reveals her own previous births. As a consequence of one life where she was a man who went after other men's wives, she was fated to suffer in a hell realm, followed by birth as a castrated goat, a monkey whose father bit off his testicles, a castrated ox, and a hermaphrodite. This action also explains why she is stuck in female form

¹⁹For the full story of Visākhā see Horner (1930, pp. 345ff).

²⁰For this and other stories of prominent Buddhist nuns in the *Dhammapada-atthakathā* see Burlingame (1996, pp. 213 and 209ff).

²¹Rhys-Davids and Norman (1997); Mellick Cutler (1993, 1994).

²²See Horner and Gehman (2005). Rebirth as a hungry ghost (Pāli: *peta*; Skt: *preta*) is the result of greed in a past birth; such unfortunate beings suffer the torment of an insatiable appetite.

for the next six births, though we discover at the end of the *jātaka* that she eventually becomes Ānanda, the Buddha's (male) cousin and chief attendant.²³ The ability of humans to be reborn as either (or neither) sex is here found as part of the idea that rebirth as a woman is bad. In the early sources this is because of the suffering inherent in a woman's life, rather than the idea that women are less capable of spiritual development. Such ideas are clearly linked, however, and are still present in Buddhist countries: surveys conducted among Sri Lankan women by Huston (1979, pp. 48ff.) and Seneviratne and Currie (2001, pp. 210ff.) showed that many Buddhist women believed their sex was decided by previous actions and that this explains the extra suffering endured by women, for example during childbirth. Kabilsingh (1991, p. 31) records similar sentiments among Thai women, noting that:

Many women are convinced that they carry a heavy load of negative karma due to the simple fact of their gender, and are therefore eager to gain merit to offset it. Making offerings to the Sangha [community of monks] is the primary way most laypeople hope to gain merit. Monks, being "fields of merit," thus benefit directly from this vicious belief.

It is easy to see how the fact of the suffering endured by women in a patriarchal context can lead to the view that women are spiritually less able than men. As well as being obstacles on the path of men, they are then denied a path of their own until they become men.

Conclusion

Like Buddhist texts in general, the JA contains a multitude of opinions on women. While some stories demonstrate ascetic misogyny (often at the expense of Buddhist values), even the more positive characterizations of women only allow them to support the men. As we have noted, such attitudes can be explained to a certain extent by the context in which the text emerged: as a text purporting to be about the Bodhisatta, other characters (both male and female) are often marginalized, and a strong need to preserve the monastic state led to stories that demonize women (literally or figuratively), often influenced by the wider Indic setting. More problematic for a feminist critique of the text is its involvement in excluding women from the *bodhisatta* path, which—although this path is less prominent in Theravāda than Mahāyāna Buddhism—significantly compromises the soteriological equality found in some of the earliest Buddhist sources. What probably began as the result of the perceived irrelevance of gender eventually supported the idea that a *bodhisatta* must be male. This in turn contributed to the notion that a female birth is not only unfortunate, but also restrictive, and that a woman's role is therefore to support the spiritual quest of her male family members and the monks while aspiring to a male rebirth. Though not explicitly excluded from arahatship, the fact of women's inferiority is even used to discourage the pursuit of this goal, which is in

²³In the *Therīgāthā* the elder nun Isidāsī relates a similar set of events and rebirths, culminating in her final life, where she was rejected by several husbands before renouncing and attaining arahatship (Rhys-Davids and Norman 1997, vv. 400–447).

any case made next to impossible by the lack of full ordination for women. That the popular literature, especially the JA, participated in the debate about women's nature and abilities is clear. Because the jātakas became identified as stories told by the Buddha about his time as a Bodhisatta, they acquired a significance greater than a simple body of folklore ever could. And while it is tempting to conclude that the JA is a product of a complex history and should not be looked to as a source of Buddhist instruction, the fact remains that such stories *are* used, and continue to affect the lives and attitudes of both men and women in South and Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Sarah Shaw, Alice Eardley and Arthid Sheravanichkul, who commented extensively on drafts of this article.

Glossary of Key Pāli Terms (with Sanskrit Cognates)

arahat—(Skt: *arhat*) “Worthy One”, a person who has attained awakening. Arahats are distinguished from buddhahood because a *buddha* attains awakening independently, whereas *arahats* attain awakening after hearing teachings.

Bodhisatta, bodhisatta—(Skt: *bodhisattva*) “Awakening-Being”, a person who is on the path to buddhahood. I use the designation “Bodhisatta” to refer to Gotama Buddha before his awakening. When referring to the potential for others to be on the path to buddhahood I use “*bodhisatta*”.

Buddha, buddha—“Awakened One”, referring both to the “historical” Buddha, Gotama, who lived in the fifth century BCE, and to any number of past and future *buddhas*. The introduction to the JA records 24 previous *buddhas*, each of whom gave a prediction of buddhahood to the Bodhisatta.

jātaka—A story told by the Buddha about an episode in one of his many previous births.

Mahāyāna (Skt)—“Great Vehicle”, a movement in Buddhism that places emphasis upon the *bodhisatt(v)a* path, and accuses *arahats* of having an inferior and selfish form of awakening.

Pāli—The language used for the sacred texts and later writings of what is now known as Theravāda Buddhism.

Theravāda—“Doctrine of the Elders”, the form of Buddhism predominant in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, also called “Southern Buddhism” or “Pāli Buddhism”.

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Chapter 8

Is Literature Any Help in Liberating Eve and Mary?

Dorota Filipczak

Abstract In *The Sex of Knowing* Michèle Le Doeuff states that “the myth of original sin survives in texts prescribing that women’s existence be uncontaminated by intellectual effort” (p. 33). My article engages with the ideas of Le Doeuff by referring to literary texts where women strive for access to knowledge but it is barred to them on the grounds of gender. Maggie Tulliver from George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and Morag Gunn from Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* yearn for acceptance of their intellect, and ultimately fail to gain it. Both heroines embody the clash between conventional femininity and writerly aspirations in the respective authors. If we draw conclusions from theology, the construction of the Virgin Mary was to put an end to the female quest for knowledge, especially the carnal knowledge that the traditional projections associate with Eve’s sin. Examining the connection between knowledge and sin, my article also discusses the deconstruction of the myth of Virgin birth in *The Christmas Birthday Story* by Laurence, and in *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King, a Canadian Cherokee. Both authors free Mary from the myth that became crucial to her image, suppressing her female worshippers’ womanhood and intellectual aspirations.

Keywords Original sin · Knowledge · Eve · Virgin · Mary · Michèle Le Doeuff · George Eliot · Margaret Laurence · Thomas King

In *The Sex of Knowing* Michèle Le Doeuff contends that “original sin was the sin of wanting to know” (Le Doeuff 2003, p. 28). Providing examples from the history of ideas, the French philosopher demonstrates how the myth of original sin has become a regulative norm debarring women from the access to knowledge which was “repressively sexualized” (Le Doeuff 2003, p. 32). Among other things, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is discussed in the study as a critique of male control over knowledge. Le Doeuff’s concern with this particular

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author encourages me to test the claims laid down in *The Sex of Knowing* against the chosen texts of English-speaking authors who have used literature in order to challenge the biases that Le Doeuff exposes. In order to connect with Le Doeuff's philosophical approach I would like to start with a personal context as a lecturer of British literature at a Polish University.

The course that I teach to the second year students (mostly women) has been loosely termed by some of us as the course on female victims, for there are quite a few on the reading list. Starting with Richardson's *Pamela or the Virtue Rewarded* we move into high-risk territory, where it is up to a woman's wits to survive the snares of her pursuer and turn a wolf into a lamb. With Gothic novels we face a gallery of damsels in distress, to finally encounter the specter of Catherine, whose death is a metaphor of her inability to reconnect with her potential claimed by the wolf (Heathcliff) on the one hand, and the lamb (Edgar Linton), on the other. Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* complete the list of women who were prevented from following their desire due to the repressive narrow-mindedness that characterized the distribution of roles in their communities.

In the assembly of the above characters it is Maggie Tulliver, who sins by "wanting to know", but then renounces and repents her desire. As a girl she is caught between her intelligence and her inability to meet the requirements of socially constructed femininity. When her father praises her because "she can read almost as well as the parson," her mother responds: "[b]ut her hair won't curl" (Eliot 1994, p. 9). Much has been said about the exotic beauty of Maggie as contrasted with the conventional looks of her cousin Lucy Deane, to mention only Ellen Moers, who juxtaposes them against another pair of binary opposites: Lucile, Oswald's wife, and Corinne, the eponymous heroine in the novel by Madame de Staël (Moers 1977, pp. 264–281).

Robert P. Lewis states quite rightly that "[t]he keynote of Maggie's character is her insatiable and destabilizing desire for 'more'" (1998, p. 123). This manifests itself in her yearning to learn everything that her brother is encouraged to learn, even though her attempt to imitate him is cut short when Tom emphatically declares that no girls could learn the Latin grammar. When Maggie announces her desire to "do Euclid," Tom counters with a similar remark in front of his teacher: "Girls can't do Euclid, can they, sir?" Mr Stelling answers: "They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say. They've a great deal of superficial cleverness, but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (Eliot 1994, p. 151). As a visitor to teacher's household, Maggie is thus taught a different kind of lesson than her brother, and the impact sinks deep despite her rebelliousness. Yet what hurts her even more than the teacher's comments is the possibility of losing Tom's approval, which she is determined to keep at all costs. When she declared she was going to be "a clever woman," Tom answered that she would be "a nasty, conceited thing" (p. 147), and he threatened to take back his affection. As Tom early discovered, blackmail was efficient in controlling Maggie, who would rather relinquish her own self than his fraternal love. Since men in positions of authority, such as Mr. Riley or Mr. Stelling (to cite only a couple of examples), construct and distribute knowledge and pronounce the so-called objective judgements, Maggie finds herself in a

situation described by Le Doeuff, who thus sums up the implications arising from a text by Gabrielle Suchon: “To have no access to knowledge is to be bound to live in intellectual and moral dependence on someone else” (2003, p. 39).

Maggie’s dependence starts when she consigns herself to Tom’s exclusive care as the provider in the household. Tom demands obedience in the smallest details and chastises Maggie for lowering herself by publicly asking to do the sewing for a linen shop in the town. It is interesting that Maggie’s humble acceptance of his anger is juxtaposed to her resigning from her previous claims to knowledge. The passage in which Eliot describes it reads nicely along with Le Doeuff’s argument detecting the connection that patriarchal institutions make between female pursuit of study and Eve’s sinful desire.

The old books, Virgil, Euclid, and Aldrich – that wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge – had been all laid by, for Maggie had turned her back on the vain ambition to share the thoughts of the wise. In her first ardour she flung away the books with a sort of triumph that she had risen above the need of them, and if they had been her own, she would have burnt them, believing that she would never repent. She read so eagerly and constantly in her three books, the Bible, *Thomas à Kempis*, and *The Christian Year* (no longer rejected as “a hymn book”) (Eliot 1994, p. 298).

Maggie’s enforced conversion to, in another of Le Doeuff’s terms, “a radical non-knowledge” (2003, p. 99), allows her to bear the socially sanctioned injustice and turn her plain existence into a life of martyrdom, a surrogate of fulfillment achieved at the cost of “volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions” (Eliot 1994, p. 298). Her mother who nagged her about her naughtiness and unruly hair now finds the daughter’s metamorphosis daunting though very welcome. Bent over her sewing, Maggie makes a pretty enough picture of the Victorian angel in the house. She allows her mother to arrange her hair into an old-fashioned coronet, only to oblige her, but she steadily refuses “to look at herself in the glass” (p. 299). What she refuses is the self-examination, the quest for the knowledge of herself. Philip Wakem quite rightly cautions her that her renunciation will not help in enduring the pressure of real life, but she ignores the warning. Abstaining from “the wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge,” she will be borne away by the tide of the Floss illustrating the emotions that she has locked up and feared to probe. Though she will reject Stephen Guest’s marriage proposal, out of loyalty to Lucy, his fiancée, she will find out that she has gone too far by the standards of her community.

Robert P. Lewis points out the influence of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* on George Eliot, while she was engrossed in her novel (1998, p. 121). Aware as he is of Maggie’s identification with Christiana and Eve, the critic applies the paradisaical myth to his analysis in a traditional way, by making Maggie’s “dark beauty” and surplus energy collide with her conventional role. The “wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge,” however, attracts attention to a subtext that Maggie feels constrained to leave unexplored. Consider a contrast to Jeanne Hersch’s (1985) description of Eve:

With one hand Eve picks the apple, with the other she touches herself. A gesture so strange: the surprise, terror, pity of Eve discovering herself *before saying ‘me’*. As if a dream, an infinite absence, this right hand touches herself, knows that it is touching. This touched

cheek feels touched. Eve knows herself. She listens and knows that she listens (Hersch quoted by Le Doeuff 2003, p. 67).

Maggie is a far cry from the triumphant figure in whom the picking of the fruit coincides with the touching of her own body and knowing herself.

More than a century after George Eliot's writings a Canadian writer, Margaret Laurence, chose to explore and redefine woman's relation to knowledge, be it carnal or intellectual.¹ She embarked upon the study of her famous Manawaka heroines with Hagar Currie, whose intelligence and precocity eclipse her "unspirited" brothers in much the same way that, as a girl, Maggie eclipses her brother Tom. Her father, though much more rigid than Mr. Tulliver, responds to this with a similar mixture of delight and apprehension: "'Smart as a whip, she is, that one. If only she'd been—' And then he stopped. I suppose because he realized that his sons, such as they were, were listening" (Laurence 1989b, p. 14). Though resilient and stubborn, Hagar resembles Maggie in considering her swarthy looks inferior to those of her blonde classmate Lottie. Also, like Maggie, she is thwarted in her plans by the men from the family. Though Hagar's journey through life also reverberates with the echo of *Pilgrim's Progress*,² her discovery of sexuality that comes through the power of touch turns her into an abashed, and yet awakened Eve. Naturally, this is where her and Maggie's experiences become radically different. Attracted by the masculinity of Bram Shipley, a farmer, she exchanges the claustrophobic fortress of her father for the openness of riverland surrounding Bram's house. She leaves the Eden of English values and Puritan asceticism and falls socially, because she is disowned by her father. His response to her marriage matches that of Tom when he forbids Maggie to reenter her home after her boat trip with Stephen. Hagar, as her name suggests, is Eve enslaved, for she exchanges the domination of her father for that of her husband, an uneducated man whose ineptitude will forever affect her own status. But Hagar at least tastes the fruit of carnal knowledge and discovers within herself "a room to house . . . magnitude" (Laurence 1989, p. 52). Unfortunately, this is where her quest is suspended, for the Puritan and social taboos make her imprison the very "passions" that Maggie channeled into martyrdom in order to uselessly seek approval. Hagar channels her emotions into hard work and contempt for reactions that clash with her code.

If Hagar's fate is conflated with the eviction of carnal Eve into the thorny wilderness, Morag, the heroine of *The Diviners*, leaves her secure marriage to a professor of English literature, so as to become an active agent rather than a passive recipient of her lot. The parallel between Morag, Hagar, and Maggie lies in the similarity of their rebellious, self-confident behaviour in childhood, despite the startling differences between other aspects of their lives. This is where I depart from Le Doeuff's idea of childhood understood (after Wollstonecraft) as an infantile state of mind in adult women (2003, p. 47). In the examples from literature listed above childhood is the time of infinite potential for the female characters who are broken into

¹For analysis of Laurence's texts about women see Filipczak (2007b, pp. 7–421).

²Thomas (1988, pp. 58–69). Though focused on Cary, the article alludes to Bunyan in its title.

subservient roles by the social conditioning that aims at making them useful to patriarchy. Thus Maggie becomes a silent martyr, Hagar a household slave, and Morag a docile wife careful about her feminine image.

Morag's case is particularly interesting in the context of Le Doeuff's *The Sex of Knowing*, especially her analysis of the gender agenda in the humanities: "A majority of women on the receiving end, an overwhelming majority of men producing canonical commentaries: could the purpose of literary studies be to make women ingest schemata administered by men?" (2003, p. 157). Morag, a student of English literature, marries a professor who is in charge of the seventeenth-century poetry course and the Milton course, and, in the passages of *The Diviners* that Laurence deleted, she writes "her marginalia on *Paradise Lost* that prophesy problems that will plague the Skelton marriage" (Stovel 2001, p. 112). Brooke's canonical attitude to literature does not accommodate Morag's different perspective. She remains "on the receiving end" until she can no longer mediate between the image of a subdued wife and the inner life of a writer with "imprisoned passions." Trapped in her cosy Eden, and surrounded by books from Brooke's library, Morag sins by "divining a self"³ because this new knowledge directs her into literature whose value is never acknowledged by the canonical commentator. As Nora Foster Stovel puts it "her Pygmalion becomes Frankenstein" (2001, p. 112) when Morag turns into a feminist. When Morag leaves marriage, gives birth to her daughter and moves in with Fan Brady, a dancer from a night club, she and her daughter share the house with Fan's snake, which lives in the basement. This is a contrast to Morag's previous life with Brooke in Toronto tower where animals could not be kept out of concern for cleanliness. It can also be read as a playful allusion to the imagery from Genesis, where the woman is posited in relation to the serpent, first as a tempter and then as antagonist. Morag resembles Hagar in being "a stout madonna" (p. 122), and threatens to kill the snake if it ever comes near the baby, thus echoing the verdict of enmity between the serpent and the woman in Genesis. Unlike Hagar, Morag does not try to dissociate herself and her baby from the baby's father and his Métis legacy. Repressive purity in her marriage to Brooke is displaced by racial and cultural contamination (Brydon 1991, p. 191), echoing Morag's metamorphosis into triumphant Eve and earthy madonna.

If Laurence tries to lead her heroines out of bondage inherent in the traditional construction of Eve, the act of freeing women from "the disgrace" (Le Doeuff 2003, p. 67) of the regulatory myth is accomplished in a delightful book by Thomas King, a Canadian of Greek and Cherokee origin, both an insider and outsider in the white culture. In his book *Green Grass, Running Water* King plays wittily and cavalierly with the creation myth from Genesis by conflating it with an Amerindian story whose progress is interrupted now and again by its trickster, the Coyote. In one of the hilarious versions the narrator starts with a rather familiar statement: "In the beginning there was nothing. Just the water" (1993, p. 104). Then he focuses on the identity of the heroine of creation story who is called Changing Woman.

³For my interpretation of "divining a self" see Filipczak (2004, pp. 210–222).

Every day, Changing Woman goes to the edge of the world and looks down at the water and when she does this, she sees herself [...]

"If she leans out any further," says the Coyote, "she's going to fall."

"Of course she's going to fall," I tell Coyote. "Sit down. Watch that sky. Watch that water. Pretty soon you can watch her fall" (p. 105).

The fall is presented as a result of the woman's curiosity, and especially her interest in her own image reflected in the water. She examines it with great pleasure while the narrator and the coyote watch her actions. When the narrator tells the Coyote that the Changing Woman lands on a canoe, the latter tries to come up with various images of boats that might be her destination, but the narrator says that this is a big canoe, and it is full of animals. Thus the woman falls into the patriarchal narrative, in which she will be trapped, though not for good. Landing on board Noah's Ark, the Changing Woman enters the world she has not bargained for. She is saved from hurting herself as a result of her fall because she lands on the coyote. They are now in the same boat, literally, for this is how King draws a parallel between the fate of women and that of the first inhabitants of America, whom the coyote embodies. Both end up within the tight structure of patriarchal myth, and both eventually shun enclosure by evading or tricking their oppressor. After spurning the sexual advances of Noah, who regards her as a God-given gift, Changing Woman is left by the angry patriarch on an island. She returns in the guise of Thought Woman in one more version of the story about the heroine who has fallen from the sky into the vast waters of creation.

Upon this fall the woman confronts another intruder on her privacy. A short man with a briefcase hands her a visiting card which says: "A.A. Gabriel, Canadian Security and Intelligence Service" (King 1993, p. 269). This is how King's parody of annunciation starts. Thought Woman is cross-examined, for Gabriel wants to make sure she is not smuggling any goods, and is not a member of the American Indian Movement. He ignores the name she gives him, and confers a different name on her, which is, quite predictably, Mary. Finally, he tries to make her sign a "virgin verification form" (p. 270) and offers her a map with the place where she will have her baby. In a stroke King exposes the misogyny inherent in the construction of Virgin Mary, who is first inspected for blemish or deviation from the patriarchal projection, and then rushed to embrace the role that will petrify her into a biological oddity for ever after. "I'm not pregnant, says Thought Woman./No problem, says A.A. Gabriel. Sign this paper" (p. 271). Much to the amazement of Thought Woman, Gabriel produces a camera from his briefcase, since he wants to record the much awaited yes. Next he asks the object of his manipulation to stand next to the snake. Yet the enmity between the snake and the woman pronounced by God after the original sin is given an unexpected ironic twist. Thought Woman finds herself stepping on a different creature by mistake: "Hello, says Thought Woman to Old Coyote. What are you doing here? Beats me, says Old Coyote. But I would appreciate it if you don't stand on my head" (p. 271). Very deftly King combines a familiar representation of the Virgin in Mariolatry with the submission of the natives and their culture to an alien religious ethos and ethnocentric violence. But Thought Woman knows better than

to submit. Her answer to Gabriel's proposal is a definite no, which he rejects using a formula that might come out of a computer game: "that's the wrong answer . . . Let's try this again" (p. 272). The patriarchal scenario does not reckon with refusal. King's "Mary" is the new Eve indeed. Like Changing Woman she simply leaves the intruder: "There are lots of Marys in the world, shouts A.A. Gabriel as Thought Woman floats away. We can always find another one, you know" (p. 272). Though pathetic, the threat sounds chilling as a conclusion to the meeting. It also sounds very true. Thought Woman still occupies the ignored periphery, while the praise goes to the one for whom "no" is the wrong answer, "the patient and acquiescent object of a phantasmagoria," to use the words of Michèle Le Doeuff about the Virgin Mary (2003, p. 99). In King's novel Noah and Gabriel intend to treat the woman as a tool for procreation, and are not prepared to admit she may have her own concerns. King's Noah announces in front of Changing Woman that he is a Christian man, and those who do not follow Christian rules "are not wanted on the voyage."⁴ In his ironic depictions of Noah and Gabriel King detects the bias in Christianity that is thus summed up by Uta Ranke-Heinemann: "Women present an image of inferiority, since, unless they busy themselves with self-sanctification—as virgins do—they are only good for having children" (Ranke-Heinemann 1991, p. 5).

Michèle Le Doeuff, who notes Ranke-Heinemann's contribution to the critique of virgin birth, states that "Protestant theology has made it possible to doubt the virginity of the mother of Christ" (2003, p. 98). Thus it is interesting how Mary is approached by Protestant women. For Margaret Laurence, embedded as she was in the Calvinist background, the virgin birth was an unacceptable concept. When asked to produce a Christmas story for children, she chose to depict Mary, Joseph, and Jesus as an ordinary, loving family, where husband and wife have a baby as a result of their happy union. The apparent ordinariness of this fact makes the story absolutely extraordinary, for it points to the potential that has rarely been tapped despite the ages of Christianity, notably, how God chose to dwell within the sexual and parental qualities, thus making them sacred.

Laurence's version of the Nativity was considered blasphemous for the reasons connected with sexual difference. Her text contained the sentence: "Joseph and Mary were happy because soon they were going to have a baby. They didn't mind at all whether it turned out to be a boy or a girl. Either kind would be fine with them."⁵ As Laurence explained in a letter to Gabrielle Roy in 1980, this sentence came to her naturally because she had a daughter and a son.⁶ As a mother, she was sure that the first question a woman asks after delivery is connected with the baby's health, and not with its sex. The story had first been conceived in Vancouver when Laurence's

⁴King (1993, p. 148). King alludes to a novel by Timothy Findley, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. For an analysis of Findley's rewriting of the myth of deluge see Filipczak (2002, pp. 55–64).

⁵Laurence (1989b, p. 221; 1980, p. 4). For a more detailed analysis of the story see Filipczak (2007b, pp. 391–393).

⁶Margaret Laurence to Gabrielle Roy, 25 Sept 1980, in Socken (2004, p. 86).

children were seven and four respectively, and she tried to adjust the biblical message to their age. Based on the elements from the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke, the text was quickly accepted by the minister and other children's parents. The birth of Christ as a gift of grace for those who have been awaiting salvation is combined with the life of an average family who receive the baby as a gift regardless of its sex.

Mary from *The Christmas Birthday Story* shares one important feature with Laurence's other heroines. She is traveling towards travail which, as she predicts, is going to take place in Bethlehem. Her progress can be compared to Hagar's trip across the prairie to hospital in order to give birth to her second son John, who is also chosen by her above the firstborn, Marvin. Apart from being connected with the Egyptian slave, and Eve who falls because she discovers carnal knowledge, Hagar refers to herself as "a stout madonna" when she narrates the scene of her conversation with the matron, prior to the actual delivery. This ironic self-reference is not only connected with the fact that Hagar is physically solid, and she preferred to arrive at hospital unescorted because she feared what impression Bram might make on the staff. Indoctrinated by the Puritan sense of guilt for sexual pleasure, she treats her carnal knowledge as something embarrassing. She claims her son John as if he were the product of miraculous intervention for she tries to separate him from the father and his legacy.

The undertone of shame, embarrassment or guilt about physicality is completely missing from *The Christmas Birthday Story*. The drawings by Helen Lucas show Mary and Joseph as a loving human couple, whose unity is stressed in partly Klimt-like, partly Chagall-like way. Mary is the one who does most of the talking in Laurence's book, and when the three kings arrive, she conducts a conversation with them after Joseph has bid them welcome as a host. Mary tells the guests what the baby will be called, and then asks them to speculate about his future character. The gifts that are offered to the family include the frankincense and myrrh that can be put into the baby bath. The money from the third king is meant for the baby things. Thus Laurence places the story of Christ's birth in an ordinary context connected with the birth of any baby whose parents are visited by all those who want to see and bestow gifts upon the new member of the family.

By stripping Mary of the myth of virgin birth Laurence reunites her with physicality, from which she has been severed for many centuries by church tradition fraught with suspicion of the body, hatred of sexuality, and fear of female physiology. Schelkle interprets the virgin birth as a result of the attitude which associated the original sin with sexuality (1984, p. 176). For Laurence, as for Joy Kogawa in *A Song of Lilit*, which reinterprets *Paradise Lost*, sin is not connected with sexual experience but with the distortion of relationship between man and woman and God.⁷ It is this distortion that deprives them of Eden. In contrast, Mary and Joseph's welcoming of new life takes place in edenic harmony, whose major indication is the bond between people and animals, which (and this is particularly stressed in the

⁷Kogawa (2000, p. 11). See Filipczak (2007a, pp. 291–303).

picture by Helen Lucas) seem to create protective atmosphere around the family. In Laurence's story animals do not make any sound so as not to waken the baby. The description of their behaviour as well as the pictures by Helen Lucas bring to mind an image of togetherness between animals and the child such as the vision of messianic fulfillment in the Book of Isaiah (11:6–8).

Laurence and King offer distinctly different though equally therapeutic treatments of the traditional opposition between Eve and Mary. Laurence's Hagar falls of necessity, because her discovery of sexuality must be a fall into knowledge that she has no means to enjoy, deprived as she is of the appreciation of pleasure. But Laurence's Mary in her simple ordinariness is the one who has avoided Hagar's experience. In a happy and consummated union with her husband, as pictures of Helen Lucas openly suggest, she gives birth amidst the materiality of the world, thus sanctifying it. To refer to my personal context, I read *The Christmas Birthday Story* to my son when he was four and a half, and I found this was the text I could read with conviction, if I wanted to cradle the Christian message at home.

King offers a particularly refreshing approach to the myth of Eve's fall and to the virgin birth. Reversing the strategy of European anthropologists studying the so called primitive cultures, King has the Coyote wonder at various intricacies of the story that defy comprehension. The effect is a humorous history of Christian oddities narrated by an outsider who continually switches from his own cultural background to the alien one and back. In this King imitates those anthropologists and missionaries who in their ethnocentric violence applied the supposedly objective standards of their own culture in their judgement of all the others. King manages to make the readers laugh at the absurdity of patriarchal claims that are first endured and then shaken off by Changing Woman and her successor Thought Woman. Thus both Laurence and King offer an antidote to the plight of Maggie, whose resolution to be a "clever woman" is ground to dust in the mills of patriarchy. The liberating potential of literature is beautifully grasped in King's conclusion to the story of Noah, who leaves Changing woman on a desert island because she has refused to procreate:

"Oh, oh," says the Coyote. "Changing Woman is stuck on the island all by herself. Is this the end of the story?"

"Silly Coyote," I says. "This story is just beginning" (King 1993, p. 148).

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Chapter 9

The Abandoned Fiancée, or Against Subjection

Daniel Whistler

Abstract In this chapter, I argue—in the wake of Michèle Le Doeuff—against the valorization of subjection that has taken hold of modern theology. Analysing Graham Ward’s *Christ and Culture*, I contend that the recent penchant for an ethics of kenosis in religious thought leads ultimately—despite explicit protestations to the contrary—to a conception of subjectivity as constituted in servitude before Christ. However, this criticism is not—*pace* Ward—to apply secular, Enlightenment values to a distinct post-secular realm; rather, in the second half of the chapter, I enter into dialogue with Le Doeuff’s criticisms of Søren Kierkegaard, in order to suggest that co-existing with Kierkegaard’s misogyny towards his abandoned fiancée, there is also an adherence in his work to a Le Doeuffean ethics of friendship. Thus, I conclude, Christianity is not incompatible with modernity.

Keywords Subjection · Kenosis · Friendship · Radical orthodoxy · Master/slave dialectic

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with conceiving Christianity in ways incommensurable with the subjection of women. It, thus, attempts to unmask such subjection in its different guises—sexual, ethical and theological. I contend that post-Barthian theology with its celebration of the infinite difference separating God and humanity often retraces the very logic by which women have historically been oppressed. Human subjectivity, it is claimed, is possible only in subjection to a higher being. This, I argue, is *not* a necessary theological position.

Thus, in the first part of the chapter, I briefly explore two *competing* ethical models underlying the rest of the chapter: G.W.F. Hegel’s master/slave dialectic and

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Michèle Le Doeuff's avowal of friendship. Second, I examine developments in post-Barthian theology (Graham Ward's *Christ and Culture* serves as representative), arguing that the anthropology developed here is grounded in subjection. Finally, I move to counter this trend with a reading of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* which gestures towards an *alternative model of Christian ethics*.

The Friend, the Slave and the Lover

The first chapter of the second part of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—"Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness"—has left a remarkable legacy on modern thought. While all subjects, Hegel claims, *desire* mutual recognition in order to communally come to self-consciousness, this is never immediately possible. Instead, it is only through being subjected that one can initially become a subject: coming to self-consciousness is the privilege of the slave—the dominated are to be envied for they are the real humans.¹ It, of course, needs no great insight to see how such an ethical model can be used as a justification for the worst forms of oppression of both women and men. Yet, despite this, first existentialism and then psychoanalysis made the master/slave dialectic one of their central images,² and in this chapter, I will show the crucial role it has also played in theological thought. Following in the wake of Karl Barth, it has become fashionable for this model to be applied to the God relation—the true human is he who is subjected to an all-powerful Lord. This tendency has been most evident in the "ethics of kenosis" propounded in Radical Orthodox circles, and it is no surprise that they look to Hegel for a modern doctrine of kenosis.³ It is precisely this application of Hegel that I challenge in this chapter.

Against the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, I oppose Michèle Le Doeuff's "model of radical friendship" for the development of subjectivity.⁴ My chapter will revolve around the following (long) passage taken from the end of her *The Sex of Knowing*, which adds a third protagonist, Kierkegaard, into the mix:

¹On the one hand, the lord fails to achieve self-consciousness despite subjecting the slave for that very purpose. That is because the slave becomes an "unessential consciousness", "a thing", which—as "quite different from an independent consciousness"—is unable to give the lord the recognition he requires for self-consciousness. The slave, on the other hand, achieves self-consciousness precisely by becoming this "unessential consciousness", because the "dread" she feels at the lord's power "rids [her] of [her] attachment to natural existence in every single detail". The slave who has "experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord" is she who withdraws from her former dependence on things and so becomes free. Hence, Hegel writes, "Fear of the lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom". (Hegel 1977, §192–195)

²For feminist readings of these appropriations, see Butler (1987) and Anderson (2006).

³For example, Ward (2005, pp. 191–194).

⁴Of course, Le Doeuff is not at all concerned with religion in her writings, but she has been sympathetic to their application in philosophy of religion. See Le Doeuff (2007, p. 320).

After *Hipparchia's Choice* [Le Doeuff's previous book] was published, Gilles Deleuze wrote to tell me he hoped I would at some point write about the figure of the fiancée in Kierkegaard's writings.⁵ I confess I saw no urgent reason to comment upon this personage, a young girl courted by a Pygmalion who, by abandoning her, subtly completes the process of endowing her with a mind. Or rather, I would not see the interest of it if it were not possible to connect this theme to the ending of *The Second Sex*. For Simone de Beauvoir gives the last word to Rimbaud: 'man . . . having let her go, she, too, will be a poet', a strange idea when one thinks of it, especially at the end of *The Second Sex*. . . Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, Kierkegaard, Rimbaud, and perhaps Deleuze seem to admit that a woman finds her way only in a state of abandonment – for which the initiative must come from the man. And what next? Can we count on the one here named 'the man' to leave us to our destinies, whether by abandoning us or otherwise? The figure of the rejected fiancée suggests that we are dependent on the other sex for the freedom we may obtain, and that freedom comes through separation from them. All in all, it denies a woman's capacity to take the initiative for establishing even the ever-so-slight distance that emancipation implies. Once again, in this story man thinks he is God; he is the creator who puts the finishing touches to his creation by leaving his creation on her own.⁶

This passage, I contend, should be read as follows. Deleuze had found in Kierkegaard's work an ethics congenial to Le Doeuff's own stance—an alternative to the Hegelian passage to subjectivity through struggle and subjection; and so he proposes it to her as a more congenial substitute. Le Doeuff, however, disagrees: it is but a more subtle version of the same Hegelian dialectic—woman's subjectivity is achieved only in utter dependence to an absolute subjectivity, man or God. The abandoned fiancée is still a slave, even if a slave who achieves self-consciousness on her own.

Key to Le Doeuff's rejection of the master/slave dialectic and its more subtle manifestations is her rejection of the notion of otherness (on which Hegelian dialectic is based). Against the crude duality of same and other, Le Doeuff (following De Beauvoir) posits "the ideal of reciprocity" (2007, pp. 107–108).⁷ "No morality is possible without at least the principle of reciprocity, without mutual recognition" (p. 187), she writes. While for Hegel such "mutual recognition" is merely an ideal,

⁵Le Doeuff excerpts an initial letter from Deleuze in the new "Postscript" to the Second Edition of *Hipparchia's Choice* (2007, p. 319); however, the rest of the correspondence (including his reference to the fiancée) has yet to be published. Deleuze does, however, mention Le Doeuff in reference to the figure of Kierkegaard's fiancée in his last work co-authored with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, pp. 71, 222) However, in a critical discussion of this passage, Le Doeuff has disassociated it completely from Deleuze's letters to her, since, she maintains, the published reference is tainted by Guattari's psychoanalysis (2003b, 364–368). She writes, "If one compares this passage to Deleuze's letter, one must think that these pages of *What is Philosophy?* owe more to Guattari, and so to the psychoanalyst, than to my philosopher-correspondent." (p. 367, My translation.) For this reason, I refrain (for the most part) from discussing *What is Philosophy?*

⁶Le Doeuff (2003a, p. 217).

⁷This, of course, provides the basis for Le Doeuff's critique of feminisms of difference, especially Irigaray's (2007, pp. 225–229).

Le Doeuff—“incorrigible meliorist that I am” (2003, p. 68)—believes it reachable.⁸ Subjection is not necessary; equality is a possibility.

How such equality is possible is described in the continuation of the above passage which resumes a topic considered earlier in *The Sex of Knowing*—Harriet Taylor’s relations with John Stuart Mill:

However far we go back in the history of their relationship, Harriet Taylor never was a disciple of John Stuart Mill. Still less was she his creation. . . Each stood up to the other, neither was completely under the ‘influence’ of, or ‘incorporated’ by, the other, but each had to defend her/himself against the other, each had a slight tendency to want too much from the other. (2003, p. 217)

This is the true alternative—an *equality* of autonomous individuals reciprocally caring for and challenging the other to new achievements.⁹ Friendship—and so dialogue—not bondage—and so heteronomy—is the way to self-consciousness for Le Doeuff.

In this chapter, therefore, I will consider Le Doeuff’s model of radical friendship in opposition to both Radical Orthodoxy’s wholesale appropriation of the master/slave dialectic and Kierkegaard’s more subtle one. However, I will argue that the only way to escape the logic of Radical Orthodoxy is not by opposing outright Christian ethics with Le Doeuff’s unabashedly secular type, *but rather by finding in Christianity the resources for friendship*. Such resources I will suggest are hinted at in the second chapter of *Philosophical Fragments* (“God as Teacher and Saviour (A Poetical Venture)”) where Kierkegaard—still within the theological project—describes personhood as arising out of the reciprocal love of equal individuals.

Ethics of Kenosis

From Barth to Coakley

Karl Barth’s Second Edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* has provided the touchstone by which all subsequent theology has measured itself. The work is notoriously founded on the “infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity” (Barth

⁸That is, Le Doeuff’s rejection of Hegel’s privileging of the slave need not stop her from endorsing other more optimistic feminist readings of the master/slave dialectic as a means to reciprocity.

⁹Le Doeuff rejects relations of dependence for a community of free persons (see 2003a, p. 39 and 2007, p. xii). The foundations of such a move are to be found in her critique of institutional frameworks of education, in which the pupil is tied to one, dominant master, and access to knowledge can only occur through him. This has led, Le Doeuff contends, to the “Heloïse complex” in which women are forced to learn about their master rather than their field (1989, pp. 104–128). It is to counteract this tendency Le Doeuff suggests pluralizing pedagogic relations (away from pupils dependent on *one* master) to a community of free aspirants working together to reach the truth (2007, p. 59); this “allows us definitively to rid ourselves of the binding mode of the master-disciple relationship”, for, with “plurality”, “the other’s mastery fades away.” (p. 170)

1933, p. 10),¹⁰ between the finitude of man's existence and God's infinitude. God's lordship resides in his absolutely autonomous mastery over human affairs; his power is "the supremacy of a negation"—"an irresistible and all-embracing dissolution of the world of time and things and men" (p. 91). In face of this supremacy, the only ethical stance possible is submission,¹¹ founded on Paul's exhortation to the Romans to fashion themselves as "obedient slaves" (Romans 6:16). This is seen most clearly in Barth's conception of grace: "Grace is the divine possibility for men, which robs them, as men, of their own possibilities." (Barth 1933, p. 200) It signifies, Barth continues, "the existential submission to God's contradiction of all that we ourselves are or are not". In short, "both sin and grace are existentially conditions of slavery. . . . Slavery defines the totality of our individual human existence." (p. 216)

Barth's position, however, would be irrelevant—if not repugnant—to feminist philosophers of religion, if it were not for Sarah Coakley's work on submission. Coakley has brought a version of the Barthian God—Lord over an enslaved creation—back into play for non-misogynistic theology.

Coakley attempts to "bring feminism and Christianity together" (Coakley 1996a, p. 84) through a revalorisation of the concept of *kenosis*. She states, "[I] offer a defence of some version of kenosis as not only compatible with feminism, but vital to a distinctively Christian manifestation of it." (p. 83)

Kenosis' long and chequered history in Christian theology begins with Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born like other human beings. And being recognised as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and graciously bestowed on him the name which is above every name. . . (Philippians 2:5–11)

According to Paul, Christ humbled himself in obedience to the Father, and in so enslaving himself, became the true exemplar of faith—that is, the Father will only glorify those who are subjected in Christ-like slavery before him. Coakley takes up this call to subjection. She writes in debate with the post-Christian theologian Daphne Hampson, "For Daphne, it seems, *any* sort of 'dependence' on God. . . can be nothing but 'heteronomy'. Whereas, for me, the *right* sort of dependence on God is not only empowering but freeing." (Coakley 1996b, p. 170) By emptying oneself in dependence before God—what Coakley calls, "a regular and willed *practice* of ceding and responding to the divine" (1996a, p. 107)—one becomes a truly human subject.

Of course, Coakley's defence of kenosis is far more nuanced than Barth's celebration of slavery—she realises for example, "What a perilous path we are treading here." (p. 106) Moreover, in the preface to *Powers and Submissions*, Coakley criticises the "*valorisation* of Christic 'vulnerability' . . . found predominantly in the

¹⁰It is significant to note that this phrase is, in fact, taken from Kierkegaard.

¹¹Although even this is tempered by the fact that submission—as human—is inadequate.

works of Karl Barth". She writes, "Such a strategy merely reinstates in legitimised doctrinal form, the sexual, physical and emotional abuse that feminism seeks to expose." (Coakley 2002, pp. xiv–v) On the contrary, Coakley herself tries to *avoid* conceiving kenosis "in terms of victimology" (p. 33), approvingly citing E.M. Townes' distinction "between abusive 'suffering' on the one hand, and a productive or empowering form of 'pain' on the other." (1996a, p. 109) Coakley searches for the "'right' kenosis" (p. 84) that avoids non-consensual exploitation and rape in favour of "willed effacement to a gentle omnipotence" (p. 110). There is a "right" form of dependence which avoids the more blatant pitfalls of Barth's position.

Coakley's influential work in this field has produced a number of imitations, many of which have not been quite so careful in discriminating between "suffering" and "pain". Foremost among these works is Graham Ward's *Christ and Culture*, and it is to this I now turn.

Ward's Kenotic Anthropology

Graham Ward's self-professed intention in *Christ and Culture* is to break out of the Barthian paradigm by showing Christ to be a "social animal"—a human subject communing among other subjects, rather than a lord above them. Yet, I argue, the means by which he attempts to achieve this (invoking a Coakley-inspired ethics of kenosis) actually impede him from this end; Ward, in fact, fails to free himself from the Barthian celebration of subjection due to his use of kenosis.

Ward introduces his Christology as an attack on Barth's dialectical method (Ward 2005, p. 7), since it is precisely the latter's allegiance to this method which evacuates Christ out from all human relations. For Barth, "the work of Christ cannot be characterised in terms of the ordinary human operations of [the] world"; that is, Barth's subscription to the "infinite qualitative distinction" ensures that, in becoming like humanity, Christ always remains radically different from it. In this regard, Ward quotes Barth himself, "Those who believe in Jesus Christ will never forget for a single moment that the true and actual being of reconciled man has its place in that Other who is strange and different from them". Hence, Ward concludes, "Barth's Jesus Christ is not a social animal; he is an other, an alien" (pp. 9–12).

This is problematic for Ward not just because of its theological inadequacy; there are ethical implications as well. To raise Christ above all human relations is to ignore the "relational" nature of Christian faith, and so fall back into the atomism of *modern* thought: "Christ becomes the perfect expression of Cartesian subjectivity: autonomous, self-determining, self-defining, the autonomous subject of a number of distinct properties or predicates." Moreover, because Christ is also dialectically other than man, no human individual can possess such subjectivity herself. Being a fully-formed subject is the prerogative of the divine, man has yet to achieve this state. Christ is, therefore, the absolute, perfectly formed subject we, as unformed ethical minors, are subjected to. In Barth's work, Ward maintains, "relations between God and human beings appear autocratic." (pp. 8–12).

In contrast to this, Ward himself claims, faith “is an engagement that can take many different forms, not just passive obedience.” (p. 8) In this way, he attempts a “sociology” of believing in which Christ is brought back into a network of relations. Ward attempts to take Christ’s *humanity* seriously.

Yet, ultimately Ward fails—he remains caught in the Barthian paradigm of autocratic relations—because the fundamental category he uses to refigure Christology is kenosis.¹² He writes,

In the descent Christ empties himself, makes himself void. The verb *keno* is related to the adjective *kenos* meaning ‘void’, ‘devoid of truth’ or ‘without a gift’. With the doctrine of kenosis, then, we investigate exactly what it is to be incarnate. Put systematically, Christology grounds a theological anthropology. (p. 184)

Christology grounds anthropology and both are figured around the central notion of kenosis, the making of oneself devoid of truth: “The fundamental experience of human existence [is] one of dispossession” (p. 213). All human relations take place within a “kenotic economy” in which the subject remains “in the accusative” (p. 218). Christ’s obedient self-voiding on his Father’s command is the model on which being human must be founded. Individuals must imitate Christ by dispossessing themselves before God, by subjecting themselves to Him.¹³

This anthropology is taken to its extreme in Ward’s discussion of suffering in the final chapter, “Suffering and Incarnation: A Christian Politics”. This essay contrasts postmodern and Christian conceptions of suffering: both are fundamentally kenotic; yet postmodernity’s kenosis is deathly, while Christianity’s is life-affirming due to God’s guarantee of a corresponding glorification. Thus, in postmodernity, whether it is the infinite deferral of the sign, the endless sublation of love or a self never at rest, all its forms display a “sacrificial logic”, “a continual wounding presented as a perpetual kenosis”. However, this kenosis is “sado-masochistic” (pp. 251–252) precisely because it is infinite: *jouissance*, meaning and stability never arrive, but are *always à venir*—man (and it is *man*) is “suspended on the brink of orgasm without being allowed the final release of coming” (p. 263). Christianity concurs with postmodernity in discovering “a certain suffering. . . endemic to incarnate living” (p. 262). All human existence is for Ward kenotic: “Suffering as a passion [is] written into creation.” However, where the Christian understanding of suffering diverges is in God’s guarantee that “suffering [is] also a glorification”.¹⁴ The “primordial suffering” of life is, from a Christian viewpoint, identified as “a continuation, a fleshing out and a completing of the suffering of Christ”: it is the *imitatio Christi*. (pp. 254–255) Therefore, just as Christ subjected himself in order to be exalted, so

¹²This is not to deny that Ward has much to offer feminist philosophy of religion; his reorientation of religious thought towards the body with the new categories this entails (especially “transcorporeality”) will, it is certain, be very influential.

¹³“The Christic operation is not apolitical; it concerns power and its authorisation. [It] concerns the submission of all social positions (and the politics of identity) to Christ, and the new orders of power (and its polity) that are engendered by this submission.” (p. 89)

¹⁴That is, while postmodernity can comprehend the incarnation and the crucifixion, it is unable to come to terms with the resurrection.

too are we—by participating in Christ’s suffering—promised subsequent glorification: “*Kenoo* is also and simultaneously *plero*. The wounds of love are the openings of grace.” (p. 266) Suffering is valorised for the Christian in the knowledge that it is merely half of the movement which will end in glorification.¹⁵

Through this move, what Coakley (following Townes) labelled “abusive suffering” is justified eschatologically. For example, Ward’s statement, “only God can discern and distinguish what is true suffering” (p. 260), forsakes any human responsibility for recognising and so preventing violence. Suffering is intrinsic to life, and, even if it seems “abusive” (which we can never ourselves be sure of), we have to put up with it passively—without condemning it—in the name of imitating Christ! As Ward himself acknowledges with understatement, “We are coming dangerously close to a theological justification for suffering.” (p. 262)

Ward also develops the very same ethics of kenosis in his appropriation of Irigaray’s work. Here, he argues that *sexual identity* is only achieved in subjection to Christ. Ward writes (mimicking Althusser), “In order to create a subject there needs to be a reified Subject, an Absolute Subject who can ‘interpellate’ the individual”, and then goes one step further in quoting Irigaray: “To posit a gender, a God is necessary; *guaranteeing the infinite*. . . As long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity.” (p. 131) Ward then appropriates this basic model¹⁶: female subjectivity is constituted in recognising a being which exceeds her. In consequence, sexual difference is founded on ontological difference: sexuality (as well as humanity generally) is produced in kenosis; woman becomes woman in acknowledging her inferiority before Christ.¹⁷ As Ward proclaims,

The encounter with Christ. . . will install an eroticism that determines the nature of a manifold difference – a theological difference (Trinitarian), an ontological difference (between the Uncreated and Creation) and a sexual difference (between the symbolics of the phallus and the two lips). (pp. 157–158)

Ward’s anthropology is, therefore, a “celebration” of difference (p. 151). Yet, as we have already seen, *such difference is always kenotic*; it is the difference between a God who commands and a humanity which makes itself void before Him.¹⁸ This is

¹⁵As we shall see in the final footnote, there are theological problems with this view as well as ethical.

¹⁶There are three major divergences in Ward’s account: first, he wishes to eschew any talk of absolute subjects in favour of trinitarian operations; second, he argues that Christ himself is able to adequately be God for both male and female sexualities, and third, Ward’s conception of transcendence remains, despite the influence of Irigaray, unashamedly vertical.

¹⁷Pamela Sue Anderson has similarly criticised Irigaray’s views from a Le Doeuffean perspective. She rebukes Irigaray for her “failure to attempt to establish an egalitarian reciprocity between autonomous subjects. . . result[ing] in an asymmetrical relation between one subject and another.” (Anderson 2006, p. 45) See also Anderson (2008).

¹⁸Thus, Ward argues that (while “I can understand Christian feminists wanting no part in an idiom that aligned femininity with submission”) through “an exploration of the relationship between kenosis, love, difference-in-relation and the Trinity”, “submission might then be read. . . as expressing the active pursuit of obedience to Christ, of being ‘interpellated’ by Christ—an ‘interpellation’ that all Christians must respond to, desirously.” (p. 152)

true of sexual difference, no less than ontological difference. Not only must woman *as subject* empty herself before God, so must she *as woman*: Ward's theory of gender regresses to a state in which woman can only exist in subjection. Difference is always kenotic for Ward, which means that—in line with the Barthian paradigm—it always involves oppressive power relations.

An Initial Response

How can we get beyond Ward, and finally leave behind the Barthian “autocratic” relations that an ethics of kenosis enforces?

One attempt at an answer has been vociferously given by Daphne Hampson, who, especially in her debate with Coakley, has been critical of ethical uses of kenosis. Thus, she writes in *Theology and Feminism*:

That it [kenosis] should have featured so prominently in Christian thought is perhaps an indication of the fact that men have understood what the male problem, in thinking in terms of hierarchy and domination, has been. It may well be a model which men need to appropriate and which may helpfully be built into the male understanding of God. But . . . for women, the theme of self-emptying and self-abnegation is far from helpful as a paradigm. (Hampson 1990, p. 155)

Kenosis as a way of disempowering subjects may well be of use to those who are prone to be too powerful, but to those who have historically been oppressed it is entirely unhelpful. This is not to say (as Hampson makes clear in her “Response” to Coakley) that it is rather the opposite—empowerment—that is required; instead, Hampson claims the binary of powerful and powerless—the master and slave of Hegelian dialectics—is the very pitfall which has to be avoided, but to which talk of kenosis succumbs. Hampson writes,

I do not think that it is either for us to be ‘in control’, having power and self-sufficiency; or, on the other hand, therefore, needing to be broken open, vulnerable and defenceless, inviting the invasion of others. . . Feminist women, as I understand it, are wanting to deconstruct the dichotomy of power and powerlessness. (Hampson 1996b, p. 122)¹⁹

For Hampson, the true ethical ideal is of subjects “both centred and open”, of individuals working together as autonomous but related. This recalls Le Doeuff’s model of radical friendship, in which Mill and Taylor collaborated in a caring relationship towards both their mutual and their individual ends. Hampson writes,

The feminist paradigm is not powerfulness, nor that of the self-divestment of power which is kenosis, but rather (what is not envisaged within the masculinist dichotomy), the mutual empowerment of persons. (1996b, p. 122)

¹⁹There remains a question concerning Hampson’s understanding of the subtleties of Coakley’s conception of kenosis (see Coakley 2002, p. 32), but this—as we shall see—is not relevant to the basic thrust of my argument.

Hegel's dialectic of power relations is rejected in favour of Le Doeuff's ethical friendship.

However, Hampson is forced by the logic of her own argument to go one step further, and become *post-Christian*. This is because, in rejecting the dichotomy between power and powerlessness, that is, the relation between God the Father and his kenotic subjects, Hampson believes herself to be rejecting the foundations of Christianity itself. Thus, Hampson claims, "Christianity, *by definition*, is not a religion which can allow for full human autonomy. Heteronomy is built into it." (1996a, p. 2; my emphasis) As such, the master/slave dialectic is an *intrinsic* aspect of the Christian belief system: "This dichotomy has been written into Christianity with its talk of God as powerful on the one hand, and as giving up on power in. . . kenosis on the other" (1996b, p. 121). Christianity as such must be discarded.

It is precisely this move, however, that is Hampson's weak-spot, for in distancing her own ethical model from Christianity, she makes it *irrelevant to discussions of Christianity*. The dichotomy she sets up between a Christian ethics of kenosis on the one hand (where the subject is dependent on God) and a post-Christian model of friendship on the other (where the subject retains an element of autonomy), is precisely the same binary employed by recent movements within theology such as Radical Orthodoxy (of which Ward is a representative); yet, while Hampson chooses to be post-Christian, Radical Orthodox theologians choose Christianity and thereby claim to choose—beyond any external criticism—subjection. That is, Radical Orthodoxy chooses subjection in full knowledge of the criticisms levied at it, for such criticisms, the movement maintains, can only occur from *outside the Christian paradigm*—from Enlightenment philosophies unable to grasp the truth on which their religion is founded.²⁰ Radical Orthodoxy rejects all that is not Christian; thus, it can safely ignore Hampson's post-Christian criticisms.²¹

Therefore, in order to challenge an ethics of kenosis and the subjection it leads to another line of attack is required. Thus, in the second half of this chapter, I will attempt to show that kenosis is not necessary *even within Christianity itself*; that is, Søren Kierkegaard—a favourite of Radical Orthodoxy—while on the one hand exemplifying the logic of kenosis (and the misogyny implicit in it) in the ethical model he employs of the "abandoned fiancée", on the other hand points beyond it towards the Le Doeuffean alternative of radical friendship. In the next section, therefore, I will (in part) be arguing against Le Doeuff's characterisation of Kierkegaard quoted at the beginning of the chapter: in one passage of his oeuvre at least, I will claim, Kierkegaard gestures at a Christian conception of radical friendship untainted by subjection.

²⁰Hampson explicitly affirms that her brand of feminism is to be understood "as the natural working out of the Enlightenment." (1996a, p. 1) For Radical Orthodox criticism of the Enlightenment, see (for especial relevance to this chapter) Ward (2005, pp. 60, 115).

²¹The same can be said of using Michèle Le Doeuff to criticise Christian ethics, since she avowedly writes in the "spirit of secularism" (Quoted in Anderson 2007, p. 385).

Kierkegaard's Abandoned Fiancée

Søren Kierkegaard straddles the divide between a theological celebration of kenotic difference and an Enlightenment affirmation of equality. On the one hand, he has been appropriated by theologians ever since Barth as a prophet of “counter-modernity”. Thus, the Radical Orthodoxy movement has dubbed Kierkegaard one of the “great Christian critics of the Enlightenment”.²² Kierkegaard is, in this regard, exemplary of theological affirmers of subjection, and, as we shall see, such subjection reveals its explicitly misogynistic foundations in aspects of his work.

Yet, on the other hand, I will argue, passages in Kierkegaard's works can be read as continuing—rather than opposing—the Enlightenment tradition of equality. On this view, Kierkegaard erects an ethics in which subjectivity is *not* achieved by means of a dialectical struggle between a powerful God and subjected humans (in their infinite qualitative distinction from each other), but through the project of co-operative friendship. Yet, most significantly of all, Kierkegaard achieves this still *within* a recognisably Christian paradigm. Subjection is *not* the only way for Christian ethics.

Kierkegaard is tactically useful: he undoes the exclusive binary Radical Orthodoxy wishes to erect between modernity and post-secularity; he straddles both camps, and so points to the places where the two become reconcilable. Thus, in the first section, I will first concentrate on Kierkegaard's work as Hegelian, that is, as paradigmatic of an ethics of subjection. This section will outline the model of the abandoned fiancée—a nuanced version of the same basic master/slave dialectic—which Le Doeuff accuses Kierkegaard of propounding. In the following section, however, I consider a passage which goes beyond Hegel; a passage—I contend—which illuminates a Christian model of ethical friendship. Here, Kierkegaard exceeds Le Doeuff's characterisation of him, and abandons his abandoned fiancée.

The Role of the Fiancée

Let us revisit Le Doeuff's characterisation of Kierkegaard's fiancée. She calls her, “This personage, a young girl courted by a Pygmalion who, by abandoning her, subtly completes the process of endowing her with a mind”, and continues,

The figure of the rejected fiancée suggests that we are dependent on the other sex for the freedom we may obtain, and that freedom comes through separation from them. All in all, it denies a woman's capacity to take the initiative for establishing even the ever-so-slight distance that emancipation implies. Once again, in this story man thinks he is God; he is the creator who puts the finishing touches to his creation by leaving his creation on her own.

There is obviously a biographical aspect to Le Doeuff's criticisms. Kierkegaard's treatment of Regina Olsen can easily be slotted into the above characterisation; the

²²Milbank et al. (1999, p. 3). See Shakespeare (2005, pp. 133–148).

mute unformed girl brought to happiness only through the man's self-sacrifice.²³ Man is the "creator" who controls not only the relationship, but the girl's own life course. Regina is the creation Kierkegaard deigns to give life to.²⁴

However, it is not biographical judgement that concerns me here, and one need not look far to find the very same pattern at work in Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings. For example, the banquet scene in *Stages on Life's Way* is infamous for its treatment of women as an other to man (Kierkegaard 1988, pp. 21–86).²⁵ As Wanda Warren Berry puts it, "This aesthetic orientation is fixated by absolutising the difference between himself as male and the *other* as female." (Berry 1995, p. 206) George Pattison also comments on the misogyny implicit in this dichotomising, "Woman as the 'Other' of man is robbed of all independent human status, deprived of identity and denied the possibility of becoming conscious of her own being." (Pattison 1987, p. 433) In his aesthetic works, to quote Pattison again, Kierkegaard becomes "one of the most significant representatives of the anti-feminine principle in Western religious thought" (p. 431).

"The Seducers Diary" in *Either/Or* is perhaps the most notorious example of Kierkegaard's misogyny; what is more, this piece displays, more than any other, the workings of the model of the abandoned fiancée. Here, Johannes acts as an absolute subject—complete and omnipotent—freely deciding the fate of an unformed woman. It is Johannes who chooses to bring the woman up to his level of subjectivity ("elevating her" (Kierkegaard 1987, p. 337)), to educate her towards self-consciousness. Johannes is, as Le Doeuff correctly perceives, God or Pygmalion, sculpting his creation to his own ends. Cordelia, on the other hand, remains the object-like Other, utterly dependent on the man's action to gain personhood; in Johannes' words, she "is invisible. . . and only becomes visible, as it were, by the interposition of another." (p. 425) Moreover, Cordelia herself writes in a similar vein, "I always think of him, just as every thought I think is *only through him*." (p. 309; my emphasis) In the end, Cordelia, by her own admission, can "rejoice solely in being your [Johannes'] slave." (p. 312)

Such a model is an obvious form of sexual subjection. However, Kierkegaard complicates matters: Johannes is teaching Cordelia autonomy and freedom ("I shall make her free" (p. 384)), so, therefore, cannot really "teach" her at all. Johannes quite categorically states,

²³See, for example, Kierkegaard (1967, vol. 5, p. 233).

²⁴In her discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (see note 5), on the other hand, Le Doeuff makes the contrary criticism that Kierkegaard's fiancée *is divorced from reality*: she is "a product of Kierkegaard's phantasmagory, not a woman among others of flesh and blood, who, as alive, have to withstand debates with what surrounds them." (2003b, p. 367. My translation.) Kierkegaard abstracts from the concrete conditions of real women's lives, in order to dream up a de-realised version of the feminine.

²⁵The views expressed in this dialogue are critiqued by Simone de Beauvoir (1997, pp. 175, 218). However, they have also recently been discussed more positively by Christine Battersby (1998, pp. 156–165).

She must owe me nothing, for she must be free. . . . Although she will belong to me, yet it must not be in the unbeautiful way of resting upon me as a burden. She must be neither an appendage in the physical sense, nor an obligation in the moral sense. Between us two, only freedom's own game will prevail. (p. 360)

Such is the paradox on which Kierkegaard's more subtle form of subjection is based: *Cordelia must become free on her own, but only on Johannes' grace*. "I complete her thought," Johannes writes, "which nevertheless is completed within itself." (p. 380)²⁶ There is almost a theological dual perspective by which, on one level, Cordelia achieves full personhood herself, but, on another, Johannes is the primary cause. Johannes expresses this through an artistic analogy:

It is as if behind a person, who with an unsure hand hastily made a few strokes in a drawing, there stood another person who every time made something vivid and finished out of it. She herself is surprised, and yet it is as if it belonged to her. (p. 420)²⁷

Johannes is the divine overarching subject who guides Cordelia towards self-consciousness, even when she believes it to be her own doing. Woman is subjected to the male absolute subjectivity, even if it is a subtle, disguised subjection of which the woman herself is ignorant. Thus, Johannes and Cordelia's engagement is an imperceptible tutorial in becoming a subject, and, when Cordelia herself breaks the engagement, she shows she has finally reached freedom; yet, it forever remains a freedom under the premeditated control of an omniscient male consciousness. Cordelia achieves personhood as an autonomous agent, but at the same time, always, she rules herself only by means of a man's indiscernible rule.

As an aesthetic figure, Johannes is of course criticised by Kierkegaard²⁸; yet the model of the abandoned fiancée exemplified by "The Seducer's Diary" Kierkegaard finds harder to abandon. In fact, I wish now to suggest that this same model of the abandoned fiancée not only grounds the obviously misogynistic aesthetic writings, but also plays a crucial part in Kierkegaard's *religious writings*. The crux of my argument rests on a passage in *Practice in Christianity*. In it, Anti-Climacus (Kierkegaard's Christian pseudonym) demonstrates the necessity of indirect communication in matters of faith; thus the section is entitled, "To deny direct communication is to require *faith*." (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 140) According to Anti-Climacus, whereas *direct* communication enforces what it teaches so that there is neither freedom nor choice in accepting the teaching (that is, the recipient

²⁶This is, of course, a gender-specific version of Kierkegaard's celebrated indirect communication, in which the aim is "to stand alone—by another's help" (1967, vol. 1, p. 280); that is, as "one person cannot have authority in relation to another" (p. 272), "the teacher and the learner are separated from each other in order to exist" (p. 288): the teacher abandons his pupil to freedom. Johannes himself admits to using "secret communication" (1987, p. 399) and "indirect methods" (pp. 423–424).

²⁷Notice how the abstract language of persons takes on gendered pronouns as if it were self-evident that the "unsure hand" belongs to the female. The "Diary" ends with the following comment: "If I were a god, I would do for her what Neptune did for a nymph: transform her into a man." (p. 445) Even a fully self-conscious woman is not quite a man!

²⁸For a complete survey of such criticisms, see Dewey (1995).

of direct communication cannot be *responsible* for her views), “faith is a choice, certainly not direct reception” (p. 141).

To illustrate this, Anti-Climacus hits upon a pertinent analogy: “That to deny direct communication is to require faith can be simply pointed out in purely human situations. . . Let us examine this and to that end take the relationship between two lovers.” To begin with, the lovers communicate both their love for each other and their subsequent acknowledgement of each other’s love, by means of direct assurances; however, Anti-Climacus continues, the male lover (and the text is gender-specific here) wants to really “test the beloved”, and find out whether she does, in fact, have faith in his love:

What does he do? He cuts off all direct communication, changes himself into a duplicity; as a possibility it looks deceptive, as if he possibly could be just as much a deceiver as the faithful lover. This is making oneself into a riddle. . . In the first instance he asks directly: Do you believe me? In the second instance he makes himself into a question. . . The purpose of the latter method is to make the beloved disclose herself in a choice; that is, out of this duplicity she must choose which character she believes is the true one. . . It is disclosed since he does not help her at all; on the contrary, by means of the duplicity he has placed her entirely alone without any assistance whatsoever. (pp. 141–142)

It is in a very similar way, Anti-Climacus goes on to state, Christ demands faith from his followers:

The God-man must require faith and in order to require faith must deny direct communication. . . As the God-man he is qualitatively different from any man, and therefore he must deny direct communication; he must *require* faith and require that he become the *object of faith*. (pp. 142–143)

Christ is comparable to the deceitful lover who abandons his fiancée to allow her to choose, and so become a person.²⁹ The implication, I contend, is that, in a way not dissimilar to Johannes the Seducer, Christ operates by “duplicity”: he is the omniscient male consciousness who orchestrates his disciples’ free choices. The task is the same for both the seducer and the God-man: “To deceive into the truth.” (1967, vol. 1, p. 288) Those who disclose their faith in a free act of will are Christ’s abandoned fiancées.

Humanity is the Other—the woman—to Christ’s absolute subjectivity. In Kierkegaardian anthropology, we are dependent on Christ to become free ourselves. Just as in Barth, Coakley and Ward, humanity is the slave who can only achieve self-consciousness in subjection before the Lord. However, unlike these post-Barthian theologians, Kierkegaard at first glance seems to have escaped the Hegelian

²⁹Climacus writes in the *Postscript* in this vein, “No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can.” (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 243) In this regard, Christ plays an important role (second only to Socrates) in Kierkegaard’s unfinished lectures on indirect communication; Kierkegaard writes (confirming the views of Anti-Climacus), “Christ continued with the indirect method until the last, for the fact that he was incognito, in the guise of a servant, makes all his direct communication nevertheless indirect, as Anti-Climacus correctly notes someplace in *Practice in Christianity*, II” (1967, vol. 1, p. 316).

paradigm: Kierkegaard does not follow Barth in celebrating passive obedience, nor does he follow Ward in recommending an ethics of kenosis; instead, Kierkegaard advocates autonomy, rejecting any direct attempt to impinge on the subject's freedom of choice. Yet, despite this superficial incongruence, Kierkegaard's model of the abandoned fiancée still remains a subtle form of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic: freedom is achieved only under the premeditated control of an absolute, dominant consciousness.³⁰ Le Doeuff is correct in rejecting Deleuze's suggestion of the usefulness of Kierkegaard, for the Kierkegaardian subject remains the Hegelian subject incognito.³¹

Fairytale Ethics

I wish to end this chapter, however, by mitigating these conclusions somewhat, for I think Kierkegaard also points beyond the dialectical ethics of the master/slave towards a form of Christian life more conducive to Le Doeuff's radical friendship. To demonstrate this, I will concentrate on the second chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*, "The God as Teacher and Saviour (A Poetical Venture)".³² This chapter takes the form of a fairytale describing a King's love for "a maiden of lowly station in life" (Kierkegaard 1985, p. 26); it tries to illuminate the reasoning behind the King's decision to cast off his riches for love, in an attempt to thereby elucidate Christ's Incarnation. What is most noticeable in this chapter is that, while the rest of the work (and Kierkegaard's oeuvre generally) is concerned with the incomprehensibility of the absolute paradox (the God-man) to finite consciousness (that is, it is concerned with the "infinite qualitative distinction" so influential in later theology), this chapter conversely is far more interested in *equality* between Christ and humanity. Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Climacus, attempts here to obliterate that infinite qualitative difference altogether.

Love is the "basis" and "goal" of the god's relation to humanity, and this love manifests itself as the "only" means by which "the different [is] made equal" (p. 25): only love "is capable of making unequals equal" (p. 28). Thus, desire for equality motivates the god's actions. As Climacus writes (speaking now of the King's relation to the maiden), "Erotic love is jubilant when it unites equal and equal and is

³⁰Battersby (with differing conclusions) has also drawn attention to the master/slave dialectic as the background to Kierkegaardian seduction (p. 160).

³¹It is significant in this regard that Pattison has argued for a continuity of misogyny between Kierkegaard's aesthetic and religious works (1987, pp. 377–379). In this way, Kierkegaard's treatment of women in his aesthetic writings reveals even more clearly the oppression on which his—and so many others'—theology is founded. In a later work, Pattison discovers a similar "alternative model" for the God-relation in Kierkegaard's writings on Luke (7:47) to that which I will now go on propose (2002, pp. 205–210).

³²In so reading *Philosophical Fragments* as setting forth a positive ethics, I am opposing those critics, such as Murray Rae (1997), who see Climacus as undermining himself throughout the earlier chapters of the work so as to inadvertently demonstrate philosophy's futility.

triumphant when it makes equal in erotic love that which was unequal.” (p. 27) The King’s “sorrow”, therefore, stems from the fact that his love is “unhappy”, that is, there is no equality in situation between him and the “maiden”, so they are “unable to understand each other.” (pp. 25–26)

The question, then, at the centre of the chapter, is how can the two lovers (and so the god and humanity) become equal and so fulfil their love. Significantly, the first means of achieving this Climacus considers—and which he subsequently rejects—is the elevation of the “maiden” to the level of the King; he writes, “The unity [could be] brought about by an ascent. The god would then draw the learner up toward himself, exalt him” (p. 29). This, of course, is strikingly similar to the method Johannes the Seducer uses in order to have a relationship with Cordelia (and to that which the Christ of *Practice in Christianity* employs in regard to humanity at large): the fully formed male brings the unformed, female Other up into subjectivity. Yet, surprisingly, Climacus here finds fault with it, since “the girl would be essentially deceived—and one is most terribly deceived when one does not even suspect it but remains as if spellbound by a change of costume.” (p. 29) *The model of the abandoned fiancée is here rejected*. Even, Climacus implies, if the “maiden” believed she was freely elevating herself and did not notice the indiscernible and indirect guidance of the male consciousness, even then the ascent is still reprehensible, because the “maiden” is not truly free (and so on the same plane as the King) but *just apparently so*: “No delusion can satisfy” (p. 29). The model of the abandoned fiancée fails to achieve equality, since the “maiden” remains subjected and the “infinite qualitative distinction” remains in force. In the ascent, love can only be unhappy.

It is indeed the opposite model—that of a “descent”—which Climacus affirms as the only way to truly ensure the equality of the lovers: the god or the king must lower himself to be on an equal footing with the “lowly maiden”. Obviously, the issue of deception arises again, and in response Climacus makes clear that the king cannot merely don a “plebeian cloak, which just by flapping open would betray the king” (p. 32); rather, he must actually and fully transform his whole person to be equal with his loved one: lowliness “is not something put on. . . but it is his true form” (p. 32). Only through a real self-transformation of the male consciousness (which, Climacus goes on to argue, only Christ is able to pull off) can an equal relation be possible between lovers. Thus, Climacus concludes, returning to the god’s relation to humanity:

The god is not zealous for himself but in love wants to be the equal of the most lowly of the lowly. . . How terrifying, for it is indeed less terrifying to fall upon one’s face while the mountains tremble at the god’s voice than to sit with him as his equal, and yet the god’s concern is precisely to sit this way. (pp. 34–35)

There are a number of aspects to be picked up in this alternative model to the abandoned fiancée. First: woman is here *not* the Other who revolves around an absolute male subject, orchestrated by him. Instead, it is the female position which is the standard towards which the god/king moves; woman is the benchmark around which a relation of equals should take place. Man is in fact the problem, and it is he who must change for a relation, and so love and mutual understanding, to be possible.

Second: it is Christ's act of kenosis (his descent) that makes equality possible. This must be distinguished from Ward and Coakley's affirmation of kenosis. Ward and Coakley conceive of Christ's kenosis as exemplary: it is the *ethical model* which all followers ought to imitate—to gain personhood is to empty oneself like Christ. For Climacus, on the other hand, Christ's act of kenosis makes all subsequent kenotic acts *redundant*. There is no longer—once Christ has become a servant—any need for servitude whatsoever. Christ's slavery puts an end to subjection, and allows equality. Christ's initial act of kenosis makes an ethics of kenosis superfluous; it supersedes the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave.³³

Third: in the model of the abandoned fiancée, the relation between the master and the slave only took place while the master was elevating the slave to free subjectivity; once that had occurred, the slave is abandoned and left on her own, an autonomous atom. In this chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*, however, reaching the same level is *only the beginning*. It is the prelude to the *actual* ethical relation which is one of equal and mutual collaboration in love. In annulling human dependency on him, Christ approaches his fiancée as an equal, and true love can then begin. Here, it seems to me, Kierkegaard is pointing towards a proto-Le Doeuffian ethics of radical friendship.

Kierkegaard presents—I argue—a viable ethical alternative to the master/slave dialectic *within Christianity*. His account of love as a relation of equals in chapter two of *Philosophical Fragments* is a plausible Christian ethics, and, as such, succeeds where Hampson's polemic founder in overcoming the hegemony of subjection in post-Barthian theology. Subjection and Christianity are not equivalent, neither are equality and Christianity incommensurable; Kierkegaard provides another answer, which, in superseding his own model of the abandoned fiancée, gestures towards a genuine Christian ethics of equality.

A final question remains: is my account close to Deleuze's intentions in proposing Kierkegaard's work to Le Doeuff? Am I in the end siding with Deleuze over Le Doeuff in describing Kierkegaard as an ally of the latter? The likelihood, of course, is no: Deleuze does not propose Kierkegaard *tout court*, but rather the Kierkegaardian fiancée as a worthy theme; however, it is only by abandoning the abandoned fiancée, stripping away this aspect of Kierkegaard's thought, that there is any hope of salvaging him as a thinker committed to Le Doeuffian friendship. It still remains possible, however, that this was exactly what Deleuze intended!

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³³On a theological level, this makes sense too: humanity does not suffer for Christ, but Christ for humanity. Ward's emphasis on suffering as a continuation of the Crucifixion downplays the efficacy, integrity and uniqueness of the Crucifixion.

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Chapter 10

Kant and the Present

Daphne Hampson

Abstract Epistemologically Christianity cannot be true, since it is predicated upon a claim to a particularity that, subsequent to the scientific advance in the eighteenth century, has been recognized as untenable. Ethically, Christianity is necessarily heteronomous; as indeed Kant adduces in his “What is Enlightenment?”. Feminists must find Kant’s stand against heteronomous relations attractive. Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* may well be counted the first great demythologization of Christianity. But it is open to question whether the Christian myth acting as a “vehicle” (to employ Kant’s term) is in the first place a carrier of innate moral precepts. May it not rather express human awareness of a dimension of reality which has previously been hypostasized and named “God”? It is for us to find ways of expressing this reality that are epistemologically tenable (thus not involving belief in particular revelation). There is no reason why such an understanding should be heteronomous or anything other than gender inclusive.

Keywords Truth issues in theology · The Christian myth as a vehicle · The moral code of feminism · Novel ways of expressing that which is God

On re-reading Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* of 1793 and his famed essay “What is Enlightenment?” of 1784 I have been struck anew how exactly *a propos* our present situation is this work. Thus it is interesting to consider what has changed with the advent of feminism, the major challenge to Christianity that has arisen since Kant’s time. This chapter consequently is a consideration as to how feminism both fits that greater whole which is the coming of modernity and yet is also essentially novel.

The issues that Kant raised with such acumen in relation to Christian faith were both epistemological and moral. In either case it could well be said that he did no more than reflect understandings which the late eighteenth century had in any case reached; indeed this is exactly how he himself would have cast his endeavor.

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Nevertheless Kant's writing has a perspicacity matched by none other. It is difficult to know how he could be contradicted. Schleiermacher did not do so, but rather walked around the epistemological Maginot line that Kant had drawn, attempting to situate religion in a human faculty other than the capacity to know, that of awareness or sensibility. Likewise Kierkegaard does not challenge Kant in the question as to the limits of the human capacity to acquire knowledge but, stepping right outside such a consideration, states in response that Christianity is a religion of revelation in which God breaks through to humanity. But in taking such a stance Kierkegaard shows Christianity to be both epistemologically and ethically incompatible with the presuppositions of modernity. After the Enlightenment, Christianity could never be the same; in that to say what is essentially the same thing in a changed world is to say something different. What concerns me is that so frequently today, unlike in the case of the great thinkers I have mentioned, the issues seem to be fudged.

We should first, if in a thumbnail sketch, recall the position from which Kant approached his *Religion*. In his "First" Critique, *The Critique of Pure Reason* published in 1781, Kant had shown that, by the very nature of the case, no knowledge of God could arise, since knowledge requires what he called experience (sense perceptions). In his "Second" Critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788, Kant did not contradict himself. What he there suggests is that the *concept* of God is a necessary postulate of reason acting in its practical capacity. If the moral universe is to make sense, so Kant surmises, this must entail the fervent hope (approaching belief or trust, *fiducia*) that there is an immortality in which a *summum bonum* is achieved, such that reward is commensurate with merit; and this in turn involves the postulation of God who shall bring this about. Kant here stands on a knife-edge, since were the prospect of reward to become an incentive for right-doing the purity of the moral imperative would be undermined. Nevertheless his contention is not essentially other than that of the twentieth-century existentialist who holds that, irrespective of outcome, we must do our duty. Rather is it that Kant's position reflects the eighteenth-century desire for a perceived order in the moral, as also the material, universe. Indeed, in his later years, subsequent to the *Religion*, Kant himself became suspicious that such a postulation of the concept of God could undermine his intent.¹ In considering Kant's moral philosophy we should thus be careful not to compromise what it is that Kant would say. As he contemplated the starry heavens Kant does appear to have been possessed of a theistic inclination, but such a premonition could never amount to knowledge. Talk of the deity in his work is, thus, not of something that we can either know or intuit but only conjecture.

Why then does Kant turn to religion? Essentially, in order to put what he will call "historical" or supposedly revealed religion in its place. Kant will show that such religion captures, in picturesque form, the moral universe of which humans are cognisant as they seek to exercise their reason in its practical capacity. It serves no less a role but is also no more than this. Kant does not think that such a religion

¹In this respect, see Theodore Greene's interesting discussion of Kant's *Opus Postumum* in Kant's *Religion* (1960, pp: lxxv–lxxvii).

without its usefulness. The historical, supposedly revealed, religion acts as a *vehicle* that conveys moral truths.² Kant's term is a technical one, employed in his day in pharmaceutics.³ What we should be concerned for is, of course, alone that which the vehicle conveys. As Karl Barth (p. 280) was to quip, for Kant the historical religion contains the true religion (ethical principles) as the shell the kernel! Like Plato before him, Kant would think that the poetry, the concrete religion, can well be discarded once it has performed its task and the penny has dropped. It is the abstract point, wrapped in this garb, which counts. Kant's book may then well be classed the first great "demythologization" of religion.⁴ Of course Kant had some eighteenth-century ancestry in this. In particular Lessing's great parabolic play *Nathan the Wise* of 1779 comes to mind: though the outward form of the three Abrahamic religions may differ, they are but manifestations of fundamental and common moral truths. However it was Kant who, in his *Religion*, first matched step by step the biblical story of our "fall" and "redemption" with an analysis of the human awareness of our moral condition.⁵

Perhaps unsurprisingly Kant's is a sparkling performance, his knowledge of the biblical text intimate. Kant shows that text to fit his ethical philosophy like a hand to a glove.⁶ Take, for example, the *Religion* Book I, on original sin. Human beings recognize that particular sins arise from the place of a basic distortion within them. Yet, on the other hand (so Kant surmises in his moral philosophy) they cannot extirpate the recognition as to what is right; they have a good will. Now the bible precisely captures this dichotomy, on the one hand holding that we are fallen, that there is *original sin*, from which particular sins arise; but it also recounts that humans were in the first instance created good, which is therefore their fundamental nature. We should be clear as to Kant's methodology; he is of course not intending to exegete a text, becoming its servant, as might a biblical theologian. Kant reads his prior

²Greene and Hudson (1960, pp. 97, 98).

³See Barth (1972, p. 285 n. 8).

⁴We should note that, unlike what might be thought the derogatory connotations of the English "de", the German prefix "Ent" simply means "out of" mythology.

⁵Notably, the book had a marked impact on the young Hegel. See in this respect Solomon (1987, Chapter 4). Solomon speaks of 1793–1799, the years of Hegel's early theological writings, as "the years of his fascination with Kant's *Religion*" (p. 59). Kant's historical religion becomes of course Hegel's *Vorstellung* (representation), while Kant's pure moral religion, the *Begriff* (concept) that it carries.

⁶The form of Christianity that Kant takes as his base line, showing it to fit the biblical text and to be commensurate with his own thought, is his native Lutheranism. Thus person always comes before works; there must first be a fundamental revolution from which good works will flow. What is of considerable fascination is that Kant tries to interweave with this structure axioms drawn from late medieval "semi-Pelagian" Catholicism that he may speak of effort and works. Thus the text may be thought to bear some resemblance to Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will*, the concern of both authors as ethicists being that we should in any case do what in us lies, while grace (if there be such) is something which lies outside our purview. I hope to pursue this in a further article.

suppositions into the biblical text.⁷ Those elements he judges superfluous to his self-appointed task (as is the case with the serpent) he simply discards. But Kant performs his task of fitting the text to his philosophy so seamlessly that the theologian would be hard put to show that he has distorted its meaning. Though he does not state this in so many words—and could hardly have done so with the censor looking over his shoulder—it becomes evident to the reader that the text is but a projection of that which human beings know about themselves. To employ the later Bultmannian vocabulary, human beings have translated *Diesseits* (this side, the everyday world) into *Jenseits* (the other side, the beyond).

Kant carries through his project to its logical conclusion. He of course holds that we are free and therefore responsible, our actions imputable to us. Hence he can allow of no works of supererogation. (In Catholic theology a work of supererogation is one performed in excess of what a person must do to gain the required grace for his or her own salvation, the grace given on account of which can consequently be accredited to another.) Such an idea must, to Kant, represent unbelief in our own moral capacity and make short shrift of our responsibility. The theory of course lies at the basis of a substitutionary atonement, classically expounded by Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo* (why did God become human, or why the God/human). Thus in an elaborate passage, in which the implications of what he is about become fully evident, Kant surmises that it is *our* “new man” (our reformed selves) which shall carry the burden of our “old man” (pp. 68–69). It is autonomy personified.

Heirs of the Enlightenment that they are, feminists must find Kant’s position attractive. The buck stops with us. To agree thus far with Kant need not however (it seems to me) entail a calculative impulse, exercised at every turn, as to whether I have done enough. We should forgive ourselves, accept another’s forgiveness, move on more readily, than Kant suggests. To indulge in fetishistic behaviour, playing childish games of trying to better myself, is self-obsession. What—we may well ask of Kant—has become of Luther’s sense of the freedom foundational to good works; the consequence of knowing myself accepted (in Luther’s case by God)? Good works can no more be spontaneous if I think myself thereby to go up a notch in my self-estimation than were I to seek to gain merit from God! Kant stands in danger of wheeling in again the Catholic problematic that Lutheranism sought to overcome. But that I am centered in myself, and not in another, is surely a truth to which every feminist must hold. One can have no God understood in a sense that would be incompatible with this.

Kant famously argued with great power in favor of autonomy and against heteronomy. (Autonomy from Greek *auto* = self, *nomos* = law, I give the law to myself; heteronomy from Greek *heteros* = other, I allow that which is other than myself to be the law to me.) In his celebrated essay “What is Enlightenment?” submitted for a prize, Kant commences: “Enlightenment is the human’s exodus from a self-inflicted immaturity” (p. 9). The German word employed, here translated immaturity, is that

⁷Kant himself distinguishes the two positions clearly; see the “Preface” to the first edition (Greene and Hudson 1960, pp. 7–10).

for one not yet come of age. Kant is contending that to be autonomous is of the essence of what it is to own the stature of being human. Significantly, in the lines which follow, two of the three examples he gives as to what it is to behave heteronomously are ecclesiastical: “if I have a book [the Bible] which thinks for me, a parson who keeps my conscience . . .” (p. 9). The chief enemy of Enlightenment is religion as commonly understood. While scripture may perform a useful role as the handmaid of ethics, what is not to be tolerated is that it should become the master. Hence also we should note that in his *Conflict of the Faculties* it is the potential conflict between the philosophy and theology faculties which is Kant’s primary concern. One’s own moral judgement must always take precedence.

We see what a muddle Christians, among them so-called “Christian feminists”, find themselves in as they seek to come to terms with the modern world. Well do I remember, as the Chair of an organization lobbying for ministry in the Anglican church to be open to women on an equal basis with men, attempting to put together a position paper arguing that women should be allowed to be deacons (the lowest order of ministry in the church) and having to submit to the fact that (in the eyes of others) the argument in large part hung on whether Phoebe of Romans 16 was, or was not, a deacon! What does it do to one’s humanity to need to submit to such considerations? It was surely with an eye to Kant’s discussion of the *akedah* (the story of the “binding” of Isaac, Genesis 22) in his *Religion* (p. 175) and in the *Conflict of the Faculties* (p. 115), that Kierkegaard raises the possibility that, subverting the moral law, Abraham should with fear and trembling obey the voice of God. It must always be thus in the case of a revealed religion. The very word religion means to be bound (to God). Enlightenment is the overthrow of such an outlook: humanity is to come into its own. It follows that—in the case in which I was caught up—one must simply say that women and men have equal rights and dignity and that that concludes the matter. The problem is that the church cannot take this stance. When considering any moral issue, from war to homosexuality, Christians must always have one eye on what the text says, even if the issue is framed as “given the circumstances of our day and age, what is it that is commensurate with some deeper meaning that lies behind its literal meaning?”.

At this point we should move from the sphere of ethics to that of epistemology. Behind Kant’s ethical position lies the epistemological recognition that there can be no such thing as particularity: “the scandal of particularity” as it came to be called in the eighteenth century by Christians themselves as they named that for which they would contend. As a post-Newtonian who has grasped cause and effect in the world of phenomena, it is for Kant simply not possible that there could be one unique resurrection; nor that there could be a single human being whose relationship to the divine is different in kind from that of all others; nor that there could be miracles, representing as they would a discontinuity in the causal nexus of nature or history. The mature Kant, from his post-Critical writings of the 1780s onwards, never suggests anything that would be incompatible with such a stance. He refers to the “wise teacher of the gospel”, but cannot and does not by definition speak of divinity or uniqueness. Whatever he may choose to say about religion must be commensurate with this a priori presupposition as to the fundamental nature of reality. Thus, to

return to our earlier consideration, for Kant the idea of one who could take away our sins on account of being in himself more than just another human being, is not simply morally reprobate but furthermore epistemologically untenable.

There was of course a whole train of development behind Kant here. The eighteenth century had been much taken up with the question as to what the new-found recognition that nature and history are a causal nexus implied for Christian claims. Earlier in the century, notably in the work of Leibniz, the concern (inherited from the ancient world) had been that the historical could never have the character of absoluteness and inevitability, which must necessarily (so it was thought) belong to the divine. But something quite other was now on the scene, which must confound the apologist for Christianity: namely, the recognition that there could not be the particularity (interventions, miracles or revelation) on which the truth of Christianity is predicated. The revolution in thought which followed from Newton's discoveries led to the banishing of God from the phenomenal world of cause and effect: the theistic outlook of the century was typically that of deism. If the phenomenal world was an interconnected causal nexus, exhibiting a regularity, whether in the fall of an apple or the turning of the planets, it was still possible to find a place for God "beyond". An influential thinker like Lessing is not simply concerned with the Leibnizian conundrum (that one can never make the move from history to that which is eternally the case), Lessing's broad, ugly ditch.⁸ The world of miracles no longer exists for him. As he gingerly puts it, they don't take place in eighteenth-century Germany; and one may well think that he doubts they ever did. (There is as always the little matter of the censor.)

This places Christianity post the Enlightenment in a novel position. In previous ages, when humans had no real hold on the world of cause and effect, anything was possible. In a post-Newtonian age the recognition that there can be no particularity makes Christian belief suspect if not impossible. For the very definition of what it is to be a Christian must surely be that one holds that a uniqueness occurred in the Christ-event. That is to say, Christians credit that there could be a particularity which does not conform to the universality otherwise present. Such a definition does not of course limit Christianity to its Nicaean expression, which is but one way of formulating that uniqueness. But to think, of Jesus, merely that he was as a man amongst others, one deeply in tune with God, while a theistic position could hardly be called Christian. To credit him with having been a great teacher (and no more) is compatible with atheism. For Christians to say the same thing (to confess to a belief in Christ's uniqueness) in a world in which a new recognition had dawned as to what could and could not be the case was to claim something subtly different. Interestingly Kierkegaard (something I cannot explore here) clung to a pre-modern understanding of how the world operates, which made his Christian belief far more thinkable.

⁸"On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power" in Ed. H. Chadwick, *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956).

The question as to whether a person could be called upon to obey a heteronomous command would seem to be closely tied to the epistemological consideration as to the possibility of particularity. If one holds that there could not be a particularity which breaks the causal nexus then, *mutatis mutandis*, one is unlikely to credit that there could be a revelation from God that overrules the moral law, the intrinsic understanding of which is one's birthright. In this respect Kant is epistemologically and ethically all of a piece. Likewise, by contrast, it is Kierkegaard, who believes that there can be a unique revelation in the person of Christ, who also credits that theoretically at least Abraham could be commanded by God to take an action which overturns the moral law. For Kierkegaard, if it be "sin" to choose to abide by the moral law in the face of God's command, then in parallel it must be counted "sin" epistemologically to continue to hold to the Socratic position (position "A" in *Philosophical Fragments*) in light of the revelation in Jesus Christ (position "B").⁹ In ethics as also in epistemology Christianity represents the denial of humanism and of modernity.

I am in no doubt as to where the feminist must stand in relation to this dichotomy: with modernity. Moreover one has no option if one finds oneself unable to credit that there could be any such particularity. In other words one should be all of a piece—and commensurately, one would hope, at peace. Equally, in denying what became apparent to enlightened modernity, that there can be no such thing as particular (often called "special") revelation, Christians open themselves to the possibility that it could be morally justifiable to act heteronomously. It does not however follow that to be Christian is likewise to be all of a piece (unless one were to deny the scientific world completely, which would be difficult). With most of themselves Christians presumably live in the modern world. There must then at some level arise a conflict for them between two worlds; or else Christians must compartmentalise themselves to make life possible.

What I find strange is that whereas these two opposed positions, together with what is at stake, would seem to have been fully apparent to a Kant and to a Kierkegaard, it would appear that this is still today frequently not obvious the more especially to those in the Catholic tradition. Catholics seem only too often to have continued to think that there could be odd occurrences (miracles) that break what is otherwise the causal nexus of nature and of history. The epistemological conflict between what is believed to have been a revelation and how the world works is not grasped. For Protestant thinkers in the Continental tradition these considerations, brought to the fore by the Enlightenment, represented a watershed, variously responded to by say Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel and, quite otherwise, by Kierkegaard who advances Christian claims in defiance of them. This is not to say that Protestants have not sought out devious ways to circumvent the problem; transmuting Christianity into what is essentially no more than an ethical teaching, or

⁹Kierkegaard (1985, see pp. 15–17) where this is first called attention to, but the theme is central to the book as a whole. See also (1983b, pp. 81–82). This position is a corollary of the Lutheran (as opposed to the Catholic) understanding of sin such that, as Kierkegaard says: "the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith" (1983b, p. 82).

construing Christ as neither God nor human, but somehow an exceptional man. We cannot discuss the history of modern Protestantism in detail here. It may however be beneficial to consider briefly the work of Rudolf Bultmann, who may be thought to come the closest to a solution, making him to my mind the greatest apologist for Christianity in the modern world. At the end of the day however I think him not to succeed.¹⁰

Living in the mid twentieth century, Bultmann knows full well that the world is a causal nexus in the sense that there can be no miracles or interruptions and thus also no particularity. How then to be Christian? Bultmann's position is ingenious. He postulates that there is another sphere, which he calls *Geschichte*, the normal German word for history, or story, but which in Bultmann's hands takes on the connotation of "meaning" or *kerygma*, a gospel which is proclaimed. One might say that it is a world that, as Karl Barth was famously to remark, touches our world "as a tangent touches a circle", that is to say without touching it. Bultmann differentiates this from the realm of what he calls *Historie*, normal secular history, the world of cause and effect. Having drawn this distinction Bultmann can contend that the act of preaching the resurrection is as of an event from the realm of *Geschichte*. Now the death on the cross is of course an event of this world in the realm of *Historie*. Thus uniqueness is lent to *this* particular man, in that one preaches the resurrection of him who died on the cross, without it being said that the causal nexus of nature and history was broken.¹¹ Bultmann would hope to have found a way to speak of the particularity which Christian belief demands while not disputing the regularity of nature.

But what, we may ask, is *Geschichte*? In the present context it is interesting that Bultmann is a neo-Kantian. *Geschichte* would seem to be some kind of a future hope, a fixed point, almost a noumenal completion, *from* which one lives in the present. It is the Lutheran sense of what has been called "inverted existence". One lives *from* the future *in* the present; Luther's *simul justus et peccator*. (I have criticised this elsewhere as leading to a kind of split self, but that is a whole other arena.) Indeed Bultmann himself makes this equation between what he would say and the Lutheran formula (1957, pp. 152–154), a formula which encapsulates the way in which Lutheran faith is structured. In Luther's case it is basically a moral statement; we are accepted by God (held to be just) although in ourselves sinners. It is Kierkegaard who, post the Enlightenment and following Hamann, first structures epistemology in this way, and Bultmann follows suit—if indeed he is making some kind of an epistemological statement, for in his hands it is more of a faith statement. Again we cannot pursue this here.¹²

¹⁰For further discussion see Hampson (2002a, Chapter 1), where I also discuss Schleiermacher's attempt.

¹¹For a succinct discussion of this see Bultmann (1961).

¹²For further discussion of Bultmann's epistemological position and for the Lutheran nature of his thought see Hampson (2002b, Chapter 6).

Suppose however one thinks this “other realm” to be wholly a product of our imagination? We are in some way quite close to a consideration as to whether we should hold that there is a Kantian *summum bonum*, in Kant’s case that we not become discouraged in acting ethically in this present world. But then one might say of Luther also that the point of faith is that it leads to works. Nevertheless for all the commonality there is within this tradition one has to say that a Kierkegaard and perhaps a Bultmann in wishing to be Christians, have an epistemological twist here that Kant would not have followed; besides which his *summum bonum* is scarcely Kierkegaard’s Christ or Bultmann’s talk of the “future” (or God). Minimally one must say that the Lutheran tradition in theology has at least tackled the problem which loomed centre stage after the Enlightenment in a way that one senses the Catholic, or Anglican, tradition has not.

Bultmann allows of but one preached event: the resurrection. For him there are no miracles as events of *Historie*. Christians who do not think in terms of this distinction and hold the Christian “events” simply to have taken place in this world in some kind of positivistic way are surely in deep water. In a past age in which all sorts of miracles and *non-sequitors* were liable to happen, Christian claims to interventions or miracles stood in a peopled field. Subsequent to the Enlightenment, such claims to particularity stick up like a sore thumb. In as much as one element of the story after another becomes untenable to them (first the Fall, then Virgin Birth, then a literal resurrection), given where this is inevitably leading Christians find themselves in a fix. Were one who is purportedly a Christian to stand with modernity and so deny credence to the possibility of particularity, the question would arise as to why he or she should look to *this* individual man or *this* piece of history rather than to any other? If there be no particularity, Christianity must fall. (Or else become no more than a meaningful myth.)

Now feminists must think this issue of particularity crucial. As we have already said, given the claim that there has occurred a particularity which is the basis of Christianity, it follows that Christians must necessarily refer back to that epoch in history in which the revelation is said to have taken place. A parallel move occurs for Jews and Moslems, although the form of the claim to particularity differs. As Kant put it, Christianity is a “historical” religion; it has an anchor in history which cannot be taken up. In this respect a religion of revelation is to be differentiated from ideas or doctrines (as for example Marxism, or feminism) which—unsurprisingly—bear the stamp of the age in which they arose. In such cases history is not integral to the thought-system concerned, which could theoretically have been conjured up on a desert island. By contrast the adherents of Abrahamic religions must, on account of their very belief, look to past history.

Today we recognize past history to have been profoundly patriarchal, this not least in the case of the ancient Near East. Given that a historical text is intrinsic to the Abrahamic religions, the outlook of that former age will inevitably be projected into the present. The presuppositions of that age pervade the text: as has been well said, scripture which is not inflected by patriarchy could be written on a postage stamp. The history is moreover considered in some sense sacred history, the history in which a revelation is held to have occurred. Its recitation takes place in the

sacred space and context of synagogue, church or mosque. Hence the patriarchal presuppositions will minimally be seen as normative for humanity; if construed in a fundamentalist sense, then as willed by God. Such a conditioning is no less potent for taking place at a subconscious level, informing people in ways of which they are scarcely conscious.

We are faced with a situation which had not dawned on Kant's horizon. Kant held that the concretion that is the biblical story served as a vehicle to convey abstract moral truths and human self-understanding. What if—as in the twentieth-century Marshall McLuhan was to claim—that medium which is the text is itself the message? The concretion of the “vehicle” may be more integral to the message conveyed than Kant envisaged and problematic in a way to which he was blind. In as much as (owing to the continued pervasiveness of patriarchal presuppositions of our society) the patriarchal nature of the text still goes unrecognised, that is only the more problematic. Kant thought the Christian story a “true myth.” What if it is a profoundly patriarchal myth which harms women's interests?

That Kant had no such recognition should not however be allowed to obscure how much we owe to him. For Kant may be thought to stand at the head of the tradition of those who have been called the masters of suspicion. We may note in passing that, in its major exponents, it is a uniquely German, Protestant and Jewish, tradition; flowing from Kant through Hegel, taken up by Feuerbach and Marx, later by Nietzsche, and given another turn by Freud. Religion might be something other than it seems. Now feminism may well be counted a latter-day mistress of suspicion. Kant's position is mild. He runs rings around the theologians, denying that they have anything of relevance to say that is not already subsumed in his moral philosophy. His tactic is to substitute an ethical discourse for religion; a discourse which, if one did but realize it, the religious concretion embodies. What is new on the scene with feminism is the recognition that the myth—the historical, supposedly revealed, religion—may not so much be a projection of innate moral understandings, the promotion of a false consciousness which is the opium of the working class, or a sub-conscious recognition of the need for the father, but an ideology which is a gender politics.

Some feminists, myself included, would want to contend that it belongs to religion's *raison d'être* that it should make it appear “only natural” that one sex is normative for humanity, while placing the other sex in the position of “the other” to the norm. Through this myth men have both projected their world and allowed their projection in turn to be reflected back to humanity as God-given. Central to the myth has been the construction of “woman” according to the male imagination. This is so whether she be placed on a pedestal as virgin, mother or both; or contrariwise, in what has been called by object relations theorists “male splitting”, conceived as “slut”, associated with the earth or sexuality, the opposite of that which is divine. To one who holds to such an analysis, religion is to be understood as an ideological form of power which legitimizes a certain gender dispensation. We have travelled a long way from Kant's original insight.

And yet, though the myth be misogynist, a feminist who finds herself a spiritual person may well allow that, however distorting a medium, it represents an attempt

to express human spirituality. So finally we must ask whether Kant is correct in supposing that that which the historical religion carries is essentially ethical self-knowledge? The myth could equally represent an attempt to capture and express, in concrete form, human spiritual awareness. To such a suggestion Kant would have mounted an a priori objection. There being no relevant sense perceptions, we can have no knowledge of God; nor does Kant allow the claim of intuition, in his book to be dismissed as fanaticism.

Here we should remember that Kant, not unnaturally, had a certain understanding of God, the classical notion of Western theism. God is defined as “separate”, “beyond” and “other” than are we. Hence God (if there be God) is either unknowable, or else must break through in revelation—an idea which is to be dismissed, since nature and history are a causal nexus and there can be no particularity. But what if a fundamental challenge (such as many a feminist would advocate) were to be mounted to the paradigm for God that we have inherited? The whole masculinist vocabulary seems foreign to some of us, suggesting as it does that God is counter-posed in a dichotomous relationship with humanity. In Kant’s age it was Schleiermacher who in his *Speeches*, published but six years after Kant’s volume, offered a novel possibility to the cultured among religion’s despisers. Religion, so Schleiermacher adduced, is a “sense” and “taste” for the infinite; for “[we] lie directly on the bosom of the infinite world” (p. 43).

Such a conception does not entail the problems that confront Christianity post the Enlightenment. If God is understood as immediately present, moreover as always so present, there is no call for special revelation and no particularity is posited. Further, no call for a heteronomous relationship to God can arise. But by the same token, as far as Christians are concerned we would seem to have lost the baby with the bathwater, for such a spirituality can scarcely be designated “Christian”. Schleiermacher’s position here was all of a piece. Coming of age in the late eighteenth century, he knew that there could be no interventions and thus no miracles. Commensurately with this he duly proclaims: “Miracle is simply the religious name for event. . . To me all is miracle” (p. 88). In continuity with the eighteenth century, God continues to be understood in universal terms. But it is no longer the universality of deism. Schleiermacher does not think God to be manifest through the order of the universe. Rather, in a dawning Romanticism, he finds that the One or All can be recognised through the exercise of a certain human sensibility. Of course Schleiermacher never suggests that this recognition amounts to “knowledge” in the Kantian sense; religion, he says, makes no such claim (p. 35). Religion is a way of being in the world, of responding to the whole. Feminists may find much here with which they are in sympathy.¹³

¹³For my own appreciation of Schleiermacher’s *Speeches* see Hampson (1999, pp. 30–31). At a later stage in *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher does of course try to build Christianity into his basic stance: see footnote 10 above. For an estimate of Schleiermacher’s mature theological position see Hampson (2002a, Chapter 6).

The question is whether this is all that there is to be said. Some of us have concluded that there is a dimension of reality which, though we may not fully grasp or understand it, moves between people and which may well be both within us and beyond us. There are coincidences that are not quite coincidences. Prayer (in the sense of quiet loving attentiveness focussed on another) is effective. Healing takes place. It would appear that there is present more than what we are individually or even collectively, integral to the whole. By contrast with the idea of particularity, intervention, or revelation, the claim is that there is a further dimension to the one reality in which we live.

Indeed we may well conjecture that it is precisely such an awareness that has led people to postulate "God", conceptualising God as a particular *hypostasis* or entity, which humanity has set over against itself. It would follow that what it mistaken is the way in which God has been envisaged in that myth which is the religion. The traditional understanding is neither epistemologically viable nor, in the modern age, ethically tenable. We shall need to find new language to articulate and other paradigms to conceptualise what we conceive to be the case. This other way of speaking would seem to involve re-thinking the nature of the self, so that instead of seeing "God" in appositional (or oppositional) terms we may conceive of the self as being open to that which lies immediately beyond the self, which is God (something which I have not the space to discuss here).

I have the impression that in this essay I have said nothing essentially new, not present in some shape or form in previous writing of mine; even that I should apologize to readers already familiar with my work! It has however seemed worthwhile to think these issues through specifically in relation to Kant and his age. What becomes startlingly apparent is that the options with which theology is today faced and the possibilities open to it had essentially been elaborated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by its greatest thinkers. (I have not here considered Hegel's position. Revelation, particularity, and heteronomy are all of a piece. They are alike the corollary of the notion of a transcendent God, who must break through in revelation, which constitutes a particularity; further, to whom in consequence we stand in a relation which is potentially heteronomous. In modernity Christianity must proclaim its "truth" *in the face of* reason. Perhaps the essay represents a clarion call for the issues to be recognized for what they are.

It becomes interesting to relate feminist concerns to this whole intellectual trajectory. On the one hand feminists hold much in common with the Enlightenment; their concern is for the liberation of human beings and they refuse to allow that heteronomous relations could be ethical. One could well cast feminist "readings" of Western thought and more specifically western theology as the final twist of the history of intellectual suspicion. The Abrahamic religions are an ideological system that has served to keep women in their place; indeed this may be their primary *raison d'être*. Feminists must critique these myths on grounds of which Kant would not have dreamt: namely that repeating them affirms and reproduces gender hierarchy.

Yet it is also the case that at least this feminist and others known to her would want to diverge from Kant's basic presupposition that what this (masculinist) vehicle carries is only, or essentially, ethics. At least in part the myth may well represent the attempt of persons to capture their awareness of a spiritual reality and a spiritual dimension to their lives. Divesting ourselves of an inappropriate myth, it remains for us to find other ways—language and symbols—to express in our day and age that which is “God”. One may well aspire to think that there will yet come out of women's sensibilities and ways of interacting the possibility of articulating a more relevant conceptualisation. The paradigms we need would seem to be markedly different from what has been the major (masculinist) Western tradition; though that tradition has not been uniform and contains thought, as for example that of Schleiermacher, on which we may usefully draw. If feminism seeks to ring the death-knell of Christianity, it may thus also point to the future.

As we have said, to speak of God in this other way neither runs counter to the impossibility of particularity, nor does it subvert autonomy. There is no reason why our attempt to conceptualise what we may think to be the case should not both comport with our ethics and be compatible with a post-Enlightenment (that is to say post-medieval) epistemology. We can set ourselves as autonomous beings and humankind in its inter-relations at the centre of the picture. Meanwhile we must challenge Kant, contending that it is not that a harmless myth is a suitable conduit for ethics, but rather that a harmful myth has nevertheless acted as a vehicle for human recognition of that which is God. But Kant—from what we know of him—would have been baffled as to what it is of which we are speaking.

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Part II
Transcendence Incarnate: Space, Self
and Other

Chapter 11

The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence

Pamela Sue Anderson

Abstract This chapter begins with a phenomenological reading of the awakening of a woman to her cognitive and non-cognitive capacities; traditional imagery elucidates the nature of “the lived body”, which is thought to exist as a kind of post-Kantian a priori, whose flesh knits human bodies together within a world. This body is a synthetic form capable of creating unity out of multiple sensations, but also capable of generating differentiations in its relation to a world. Granted the lived body, how does the body-subject lose confidence in her own capability? A doubt or weakness is something portrayed in traditional myths about Eve and similarly in twentieth-century portraits of the young Simone de Beauvoir. Each capable subject can imagine herself in the bodily situation of Eve: awakened to the incarnate modalities of our existence we discover the possibilities of “transcendence incarnate.” We appear to be given abilities for transcendence; and yet the ambiguity of transcendence within a fleshy, bodily existence suggests a loss of what is, in phenomenological terms, “originally” ours. The chapter demonstrates that what makes a particular person a woman has at a certain historical moment and within a western philosophical tradition also marked her as, in Beauvoir’s terms, “the second sex.” The gendered variations which distinguish confidence as a personal and social phenomenon indicate that neither women nor men are as we might be. The chapter concludes by advocating a transformation of this negative reality into something positive for transcendence incarnate: new ethical confidence in the abilities of capable subjects.

Keywords The lived body · Capability · Confidence · Flesh · Phenomenology · Transcendence incarnate

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Setting the Scene: A Phenomenological Description

Let us begin with a portrait of Eve's incarnation supplementing the phenomenological terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose *Phenomenology of Perception* presents an original account of how a "body-subject" becomes aware of its own "pre-reflective incarnation in the world" without ever ceasing to remain incarnate.¹ For Merleau-Ponty, "the world" is not what I think, but what "I live through"; this will mean, for my account, that "the lived body" insofar as confident can be described as *transcendence incarnate*. To approach this description of the lived body, imagine the awakening of Eve:

Lips closed, eyes too wide, cheeks taut, the face – absent from itself in concentration – listens. Eve listens to what? She listens to the birth of a listening. While her left hand wanders away, unbeknownst to her – she wants to ignore it – to pick the forbidden fruit her right hand, above the elbow still immobilized in eternal clay, brushes her own cheek for the first time. With one hand Eve picks the apple, with the other she touches herself. A gesture so strange: the surprise, terror, pity of Eve discovering herself before saying "me".²

The above can be read as a significant intervention into phenomenological description of the lived body: in this portrait which draws on myth, Eve becomes aware of the embodied modalities of her existence as she is thrown open into a mortal situation of listening. Becoming attuned to this situation, her self-discovery involves surprise and terror. Moving from pre-personal to personal awareness, Eve remains incarnate. In fact, I suggest that her portrait shows awareness of being "transcendence incarnate."

Phenomenological descriptions of the lived body, like that of Merleau-Ponty, were especially popular in twentieth-century European philosophy. What was not so popular is a focus on Eve and her gradual awakening to the pre-personal capability to which her body will in some sense cleave, but from which she will in another sense be separated. This dual sense of a body both cleaving to and separating from a pre-personal form, or "capability",³ creates an ambiguous condition for the lived body. The pre-personal capability of this body produces a "fleshy" inter-subjective field of affections; at the same time, this living body is surprised by the upsurges of

¹Merleau-Ponty (2002, pp. x–xvi).

²Hersch (1985, p. 27); quoted by Le Doeuff (2003, p. 67) (emphasis added). The depiction of Eve about which Le Doeuff and Hersch speak derives from the twelfth-century sculptor Gislebert (also known as Gislebertus) whose "*la tentation d' Eve*" was a *linteau* constructed above the north door on the early twelfth-century cathedral at St-Lazare in Autun, France; however, this sculpted depiction of Eve is no longer part of the cathedral but in the Musée Rolin in Autun.

³I am indebted to Paul Ricoeur's last writings on "capability" but am still trying to work out exactly where to locate this idea: is it "pre-personal" in Merleau-Ponty sense of the adjective? "Capability" seems to be a metaphysical notion in Ricoeur, especially since informed by Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Spinoza's *Ethics*, grounding his discussions of "selfhood" and the "I" abilities, including "I can speak, I can narrate, I can act..." see Ricoeur (2007, 76 f.); cf. Ricoeur (1992, pp. 10–23 and 298–317).

transcendence which “fly up like sparks from a fire”,⁴ setting off new, more personal discoveries within the “lived through” world.

“Flesh” is the phenomenological term for that which connects bodies and world(s) inter-subjectively. Flesh constitutes a generality from which particularity emerges; in the mythical portrait, Eve emerges as a particular person. Flesh and “fleshy” recall the biblical myth of Eve’s body whose negative imagery has been rejected by some philosophers and feminists who think we have—and should have—left mythical stories and images behind. However, descriptions of flesh, especially including the female body’s association with abject or defiled flesh, remain part of our ethical, social and spiritual imaginary; “fleshiness” remains part of how we imagine and think about sexed bodies. In the terms of Merleau-Ponty’s exact contemporary, Simone de Beauvoir, the female body becomes “the second sex”.⁵ In this light, I will argue that both phenomenological descriptions and mythical stories of the abject-defilement of the human subject can shed light on the gendering of our epistemic practices. But more on this—later.

Phenomenology enhances those genealogies of flesh which are traced in how biblical narratives and other sacred texts “gender” bodies. In turn, traditional texts raise ethical issues about how this “gendering” marks body-subjects personally, socially, materially and intellectually. I aim to elucidate the manner in which the *confidence* of individual (gendered) bodies becomes a critical question for feminist discussions. Confidence as a social phenomenon will be elucidated, in phenomenological terms, at the point in time when the lived body intersects with the personal realm of one’s history and culture, including the religious traditions of that history.

Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir each offer highly significant descriptions of the ambiguous condition of the lived body. It is significant that their phenomenological method of description uncovers the way in which the pre-personal realm of (capable) flesh surges forth in sensual, spiritual and ethical life making possible a general atmosphere of inter-subjective communication. It is also significant that their existential phenomenology discovers the way in which fleshiness as an original medium of communication enables body-subjects to remain entangled in an inter-subjective world, that is, body-subjects can become fully aware of themselves as persons vulnerable in their relations within a world. The critical question for a feminist philosopher is: in what sense does an individual body exist? It should be clear that Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* elucidates the general pre-personal (motor) intentionality of which an individual body is not its own cause and for which it is not responsible. At the same time what is called a “pre-personal fleshiness” remains inseparable from the body’s personal life. It is as if this phenomenology employs a transcendental argument to deduce the necessity of pre-personal flesh for the possibility of any personal experience. It follows that the capable fleshy body exists as the necessary a priori “form” for all of the modes of

⁴Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. xv; cf. 250).

⁵de Beauvoir (1989).

incarnate life which are both attuned to a field of sensations and located within a larger situation of historical change and cultural variations.⁶

From the above, I would conclude that the fleshy body appears to exist in some sense as a kind of post-Kantian synthetic a priori form: its flesh knits human bodies and worlds together. The body as a synthesizing form is capable of creating unity out of multiple sensations, but also capable of generating differentiations in its relations to a world. The lived body due to is “pre-personal” and in this sense “fundamental” capability remains continually open to a fleshy inter-subjective and spatial-temporal network of sensuous and other affections; this network of affections is tied to historical and social structures. As becomes increasingly clear, the openness and relational ties of a fleshy existence renders “the lived body” deeply ambiguous, locating the capable life of the body in a world it did not create and over which it has only fragile control. One implication of this incarnate life is that the body is just as capable of creative communion as vulnerable to (linguistic) disability and tragic loss. But how more precisely does the lived body lose confidence in the power to act; that is, in its pre-personal capability?

It is not only the variations of history and culture which threaten to inhibit the lived body’s awakening and openness to the world: transcendence is rendered ambiguous by a body whose confidence in its own capability is inevitably “fragile” (or “vulnerable”).⁷ Gender becomes a factor in regulating the cognitive capacities of the body-subject as it emerges in a personal and social world of material inequalities, loss and discord. Yet a doubt disrupting (one’s) confidence, a weakness or fragility is something portrayed in traditional myths about Eve. Consistent with this phenomenology of the lived body, the biblical myth of Adam and Eve recounts the fall of the first couple from paradise as inevitable.⁸ Gender as only one significant historical, personal-social structure plays either constructively or destructively upon this doubt about the body and its capability, affecting the lived capacities and incapacities, as well as various modalities of existence. For good or for bad, the lived body both affects and is affected by an epistemic confidence. If we take Eve as a female body who becomes “the second sex”, then a socially constituted confidence in her own body motivates this female subject to act as a mediator in specifically gendered ways: she is mediator of both the incarnate yet indeterminate sensible openness of the cleaving body and the incarnate yet surprised spiritual body affected by the upsurges of transcendence. Merleau-Ponty’s account of the “sparks of a fiery life in the flesh” as they surprise and terrify becomes gender specific insofar as that interior surge of transcendence marks, for example, Eve’s spiritual awakening in a sexually and materially distinctive way.⁹

⁶Merleau-Ponty (2002, pp. 158–160, n94, 257 f. and 403–425).

⁷Ricoeur (2007, pp. 76–77).

⁸Mulhall (2005, pp. 6–15).

⁹Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. xv and 180–182).

Furthermore, each human subject can imagine herself in the bodily situation of Eve insofar as she recognises herself “already born” and “still alive”.¹⁰ We are each equally awakened to the incarnate modalities of our existence which are premised on pre-personal capability. I have identified these incarnate modalities as the possibilities of transcendence incarnate. In our fleshy incarnation, we appear destined to certain possibilities, while the very *ambiguity* of transcendence within a fleshy, bodily existence marks the loss of a capability which seems “originally one’s own.” What makes Eve a particular person also marks her as “the second sex.” The gendered variations which continue to distinguish (her) confidence as a personal and social (and inevitably ethical) phenomenon indicate that we are not always as we might be.

With this phenomenological description, I am not proposing that a woman’s gender is the result of what Christians might call “the fall”; but some theologians might read what follows in this way. Instead of employing the metaphor of “a fall”, I would prefer Paul Ricoeur’s *apt* account of everyday life which is experienced as “the captivity” of a capable human subject.¹¹ Capability is described symbolically as being held “captive” to the material and social structures which, according to Ricoeur, are like a geological rift, or “fault”. These structures rupture the lived-through world and gradually render the existence of women and men “out of joint.” There is no escape from this fractured condition of, what in symbolic terms, is captivity. So, when it comes to confidence every subject has the capability of a lived body (for selfhood) which is always vulnerable to this captivity’s rifts and ruptures.

Critical Questions: Kant’s Philosophical Influence

My own critical question about the phenomenological description which has been given so far will be derived from the deep influence of Kant’s philosophy on my thinking. In other words, I have an affinity to those philosophers who Beauvoir herself claims would respond: “All well and good. But. . . for [Kant] genuine reality is the human person insofar as it transcends its empirical embodiment and chooses to be universal.”¹² Unlike transcendence incarnate, Kant employs “transcends” to

¹⁰Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 250). For very significant and sympathetic feminist readings of Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir, see Heinämaa (2003, pp. 66–86) and Langer in Card (Ed.) (2003, pp. 87–109); and Kruks (2006, pp. 25–48) (but some of the other essays in this volume are much less sympathetic to Merleau-Ponty).

¹¹Ricoeur’s notion of “captivity” goes back to his early work in Ricoeur (1969, pp. 4–10, 152, 237); cf. Kant (1996); and Anderson (1993, pp. 82–93, 102–112). Ricoeur’s last work in which he develops an account of the capable human subject is clearly Kantian but also Spinozist (!) rather than Sartrean. Crucially Ricoeur does not think that captivity eclipses the fundamental condition of human autonomy; even if autonomy remains both “a condition” and “a task” (Ricoeur’s terms) one’s capability remain. Captivity makes us vulnerable and inclined to evil, but does not destroy the capability which renders us human and responsible; see Ricoeur (2007 pp. 51–52, 65, 74–84). Compare Ricoeur’s account to Mulhall (2005, p. 9).

¹²Beauvoir (1976, p. 17); cf. Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 241).

mean “goes beyond” the sense of the body as an object in the empirical world. Yet, does this Kantian choice “to be universal” have to imply a complete transcendence of the body and no sense of transcendence incarnate?

The latter as seen (above) in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty assumes an original bodily field of fleshiness as the *a priori* of its lived through existence; and this condition remains the grounding for the incarnate life of the flesh.¹³ So, is Beauvoir’s claim against “Kant’s human person who transcends empirical embodiment” completely fair? Kant could not mean completely transcend the body as an aspect of the subject without an inevitable illusion. Note that Beauvoir herself chose to be universal in an existential sense: that is, the choice of being incarnate is to choose to recognize incarnation as a universal condition of every phenomenological description of existence. For my part, I aim to place confidence in a capable human subject who can choose to be universal in the sense of being fully aware of her body (i.e. in the sense of one’s being incarnate), while still transcending the marks of gender which inhibit and debilitate the capable body. This confidence means mutual trust: that is, the trust of the capable subject in relation to all of its own bodily modalities. Confidence, then, becomes another term for transcendence incarnate.

Here questions arise for the Kantian.¹⁴ Would the human person in Kant, as Beauvoir claims (above), transcend completely her incarnation insofar as this implies a non-empirical (noumenal?) life as her “genuine” reality? On the one hand, a post-Kantian could associate ethical confidence with a sort of transcendence that would involve going beyond—and in this sense transcending—the ambiguity, contingency and uncertainty of the empirical body; this transcendence would give confidence to our convictions. Yet would this be a false confidence about reality or worse, mere self-deception? On the other hand, a Kantian would risk transcendental illusion¹⁵ in talking about transcendence incarnate as the two-aspect subject who is both a body (subject) as it appears and the unknowable reality of the subject-in-herself. Yet this risk is inevitable for the two-aspect subject who, in the end, is not decisively different from the pre-personal body-subject uncovered by the phenomenologist. For Kant, transcendental illusion would be generated by cognitive claims about the non-sensible yet free body-subject; similarly it would follow that claims about pre-personal incarnation assert more than we can know in Kant’s empirical sense. The problem is that phenomenological accounts of transcendence tend to claim too much if treated as knowledge: if a Kantian regulative ideal, transcendence incarnate would have to represent paradoxically both the unmotivated surge for the unconditioned (as the complete totality of conditions for all appearances) and the falling short of this, since limited by still being in a body. Obviously, the lived body in itself could not be known, yet it could be thought as unconditioned in Kantian terms.¹⁶ Yet striving for the unconditioned must, in some sense, be the

¹³Merleau-Ponty (2002, pp. 250–257).

¹⁴I aim to explore Kantian questions concerning “the a priori” further by reading Dufrenne (2009).

¹⁵Kant (1933, pp. 297–300) (A293–8; B349–55).

¹⁶Kant (1933, B xxviii).

goal of transcendence incarnate; in other words, our telos as incarnate is to be able to fulfil our bodily and cognitive capacities—ensured by a fundamental capability—with the right amount of confidence. To tackle this (post)-Kantian dilemma of either claiming to know too much about transcendence incarnate or claiming to go too far (say, in a platonic sense) in transcending the body. We are then left with these additional Kantian inspired questions.

Where should we begin our reflections? With a mythical story about the lived body? Or, with a philosophical account of the transcendental subject whose representations of objects must be prior to all experienced phenomena as a condition for all our knowledge?¹⁷ If we follow Kant, it is not clear that we can begin with any cognition of life awakening within the corporeal. Yet we can start with a vague sense of the universal as what we share in being a conscious subject, i.e., in thinking at all.

But then, who or what comes first in thinking about our lives?¹⁸ A Kantian philosopher would argue, roughly, that the universal “I think” comes first. In a non-empirical sense, this “I think” connects each of us cognitively; but with this condition, we can only make empirical claims about our bodies as they appear to us not as they are in themselves. Does the I living in this body give me the confidence to claim something about the self in-itself?¹⁹ Kant could never have theoretical knowledge of a self in-itself. Instead Kant himself deduces only that a strictly formal subject accompanies all of our representations of objects in the world,²⁰ including representations of our own bodies. In Kant’s terms, a transcendental unity of apperception²¹ must be presupposed by all our experiences: this necessary unity enables us to distinguish the external world, including our bodies, from our perception of that world. The basic Kantian lesson is that the “I think”²² and the transcendental unity of apperception²³ must be universal and prior to any empirical knowledge which we have of our bodies; so this is as far as the Kantian philosopher can go confidently: to make assertions about incarnation as a pre-reflective condition which remains unchanged.

We might want to claim more than the Kantian philosopher in terms of confidence as mutual trust in oneself, that is, as being incarnate yet with, what we found Merleau-Ponty describing as “the upsurges” of transcendence setting off new personal discoveries in “the lived through” world. Perhaps Kant’s limit on what we can know could allow for someone to argue that where knowledge ends confidence

¹⁷Kant (1933, pp. 364–366, 377–378 (A401–3, B422).

¹⁸Merleau-Ponty (2002, pp. 71–73).

¹⁹Ibid. (p. 72). This question to Merleau-Ponty may have a partial answer at least in Ricoeur’s grounding of “selfhood” in Spinoza’s *Ethics*; see Ricoeur (1992, 315–317).

²⁰Kant (1933, pp. 152–153) (B131–3).

²¹ibid. (pp. 136–137, 154–155) (A108; cf. B135).

²²Ibid. (pp. 152–153) (B 131–2).

²³Ibid. (pp. 153–155) (B132–5)

in the thinking subject as incarnate, in the sense of a synthetic *a priori* form, is required.²⁴

Transcendental Philosophy, the Lived Body and Confidence

A good question for understanding transcendental philosophy's relation to phenomenology is, how would the transcendental subject²⁵ square with the lived body? Would the latter have to replace the former? Even if the answer is "yes", the lived body might not be any less problematical, especially when it comes to gender, than the transcendental subject. Both Merleau-Ponty's lived body and Kant's transcendental subject have been criticised by certain feminist philosophers for presenting an exclusively masculine perspective on the body and/or subject.²⁶

To locate a crucial difference between "transcendental" as an adjective describing the subject and "transcendence" as a movement of the subject either beyond (following Sartre) or within its embodiment, I propose to seek the ethical and epistemic significance of confidence. This difference between a condition which is transcendental and an incarnate form which is transcendence might seem imprecise, but metaphors of location and movement in space can help here. The transcendental subject might be said to give confidence in the sense of trust in myself to know the world as it appears to me. In contrast, transcendence of the subject within the corporeal implies ethical confidence in an often ambiguous pre-personal, pre-reflective capability cleaving to, yet pulling-away from the life of the incarnate self inasmuch as another. Again, the lived body is ambiguous, if not self-contradictory: there seems to be another beyond, yet within the capable self.

At this stage, what more can be said about confidence? It is a social phenomenon of (mutual) trust in oneself, or possibly faith in oneself inasmuch as another. This phenomenon is also inter-subjective in the sense of its social nature, including pre-personal aspects making it possible to live our lives together. The existential phenomenologist might also identify cognitive and bodily confidence as a variable of the human condition. As human, confidence is inevitably gendered by the subject's social-historical locatedness. In one sense, this gendering of confidence is inevitable, even necessary: confidence as a personal-social phenomenon cannot be neutral; it must be gendered and cannot be anything else as long as every person has a "sex" and a material distinctiveness which are associated with her or his body. In another sense—that in which we live or experience—gender is always contingent; it varies. Gender is located in space historically, socially and materially. The dual sense of gender renders it both a necessary condition of our bodily experiences of living together and a variable of history and culture. Due to this dialectical relation,

²⁴Cf. Ricoeur (1992, pp. 240–296).

²⁵Kant (1933, pp. 364–366, 377–378) (A401–2, B422).

²⁶For a feminist critique of Kant's transcendental subject, see Battersby (1998, pp. 61–80). For feminist criticism of Merleau-Ponty, see Le Doeuff (2003, pp. 79–85); and Kruks (2006).

gender not only affects the subject's bodily and cognitive confidence, but also the objective appearances of ethical and epistemological credibility affect constructions of gender.²⁷ Moreover, what we find with confidence, so too with the gendering of other personal and social phenomena: contingent inhibitions and ambiguities of the phenomena's fleshy locatedness restrict transcendence as incarnate. Transcendence "of" or "as" a fundamental capability is rendered ambiguous insofar as a specific capacity of the "I can" becomes the "I cannot" of a lost or weakened self-confidence.

We might imagine that, in phenomenological terms, the awareness of confidence arises at the point in time when and at the place where corporeal, cognitive and spiritual capacities are being weakened or damaged by gender. Yet the question raised by this phenomenology of confidence is whether the gendering which results in a loss of self-trust—especially for women who are socially constituted like Eve—presupposes a retrievable form of so-called innocent capability. Faced with the apparently vulnerable capacities of individual bodies, the phenomenologist who elucidates an ethical task, might and can seek to strengthen transcendence as incarnate in human subjects by returning to and taking seriously the disabilities suffered by a fragile body. Understood in the French phenomenological terms which I have been setting out here, transcendence incarnate requires that we approach the lived body as the *a priori* unifying or synthesising "form" of our self-perception, as well as our ethical and spiritual knowledge. The capable form of the fleshy body is supposed to be where each one of us begins. But in what sense can we say that a synthetic *a priori* form exists? You might wonder why this question tends to return us to an old myth of an original capability, something like an innocent state of nature. Isn't the story about Eve both a false and a bad myth? If this story still matters, can it be reconfigured phenomenologically as a good myth for regulating gender?²⁸

There remain a number of critical issues which support a contemporary revival of phenomenology and of myths about a pre-personal capable state (of nature). Not least of these issues is whether on a personal level we can avoid treating male bodies as subjects (like Adam) and female bodies as objects of a gendered gaze? If we recast Eve in the myth of innocence and wholeness, can we avoid treating her (ultimately) as expelled from the world of confident male subjects; that is, as an abject. Basically, abjection refers to an act of expulsion.²⁹ The abject woman is expelled in order to give the sharp boundaries to man's identity in all its purity. The question is whether the identity of "the first sex" necessarily requires the abjection of "the second sex" with its negative connotations.

²⁷ Anderson (2004, pp. 87–102). For a more sustained work on the ethics of knowing, see Fricker (2007).

²⁸ Ricoeur (2007, pp. 2, 39, 47–52).

²⁹ Anderson (1998, pp. 189–230).

The Gender of Confidence: Eve's Awakening

This chapter began with Michèle Le Doeuff's appropriation of Jeanne Hersch's portrait of Eve's temptation. This gendered portrait illustrates the way in which the mythical Eve awakens to the possibilities of her bodily and cognitive capacities which regulate the epistemic confidence of our corporeal and spiritual practices. To complete the quotation from where the opening account left off:

... As if after a dream, an infinite absence, this right hand that touches herself, knows that it is touching. This touched cheek feels touched. Eve knows herself. She listens and knows that she listens.³⁰

The question of the degree of confidence is contentious. In particular, when it comes to the corporeality of the spiritual, as another way of describing transcendence incarnate, why do some body-subjects not put trust in their own corporeality? Why do others express the spirituality of their bodies with a jubilant over-confidence?

The implicit movement of transcendence in becoming incarnate presupposes the lived body as the vehicle for self-affection.³¹ In broadly Kantian terms, Eve might portray the regulative myth which limits our claims to knowledge of the body in-herself. Can it represent more than this? Admittedly, for those who know "their Kant", I don't need to say that his transcendental philosophy generates a paradox of self-affection; but this is as far as he goes. Elsewhere I've argued that this paradox can be treated as a tension between two ways of looking at the self-affecting subject: the self is both affected by and affecting its own self; both one thing and another at the same time. My manner of conceiving gender today might derive its dialectical form from this treatment of self-affection. To some degree, the distinction between two points of view on how we understand ourselves avoids ambiguity, while maintaining a serious tension. But both the ambiguity and the tension are resisted by those philosophers who refuse Kant's transcendental idealism. The existential phenomenologist might be called Kantian or post-Kantian, depending on how she or he treats self-affection.

Le Doeuff's portrait of Eve leaves open the possibility that we know something more about the body (via a Bachelardian imaginary)³² than is given to us as fully socialised persons, despite the gendering of the subject's knowledge as that of the second sex. This possibility is evident in the ways in which the degrees of epistemic confidence vary according to how one is gendered by particular social locations, religious traditions or cultures. A significant ambiguity does become acutely evident in the bodily and cognitive achievements which are recorded in the history of the lived experiences of individual women. I take as my focus the example of ethical confidence related to moral knowledge. Women possess the capacity for cognitive

³⁰Le Doeuff (2003, pp. 67–68).

³¹Kant (1933, especially pp. 166–169) (B153–8).

³²Le Doeuff explains that she is in part reliant on Bachelard's conception of the imaginary, yet her own originality moves beyond Bachelard on the relation of the imaginary to conceptual thinking, see Le Doeuff (2002, pp. 2–7 f.).

certainty and credibility, and yet instead of a confident, “I can”, women frequently experience a self-imposed “I cannot” when it comes to the creation or reflection upon moral philosophy. As Le Doeuff would say, women have not been allowed to have “their own ideas” (i.e. to be recognised and to recognise oneself as having original ideas); or they have been dis-inherited systematically from claiming their knowledge as their own. For Le Doeuff, knowledge has no sex until it has been appropriated by men and kept from women like Eve.³³ Even if this imposition of the “I cannot” onto a capable life is due to women’s social formation, the history of female lives demonstrates how women both block and have been actively blocked from asserting a confident “I can do Y”.³⁴

This lack of confidence is powerfully exemplified by the self-portrait of Beauvoir in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, especially when it is placed alongside of her *Ethics of Ambiguity*. At least to some degree unwittingly, Beauvoir exhibits both the prohibition of women from knowledge and the liberation of women from thinking that knowledge has not had a sex or gender! Beauvoir’s writing of her memoirs reveals how deeply ambiguous both subjectivity and transcendence had become for women in Western European intellectual history. Not only is her transcendence ambiguous, but the “I can” necessary for a woman’s confidence becomes inhibited by the gendered formation of human incarnation.

If we pay special attention to Eve’s self-affecting gestures as movements of transcendence, they exhibit still nascent motions of listening and touching which both cleave to the capable body and are at risk: the projects of transcendence can deny the incarnate capability of gendered—racially, ethnically or otherwise socially shaped—bodies. Confidence as a social phenomenon, but also as a practical disposition of trust in, or faith with oneself as another, remains vulnerable to personal contingencies. These manifest themselves in various ways in the lives of individual bodies. Eve listens and knows that she listens... but to what or to whom? We have seen that for the French phenomenologist pre-personal communication is corporeal—or, fleshy—and corporate; yet on a personal-social level, communication is not always fair, relational and open. It is not only a person’s social formation, but each person’s relation to the intellectual and spiritual content at issue: this will determine the degree to which and the manner in which confidence is aptly gendered. Ideally this would be without the binary opposition of a first and second sex, but possibly with gendered bodies on a continuum of bodily differences, including sexual, racial, genetic, physical, cognitive and so on. Essentially the ethical value of gender is variable with either good or bad, positive or negative affects on confidence. Whether socially or cognitively affected, the variability and vulnerability of a woman’s confidence is exposed in the epistemic practices which have been unfair,

³³Le Doeuff (2003, pp. 33–39, 67–68).

³⁴For an especially lucid response, which brings in the idea of the capable human subject (*homo capax*), to the contestations generated by placing Ricoeur’s work on narrative identity in various concrete contexts, see Ricoeur (1997, pp. xxxix–1).

for example, to the credibility of women's claims (to knowledge) in the history of philosophy and of religion.

The Kantian picture of the autonomous subject which I have preferred (in the past) is the at-least—potentially autonomous body³⁵ at the moment of self-encounter. Notice that this is precisely not the incarnate sensibility of the body as maternal; that is, this is not the incarnation of the other within oneself.³⁶ In one of his very last essays, Ricoeur unpacks a highly significant idea:

[this makes] sense of the synthetic operation found in Kant's idea of autonomy, which joins *auto* and *nomos*, oneself as author and the law that obligates. . . this connection coincides with the vulnerability imposed by the fact that the idea of autonomy occupies two apparently contradictory positions: that of being a presupposition and that of being a goal to attain, that of being both a condition of possibility and a task.³⁷

Consistent with the above, our appropriation of the portrait of Eve suggests an initial awareness of the task and possibility of this “autonomous” self who is humanly and fundamentally capable. This awareness is prior to any sense of maternity, or an ethics generated by the Other's demands on the mother's body prior to her giving birth. In a (post)Kantian sense, Eve becomes aware of herself gradually as she also becomes aware of her desire for knowledge of right and wrong: what might be called knowledge of “the law that obligates” (as quoted above). Similarly, she becomes aware of her capacities for affection; intuition, cognition; and spiritual yearning. Certain capacities become evident in a however implicit, yet self-aware assertion, “I can”. Admittedly capability implies power. But this could be a positive power of being able to do as a form of transcendence within incarnate existence which each human body lives. On a more everyday level Eve learns that “she can” know... hence, capability grounds her confidence as prior to bearing the incarnation of another in her body. This initial self-awareness should not be forgotten even in her bearing of new life.³⁸

Arguably, without some idea of autonomy as both a condition and a possibility—including the subject's synthetic operation as described by Ricoeur—a seriously unethical, that is, heteronomous gender blindness would condemn subjects to a condition of hopelessness in the face of injustice and oppression. In my opinion, the

³⁵Ricoeur (2007, p. 83).

³⁶To be fair, consider Merleau-Ponty (1968); and Irigaray (1993, pp. 151–185) cf. Butler (2006).

³⁷Ricoeur (2007, p. 83). This idea could be sharply contrasted to the position found in Levinas (1991, p. 76).

³⁸The social positioning of gender matters: if a woman begins as the Other, and then, is overwhelmed by others where/when does she find her own subject position? Ethical confidence would not necessarily be given to Levinas' ironic host-hostage on whom infinite demands are place: what has to be acknowledged as confused in this picture is that the subject and the other do not start from neutral, pre-personal positions, but from the personal and social locatedness of gender and other social-material hierarchies; cf. Translator's Introduction, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. xvii–xviii.

achievement of ethical confidence will depend upon the social situation, or standing, of the incarnate capable subject.³⁹

Confidence⁴⁰ and Its Lack: The “I Cannot” of Epistemic Injustice

The words which create my second (and last) portrait of the lived body come from a particular historical moment in the gendering of confidence. These words were originally written in retrospect by the woman who in 1929 Paris had just received her results for the highly competitive *agrégation* in philosophy. Her highly impressive—for any man let alone a woman—results made her second in that year’s examination. The following passage from Beauvoir has been the focus of various assessments by feminist philosophers at least since Le Doeuff unpicked them in the “Third Notebook” of *Hipparchia’s Choice*:

[Day after day, and all day long I set myself up against Sartre, and in our discussions I was simply not in his class. . . .⁴¹] ‘One morning in the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Medici fountain, I outlined for him that pluralist morality which I had fashioned to justify the people I liked but did not wish to resemble: he ripped it to shreds. I was attached to it, because it allowed me to take *my heart* as the arbiter of good and evil; I struggled with him for three hours. In the end I had to admit I was beaten: besides, I had realized, in the course of our discussion, that many of my opinions were based only on prejudice, bad faith or thoughtlessness, that my reasoning was shaky and that my ideas confused. “I’m no longer sure what I think, or even if I think at all,” I noted, completely thrown. My pride was not involved. I was by nature curious rather than imperious and preferred learning to shining.⁴²

³⁹Young (2005, p. 45); this chapter was first presented at the Mid-West Division of the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) in October 1977, and first published Young 1990. For a more recent attempt to revise Young’s phenomenological model of reading gendered confidence, by focusing on the cultivation of the lived body’s motility and spatiality to transcend gender-limits, see Chisholm (2008, pp. 9–40).

⁴⁰Here I am indebted to a philosophical account of confidence developed by Bernard Williams (2006, p. 219) (also see pp. 170–171; A.W. Moore, “Commentary”, in Williams 2006). In Williams’ words,

The first questions that should come to mind about ethical confidence are questions of social explanation. This does not mean it has nothing to do with rational argument. . . . if we try to generate confidence without rational argument or by suppressing it, we are quite likely to fail . . . [Confidence] has a price, and the price should not be set too high (p. 170).
 . . . One question we have to answer is how people, or enough people, can come to possess a practical confidence that. . . will come from strength and not the weakness of self-deception and dogmatism. (Confidence is not the same as optimism; it could rest on. . . the pessimism of strength) (p. 171).

I suggest that the pessimism which can generate an ironic strength of confidence prevents the danger of the optimism of Adam’s “confidence” after the fall coming from the weakness of self-deception.

⁴¹Beauvoir (1963, p. 344).

⁴²Le Doeuff (2006, p. 136); cf. Beauvoir (1963, p. 344).

... Sartre wasn't the only one who forced me to take a more modest view of myself; Nizan, Aron, and Politzer were all much further advanced than I was. ... they had all explored much more fundamentally than I had the consequences of the inexistence of God and brought their philosophy right down to earth.⁴³

The above was written by the mature Simone de Beauvoir about her earlier self whose philosophical ideas were torn apart by her soon-to-be partner Jean-Paul Sartre who, by the way, failed his *agrégation* the first time round. Le Doeuff implies that Sartre suffers from “an Adam complex” in claiming that God is dead and so he (man) alone is his only authority on matters of truth.⁴⁴ In *Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir also admits that: “man... tries in vain to make himself God.”⁴⁵ Yet as a woman philosopher of the generation after Beauvoir, Le Doeuff questions the account which Beauvoir herself gives (in 1956) to Sartre's unquestioned philosophical authority. Le Doeuff indicates—on the one hand—an absurd lack of confidence in the account of such a brilliant young woman—who completely gives into the view of her male contemporary of the utter worthlessness of her outline for a pluralist morality after one difficult conversation in the park and, on the other hand, the account of this incident illustrates an all too apparent over-confidence of a man who takes on and maintained the superior (cognitive) authority of THE philosopher!

Le Doeuff contends in response to Beauvoir's expressed preference for “learning” to “shining”, that to prefer honest learning to showing-off and impressing other people is the more significant stance to take for doing philosophy; and it has been since ancient times.⁴⁶ Not knowing in pursuit of knowledge; uncertainty in pursuit of certainty, or uncertainty accompanied by openness to learning is the attitude which, according to Le Doeuff, philosophers today should preserve or instil anew in contemporary women and men. But of course, the danger for our discussions of transcendence incarnate is that, for example, Descartes' own pursuit of an indubitable by way of methodological doubt depends upon the mind's confidence without reliance on the body.⁴⁷

⁴³ Beauvoir (1963, p. 344); emphasis added; cf. (2006, p. 136 f.); Moi (1994, pp. 15–37); Fricker (2003, pp. 216–217). For further discussion of Beauvoir and epistemic injustice as generated by a lack of confidence, see Fricker (2007, pp. 50–1 f.). Also on epistemic credibility in the context of racial and gender issues, see Alcoff (2000, pp. 250–253). Alcoff is also insightful on the ways in which historical and cultural practices are learnt—by head and heart.

⁴⁴ Le Doeuff (2006, p. 191).

⁴⁵ Beauvoir (1976, p. 10).

⁴⁶ Le Doeuff (2006, p. 136). However different, both Socrates and Descartes would agree: not knowing in pursuit of knowledge, or uncertainty in pursuit of certainty, comes closer to the attitude necessary for becoming a true philosopher.

⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Le Doeuff finds hope in the confident “I can” of the lived body in rejecting sexist objectifications of female bodies; in turn, Descartes' indubitable looks like overconfidence which ignores its dependence—lack; he requires another to ensure his connection to other bodies, even his own, to other minds and the world(s) exhibits hope in agreeing that the awakened body of Eve symbolises how a woman can recognize her original desire for knowledge, awaken to her listening and to a pleasant surprise in the discovery of her own ideas and in the pursuit of genuine (self)-learning. The awakened bodies of women should not be forgotten or replaced by the rigid,

More recently a woman philosopher of the generation after Le Doeuff, Miranda Fricker has recognized the sinister nature of gender implied by both the man and the woman in the philosophical conversation which took place that day in 1929 Paris. In Fricker's words:

Any woman who has had the experience of being a philosophy student among a majority of young men will find a particular poignancy in the scene recounted, for it is so obvious what is going on. What female philosophy student has not had that discursive experience with some clever young man ready to be one's superior if one gives him the least encouragement? One finds oneself audience to a dress-rehearsal of another's emerging intellectual authority, and this experience typically involves being on the receiving end of a (perhaps naively enthusiastic) barrage of competitive energy still so automatic in many young men and so alien to so many young women, who may or may not have the political and emotional resources to experience the exchange for what it is. Beauvoir did not have these resources . . . so she could not do what one knows the young woman philosophy student really must do to survive: avoid those conversations, or (better) neutralize their impact by writing them off as "one of those" – think of them like the rain.⁴⁸

Yet in fact as Fricker goes on to point out—it is Beauvoir whose own writings came to help us become aware that the sinister force in this story is that of gender:

We are indebted to Beauvoir for the better conceptual and hermeneutical resources we now have to see such quotidian philosophical crushings for the banal gender performance they are. . . . [but] one must not forget, after all, that [Sartre] was as subject to gender as [Beauvoir] was (if never so disadvantaged by it) and consequently stood to lose a great deal in any failure to deliver the discursive performance of a self-styled superior – indeed, according to Beauvoir's account of her own psychology, he would have risked losing *her*.⁴⁹

So Beauvoir's gendered standpoint meant she would only have a man of superiority as her life-long partner. Does this mean her gendered "I cannot" (be a philosopher) was self-imposed? To answer we must be able to get beyond (or is it behind?) this experience of a lack of confidence due to the imposition of gender; that is, due to the limitation on the "I can" of the body as nevertheless a capable life. Beauvoir's particular historical and social gender-type meant that she wanted a man who was intellectually superior to her in philosophy and this is what she got. But she also transformed for us imagery of gender, including the myth of Eve as virgin or mother, which in Beauvoir's time and context, would have prevented her from recognising and challenging sexist oppression at all. So her philosophy gives to us new confidence for the lived body in the transformation of gender. In other words, she unwittingly helps us to recognise transcendence incarnate as the lived body's form of confidence and so as the possibility for new personal discoveries in relation to the lived through world.

immanent *en-soi* who was Sartre's other—or the objectified body of the heterosexual gaze. Cf. Le Doeuff (2003, pp. 79–82); Fricker (2007, p. 49).

⁴⁸Fricker (2003, pp. 217–218); Cf. Fricker (2007, pp. 50 f.).

⁴⁹Fricker (2003, p. 218).

Conclusion

With the two portraits in this chapter, I have intended to stress that the gendering of confidence is a feminist issue for philosophers, perhaps especially for feminist phenomenologists of religious myth. Confidence is gendered as a personal-social and historical phenomenon which varies; the implication is that we cannot simply assign a fixed gender role which values each and every bodily or cognitive capacity as masculine strength or feminine weakness. The ambiguous lines of gender are complex.

Once inhibition is self- or other-imposed spiritually onto the corporeal, and more specifically, the female body is inhibited as immanent, natural, material—without the self-expression of transcendence incarnate—then we are left vulnerable to, on the one hand, the over-confidence of (say) Sartre’s so-called Adam complex,⁵⁰ and on the other hand, an account of abject bodies (say) as disgusting, slimy and nauseous female bodies—a situation which is easily extended by philosophical theologians to all fleshiness and life in the flesh. Such abjection undermines a woman’s own self-perception and so her confidence, while “a superiority complex” can easily be forced on the male subject, too, by the sinister nature of gender: Beauvoir wanted a superior man and so Sartre needed to be superior, just as much as he would undoubtedly have sought this superiority, especially in his attempt to be a man-made God.

One way in which this asymmetrical situation of gender has been countered is for women to deny their bodily nature. For example, as we found Beauvoir claiming for the Kantian, “the human person transcends empirical embodiment”.⁵¹ But can a non-typically gendered woman or man ultimately have the confidence in her-his own cognitive capacities, or generally, confidence in the power to act, without acknowledging those excluded specificities read as “disabilities”, of her-his own bodily existence? I do not think that self-perception as either an object or a subject of a transcendent position which ignores gendered specificities is an adequate alternative. There are better ways forward for ethical confidence.

Another stance which I have mentioned is that of abjection—this is the point at which the subject’s identity is recognized in a moment of rupture by the expelling of a pre-personal, inter-subjectivity (as read in feminist psycholinguistic terms, as the unity with the maternal). Yet this way is equally plagued with dangers for the lived body and her or his confidence, even if abjection is one way out of choosing between *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, being immanent or transcendent. I argue in a 1998 publication that abjection is “the most propitious place for communication”

⁵⁰But note that the Sartre-Beauvoir paradigm is only one possible account of gender in philosophy—and Sartre’s account of transcendence and immanence is not the only or the worst manifestation of gender-bias in philosophy. In fact, there is a sense in which Sartre’s assumptions concerning the strength of transcendence are not typical of much western understandings of masculine bodily and cognitive strength: Sartre’s negative view of the body (especially his own) has him devaluing physical immanence (*en-soi*), and instead he finds strength in a creative form of transcendence (*pour-soi*) which virtually denies bodily strength.

⁵¹Beauvoir (1976, p. 17); see p. 6 above.

between self-affecting subjects under patriarchy.⁵² Roughly, I thought that this was a place for the transformation of patriarchy by reincorporating the abject maternal into accounts of self-affection; today I am not so convinced by this.⁵³ Instead I have tried to argue in this chapter that there is significance in elucidating a pre-personal capable life in order to understand the ambiguity of the lived body, gender and confidence; and I have described this significance in terms of transcendence incarnate, signifying the grounds for a new ethical confidence within women's incarnate existence. Building on this phenomenological description, feminist philosophers of religion generally might find that the affirmation of life in a fundamental capability is the key to self-confidence: both self-affirmation and other-approbation are, then, necessary for confidence in the power to act.

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⁵²Anderson (1998, pp. 228–230).

⁵³And yet Paul Fiddes (in Chapter 17) offers a highly significant reading of the site where the semiotic *chora* in Kristeva constitutes a place for transformation within the subject and so culture. Fiddes argues that "the body" is the site of both continuity and change.

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Chapter 12

In Defence of Female Genius: Maude Royden and Passionate Celibacy

Alison Jasper

Abstract Genius is a concept, derived from a pre-Christian European past which has been identified with the creativity of an exclusively masculine, transcendent, disembodied and idealised god. This identification has encouraged the view that women, in so far as they represent both singularity and materiality, cannot exemplify the divine creativity of genius and that, for the same reasons, the feminine has no part in any understanding of the creativity of the transcendent divine. Julia Kristeva's re-vision of "female genius" draws on psycholinguistics and also her own use of revolt to claim that the feminine and especially the feminine maternal, far from being excluded from genius, constitutes the key to its dynamics.

I use Kristeva on female genius to shed light on the life and work of Maude Royden (1876–1956). Royden, an early campaigner for women's ordination, exhibits female genius insofar as, celebrated or not, she exceeds the boundaries set against her by patriarchal ideologies. Royden helps gradually to reveal what these ideologies are excluding, while proposing a creative alternative.

Keywords Female Genius · Representation · Semiotic · Singularity · Maude Royden · Julia Kristeva

In the Beginning

In the beginning God created the world.

Today there are scholars who accept that there is a connection between the God of Genesis 1 whose very word and breath were the means of creation, the Word or *Logos* of John's Gospel and the figure of Wisdom, Sophia—the female hypostasis of divine creativity from the Old Testament and Apocryphal Wisdom literature. On the whole, however, the Biblical persona of the divine creator is still largely

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masculine. There is even less doubt about the masculinity of the *logos spermatikos* of Stoic cosmology, for example, who, in Christine Battersby's words, was like "great male animal, panting with hot fiery breaths and ejecting sperm out of which a new universe grew when the old one died" (1989, p. 59). For the Romantics in a European context the connection between pro/creativity and divinity effectively crystallized in terms of a gendered notion of human genius. What had begun as divine possession or inspiration creating and producing change became the fullness of virile energy (Battersby, 1989, p. 3) achieving the same, or at least comparable, effect. Though it made no direct recourse to a transcendent divine, this modern view of genius was still an apotheosis of traits and activity deemed masculine even when possessed by women (Battersby, 1989, p. 3). Correspondingly, it was impossible to ascribe positive value to femininity or, by association, to women, except by bracketing off their gender. This very brief genealogical reference should be enough to indicate why "female genius" has not, until recently, been celebrated in the Christian west; the concept of genius was too closely related to a masculine-gendered view of divinity. And the work of feminist theologians over the last fifty years leaves little room to doubt that the relationship between divinity and femininity has been framed until very recently indeed, by a view of woman's earthbound, material singularity linking her to the impurities of blood, sex, and guilt. Equally as significantly, it has absolutely excluded the feminine from the purified realm of ideas and creative thinking.

Do we have to continue this way? There are surely no longer good reasons why genius—celebrated because it creates, enlivens, and transforms our worlds in extraordinary ways—should be distinguished from femininity or from the work women do and have done in the past, for example, to bring us to this point of recognition. In spite of the difficult relationship between a Christian God and womankind in the past, it is also clear that there have always been women who contested the truth of the Christian symbolic construction of gender and, arguably, transformed our worlds by their creative resistances. There have always been women who contested the implications of patriarchal ideology, supported in Christian theology and praxis. They have done this by refusing marriage and motherhood and by other behaviors interpreted as mad, bad or dangerous.¹ They have also done this in work that bridges the perceived gap between female bodiliness and masculine mind, through writing and making works of art, scholarship and science. Back in the 1970s and 80s theologians like Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza were arguing that mapping the description of God's relationship with his people in terms of relationships between men and (wifely/childishly

¹For example, the popular second-century Encratist text the *Acts of Paul*, which contains the story of Thecla who resisted her parents' attempts to force her to marry Thamyris in order to follow Paul. See also Rudolf of Fulda's ninth-century *Life of Lioba* that recounted how Lioba's parents conspired to help her suitor Burthred enter her bedroom and force himself on her while she was asleep (Happily, she was providentially spared and she escaped!). See Eleanor McLaughlin, "Women Power and the Pursuit of Holiness in Medieval Christianity" and Karen Armstrong "The Acts of Paul and Thecla", (in Loades [Ed.] 1990).

disobedient) women has been one of the most powerful ways in which people in Christian cultures have “been led to imagine”² female subordination and to justify their failure to recognize women’s creativity. So did they, in fact, overstate the case? Surely not! They have rightly stressed the stifling effect of patriarchal, Christian culture and its politics of memory that continues to “forget” achievements that can’t be measured against a patriarchal scale of values. These memories of extraordinary women are undoubtedly occluded by the view that women don’t or can’t “do genius” or be creative in the extraordinary “godlike” way of antiquity. I accept the conclusions of a generation of feminist writers that patriarchal cultures have always attempted and often succeeded in controlling and immobilizing women (and anyone who fails to fit the pattern of heterosexual gender). Nevertheless, it seems counter-intuitive to assume that women have no capacity to transform worlds or that they have had no hand already in doing so through their creativities—both maternal and otherwise—and their resistances to the prevailing patriarchal culture.

Julia Kristeva on Female Genius

To give this intuition some theoretical substance, consider how the philosopher Julia Kristeva, re-visions female genius. She offers an alternative to the view of genius as a combination of divine transcendence and pro/creative masculine virility. Since at least the 1960s, Kristeva has been strongly informed by psychoanalysis. It makes sense, then, that her theoretical ideas should reflect in some way this discursive territory. The idea of female genius is no exception. It draws on her psycholinguistic account of the “subject-in-process” and particularly on her idea of the semiotic which is associated closely with the maternal body and a birthing role. For Kristeva, the semiotic is a form of signification bound up with the libidinal investment of gestures, colors, phonic entities or other sensory, rhythmic constituents (to which she gives the name *chora*) of our earliest experiences. The semiotic has multiple points of reference, not all of them identified with early infancy—a time before speech—but sometimes with the purely visual imagery of dreams,³ crucially with poetic language—particularly the unsettling, exciting, disturbing language of poetry and literature called “avant-garde”—and the maternal body itself. She claims that these semi- or non-linguistic perceptions are mediated when we are infants, on the one hand through maternal love which settles us in our absorption with the body and its pleasurable energies and, on the other hand, through maternal abjection which is a

²Introducing the idea of “revision”, Adrienne Rich encourages women to undertake what she called “a radical critique of literature”. She said this “would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh” (Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ [1971], in Gelpi and Gelpi [Eds.] 1993, p. 167).

³See Sjöholm (2005, pp. 23–25).

visceral revolt or turning away from that body and absorption with it,⁴ brought about in the dawning of a sense of who “I” am, derived from negation; “I” am “not this” (breast, milk, faeces. . .). The oscillation both towards and away from the maternal body becomes, in Kristeva’s theoretical unpacking of the subject-in-process, both the framework and the dynamic of our later lives as complex speaking and thinking subjects. In other words, we are born and continually renewed as subjects-in-process as a result of an “impossible dialectics” (Sjöholm 2005, p. 50) between pleasurable absorption in affective embodiment and a form of negativity or revolt from it—something Kristeva might also describe as a strangeness to ourselves. The semiotic oscillation creates something akin to a semi-porous membrane separating yet connecting un-representable bodily experience to forms of representation in language and writing. Its origins and energies derive from our relationship to the (maternal) body yet at the same time, it constitutes us as speaking, thinking beings.

By drawing what amounts to a kind of analogy, Kristeva aligns the semiotic within the subject-in-process—with female genius understood as a kind of maternal role in its dual modes of love and abjection. Cecilia Sjöholm suggests that whereas Simone de Beauvoir had complained of “culture’s destruction of female genius and the incapacity of women to transcend their corporeal position . . . Kristeva places the idea of genius not in transcendence but in an affirmation of the maternal position situated between nature and culture” (Sjöholm 2005, p. 57). It is important to stress here that female genius shouldn’t be entirely identified with inarticulate affect or undirected energy. The female genius, like the semiotic, is invested in the complex processes of symbolization as a whole. Above all else, and typically in language, the semiotic *connects* body and mind, sexuality and thought, politics and pleasure, affect and representation. In other words, Kristeva’s insightful reference to the semiotic in the context of female genius, indicates her concern with a resistance related to the maternal role, but not one that is somehow exiled outside of language and culture but rather a dimension of the signifying process itself: “It is not a murky undercurrent of language, but an aspect of it” (Sjöholm 2005, p. 22).

Kristeva’s theoretical construction of the semiotic and the relationship she traces between it and the female genius is suggestive and, as I have said already, gives some substances to my intuition that however occluded the record may be, women, embodying the feminine maternal associated by Kristeva with the semiotic, really do have the capacity to transform how we work and think and create—and that they have sometimes exercised it. Of course, Kristeva’s reliance on psychoanalytic categories has sometimes come in for criticism. Psychoanalysis’ Oedipal terms have the potential to shore up an idea of primary sexual difference and normative patterns of social and sexual relations.⁵ However, it should also be said that Kristeva does not herself seem much interested in using those terms to pathologize any particular types of sexual identity or in attempting to define im/proper desires (see Sjöholm

⁴Sjöholm (2005, pp. 20–21).

⁵The underlying Oedipal structures are rejected by critics such as Judith Butler, who sees gender as a socially and culturally constructed continuum that resists binary forms of heterosexuality.

2005, p. 54). Nor, in speaking of femininity as maternal, does she attempt to identify women with motherhood or with anything outside language and culture with their paternal/patriarchal indices. As mothers, she thinks women can be geniuses “of love, tact, self-denial, suffering and even evil spells and witchcraft” (Kristeva 2001, p. xv), but as women they are able to contribute something more or besides this, sharing in the creativity of Arendt’s concept of “natality”—which includes birth, life, and the life of the mind (Kristeva 2001, pp. xv, 239)—or, just as much, the resistant immodesty of Colette’s writing about exploring the pleasures of women (Kristeva 2001, pp. xv–xvi). Kristeva’s critics may have a point. Psychoanalysis can be employed to promote normative patterns of gender, sexuality, and subjective development that simply support existing oppressive ideologies. But it is also possible that they fail fully to appreciate how Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic remains part of a broader theoretical supposition associated with the transformative powers of signification within literature and theoretical writing (see Sjöholm 2005, p. 18). In other words, the psycholinguistic framework reflects not only her view of the subject in process straddling a division between categories of “nature and culture”, but also her faith in forms of negativity, revolt, and contestation—also associated with the semiotic—across the board.⁶

The female genius identified by Kristeva is someone who activates the complex interrelationship of affectivity, embodiment, and representation unlocking their unique potential. They do this not by becoming reified in themselves as one representation of a quasi-divine or transcendent idealization of creativity (Kristeva 2001, p. 99), but by the exercise of their own extraordinary ambition or curiosity, pursuing the pleasures of sometimes divergent speech, writing, and interpretation in a singular life. Kristeva continues to take it as read that political and cultural systems built on the basis of male hegemonies have limited women’s lives,⁷ but opens up the possibility that female genius may be about an effective resistance, revealing something new, piece by piece, from personal memory, inventing words or theories out of embodied, material, day-to-day circumstances. Writing about the specific experiences of three women who challenge inherited cultural, social, and intellectual limitations, Kristeva also sees female genius as “a therapeutic invention that keeps us from dying from equality in a world without a hereafter” (Kristeva 2001, p. x). Her rejection of “equality” in this context should not be read as an attack on women’s political aspirations for equal rights but as a critique of the

⁶“...[b]ecause it’s precisely by putting things into question that ‘values’ stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life” (Kristeva 2002, p. 12).

⁷“Everyone knows that women, through an osmosis with the species that makes them radically different from men, inherit substantial obstacles to realizing their genius and to contributing another specific, if not ingenious talent to the culture of humanity that they shelter in their wombs. Many people have thumbed their noses at these insurmountable natural conditions that appear to banish female geniuses for good . . .” (Kristeva 2001, p. xiv).

“society of the spectacle”.⁸ She uses the term “society of the spectacle” to indicate an effort within modern capitalist economies to saturate our experience with a kind of deadening uniformity. This uniformity is constituted through all sorts of banal representations like fast food chains advertising “home cooking” and TV “cop” dramas dealing in low level sadistic excitement. These representations reflect dangerous but seductive ideologies that work by appeasing our desires without the deeper satisfactions that Kristeva believes come from work that contests and challenges these kinds of cheap “one size fits all” representations. These serve to create an apathy that mocks any ambition to address and reshape “the human condition”.⁹ The ambition of the female genius is nothing less than to remake the human condition but not in relation to idealizations from above so much as in a constant interrogation of the way we live now in conditions of embodiment and materiality. But though a life of genius is possible for women, in which existing values and standards are being challenged or put in question, it may still not lead to fame or public influence; what female genius describes will oftentimes not have been recognized in the academy, the church, government, publishing, medicine. When it comes to the ideological contextualization of history or memory it is still possible that, even if people see them, these questioning, challenging gestures will be misread as obscene, trivial or inconsequential. Of her three subjects, Kristeva says “[al]though innovative in its refusal to conform, the genius of these women came at a price: rebels glean their stimulation from their genius, and they pay for it by being ostracized, misunderstood and disdained” (Kristeva 2001, p. xix). Nevertheless, the implication is clear: without implying that men and women have shared a level playing field, as a result of their undaunted curiosity and rebellious resistance, female genius has the capacity to birth significant transformations—perhaps not least in changing the way in which we understand what it means to be female.

Kristeva’s idea of female genius encourages hope for a better future and to search for or imagine rebellious resistance fruitfully at work throughout history, out of the light and in ways as yet untraced. As public events, Kristeva’s studies of female genius themselves function as part of the process of feminist reclamation, reconstruction, and rebirth.¹⁰ The stories of Klein, Arendt, and Colette build into a narrative of creativity through resistance in twentieth-century philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature. Women, from their veiled or marginal standpoints, see things invisible from the center and make connections impossible to others more strategically placed. It is arguable, for example, that Klein extrapolated

⁸Kristeva’s use of the term “the Society of the Spectacle” refers to the work of filmmaker and Situationist intellectual Guy Debord, who published *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. See Jasper 2006a, p. 212 n. 7.

⁹Kristeva argues that women are “able to work toward unique, innovative creations and to remake the human condition” (Kristeva 2001, p. xv).

¹⁰With no lack of confidence, Kristeva describes how she has been able because of her own singularity—and perhaps she would not entirely resist the description also of female genius—because she is herself and specifically herself, she has been able to “introduce the contributions of women to a large segment of the world” (Kristeva 2001, p. xiv).

her innovative approach to psychoanalysis at least partly from observing and enjoying the pleasures of motherhood herself. Arguably her genius lay in recognizing and energetically contesting that this was significant, not “neutral” or “irrelevant” or a specialist branch of knowledge, but a source and grounds for challenging the prevailing psychoanalytical orthodoxies of her day.¹¹

To summarize so far: scholars of various kinds have established over the last forty years or so that much previously passed over as unimportant or unworthy of attention can be seen to be of enormous significance within a differently framed and justified politics of memory. Kristeva’s project of female genius supports and sharpens this memory politics. Coming into focus in three twentieth-century women, the idea of female genius can itself be seen as a form of resistance and ultimately creative transformation of the past in relation to women’s work; in the important role of motherhood certainly but also in thinking, writing, speaking, and changing the worlds in which we live. Kristeva allows us to see that the female genius can be creative not in spite of her body and entanglement with sexuality but precisely because of a maternal position bringing to birth an intellectual creativity rooted in embodiment and recognized as such. Taken together these forms of analysis give us the means to explore the evidence of women in the past who, rebellious and resolute, refused to be gainsaid in pursuing the pleasures and ambitions of singular lives. They challenge us continually to make the effort to remember—or if necessary invent the idea¹²—that women have not simply been the “dead wood” of history and may legitimately claim a form of creativity that challenges both our ideas of woman and of divinity as a (distinctly masculine) transcendence.

Maude Royden (1876–1956)

Kristeva provides us with insights into how we might re-vision female genius in creativity that doesn’t exclude the work of women in birthing children, or reduce writing and thought to a merely transcendent, disembodied activity in which femininity must be bracketed off without acknowledgement of their maternal position. In the history of Christianity it seems inevitable that there have similarly been female geniuses with extraordinary insights to share. Yet they will all have had to contest, in one way or another, with the view that it was men rather than women who could reflect the normatively masculine genius of the creator God.

Maude Royden was one woman with insights to share. As a Christian woman throughout her life she resisted the patriarchal ideology so powerfully allied with elements of the Church. She identified the ways in which they tried to impose their

¹¹“Caring for children had taught [Melanie Klein] that in the beginning is the urge to destroy, an urge that eventually is transformed into madness but that always remains a conduit of desire. Freud had always said as much, but it was Klein who fully developed the notion” (Kristeva 2001, p. xviii).

¹²The reference in this text is to Monique Wittig’s lesbian/feminist utopian, *Les Guerillieres*: “But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent” (1969, p. 89).

idealizations on her life, frustrating her singular ambitions to take up a profession and to love a man. She also produced a body of work—thoughts and words in essays, books, lectures, and sermons—in which she was able creatively to transform or circumvent those idealizations both in what she said and in the fact that she said it.

In the context of the time, she was a privileged and educated woman, the daughter of a wealthy ship owning family from Liverpool which had supported her through school and afterwards for three years at Oxford University. Nevertheless, outside marriage and motherhood at the time, there were still very few career patterns for a woman in her position to follow once she had finished her course and passed her exams.¹³ Since she was able and personable with a good circle of influential friends and contacts, she made her way, working sometimes for money and sometimes as a volunteer, in a woman's settlement in Liverpool, as a parish worker, as a lecturer within the Oxford extension scheme. Her family wealth sustained her in her single life and also allowed her to devote time to causes, notably women's suffrage and pacifism. In time she became a public figure, constantly writing, speaking, and lecturing both at home and abroad, her views and opinions on Christianity and politics sought and published in popular daily papers. She was a whole-hearted supporter of the cause of women's ordination and in 1917, the first Anglican woman publicly to preach in Church.¹⁴ She was a Christian writer and radical of the early twentieth century known to many of the great and the good of her time. To date, however, only one full-length biography has been written (Fletcher 1989) and most of her published work is out of print. Otherwise there are a few scattered references to her in more recent books about the history of women in the English or British church context. Does this mean that her contribution was slight, second-rate, and quickly superseded by more able writers? Or in terms of a politics of memory in search of female genius are her life and work worth further exploration?

Sex and Commonsense

In 1921, Royden gave a series of public lectures that were subsequently published as a book, *Sex and Commonsense*. The theme and Royden's treatment of her topic reveal a good deal about blinkered perceptions of gender at the time. For various reasons, including the toll taken on the lives of young men during the First World War, there were serious limitations facing young women at the time. To put it bluntly, there were too few men to go around in a context in which heterosexual monogamy and motherhood was overwhelmingly the norm for women. People

¹³Women at Oxford University were still unable at that time formally to graduate.

¹⁴She undertook a series of sermons within the non-conformist City Temple in London. Although she was herself an Anglican, the Church of England was still, at this time, adamantly opposed to women preaching inside its churches.

might pity a woman who was unable to fulfil this domestic vocation but very few would have doubted it was a shame and a waste if she could not (Fletcher 1989, p. 117). Nevertheless, Royden writes her lectures in the knowledge that some younger women were beginning to ignore the limitations laid down by Christian tradition and social custom and to make their own arrangements about sex and motherhood.¹⁵ Clearly this had caused consternation amongst Christians at the time, some of whom had been quick to condemn this behavior as immoral. Royden speaks up with furious indignation on behalf of those, including herself, who *had* conformed to the Church's moral teaching. The Church had certainly benefited from what Royden viewed as their sacrifice. Mostly, deprived of partners and children against their dearest hopes, she believed these were women who were consciously channelling their affective and sexual energies into all kinds of voluntary Church work. And yet this sacrifice was going unnoticed and unrewarded, except sometimes by the cruellest kind of mockery that suggested their unmarried condition was merely the result of their failure to be sufficiently desirable to men (Royden 1921, pp. 6–7).

The limitations faced by these young Christian women were mirrored—for different reasons—in Royden's own life. As later readers are aware from the account she later wrote in 1947,¹⁶ Royden wanted to marry a man she loved but couldn't because he was already married. In other words, neither marriage nor sex were options for Royden in 1921. At the same time, her sense that she had sacrificed this for the exigencies of others including the Church, was made even harder to bear by the Church's refusal to accept what she saw as her vocation to Christian leadership simply because she was a woman. In the 1920s women's leadership roles in the Church of England, such as they were, did not stray into the formal and public territory of priestly ministry and preaching within the delimited "sacred spaces" of chancel and pulpit. So that when, at the beginning of her book *Sex and Commonsense* (1921), Royden talks about "humanity's needs" or about framing an authoritative morality for "ourselves" (Royden 1921, p. 5), she must have been well aware that some people would find the implicit claim to Christian leadership difficult to accept. Questions about the authority of women publicly to ask questions or to attempt to provide answers about Scripture, theology or the Church, were as old as Christianity itself. They were usually answered with reference to the biblical injunction against women speaking in Church.¹⁷ This, at least the Church of England in 1921, did not absolutely require. In fact, Royden's energy, effectiveness as a preacher and her commitment were actually welcomed and fully

¹⁵ Emboldened perhaps by the dawning recognition of new status when women gained the vote in 1918.

¹⁶ See TFC 1947 Royden (1947).

¹⁷ 1 Timothy (2:11–15); "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent." 1 Corinthians (14:33–34); "As in all the churches of the saints; women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church".

exploited in some contexts. But the scope of her involvement remained constrained on gender-based grounds and it seems very likely that these lectures on the theme of Christianity and sex in 1921 address a very personal sense of frustration and disenfranchisement.¹⁸

This raises a question. Royden affirms herself as a Christian, but it is hard to see in the circumstances how this could figure as a way of aligning herself with a genius for liberative rebelliousness and curiosity. The Church in this context voices ideological patriarchal thinking that seems preoccupied with limiting her fields of action. Yet it could be said that this was what constituted Royden's genius; she fought and struggled to escape diminishing expectations. She was a female genius in the business of transforming perceptions of what was "owed to" her and others as women. She demonstrated her genius in voicing her challenge to limited expectations in the strength of her ambition as a singular woman. In so doing, she helped open the way to further transformations in the ways in which women could conceive of themselves and what they might achieve.

Maude Royden and Passionate Celibacy

The female genius is nothing if not a woman who brings her singularity, the totality of who she is and what she wants, to bear upon the world in which she finds herself. As a liberal "first wave" feminist, Royden objects to the prohibition on her official role in the Church in the first place as a matter of discrimination and she puts her mind to fighting it. At that time, Royden was starting over in the Church of England, often fighting the same battles as she had during her involvement with the earlier suffrage campaign and drawing on that experience, in order to convince people that a woman could and indeed needed to make political choices to speak and act just as a man did. Some of her fellow Anglicans—in spite of the changes to the civil laws on suffrage—still vehemently opposed the idea that it was right or even possible for a woman to speak on her own behalf in public or in church.¹⁹

But in these circumstances, against official and clerical voices within the Church, Royden finds her justification for speaking out in the Gospels. She is highly sensitized to the ways in which man-made discriminations or hierarchies give some people power over others and regards this as the attempt to limit what might be called a god-given equal opportunities policy. In *Sex and Commonsense*, for example, Royden says,

¹⁸Anglican women were no longer barred from serving on Anglican Parochial Church Councils on the same terms as men after 1919 (Enabling Act).

¹⁹"No doubt a woman's voice must be heard in these 'modernist' days . . . But all this is unofficial . . . The really pleasant and devout communicant does not speak where she has any single man (brother, husband or father) to be her spokesman". (Fletcher, 1989:p. 144)

When people speak as though it were one of the weaknesses of Christianity that it appeals, or seems to appeal, more to women than to men, I ask you to believe that sometimes consciously, often quite unconsciously, women respond with passionate gratitude to Christ, because of His sublime teaching that every human soul was made for God, and that no part or section of society, no race, no class and no sex, was made for the convenience of another (Royden 1921, p. 13).

Royden argues that differences between men and women are commonly exaggerated by those intent on their own advantage. *Sex and Commonsense* begins, for example, with a critique of gender stereotypes: Why is it somehow acceptable for men to have sexual needs and even to satisfy them through exploiting women as prostitutes while women's sexual needs are denied? Or, if they are not denied, why are they thought to be less intense? Royden is aware of the ways in which gender is being constructed in relation to specific social and especially sexual practices in the interests of shoring up patriarchal structures. Crucially, she also understands that the Christian Church has helped to police these structures. Like more contemporary feminist theorists (Le Doeuff 2003; Althaus Reid 2004) she could see that patriarchal Christianity and society at large often acted in concert, to control women through their sexuality—arbitrarily determining what counted as appropriate behavior in terms of a conformity which sat ill with any woman's ambition to take on a significant leadership role.

Was Royden's confidence in the rationality and goodness of a creator God justified? What is more easily gauged is that her claim for justice and the equality of the sexes within the context of Church life was rooted in the circumstances of her life with its singular ambitions and frustrations—the Church's refusal to acknowledge her vocation and the pressure to see herself as a failure in sexual terms. What is also clear is that she accords to her own singular and "impossible dialectics" a powerful authorization as is only to be expected from the female genius! In continually challenging the rules, she is in dialogue with pleasures and pains rooted in her embodied experience as a woman frustrated yet still working to find a better means of representing who she is or is not—a more satisfying symbolization that fully acknowledges her "maternal position" and her condition of embodiment between "nature and culture." So she writes about a God who creates and rules according to a divinely compassionate egalitarianism, mirroring her own ambition. The Christian position equates to a "common sense" as Royden understands it. The wisdom of Jesus disallows discrimination and injustice against women but not as a principle or rule but in relation to a quality of human—male and female—intuition, understanding, and empathy most perfectly exemplified in the incarnation. Jesus' understanding of the human heart is not some sort of esoteric knowledge only available to God but akin to the "common" aspirations of ordinary men and women, as Royden accounts herself ordinary. Speaking from outside the institutional framework, Royden's view reflects a vote of confidence in her own genius—bringing something productive to birth by challenging that which seeks to silence her and fails in its symbolic representation fully to acknowledge and account for the sources of her frustration or the means to satisfy her longings. She gives expression to all

this in an implicit polarity between “religious people” and her own interpretation of the Gospel.

Religious people do sometimes think such mean things of human nature, and human nature is, for the most part, so much nobler, so much more loyal, so much more loving than we imagine (Royden 1921, p. 44).

Royden writes that men and women have an equal vocation to Christ-like perfection (Royden 1921, p. 101). But although this perfection is determined by the example of Christ, for Royden, Christ’s exemplary actions and words themselves reflect a common sense of what is right and appropriate. So much then is clear—Royden rebelliously rejects the judgement of the Church that she is unworthy; this judgement goes against what she understands as common sense and is a matter of out and out patriarchal discrimination. If confirmation is needed, it is there in the Gospels.

Of course, it is also true that Royden holds opinions on sexuality and marriage consistent with the idea that the Church’s ruling should be upheld and its view of sexual morality respected. But once again, these rulings are only authoritative for her when they reflect a view of something she might have chosen to do because it made sense to her rather than because it represented some existing social or cultural norm. Female genius in this context lies in being able to discriminate—to know or perceive what makes sense and what does not in conditions designed to undermine our confidence—invoking the whole embodied process of symbolic representation as one that crucially relies on a *connection* between body and mind, sexuality and thought, politics and pleasure, affect and representation. In *Sex and Commonsense*, Royden argues that sex and marriage belong together. But her reasons, seen in context, still strike the rebellious note. These are not the reasons typically put forward in defence of restrictive sexual practices based on patriarchal notions of property, male honor or hatred of the body, for example. She is utterly scathing about those in the churches who loudly claim the moral high ground on adultery and sex before marriage, but fail to address the appalling ignorance about sex that plagued the lives of many very ill-prepared young people coming forward at that time for marriage, creating a burden of shame and misery that sometimes blighted entire lives. At a time when bodies and sex remained taboo subjects for many people, Royden boldly claimed that far from being a matter of shame, a sexual act between two equal partners partook of divine creativity.²⁰ And her view that sex makes marriage real rather than that marriage legitimates sex represents a heady ambition to make more of both sex and marriage.

²⁰It does have to be admitted here that the sexual act she had in mind was undoubtedly heterosexual.

Of course, from a twenty-first century perspective, her view of sex still looks discriminatory—for one thing, it seems distinctly heterosexist.²¹ But it is perhaps unfair to condemn Royden too harshly though it is also a salient indication that—genius or no—she had not found all the answers. The situation, as must frequently be the case, was complex. Shaw and Royden would have married if they could. However, Shaw was already married to a woman he would not divorce. It appears that she was very dependent on him and, in any case, had he divorced her he would not have been able to continue as a clergyman—a job he loved. The Church would not ordain or pay Royden but provided her with a great deal of work and interest and some unofficial position and influence that she might well have had to give up had she married. At the same time, as a woman of means, she did not need to be married for financial reasons. Though there are good indications that the relationship between Shaw and his wife was sexually unrewarding for both of them and that the relationship between Royden and Shaw was one of sexual attraction, the secrecy and, in this case, the transgressive pleasures of adultery were not for them. Finally, though Royden was sufficiently interested in being a mother to adopt a daughter, it appears that the Shaws' experience of pregnancy and childbirth had been so traumatic for both of them that he might have had issues about having further children anyway. Of course, life was not without its compensations, particularly for Royden in terms of Shaw's life-long unwavering interest and support and the freedom to think and write largely uninterrupted by the demands of children or a husband.²²

Nevertheless, Royden's commitment to both the Anglican Church and to Hudson Shaw took quite a heavy toll on a young, ambitious, and vital life. Her—arguably creative—solution in the circumstances was to adopt a celibacy as passionate as the “sex-instinct.” In this way she effectively set up a challenge to the limited order of choices recognized for women within the Church of England of her time. She could not be a wife or, biologically, a mother,²³ and her relationship with her adopted daughter Helen suggests that motherhood in this sense was not the key dimension of her genius. Most of all she rejected the patronizing, belittling description of the single woman as an “old maid” with its implications of underdeveloped or dried up sexlessness. But she can—and in *Sex and Commonsense* she does—celebrate celibacy and celibate women. If the Church denied her vocation to preach and circumstances frustrated her ambitious view of sexual love she could defiantly honor her sexuality and that of many other women in equally limited circumstances by its renunciation, claiming no less a figure than Jesus himself as the Sponsor of her “glorious celibacy.”

²¹ . . . the creative power of physical passion remains at once its justification and its consecration. To use it in a relationship which must forever be barren is “unnatural” and in the deepest sense immoral (Royden 1921, p. 47).

²² In 1947, she published the personal memoir *A Threefold Cord*, recounting her long-term association with both Hudson Shaw, and his wife, Effie. The memoir, which explains that Hudson and Maude, in full acknowledgement of their love for each other, waited until Effie died before getting married, only months before Shaw died himself.

²³ Royden adopted a daughter, Helen, in 1918.

Once again however, Royden's choice of celibacy is not about a rule to be imposed either on herself or on others, but a voluntary sacrifice. In 1947, Royden made her own celibacy a matter of public record in the book *A Threefold Cord*, showing how she had tried to maintain a praxis of renunciation consistent with her argument of 20 years earlier that passionate celibacy wasn't merely a craven, defeated acceptance of the limitations imposed on single women by a Church that had continually demonstrated its contempt by refusing formally to acknowledge their ministry. She continues to express the view that both her public ministry on behalf of the Church and her relationship with Shaw remained a source of energy in her life and that she was not "in denial" about the character of her feelings for him.²⁴ Moreover, in celebrating celibacy, she manages an ambitious rebelliousness in the face particularly of the dominant patriarchal, heterosexist ideology which abjects the single, sexually unavailable woman, by boldly aligning herself with the struggle of the saints throughout Christian history against convention and social conformity thus bringing about a transformation in the way in which we conceive or think of things—from the role of a woman to the nature of love and the life of the mind.

Conclusion

Of course, at a time when sex was beginning to be discussed with unprecedented frankness and openness in some circles,²⁵ Royden's choices may have appeared naïve and timid, as they do today. Her feminist contemporary Dora Russell, for example, argues against her that the traditional attitude to marriage is "wrong from top to bottom"; and she identifies the Christian Church as the primary source of an unrealistically ideal and highly punitive sexual ethic.²⁶ It is not hard to see how she might have interpreted Royden's choices and why she might have found her

²⁴After both Shaw and Effie were dead—she revealed how she and Shaw had corresponded about their love for each other for decades without ever physically consummating it. In one letter Shaw told her: "Yesterday was a hell of depression. . . . Do you know what it is to me, at times like these, not to be with you, not to greet you on the morning of your birthday, not to share your joy? Others may. I may not, though I am nearest to you and I know you want me" (Royden 1947, p. 71).

²⁵Simply considering what was being published in Britain around the period in which *Sex and Common-Sense* (Royden 1921) first appeared, it is clear that people were becoming familiar with "sex" as a controversial subject. Henry Havelock Ellis had already published the six volumes of his provocative *Social Psychology of Sex* between 1897 and 1910. Three years before the publication of *Sex and Common-Sense*, in a more popularist and evangelical vein, the Scottish-born scientist and feminist Marie Stopes had published *Married Love*, which sold 2,000 copies in a fortnight and went through five reprints in the same year. Five years later, in 1926, D.H. Lawrence would write the first version of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, a novel notoriously explicit about sex, while Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) explored the tragic reality of love in a world of much greater sex and gender ambiguity than conventional morality was prepared to admit.

²⁶"If you take the extreme traditional religious view of marriage, her sole right would have been not to marry, to have remained celibate. Once married, she would be obliged to accept all the consequences; the worse the consequences were, the more noble she would be for accepting them, and so on" (*Guildhouse Monthly*, October 1927, p. 46).

Christianity difficult to accept. Yet Royden is committed to a view that both marriage and celibacy represent genuine choices for passionate living and that, for all that celibacy may represent a very real sacrifice, it is in no sense a second order vocation or an indication of defeat and failure but rather a genuine—she might term it “Christ-like”—alternative. Though *Sex and Commonsense*, for example, is addressed to the genuinely tragic reality of many young women’s lives in 1921, deprived of loving partners and children, it is clearly possible to read this book as the expression of Royden’s female genius. Particularly when it is studied in conjunction with the 1947 essay *A Threefold Cord*, *Sex and Commonsense* seems to express Royden’s longing for the sexually substantiated marriage of equals,²⁷ as well for the Church to recognize her vocation to Christian ministry on the same terms as a man—neither of which she lived to experience. But it is still possible to claim that in telling her story, she contests the limitations imposed by convention. Her curiosity and rebelliousness drive her to seek out answers that don’t simply silence her but satisfy her passionate nature. She pursues single-mindedly, for example, the question of why the Church would not let her take a leading role, and she finds her answers in yet more questions about what it really means to be a woman. Her claim to genius lies, I believe, in the way that she allows her readers to conceive more clearly the creative potential of something new in terms of a theology that consistently connects body and mind, affect and representation, pleasure and politics, and in terms of a philosophy that does not see God as a masculine idealization of creativity but locates the divine in the creativity of each singular life marked by embodiment, affectivity, and representation.

Christianity entrusted to male interpreters in patriarchal societies is likely to produce work that “forgets” women’s roles and significance in the past and is unlikely to think creatively or ambitiously about their contribution in the present and future. Having fought the campaign for women’s suffrage, Royden was well equipped to recognize sexism for what it was and not to be confused by attempts to mystify gender roles. And yet she does not deal with the problematics of sexism within the church any more than with sexism in the British constitution by abandoning the institution or even its inconvenient rules, but by continuing to contest or engage with them at every opportunity. Her motivation comes undoubtedly in one sense from her understanding of the Gospel as a divinely sanctioned vision of human equality rather than of hierarchy; but clearly it also comes from a consciousness of her own rage, ambition, and curiosity seeking out the pleasures of writing and thinking and publicly performing the maternal position that links contestation and revolt with the pleasures of representation.

²⁷Royden and Shaw were married on 2 October 1944. Shaw died about two months later.

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Chapter 13

Becoming the Goddess: Female Subjectivity and the Passion of the Goddess Radha

Jessica Frazier

Abstract While women in every culture have learned to identify with male heroes in forming their own subjectivity as rational feeling and flourishing agents, India has a long history of men identifying with female spiritual exemplars. Here we address Zizek or Kristeva’s call for a “strong self” grounding ethical and spiritual commitment across genders, by asking what kind of subjectivity can inspire such transformative empathy able to attract a range selves across gendered and social divides to “become the Goddess.”

In the theological narrative poem the *Gitagovinda*, Radha is a passionate woman who both becomes divine, and incorporates her divine lover and audience into her divinity. The narrative form of her iconography manifests the emotional reason of an embodied religious agency, and through the affectivity of the poem she is able to share this fluid subjectivity, manifesting a pluralistic form of monism that is only one of Hinduism’s many variations on a supposedly “pantheistic” model. Patterns of subjection are traded for alternating dynamics of passionate commitment. In Indian culture Radha continues to serve as an exemplary model of female-neutral subjectivity for all persons—an active, non-substantial, shared, *strong* self that rationally embraces its (religious) passions. As such she offers material for feminist philosophy of religion’s new era of single parents, diverse cultures and multiple genders, suggesting that freedom be complemented by an affirmation of the passions for which freedom has its worth.

Keywords Hinduism · Subjectivity · Monism · Passionate rationality · Bhakti · Radha

Radha is love objectified. . . she is also love subjectified. . . she is: mahabhava, great Feeling

(Hawley 1986, p. 55).

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Note: References to the *Gitagovinda* (GG) are to numbers in the translation by Miller (1977).

Feminist Philosophy and Finding One's Self

To step into another culture is to step into the sway of radically different configurations and possibilities for thought and being. It means entering a new landscape, in which we are ourselves made new.

In a letter to Sigmund Freud, the pioneering Indian psychoanalyst Girindrasekhar Bose reported that in his treatment of Indian patients, instead of the penis envy that Freud predicted, he found that “[t]he desire to be a female is more easily unearthed in Indian male patients than in European. . . . The Oedipus mother is very often a combined parental image” (Kakar 1989, p. 129). Freud responded with a tactful dismissal of the findings, but Bose’s observation of 1929 has been affirmed by the contemporary Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar’s experience of a striking “fluidity of the patients’ cross-sexual and generational identifications” (1989, p. 131).

In my own experience, this “challenge to the continued use of the sex-gender distinction once so useful to feminist thought itself,” and to the “constitutive exclusions” (Frankenberry 2004, p. 22) of masculine and feminine typologies, was echoed in a conversation I had while conducting fieldwork in 2002 with four young Indian men outside the walls of the Taj Mahal. We were talking about contemporary Indian cinema. When I asked who was their favourite actor, they unanimously named India’s most popular star, celebrated for his highly emotive depictions of intense suffering for the sake of uncompromising love. When asked why he was their favorite, they reflected for a moment, and finally answered “Because he’s a *real* man. He really knows how to *cry*.”

While women in every culture have learned to identify with male figures in forming their own healthy subjectivity as active, just, flourishing, and spiritual agents, India is known for its history of men (both hetero- and homo-sexual) identifying with women.¹ Indeed, Kakar, in his contemporary Indian case-studies, found it to be the woman who is the “neutral” setting for selfhood (1989, p. 131). In what follows I will ask what it is that leads a key religious character in a twelfth-century poem, famous throughout India, to become elevated as a Goddess who embodies a metaphysics of form, emotion, and transformation, establishing a widespread cultural template for “heroes” throughout the range of Indian narrative, based on a distinctive model of feminine-neutral subjectivity. This is a subjectivity that flows and overflows like a fluid, shifting between persons and challenging distinctions between male and female, mortal and divine, at the deepest level. A modification of the supposed “monism” of “Hindu” metaphysics, Radha’s shared subjectivity shows us that Indian religion includes a variety of ontologies in subtle variation and diverse implication. Available to all, Radha’s selfhood is characterized not by the passionless absolutism of substance and objective truth, but rather by the dynamic, processual existence of a passionately subjective truth.

¹Bose speculated that the fact of children growing up naked until the ages of seven to nine in many Indian communities means that “the difference between the sexes never comes as a surprise” (Kakar 1989, p. 130).

The sharing of the feminine self is reflected in the many religious practices in which men and women seek to become female or to become a goddess. A deity who draws upon the theological reflections and the devotional narratives of the *Bhagavata Purana* as one of many adulterous wives besotted with the seductive young God who plays his flute in the forest, Radha has been a major focus of such practices for more than six centuries. Male spiritual leaders, such as Caitanya in the sixteenth century and Ramakrishna in the nineteenth, claimed to have literally become her. Devotees in the movement which Caitanya started still follow a spiritual practice which strives to realize their identity with Radha or one of her female friends in terms of “the inner, innocent girl in us all” (Rosen 1996, p. 130). Today many Indian religious sensibilities influenced by the theology that developed around Radha will still agree that—as the Rajasthani poetess Mirabhai reportedly reminded her male detractors—all souls are feminine in the context of devotion to god. One of the features most provocative to Western modes of thought is that not only do many devotees aim to be like her, but god also gradually progresses to *become* the goddess, kneeling to her as his icon (*murti*), his teacher (*guru*), his true self (*svarupa*).

We will look at the philosophical theology of the goddess Radha in Jayadeva’s *Gitagovinda*, or “Song of the Lord.” The poem is a canonical text for most traditions of Krishna or Radha-focused devotion, and remains popular in reading and recitation today. I will ask why Radha’s character possesses such empathetic *gravity* that she has attracted so many other selves, across gender divides and classes to identify with her so deeply? In the *Gitagovinda* Radha’s character is like a celestial body that attracts us closer, until we finally become her. The answer will point to a notion of self and reality that suggests ways to meet some of the epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical demands that have been made of a future feminist philosophy of religion.

Contemporary Feminist Philosophy

In an era of single parents and multiple genders, to what new axis will the binarism of earlier stances in feminist philosophy of religion adapt? The growing map of a “global” culture reflects the growing landscape of feminist concerns. As a female philosopher of (world) religion, the refigurations that I offer reflect my own concerns about being restricted as much by feminist notions of the feminine as by patriarchal ones; about acknowledging that I have been as much facilitated as a feeling, flourishing self by male peers as by female ones; and about my belief that my gendered liberation is only truly fulfilled by models of self-hood that I can share with every member (male, female, hetero-, homo-, bi-, trans-, a-sexual, etc.) of every community (Asian, European, American, African, etc.) in which I find myself.

In revising her previous position-piece on feminist philosophy of religion, Frankenberry reflects the fast rate of change that the movement is undergoing: “The dyads male-female and their mapping to masculine-feminine are constitutive exclusions that feminist philosophy of religion can no longer presume” (2004, p. 22). But

the elision of such defining concepts leaves a gap in which we must re-orient ourselves. Feminist philosophers have debated whether we should seek stronger forms of universal subjectivity, or more determinedly female selves rooted in our sexual specificity—or perhaps abandon such apparent egocentrism altogether through more thorough deconstructive self-disruptions, offering “a not-so-solid ground upon which or in the midst of which relationships between differentials can potentially establish themselves and flourish” (Armour 2004, p. 51).

On the other hand Kristeva has cast a critical eye over the urban, media-constructed text of post-modernity and asked “Do you have a soul? . . . in the wake of psychiatric medicines, aerobics and media-zapping, does the soul still exist?” (Kristeva 1995, p. 3) Can we still have any selfhood that is not constructed in relation to cultural values with which we feel uncomfortable, a self which is not lost in its relations leaving us paralysed as a non-existent non-self? Such questions lead feminist philosophers of religion to ask what their ideal of liberation involves. Anderson writes that:

Essentially philosophy of religion done by feminists for women and men, has as its focus that which makes up our fundamental nature and our relationships to what we find undeniable: that we are born, we love, suffer loss, long for love which endures, and we die (1998, p. 15).

In addressing the possibility of “changing the subject,” Mary McClintock Fulkerson suggests that the discourse of “women’s” experiences is itself contingently constructed discourse that stands against the background of other possible voices, situations, and identities (McClintock Fulkerson 1994, p. 115). There is a blossoming realization of community with men, seeking affirmation of “the varieties of women’s and men’s experiences” (Frankenberry 2004, p. 13) in ways that are adequate for the complex reasoning, feeling, desiring, intuiting, believing, capacities of multiple subjects (Anderson 1998, p. 30). Thus in seeking to “reinvent ourselves as *other*” (Anderson 1998, p. 165) I see an underlying process of trying to reinvent ourselves as *self*.

By exploring the puzzle of how Jayadeva’s very particularistic, sensual, provocative portrayal of Radha contributes to her status as universal and divine self, we pursue stronger models of selfhood that can unite females with their male peers and role models without reducing the significance of biologically sexual or socially gendered particularity. I wish to provide an understanding of religious flourishing that fits the experience both of the unrestrained ascetic monks (male and female) and the restricted relational parents (male and female) of Janet Martin Soskice’s essay “Love and Attention,” i.e. of all those who discover that self-aware self-sacrifice to one’s own passions, is really self-fulfilment (Soskice 2004).

This in turn can reveal alternative (“Hindu”²) configurations for a non-objectivist, embodied, emotional conception of reason, and a metaphysics that affirms immanence, locatedness, and creativity. The new landscape thus defined can suggest a

²The term “Hindu” has become hugely fraught in recent years, and its use or dis-use taken to indicate a position that is political in both the rhetorical and sectarian senses. Here I use it as an

natural ethics based not on abstract, objective “rights,” but on the justice of the passions, rooted in empathetic recognition of one’s own subjectivity in others. Further, it aims to facilitate a conception of the flourishing that comes *after* liberation, or rather a flourishing *for which* liberation has value, figured as a freely impassioned consecration of one’s freedom to that which is “beloved.” While so much feminist thought involves a struggling out of bondage and restriction, religious reflection must always engage with a positive understanding of what it means to struggle with the bond that rises from within—the bond of belief that is at once difficult and limiting, but beautiful.

In reading the text of Radha, I acknowledge that the voice of the author, as of most who shaped the tradition in which this Goddess stands, is a male one. Jayadeva is said to have written the poem for his wife Padmavati, but we cannot know what role she, or any of the other women of his community, had in shaping the world within the text. Rather, the difficult social backdrop against which these ideas stand, is indicated by the relative paucity of female voices within Indian history. Radha could thus be read as a puppet or cuckoo mimicking the feminine for nefarious purposes.³ But the danger here is that any male-authored text can be read in this way, producing an unfalsifiable hermeneutics of suspicion. One is in danger of missing out on much of Indian women’s experience over the centuries if one fails to acknowledge that most of the discourse through which Indian women have found and formed themselves in line with models of the good and the true has been male-authored. Thus Flaherty also cites with approval Sarah Caldwell’s labelling of the Indian texts that express distinctively female experiences (such as childbirth) as “female-centered”—“rather than a woman’s text that shows a strong concern for the female point of view but is not necessarily by a female author” (Caldwell 1998, p. 114).

Incarnational Metaphysics and Devotional Attention in Hinduism

In many traditions of Indian religious practice people have approached the subjective space of their own experience as a medium which can be sculpted into diverse spiritual forms. In the devotional religious forms known as *bhakti* traditions, focusing on particular deities, devotees have aimed at shaping their consciousness into a focused, impassioned, complete attention to the divine.⁴

imperfect shorthand for the many changing Indian traditions and practices that are broadly speaking self-designate as distinct from Jain, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim traditions, and which are linked by common themes, texts and conversations.

³See O’Flaherty (1999).

⁴Jonardon Ganeri (2007) has probed Indian approaches to the self with meticulous philosophical attention. Gavin Flood (2005) has explored the transformative enactments of “hands-on” theories of selfhood.

In many Vaishnava traditions influenced by the theological narrative of the *Bhagavata Purana*, “which introduces passionate emotionalism into the world of intellectual krishna-bhakti” (Haberman 2007, p. 409), devotees aimed to become *sahridayins*—“those possessing hearts,” and *rasika-jana*⁵ —“people with highly cultivated emotion.” In the bhakti sects which centered on the pair of Radha and Krishna, women were claimed as the exemplary *sahridayins* (Donna Wulff 1986, p. 40). Both men and women aspired to the feminine subjectivity of Krishna’s lovers. The practices developed to facilitate this inner transformation focused above all on the arts and their affective capacities and the result was a flourishing of poetic forms aimed at shaping old identities into new exemplary and sometimes divine ones. Such literature has not lacked for critics, such as the complaint of a nineteenth-century male Bengali writer that Jayadeva is the poet of “an effeminate and sensual race” (Miller 1986, p. 25). Yet his text remains one of the most beloved and frequently performed of Indian poems.

It is a work overflowing with lush language and imagery, appearing to provide a wholly sensual and particularistic theological discourse of emotional response. But behind this “affective” dimension stands a systematic philosophy of reason and reality. The philosophical theology of Radha reflects a metaphysics that, as Halbfass puts it, deals with non-dualism not “in the sense of the *tat tvam asi*, but with other relevant forms of transcending particularity and division” (Halbfass 2007, p. 175).

The social context of the poem reflects an intense period of interaction between the diverse religious cultures (including Muslim, Buddhist and Jain elements) that for convenience we now call “Hinduism” in its syncretic medieval stage. The elevation of the incarnate form of the deity Vishnu, and the proliferation of Tantric traditions which used the body as a spiritual tool, coincided with a flourishing of the visual, literary, and musical arts as a canvas for religio-philosophical reflection. Concurrently the “pure-consciousness” ontology of the Advaitic (non-dual) strand of Indian thought was synthesized with the more pluralistic and energetic metaphysical scheme of the Sankhya school of philosophy. The result was a merging of advaitic monism with sankhya pluralism into a model affirming complex, dynamic, and dialectical ontological concepts such as *prakṛti*—literally “pro” (*pra-*) “creation” (*kr*) (Flood 2006, p. 29).

Such syntheses found a medium and a motif in the poetry of Radha, which negotiated a curious place between tradition and socio-cultural innovation, unification, and pluralism. For almost the first time a body was an intrinsically good thing to have—after all, divinity had acquired one as a spontaneous expression of its essence. According to the multi-faceted but integrated semiotic reasoning so typical of Hindu theism, insofar as one worshipped the incarnate divinity, one worshipped incarnation itself. Though male, Krishna did not signify “the patriarchal order [that] was based upon worlds of the beyond: worlds of before birth and especially of the afterlife.”⁶

⁵GG, 12.9. GG will from here refer to *GitaGovinda*, see Miller (1977).

⁶Luce Irigaray, cited in Jantzen (1998, p. 504).

Descriptions of him in the *Gitagovinda* “are explicitly sensual,” and Krishna’s devotees do not aim primarily at “liberated” escape from embodiment; they preferred the bondage of love. Observing this in later literature, Wulff asks “[w]hy should commitment in love be preferred over freedom?” and answers that “for the Vaishnava, the highest religious ideal is the sweetness of perpetual relatedness in bhakti, rather than the release from all bondage that is represented by the goal of moksha” (Donna Wulff 1986, p. 33).

The Narrative Goddess

Radha is the symbol of this idea, affirming a “sweet” form of bondage as relatedness. Her development of these religio-philosophical reflections is inseparable from her poetic medium and her narrative identity.⁷ In many ways, it is the narratives of Hindu religion that show us how philosophical ideas and theological ideals play out in embodied situational realities.⁸ Her authors do philosophy of religion in ways that “court rather than ignore the social, historical, embodied context in which religion takes place,” reflecting the structure of “lived religious experience” in dialogue with an expanded “list of conversation partners” (Armour 2004, pp. 51–52).

Such complex narratives offer quite different resources for the creatively appropriate reading of feminist philosophers of religion, than the static, synchronic symbols through which many of the most extreme Goddesses are conveyed. Kali as mother symbolizes extremes, paradoxes, and mysteries but we do not see her manifesting what she represents in concrete situations, exploring possible outcomes in any form of flourishing. She does not explain her logic in ways that we can understand and empathetically discover in ourselves. Radha is an excellent corrective to the abstracted semiotics of the Goddess as a cathartic symbol that often facilitates *escape from* rather a means of *dwelling in* the circumstances of life.

The narrated female figures of Hinduism are frequently the focus of the audience’s empathy due to their reasoned voice of natural justice. Thus for example, whereas Sita is held up as the perfect wife whose husband is (literally) her God, few commentators within and without the Hindu tradition highlight the fact that she responds to her unjust suffering at the end of the Ramayana’s epic narrative by convincingly protesting her treatment on the basis of instinctive rather than social justice, proving her case, and finally refusing to bend herself to a society and a marriage that have revealed their injustice. She then abandons her husband. Often criticized for impacting women’s lives in India in a negative way, a closer look at Sita shows her as a heroine who ultimately refuses to support the system which

⁷J.S. Hawley gives an excellent brief history of the Radha in the introduction to Hawley and Wulff (1986, p. 25).

⁸This has become a popular theme for analysis of the Mahabharata in which characters follow through the rules of duty and ethics (*dharma*) only to complain about the many ambiguities and puzzles to which it leads.

oppresses her, and like Draupadi and Damayanti, lets everyone know it. In so doing she establishes a natural connection between her mind and our own that may be missing in the less conflicted, ambivalent motivations of the heroes. Radha too draws in her audience by displaying distinctly human(e) experiences of indignation through her “words of protest filled with passion.”⁹

The Universality of the Exemplary Subject

In his attempted psychology of Radha’s character, David Wulff signals the high cultural stakes placed upon the tradition of interpreting Radha’s character, writing that C.G. Jung “was profoundly concerned with the effect of psychological interpretations of myth: what we do to the age-old images, he said, we do also to our own souls” (David Wulff 1986, p. 283). Karine Schomer writes of how Radha became reduced in later Hindi literature to the courtly lover of classical poetry, divested of her theological significance and her subjective depth of experience (Schomer 1986). There she was “totally consumed by her infatuation with Krishna, to the total exclusion of any other interest in life. She is completely vulnerable to him, exists only to be with him, has no life outside her relationship to him” (Schomer 1986, p. 96).

But Jayadeva’s medieval Radha was “neither a wife nor a worshipping rustic playmate.”¹⁰ Rather, “she is a jealous, solitary, proud female who is Krishna’s exclusive partner in a secret love” (Miller 1986, p. 13). She is both a personification of the generic devotee who adores Krishna in the *Bhagavata Purana*, and a completely unique figure who is raised out of their midst by later poets only to be contrasted with them. It is as if a sensitive reader, a *rasika* or *sahrdaya* had reflected on the unconditional love portrayed in the earlier text, and distilled it into the more powerful but painful religious truths that it implies. In many ways Radha’s deep feeling is that of someone who has summoned the courage to embody the most extreme implications of Hindu devotion’s emotional logic. This reflection is both symbolized and recreated on the shared stage of subjective narrative established by the text.

Barbara Stoler Miller writes about the use of memory in the *Gitagovinda* to establish a shared internal space of imaginative capacities, located “within” the *manas*: a classical Indian conception of the organ of thought as incorporating both heart and mind. Here decisions are made, moods reside, and *smara*, a notion of memory that slides over into imagination, gives color and shape to all that we experience. This notion of interiority combining emotion, reflection, and imagination sets the stage for Radha as “the symbolism for a woman of reason and passion [who] represents alternative histories of a differently figured reason” (Anderson 1998, p. 174). Many thinkers in the bhakti traditions became suspicious of “those who possess dry knowledge. . . incapable of experiencing devotion” (Gosvami 2007, pp. 431–432).

⁹From Rupa Gosvami’s play the *Vidagdhamadhava*, Trans. and cited by Donna Marie Wulff in “A Sanskrit Portrait: Radha in the Plays of Rupa Gosvami” Hawley and Wulff (1986).

¹⁰See Young (1996).

The ideal of reason became an ability to be aware of one's motivations and to think *through* them, thus staying true to their own trajectories and implications. The ideal integrity of method and emotion meant that Radha's *mahabhava*, "great feeling," had to be great not only in quantity, but in skill and quality.

Exploring this meant that the poem had to display Radha exemplary abilities in this sphere. To this effect *manas* and memory become a stage full of vividly detailed visual imagery, portrayed in frequent imaginative departures that, dream-like, threaten to lose us in Radha's inner world¹¹:

My heart values his vulgar ways,
Refuses to admit my rage,
Feels strangely elated
And keeps denying his guilt. . .
My perverse heart wants Krishna back. What can I do?¹²

Her emotions are never univocal. She is constantly shifting and one is reminded of Ricoeur's notion of "the narrative identity of the character between the poles of sameness and selfhood" as one which "is attested primarily by the imaginative variations to which the narrative submits this identity" (Ricoeur 1992, p. 148). Already we are far from the substance ontology of the self, exploring notions of subjectivity in which Radha is unrestricted by any fixed designation. It is not that which she statically symbolizes, but rather her dynamic, mobile, self-propelling ability to flow through a range without losing any of her own strength of feeling, which makes her so fascinating. She is Zizek's passionate protester, whose strong non-substantial subjectivity empowers her to feel, act, and win both her desires and her rights. This is highlighted in contrast to Ricoeur's male-neutral model of the narrative self in Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, which—when stripped by the revelations of time and mutability—reveals an empty and fundamentally passionless core (Ricoeur 1992, p. 149). Radha has won empathy and pre-eminence because the centuries have taught Indian culture that however painful it may be, much strength and beauty is gained by responding to adversity with one's heart intact and fully-feeling.

Qualities of emotional honesty and inner tension mark such speeches, and one of the things that make her such a heroic character is that she seems to possess the courage to bring all of her faculties (emotion and imagination, desire and indignation, fear and caution, compassion, loneliness, and pride) to bear on the situation at once, without denying any single note in the fascinating disharmony of her feelings. In a relatively short text, a wide and protean range of responses are juxtaposed as the revelation of a full and fascinating inner life.

One of her salvific semiotic functions is to manifest the passionate potentiality of all other hearts to themselves. Such insights could only be conveyed in

¹¹The use of memory as a trope for the development of plots and emotional dynamics in love poetry is long established as a literary genre typified by *Duta-kavya*—messenger poetry—in which a lover sends a messenger to his beloved to evoke the presence of what is far-away through imagination's unique capacities.

¹²GG, 2.10.

the affective discourse of the arts. A. Whitney Stanford has commented on later Krishna-bhakti poetic techniques of admission to the mediatory space of the aesthetic mind, speaking of the synaesthetic vision evoked through densely sensual language which mimics the combined sensory input of actual first-hand experience and thus turns mere poetry into *darshana*—a real vision of the divine. The mind becomes the temple in which one awakens a divine subjectivity (Sanford 2002). J.S. Hawley observes the same techniques at work in vernacular poetry devoted to Radha: “[t]here is no extraneous, neutral voice to stand between the audience and the drama itself: to hear the poem is to enter the world of Braj. . . Such use of perspective on the part of the poet permits the hearer a direct access to the world of Radha and Krishna at the same time that it shields its intimacy” (1986, pp. 46–47). There is no abstract “god’s eye view” in these texts, there are only multiple selves in each of which we are ourselves implied.

Miller concurs with regard to the *Gitagovinda*: “The friend, the poet and the audience share the experience of secretly participating in the play of divine love” (Miller 1984, p. 16). Note here that she says participating, and not merely viewing. This goes to the heart of the devotional form of religion, which still seeks in its later forms to fulfil Krishna’s original injunction in the *Bhagavad Gita* to be “with one’s thought fixed in the self” (*adhyatma-cetasa*), “without a sense of mine-ness” (*nirmamah*),¹³ with one’s “mind for me and surrendered to me” (*man-maya mam upashritah*).¹⁴ The “sea of erotic mood”¹⁵ brought on by the later aesthetic mediation between the divine and devotional selves can result in an explosive union, thus Hardy writes of the self-expanding experience of Radha that:

The impression is so strong that it transcends her understanding, paralyses her actions and goes beyond her emotional control. Her self seems to explode into Krishna (Hardy 1983, p. 6).

One could see this not as an explosion, but as an implosion in which Radha’s own gravity is increased. It is also a reflection on the imaginative capacities of the perceiving self to become saturated by its contents. Thus the absorbed, effortless quality of devotional attention is not unlike Murdoch’s idea of the absorption of the self through aesthetic attention that Soskice cites with approval (Soskice 2004, p. 200). Thus, as Hawley says, “If it is she who is speaking, then it is the voice of all” (1986, p. 54). There is no hard and fast line between human and divine subjectivity in this religious landscape.

The scene is set to read the revelation of Radha’s experience as a manifestation of the inner workings of the universal self. Norvin Hein suggests that her loving relation-identity with Krishna is the foundation for an “erotic communitas” (Hein 1986). In the *Gitagovinda* the God of love is addressed by many names which indicate a subtle, pervasive quality which is said to be able to enter anyone, anywhere: *ananga*, bodiless; *vitanu*, subtle; *manobhava*, mind-born; *manasija*,

¹³ *Bhagavad Gita* 3.30.

¹⁴ *Bhagavad Gita* 4.10.

¹⁵ GG. 6.10.

heart-born. Such images of non-substantiality are interleaved with images of love as a flowing, uncontainable, over-flowing fluid substance: *sarasa-srngara*, a “river or ocean of passionate feeling.” This fluid subjectivity is contagious, crossing all boundaries, recalling the shared, ever-present atmosphere or *prana* that flows in and out of each individual with every breath in Sankhya and Yoga philosophies.

Radha’s Passionate Rationality

Although the text flags up for the reader the fact that the story of Radha’s love, separation, and eventual re-union is a both a devotional and metaphysical metaphor, Radha herself is caught up in the intimacy of the relation. She holds out for an exclusive love while the other women crowd around; she rages, suffers, and indignantly forces God’s own suffering, softening, and self-discovery; and in turn she discovers the tenacity of her own love. She doubts it, weighs it, and without giving up her insistence on just treatment, she commits herself unconditionally to the love which she has cultivated in herself. By the end of the poem both devotee and divinity stand humbled and laid bare before each other, leading to Krishna’s promise of fidelity and a passionate union in which Radha “launched a bold offensive/ above him/ and triumphed over her lover.” After this she speaks out “freely,” “secure in her power over him,”¹⁶ and ends by inviting him to adorn her as his deity, having won his willing submission.

Like the women of the *Bhagavata Purana* and Rupa Gosvami’s later texts, Jayadeva’s Radha is likened to female yogic or tantric ascetics who, through her single-minded trials, effortlessly achieves the meditative singularity of “attention” for which their austere male peers have struggled for years. The implication is that love is indeed the key to perfect attention, and that passion’s powerful magnetism is a more effective force for directing one’s life than the variable efforts of the mere will. Krishna, who unbeknownst to Radha has been inspired by the quality of her love and now also wanders in a similar state yearning for her, is duly likened to Shiva or one of his tantric practitioners, with “a necklace of snakes”¹⁷ smeared with ash on his lovelorn body. He too becomes the ascetic who has taken up the project of shaping his subjectivity with the powerful force of passion as his tool.

Jayadeva plays heavily upon suffering’s affective power to affect other subjectivities through the instinctive empathy which it evokes. Here again we see the willing self-submission to one’s most passionate instincts as the key to becoming a self with ideal ethical and spiritual qualities, rather than a pessimistically Schopenhauerian submission to dark and alien inner powers. The author forms the distinctive image of passion as an initially unwelcome intrusion which gives access to inner resources of soft, human and humane strength, as in Krishna’s reference to “love’s arrows”

¹⁶GG, 12.11.

¹⁷GG, 3.11.

which pierce his “soft mortal core.”¹⁸ Jayadeva uses the trope (again associated with Shiva) of love’s arrows to illustrate his gradual transformation: “Arrows of love pierced his weary mind-heart/And Madhava repented,”¹⁹ “Glancing arrows. . . may cause pain in my soft mortal core.”²⁰ For Krishna the transformation into a feeling, and in the Indian paradigm, *feminine* self is almost complete, and marks his transition to a new ethical awareness that will enable their union.

Becoming the Goddess

Your garlands fall on Krishna’s chest like white cranes on a dark cloud shining light over him.

Radha, you rule in the climax of love²¹

Throughout the poem, God’s (Krishna’s) own attraction to Radha and ultimate submission to her shows us, in microcosm, the movement of the (divine) self toward the Self. In a final twist, the situation reverses: through her passion, Radha becomes divine. In the final chapters of the *Gitagovinda* Krishna becomes Radha’s devotee, requesting that she place her foot on his head (the ultimate expression of reverence),²² seeking *darshana* or the bestowing of grace by viewing the image of the deity.²³ When she asks him to adorn her after their union, it is with the ornaments of the Goddess. Radha’s divinization is completed, she is sensually and spiritually fulfilled at once, while at the same time Krishna becomes the transformed devotee, learning to explore the furthest reaches of his own passion. One could imagine the process reversing itself again—Krishna becomes Radha’s teacher and she must be pierced, softened, made mortal and “feminine” in her capacity for feeling once again. Then the scale tips again; the process is unending.

Radha and Krishna are, in almost every theology that developed around them, revealed as ultimately parts of the same divine subject. We see a reference to this idea here in Krishna’s speech naming her as “my ornament, my life, my treasure in the ocean of being” (*mama bhava-jaladhi-ratnam*).²⁴ Recalling the language of Advaita, he tells her *satyam eva asi*: “you are truth.”²⁵ The drama depicted is a dialectical movement of forces located within a single subjectivity (divine), while the mediatory dimension of the characters acknowledges these as factors and possibilities in every subjectivity that wishes to cultivate itself.

¹⁸GG, 10.10.

¹⁹GG, 3.2.

²⁰GG, 3.13.

²¹GG, 5.12.

²²GG, 10.8.

²³GG, 10.12.

²⁴GG, 10.4.

²⁵GG, 10.3.

In his study of Indian philosophical approaches to selfhood, Jonardon Ganeri writes “how well the Indians appreciate that there are many things to do with a text, that both reading and writing a text can be an exercise for moral progress” (2007, p. 207). One of Jayadeva’s goals here is not only to describe religious realities, but also to realize them in the reader through performative forms of truth. He uses the complex structures of the Indian arts to furnish a simultaneous meta-text in which we can see him commenting on his own soteriological activity. The text becomes the guru, mediating a transformative discourse filled with causative verbal formations that reflect the affective function of every image, event, character and verse of his text. With each emotional twist of the story the audience is brought into more and more painful sympathy with Radha, creating a new reality in the reader.

This affective strata of the text is flagged with a “*bhanita*” signature verse which “reaffirms the affinities of the poet’s creative activity and the audience’s aesthetic experience to the developing erotic relationship between Radha and Krishna. It functions in each song to give the perspective of aesthetic and religious perception to the emotional intensity of the preceding stanzas.”²⁶ Such verses favor verbs of evocation, spreading, heightening, and intensification, and are juxtaposed with images of imagination, fantasy, and the private spaces of memory and the heart.

Listen to the perfect invocation of poet Jayadeva,
joyously evoking the essence of existence.²⁷
... May poet Jayadeva’s song
Bring joy to sensitive [people].²⁸
... Keep it in your heart like a tender girl skilful in love.²⁹
... His vision of reality in the erotic mood,
his graceful play in these poems.
All show that master-poet Jayadeva’s soul
is in perfect tune with Krishna. . . .
Jayadeva expresses the power of poetry
in the Gitagovinda.³⁰

As we are disturbed by Krishna’s apparent betrayal in Chapters seven to eight, and see the previously charming situation with new, pained and questioning eyes, Jayadeva holds our gaze as it were, and points out our heightened engagement with the text through Radha’s angry voice:

Bloodshot from a sleepless night of passion, listless now,
your eyes express the mood of awakened love³¹

²⁶GG, p. 11.

²⁷GG, 1.19.

²⁸GG, 6.9. Contrary to Miller’s translation, the original the phrase *rasika-jana* does *not* specify one gender or the other. Indeed, it links neatly with the next invocation.

²⁹GG, 7.10.

³⁰GG, 12.22.

³¹GG, 8.2.

The text then is prized in Indian culture because it simultaneously creates the self that it displays. When it is successful the listener finds him or herself desiring something that they subsequently realize they have acquired through their desiring. Finally, because Radha in her energies and passions is really the true nature of reality, we, the audience, are also able to become part of the divine subjectivity—both Goddess and God.

Passionate Selfhood

What then is this self which so many men and women desire and become through Radha's mediation? Her progression through different stages of feeling and reflection is not just an augmentation of her root character with various great-making or divinizing features. Nor is she merely unveiling a true unaffected authentic self. Rather, purely latent potentialities, undeveloped, are converted into the real feelings that constitute her self through the process of the narrative. This entails a self and a notion of truth that are enabled by "particular, historically determinate circumstances, that is, the locations and effects of desire" (Miller 1977, p. 21), and which can be seen to counter "the patriarchal order [that] is based upon worlds of the beyond: worlds of before birth and especially of the afterlife."³² It is not an account that "vainly tries to achieve truth, objectivity and impartiality from a God's-eye view of male-neutral reality" (Anderson 1998, p. 130). Rather from the perspective of a female-neutral reality, its feeling content is its existence. Rather than uprooting desire to divinize (and in a sense create) the body, a pattern that Flood observes in tantra, Radha cultivates desire to divinize (and in a sense create) its agent, the self (Flood 2006, p. 30).

Various metaphors are commonly used in poetry devoted to Radha for the kind of dialectically defined selfhood that is facilitated by circumstance and relation: she is the arrayed play of color facilitated by the many facets of the jewel (*ratna*), the mood (*rasa*) that requires an artistic presentation to bring it into being, and the sexual pleasure (*rati*) which biological difference enables. In the wider sphere of ethics she is the ethical and religious concerns brought out by any given situation and social identity (the specificity for which "femaleness" becomes a symbol). Miller offers her own metaphor of the *Gitagovinda* as an architecture in which aural textures

...create a sensuous surface of verbal ornamentation that suggests comparison with the sculptured surfaces of the medieval Hindu temples of Bhubaneshwar and Khajuraho.... each temple moves to a point of intense concentration, where it simultaneously plunges into the womb-house of the deity and transcends itself (Miller 1984, p. 13).

The "flesh" of the poem's sounds and temple's tangible shapes have their center in an intangible space where a pervasive subjectivity with infinite potential resides. Radha exemplifies this non-substantial ontology of the Goddess:

³²Irigaray, quoted in Jantzen (1998, p. 504).

Hers is not the throne of structure, not the place of pride; she is rather the condition that makes structure itself possible.... she is the soul of relation. She connects, she communicates, she is warp to the woof. She makes the world organism live, speak, love.³³

To understand the narrative symbol of Radha is to enter her inner space, have one's own passions aroused, and see what it means to possess them in the face of the deepest questioning.

Empathetic Ethics and Feminist Semiotics

We have tried to show how the *Gitagovinda* suggests a Hindu template (there are surely many more) for an *exemplary subjectivity*. The subject here exists not as a withdrawn substance, but as an ever-present site of creation, and the text is the site of its enactment in the audience across genders or social contexts. Radha teaches us to “treat our insight on emotion as a fundamental component of epistemological ethical pursuits” (Anderson 2004, p. 99). This self-possessed self—when shared—has the potential to found an *empathetic ethics* based on a “feminine neutral” rather than a “male neutral” model of consciousness.

Western democratic notions of autonomy have been criticized as fundamentally flawed in their trajectory towards a secular conception of negative freedom, solely defined as an absence of restrictions. Without an account of positive freedom, i.e. freedom defined as potentiality and the sensing and dispensing of one's most sincerely held values, the subject is bereft of motivation. Commitment—religious, familial, political, amorous—requires an account of self with positive content, and one that premises its ethics not on duties, but on passions. Indeed, what other foundation for ethics could there be? We can ask “[a]re the characteristics thus projected really the ones that will best facilitate human becoming? Or are they partial, distorting or inimical to the flourishing of some groups of people?” (Jantzen 1998, p. 89). The real Radhas of Indian history have rarely reached the freedom of the forest where their own judgement reigns, and of those who did only a very few (such as Mahadeviyakka) left any record. But the idea of Radha has provided a refuge for young women who do not want to marry, for widows with whom modern Brindavan is filled, for men who do not want to follow traditional gender roles.

She emerges time and again in the forms of different heroes and heroines in the arts, a favourite who repeatedly reminds the audience of its capacity for complete, unconditional passions. For Hawley she is “the stuff of religion itself” (1986, p. 55). Kristeva writes of a lost time in which “passionate excesses directed toward the absolute subject—God or Jesus—ceased to be pathological. Instead they were thought to map out the mystic itinerary of a soul aiming for the ultimate” (1995, p. 4). What attracts audiences to Jayadeva's Radha across gender and class divides is her empathetic overflow of a holistic rationality, her transformative effect, and the ethical wisdom that mere freedom is a worthless currency unless it can be devoted

³³J.S. Hawley in the introduction to Hawley and Wulff (1986, p. xi).

to what it loves most. The Radhas of religion and the arts, whatever their gender, shows us ourselves as *sahrdaya*, “with heart.” They help us to generate that heart, and show us the ultimacy of its valuing. For that spiritual wisdom we are profoundly grateful.

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Chapter 14

Bodies in Space: Transcendence and the Spatialization of Gender

Roxana Baiasu

Abstract This chapter revisits and rearticulates a fundamental issue in the feminist philosophy of religion, namely, the relationship between gendered embodiment and spirituality. Starting from an existentialist phenomenological understanding of transcendence, which is indebted to, but also departs from, the early Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the issue is rethought in terms of spatiality. The argument is thus directed against idealized conceptions of gender, spirituality and the relationship between them; however, the intersubjectivity and objectivity of theoretical aspects of discourse—whether in the philosophy of religion or in other disciplines—does hinge on the possibility of stepping over particularities of gendered embodiment. In feminist philosophy, such epistemological values, as well as practical ideals, like equality and political solidarity, rely on some account of neutrality. This gives rise to tensions and a certain dilemma, and I suggest that the inquiry into the spatiality of human existence can offer new ways of dealing with such problems.

Keywords Space · Body · Gender · Neutrality · Spirituality

In theoretical disciplines the overcoming of the particularities of human existence, including gender and bodily specifications, has been motivated by the requirements of objectivity, intersubjectivity, and rationality, regarded as constitutive of the point of view from everywhere, and thus from nowhere in particular. Yet this neutrality of embodied subjects engaged in cognitive practices has often remained merely an assumption, or insufficiently examined. This chapter engages with the question of the possibility of such a neutral perspective in the space of transcendence. If transcendence is understood in the existentialist phenomenological manner of Martin Heidegger and in its further development in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, then it refers to standing out or stepping outside oneself in the openness of sense; as such the movement of transcendence is essential to human existence and involves an orientation towards something other than one's own existence. If transcendence is

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understood in terms of its orientation towards and within the space of sense wherein one always already finds oneself, transcendence does not then stand in opposition to immanence. On the contrary, on such an approach to transcendence, it is possible to think of transcendence as incarnate and spatial, and thus of our existence as embodied and immersed in the world. Transcendence incarnate, and its bodily way of making sense of the world, is one of the modes of transcendence this chapter is concerned with, along with the transcendence enacted by spiritual concerns regarding religious space. The question is how these two modes of transcendence stand in relation to one another and in relation to the human condition. Are they essential or inessential to the kind of existence humans have? Is one more primitive than, and determinative of, the other? Can they be properly understood separately or is the constitution of one necessarily connected to the constitution of the other?

These questions are linked to the issue of the neutrality of investigation with regard to gender and bodily specificities. The lack of a critical perspective on this issue has led to falsely universalizing claims and has covered up male-biased presuppositions in the understanding of the epistemic values of objectivity, intersubjectivity, and rationality. These epistemic values have been attributed to the ideal observer achieving or able to achieve, through some sort of a “god-trick,”¹ a God’s eye point of view—where “God” is without a body and beyond (bodily) space. The inquirer, or rather the ideal observer, does not talk about gender and bodily specificities. The quietism over *specific* gender issues would be required by the inquiry concerned with universal claims. But how, if at all, is this possible or legitimate? If the inquirer’s life is a gendered, embodied life, how is it possible for her to theorize about other essential aspects of her life, such as her spiritual concerns, in a way that overcomes gender particularities? This problem constitutes a crux for philosophical investigation in general and for the feminist philosopher who recognises the need for the objectivity of discourse, in particular. In “Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Difference in Feminism,” Sonia Kruks puts this problem as follows: “the problem is to find a way of acknowledging the claims to the *specificity* of knowledge of particular groups of women, without thereby denying the possibility that there is a *more general basis* for knowledge” (2006, p. 25). Thus what is at issue here for feminists is the possibility of an alternative to, on the one hand, universal descriptions of the feminine, which have been proven inadequate and dangerous, and what Kruks refers to as “multiple-difference feminism,” on the other, whose “excessive preoccupation with differences among women” threatens the epistemological values of the objectivity and intersubjectivity of discourse and feminist solidarity in politics (Kruks 2006, pp. 26–27).

Put in more general terms, the question concerning the neutrality of embodied, gendered human existence and, in particular of this existence’s inquiry into various significant aspects of its condition, seems to reveal a deep difficulty, a tension or even perhaps an aporia which we cannot get beyond. On the one hand, it is plausible to think that an adequate philosophical approach to some important aspects of the

¹I owe this phrase to Donna Haraway (1991).

human condition must take into account gender determinations and possibilities; but, on the other, the inquiry should be impartial and neutral with regard to gender specificities if it aims to meet central methodological requirements concerning the autonomy and universality of theoretical discourse. But then the investigation seems to neglect important aspects of human life concerning gender and bodiliness, and thus does not even seem able to properly engage with them. If the inquiry is neutral in its overcoming of these aspects of human life, how could it even begin to engage with issues concerning gendered incarnate transcendence? And if such issues are taken into consideration within a theoretical account, does this account not become too specific? So, this is, in brief, the aporia: either the investigation takes into consideration gender issues of embodiment—but then it seems it has to renounce aspirations to universality; or the investigation is silent about gender and bodily specificities—but then it no longer seems able to do justice to very significant aspects of human existence.

This chapter engages with the questions concerning transcendence incarnate mentioned above by looking at a basic characteristic of human existence: its spatiality. In this way, the inquiry is not only indebted to, but also departs from Heidegger's temporal existentialism and Merleau-Ponty's prioritising of the living body.

Gendered Incarnate Transcendence

There are, in the constitution of embodiment,² various interconnected material determinations of fleshiness, such as, for example, the way the body is made up of its various parts—of organs such the brain or the sexual apparatus, of flesh, blood, and bones. Other determinations of the body are set by the possibilities of movement and expression which pertains to certain parts of the body, for example to the face, the eyes, the lips or the hands. All these determinations are important aspects of bodily existence, but they do not exhaust the scope of the determinations and possibilities which belong to the human body, as understood phenomenologically. Nor are they to be understood as mere objective determinations of embodiment, for the body is not some sort of thing lying or moving alongside other objects. The body of transcending existence cannot be properly understood if it is taken to be a mere physical entity governed by the laws of Nature. Nor is gendered, sexed being reducible to the mere possession and activity of the sexual apparatus.

The body and its gender are in some sense and to some extent “given” to us, as we do not have absolute power over our bodies. The body and its sexed being are not, however, first presented in reflection, but most often one's own gendered body is given in action, action-oriented attitudes, and in one's being affected by what one lives amid (for example, in perception or in emotion). Having a body does not mean possessing some sort of physical entity external to the mind, nor is

²The embodiment I am concerned with here is the bodiliness which is characteristic to our kind of existence. The issue of the incarnation of the Divine or the sacred is not a topic of this chapter.

the body something extrinsic to one's essential being and to the way one makes sense of things, but the body and its gendered life are inherent aspects of one's existence. They are part of what is one's *own*, and are so in a distinctive way. My body is *given* to me (in the sense explained above) but, at the same time, my body is my *own* in a distinctive way. This is one of the possible ways of understanding what Merleau-Ponty calls the "ambiguity" of the body, and is manifest, for example, in the case of the double sensation: when I am touching my hands, one of them is touched and thus given to me as the other hand touches it, and the other way around.

One's body is one's own in a distinctive way: this ownness is essentially different from any other kind of relationship, authority or power one could have in relation to other inanimate or living bodies. For example, only I can feel the pain I am feeling now in my arm. My acting in a certain way which, say, would be conducive to my feeling that pain is, in a certain distinctive sense, mine even if I did not intend to act in that particular way. Someone else can perhaps have the same pain right now, or act in the same way as I do, or have made me act the way I do (e.g. by forcing or deceiving me); someone else could represent or imagine me feeling pain or acting the way I am acting now, or can empathize with my suffering. But nobody else can feel my own pain, or act in my place, for she cannot be me feeling the pain, cannot be me acting in the way I do. My relating to my pain and to my actions, my making sense of them in some way or another is my own and cannot be someone else's. My pain and my actions in the current situation have a particular significance, place and time in my life, which cannot be reproduced in somebody else's life. My pain is not transferable *as such* into someone else's affectivity, nor are my actions reproducible *as such* in someone else's life. Somebody else's feeling pain or acting in a certain way belongs to her life—these experiences are her own, not mine. Transcendence incarnate is thus characterized by a distinctive *ownness*.

The material determinations of embodiment mentioned above are interwoven with another kind of phenomena: projects, action-oriented attitudes, interests or involvements in action enact transcendence incarnate. These are embedded within a current situation and within the temporal articulation of bodily existence. Our making sense of our being in the world as embodied, gendered beings implies at the same time making sense of what surrounds the body, the context wherein we find ourselves. One's making sense of one's own gendered bodiliness is informed by modes of intelligibility which are culturally and historically articulated and, at the same time, guided by the way one understands oneself, by current concerns and the way further tasks are set up. What is significant by virtue of embodiment is primarily neither an object of knowledge, nor of explicit reflection, but something which is taken in stride within a context of life and agency. In daily contexts, transcendence incarnate develops its sense of embodied existence (that is, of the body and of what is encountered through the body) primarily as habitual behaviour; the latter, in its turn, takes part in the constitution of the "automatisms," the institutions or

routines of agency in daily contexts.³ There are moments of perception, or of sexual impulses and “colorings” in an individual’s daily life, of which she might not be explicitly aware, but which might (or might not) come to her mind later. Embodied transcendence and the corresponding making sense of the world does not primarily develop some kind of knowledge through the operation of the senses, nor is it primarily oriented towards the acquisition of such knowledge, but it rather takes what is encountered in stride within a context of life or agency.

Gender, understood as a possibility of embodiment, constitutes a facet of transcendence incarnate.⁴ Sexuality and sexual differentiation, as two aspects of gendered being, inform one another: for example, being a woman delineates a certain scope of the possibilities of sexual life; in its turn, sexuality plays a significant role in the constitution of one’s gender. At the same time, these two aspects of gendered bodiliness neither completely overlap, nor is one reducible to the other. For example, the life and agency of a woman is not reducible to her sexual life; nor is her sexuality something one can make sense of merely in terms of her being a woman, in terms of her femininity—other aspects of her existence are also relevant here, such as her personal history or what she encounters in the situation in which she finds herself. As a facet or possibility of embodiment, gender cannot be properly understood in purely physical terms, nor can it be reduced to a cultural construction; yet both material and historical-cultural conditions are relevant to the issue of gender formation. This contention follows from the more general analysis of transcendence incarnate provided above and from some further, more specific considerations which are developed in what follows.

³ A possible objection to the account of embodiment offered here could be that this account involves a certain circularity. Our making sense of our embodied existence in the world is historically and culturally constituted and, at the same time, plays a role in the articulation of certain aspects of a culture or form of life. I suggest that this is not a vicious circularity but a circularity specific to the framework of sense corresponding to human existence in the world. For some reasons as to why the circularity of sense is not a vicious circularity see Heidegger (1997, esp. Section 32). As Heidegger points out, the hermeneutic circle essentially belongs to the possibility of our making sense of what there is. We are always already making some sense of our Being in the world, and this makes it possible for us to further develop our sense of ourselves, of the world and of the others. Moreover, in the case of embodiment, this circularity between sense constitution and the formation of a historical life form is short circuited by the materiality or fleshiness of the body. Making sense of embodied existence is not only culturally articulated, but is also essentially affected by the materiality of the body; the body is not just a culturally formed thing, but it has its own kind of materiality.

⁴ Gender is taken here to cover, among other aspects of existence, sexuality (or sexual life) and sexual/gender differentiation. For a convincing, concise account of the challenges to the distinction sex/gender, of some reasons why this is rather a blurred distinction, and for the significance of the sexual difference, especially in relation to the philosophy of religion, see Anderson (1998, Introduction, Section 2). There are many important questions concerning gender differences, but I do not intend to discuss these here. Although there is no assumption or contention made here that there are only two sexes, part of the discussion of gendered being will however refer to the sexual difference between women and men, paying more attention to the issue of the constitution of femininity.

The neglect or, on the contrary, the positive recognition of gendered embodiment has significant normative implications in our lives; as Pamela Sue Anderson points out, such implications occur in relation to epistemic and ethical practices. Embodied, gendered beings existing and acting in the world are put in motion by gendered confidence; the latter affects the way we engage in normatively constituted epistemic and ethical practices, such as, the ones pertaining to philosophy and theology.⁵

The Spatialization of the Gendered Body

Insofar as being in space is a necessary feature of our existence, and we exist in space essentially as embodied beings, embodiment is a necessary characteristic of the kind of existence we have. Gender is an essential facet of embodied existence; this existence cannot be a-sexual or sexless in an absolute sense. Moreover, gender cannot be properly understood in isolation from other essential aspects of human life, such as our relation to others, the world, or language use; gender is geared to these other constitutive facets of human life and agency.⁶

The inquiry into the spatializing of the gendered body which is pursued in what follows and which is inspired by Heidegger's account of spatiality in *Being and Time*, proposes a way of revisiting Merleau-Ponty's view of the necessity of embodiment in the constitution of transcendence and of our making sense of things. For the most part, one's sense of one's own body does not consist in one's attending to parts or points of one's body, which would be, in their turn, connected to parts or points of the environment affecting the bodily bits. Rather, in each case, there is a much more diffuse relation to the body and to what affects it. We are always already dispersed within the totality of our body, within its material make-up and possibilities, within its moments of passivity, blind spots, or blind intuitions. One's own gendered body is always already within a distinctive, diffuse proximity which corresponds to its characteristic ownness. My body is my own and is always here

⁵Pamela Sue Anderson, "Gendered Confidence and the Lived Body," Also see Chapter 11, pp. 163–180.

⁶My account of gendered being draws on Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexual being in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, but also departs from it with regard to certain central claims which will become clearer later. Merleau-Ponty (2006, Chapter 5) offers an interesting discussion of the manner in which sexual being is essentially related to the rest of one's life. He strongly opposed Heidegger's view of the body and sexual being as ontical features of existence, that is, accidental determinations of our existence. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty argued for the claim that embodiment and sexual being belong with necessity to our Being-in-the-world. I follow Merleau-Ponty in this respect. However, while I argue too that the embodiment is an essential aspect of Being-in-the-world, I do not endorse Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is the center or "pivot" of Being-in-the-world. Furthermore, I argue, against Merleau-Ponty prioritising of the body over spatiality, that spatiality is the condition of possibility of embodiment.

for me. The spatializing of the body involves a radical de-distancing which makes possible the sense of the body as one's own.⁷

The distinctive proximity of one's own body has neither primarily, nor essentially, a measurable character. The distinctive closeness of the gendered body does not consist in something like an erasure of any measurable or even non-measurable distance within the spatial ownness. There is thus necessarily a certain distance, primarily non-measurable, non-objectified, and pre-reflective which is always maintained in relation to one's very own body. However close, the body always withdraws within a certain distance. Gendered embodiment presupposes not only a radical proximity of bodiliness, but also a configuration of a possible "yonder" corresponding to bodily possibilities which are merely schematically delimited. Such are the possibilities of me being "there," in a different place or environment; these possibilities which are articulated in accordance with the way they have been actualized in the past, or as they are anticipated in the future, or as they are preserved in their possibility within a certain project. Such body-schemas inform one's sense of one's embodied, gendered existence in the world. These possibilities belonging to a distant "there" organize in a relatively formal way transcendence incarnate and its field of sense. This sense constitution is developed not only in terms of projects, interests, or actions but also in terms of habits, tendencies or dispositions. The latter are elements which situate incarnate life within the anonymity or generality of embodiment. Thus one's own body is not only a site of the particular, of the personal, and the subjective, but also of a certain kind of generality which corresponds to the anonymous facet of the body. This anonymity attests a certain farness and distancing of one's own body.⁸

The distancing and de-distancing which are both operative within bodily spatiality are not determined by certain fixed parameters, but can fluctuate; this is a non-measurable fluctuation which is delimited by the distinctive "here" and possible "yonder" characteristic of bodily spatiality. Thus this fluctuation has certain necessary spatializing limits, the transgressing of which is a transgressing of the domain of sense pertaining to gendered embodiment. Iris Marion Young's analysis of feminine spatiality, which is discussed below, offers to some extent an illustration of the fluctuation regarding bodily spatiality.

The spatializing which informs embodiment has a diffuse, fluctuating character, insofar as its orientation is polarized in relation to a certain kind of proximity and, at the same time, towards a certain bodily farness. The spatial polarizing in the space of

⁷My body is here, and I am dispersed in all its movements (of hands, eyes, lips, etc.), oriented towards certain actions and tasks, or in its transitory moments of rest. Another example which is also illustrative of the proximity of the body considered here is that of the phantom limb. The phantom limb is still "here" for the patient, still part of his body-schema, of the scheme of his world, projects, actions or attitudes.

⁸This account of the spatiality of the body in terms not only of its proximity but also of its farness implies the impossibility of equating existence or transcendence with embodiment. From this follows that existence is, as Merleau-Ponty rightly pointed out against certain tendencies in psychoanalysis, irreducible to sexual life (2006, Chapter 5).

transcendence incarnate corresponds to the ambiguity of the body.⁹ This ambiguity or openness is an essential feature of the sphere of *sense* constituted through gendered incarnate transcendence. Because of the openness characteristic to the domain of sense corresponding to gendered embodiment, it is impossible, *in principle*, to determine its exact scope and to delimit it with precision from other aspects of existence and agency with which it is interwoven. Precise models of delimitation and definition cannot be applied to gendered embodiment without distorting it or restricting its scope. As Pamela Sue Anderson points out in “Gendered Confidence and the Lived Body,” gender is not only ambiguous but is a variable “the lines [of which] are complex,” a variable which affects confidence positively or negatively.

The inquiry into bodily spatiality offers new resources for further investigation which can illuminate important aspects of gender constitution. In “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body, Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality” Iris Marion Young undertakes such an inquiry. She regards the investigation of women’s bodily comportment, manners of moving and relation to space in male-dominated societies as a phenomenally secure way of approaching the feminine and sexual difference in accordance with their situatedness. I do not intend to discuss her account of the feminine inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the lived body in detail here,¹⁰ but only to introduce by means of her discussion of the feminine certain further elements and questions relevant to the argument of this chapter. Like Merleau-Ponty, Young assigns priority to the body over spatiality: the body is the “source” of the space we live in. As embedded in the world through its transcendence, the body spatializes its environment. The movements, affections, perceptions, and agency of embodied existence open up, give structure and significance to the space surrounding it, wherein worldly things and living beings are encountered.

Young’s analysis spells out three basic features of the feminine being in space. Typically, women tend to exist in what she calls an “enclosed,” “constricted” space. The possibilities of their bodily comportment and motility are restrained to a space

⁹The twofold articulation of the gendered bodily space, namely its active and passive moments, its material and formal aspects, and the orientation within proximity and towards what is prefigured in the distance indicate the ambiguity of embodied existence. At the same time gendered existence has its own kind of normativity. It can be argued that the ambiguity which pertains to the sphere of sense delineated by gendered embodiment is similar to the vagueness of our ordinary language use, or more exactly to what may appear as vagueness from a point of view which prioritizes a crystal-clear logic. This vagueness is, as Wittgenstein pointed out in the *Philosophical Investigations*, not a flaw of language but an essential aspect of it. This ambiguity does not undermine but corresponds to the rule governed practices of language.

¹⁰Young indicates that her investigation is confined to the Western, contemporary, urban culture; such a delimitation of the scope of the investigation follows, she points out, from the view of the historical-cultural situatedness of existence (1998, p. 261). Her inquiry focuses on purposive agency, such as performing a task, throwing, hitting, or running. She takes from Merleau-Ponty the existentialist view that purposive agency primarily defines our relation to the world (p. 261). Young’s description of the basic features of the feminine are also based on the observation of women’s behaviour and on studies in psychology.

more limited than the space which would in fact be available for them to inhabit. In terms of the conception of spatiality proposed above, this means that feminine spatializing articulates only a constricted, less radical proximity of one's own body, a more limited and not fully open "here" of bodily space. To this corresponds a restrictive distancing from one's own body, a distancing which distorts and inappropriately limits one's possibilities of existence and agency. In Young's terms, feminine existence has the tendency to experience the body as an object located in space alongside other objects. She identifies this as a second basic feature of the feminine bodily space. The scope of the possibilities of the feminine "yonder" is truncated, as the "yonder" is taken to be more remote, less accessible than it actually is. The feminine being in space, as described by Young, is not that of a free, full existence but of a fragmented, discontinuous spatial existence, which is characterized by a "double spatiality" corresponding to a radical severing between a constricted "here" and truncated "yonder." This doubling of spatiality constitutes the third feature of feminine spatializing, which thus lacks a focused direction, a freely projected sense. The feminine manner of being in space is not only ambiguous, but is, in Young's view, "contradictory" (1998, p. 268). Thus, she writes, "women in sexist society are physically handicapped" (p. 269). The spatializing—the basic features of which are constriction, duality, and objectified (self)positioning—plays, in Young's view, a significant role in the way in which women tend to make sense of their possibilities. Thus, Young regards feminine existence and agency as characterized by an inhibited intentionality.

Young's account of spatiality seems to explain, rather than to be explained by, her account of feminine embodiment (the essential features of which she identifies as ambiguity, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuity). This challenges her explicit prioritizing of embodiment over spatiality in her approach to existence and agency in the world. I suggest that, rather than making the strong claim that spatiality has its source in the body, as she and Merleau-Ponty do, it is more plausible to regard being in space as a more fundamental feature of existence, and spatiality as informing bodily existence.

In "Climbing Like A Girl: an Exemplary Adventure in Feminist Phenomenology," Dianne Chisholm engages critically with Young's approach to the feminine and sexual difference. Her main objection is the restriction, and thus inadequacy, of Young's account of the feminine motility to considerations of debilitated intentionally and inhibited movement; she develops an analysis of free bodily movement through the case study of Lynn Hill, an outstanding figure of free climbing (rock climbing without artificial aids). Chisholm, however, does not pay as much attention as Young to the bodily spatiality of the everyday feminine (style of) movement. If the suggested contention of the constitutive priority of spatiality over embodiment proves to be right, then an inquiry into what can be perhaps referred to as the feminine style of inhabiting bodily spatiality—an inquiry which would recognize its inherent variations, corresponding to other variations, such as the ones concerning the freedom or inhibition of intentionality and movement—such an inquiry might reveal commonalities which would be sufficient for the grounding and delimitation of a shared space of feminine existence.

The significance of “Throwing Like a Girl” in the context of this chapter lies in this text’s attention to bodily gendered (feminine) spatiality and to certain methodological aspects of the inquiry; the way these issues are developed by Young is contentious, but this is not a matter of my current concern here. Let me just note, however, that in ““Throwing Like a Girl’: Twenty Years Later” Young herself points out certain limitations of her earlier text, which she identifies as follows: the presupposition of the unity of subjectivity, the instrumentalism of the earlier approach to action now seen as a masculine model of action, and the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence. Furthermore, there is a fundamental tension which, in her later view, underlies the earlier account of the feminine: the tension between an *accepted* humanism—a universal, gender-neutral understanding of the human (for which she drew on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy)—and her gender-specific investigation which, as such, questions the former to some extent. In Young’s later view, “Throwing like a Girl” does not question the former radically enough, and is not critical enough in relation to it; it thus harbors masculine-biased presuppositions taken over from Merleau-Ponty. The question, however, is then whether the first element generating the tension—namely the notion of a neutral standpoint of embodied existence (a more qualified and adequate one)—remains a valid possibility, and whether the tension itself can be resolved.

The Spirituality of Transcendence

Spiritual concerns and comportments are understood in this chapter in a very broad and formal way. The inquiry here assumes neither a definite philosophical position nor a particular religious perspective, nor any specific views concerning the attributes, or ontological characteristics of the Divine.¹¹ The inquiry not only does not presuppose a particular religious or theological perspective, but it does not even start from the assumption of any kind of spiritual belief or faith. Rather the investigation looks into the conditions which make these possible, as specific modes, among other modes, of spiritual concern which the investigation attempts to cover. That towards which the spiritual mode of transcendence is oriented is conceived in a minimalist way in terms of an exceptional kind of alterity or otherness.¹²

The argument begins with an analysis of two basic constitutive items of spiritual transcendence: first, that towards which transcendence is oriented or that which the spiritual comportment seeks to make sense of, and, second, the very movement or development of spiritual transcending. These two moments constitutive of spiritual

¹¹For challenges to the problem of the existence of God in the Western philosophy of religion on similar line of thought, see Levinas (1987); Anderson (1998, pp. 47–48); Moore (1997, pp. 277–278). As Moore puts it, “there may be reason to believe in God *because* God does not exist” (p. 278).

¹²This might remind one of Levinas’ understanding of God as the absolute Other. Levinas’s God belongs, however, to a particular religious perspective, that of Jewish monotheism.

concerns are considered first separately; the inquiry is then concerned with the constitution of the spiritual mode of transcendence as a whole. Starting from a formal, schematic understanding of the first constitutive item of spirituality, it is possible to bring to the fore the necessity of this mode of transcendence within the kind of life humans have. A basic presupposition or starting point in the development of an ontological, epistemological or religious conception of the religious realm is an understanding of this realm in terms of an exceptional kind of alterity. There is an *extraordinary difference* between that towards which spiritual transcendence is oriented and worldly beings, including us and beings like us. The difference is extraordinary in the sense that this mode of transcendence and that towards which it is oriented are out of the ordinary, are unlike anything we are familiar with in our daily existence and agency in the world. Because of the extraordinary character of the alterity or otherness at issue in spiritual transcendence, this alterity always affects our finite existence and agency in the world in a way or another.¹³ The transcendence of embodied existence towards an extraordinary otherness cannot be erased, and therefore is a necessary facet of human life.

Starting now from a formal, schematic approach to the basic possibilities of the movement of spiritual transcendence, another argument can be developed for the necessity of spiritual compartments within human life. These compartments can take the form of a positive turn or move towards the Divine or, on the contrary, they can take the shape of a turn away from, or contestation of religious spaces (this occurs, for example, in some forms of agnosticism or atheism). These two basic modes of spiritual compartment do not necessarily develop separately; sometimes they might intersperse or one might, through certain modifications, lead to the other, such as, for example, in some cases of religious crises or rebellion, or in cases of occasional doubting of the believer, or of sacred moments in the life of the profane. The polarity articulated by the two basic possibilities of spiritual transcendence, namely the move towards and the turn against the radical alterity which is at issue in this transcendence, makes room for a mode of existing in between these possibilities—whether, say, in the form of a restless, violent crisis, or in the form of a *stasis*, a suspension of, and in between the two possibilities, a suspension or indecidability which would constitute a religiously neutral perspective.¹⁴ Hence, whether we are reflectively aware of it or not, we are always situated within a transcendence which has a spiritual facet. The latter necessarily belongs to our existence and, as such, we understand ourselves in terms of it.

Let us now turn our attention to the phenomenon of spiritual transcendence as a whole, and look at an essential aspect of its constitution, namely its spatiality. Since

¹³It is in these terms that we can understand the possibility of various particular modes of spirituality, including the extreme ones such as radical forms of mysticism, or religious crises, deep concerns or anxieties corresponding, for example, to the idea of God's withdrawal from the world, or the death of God.

¹⁴Heidegger suggests, in an essay from 1922, that philosophy should be placed in the space of such an indecidability (see Heidegger 1992).

we are embodied beings, existing necessarily in space and time, *our* spiritual concerns must involve spatio-temporal aspects.¹⁵ Our being in space must play a role in the constitution of spiritual concerns. Issues such as the question as to whether the Divine is spatial or can be understood as spatial (for example, through incarnation), or not (as, for instance, Cartesianism claims) are, however, left aside here. An embodied being makes sense of some otherness, in the sense explained earlier, her own and not of the other's.¹⁶ This is *par excellence* the case when the otherness is characterized by an extraordinary alterity, which can never be appropriated as a mode of human existing. Thus, we, humans, can never be absolutely deified, nor can we ever fully transfer or reproduce in our lives the characteristics, attributes or figurations of the Divine.

To the extent that spiritual concerns are, in each case, one's own they must be informed by the features which are essential to one's own human condition. Insofar as being in space is such a feature of existence, a certain spatiality must mark our human spiritual concerns. Since directed towards an extreme mode of alterity, spiritual transcendence can be understood only in terms of a limit of our being in space. As such, the limit itself must be, or belong to, a mode of spatializing; it would thus be a limit mode of spatializing. The view that spiritual transcendence involves spatializing further supports the claim that spirituality is a necessary constitutive aspect of human existence. In what follows I am concerned in more detail with the spatializing of spirituality.

Such a mode of spatializing cannot be understood in terms of measurable distances or points in space. Insofar as what is at issue is an extraordinary alterity, the spiritual transcendence of embodied existence involves an orientation towards a "yonder" which cannot be located in terms of worldly spatial determinations, but which is a diffuse "yonder," *beyond* such determinations. The orientation towards a "yonder" of most extreme remoteness constitutes a limited possibility of distancing. I suggest that this spatializing, primarily understood in terms of radical distancing, makes possible spiritual transcendence and its development—not only in the negative manner of opposing or contesting a sacred realm, but also in the manner of the quest or encounter of the Divine. The possibility of such an encounter is intelligible only on the assumption of a prior "yonder" or distance of the Divine in relation to human existence; moreover, the Divine's necessary remaining in a distinctive farness is a mark of the encounter as an encounter with an extraordinary alterity.

Spiritual transcendence is possible insofar as it involves, at the same time, a de-distancing, a proximity of the extraordinary alterity towards which transcendence is oriented. This proximity cannot be measured or estimated in terms of worldly space but is rather ambiguous, diffuse. Let us consider first the spiritual comportment which takes the form of a move towards, or even of an encounter of, the Divine.

¹⁵I do not intend to discuss here the temporal aspect of transcending existence.

¹⁶My relation to a particular being or thing in the world has *as such* a definite place within my existence, within the complicated texture of my determinations and possibilities, of my projects and affections, of a certain horizon of possible perspectives. There is, in the constitution of my relating to anything, an irreducible ownness.

The religious encounter with the Divine incarnated or spatially manifest, the bodily aspects of rituals, the deification of individuals, which all have their various significations in particular religions, can all be regarded as involving a proximity of a material, yet divine kind. The encounter of the Divine presupposes a de-distancing of a sacred, material proximity, which maintains, at the same time, its other orientation towards the radical farness characteristic of the spirituality of transcendence. The other basic, negative mode of spiritual concern, the opposition to or contestation of a religious or sacred realm—which might take the form of, say, a refusal, or an assumption of the absence or even “death” of Deity—also involves a certain, though different, mode of de-distancing of that towards which the spiritual concern or comportment is directed. In such cases, the de-distancing develops at a rather purely symbolic level of words, concepts, representations, images or (“dead”) myths which are about a religious space, but which are not, however, significant in the same way in which they are for a spiritual existence oriented in a positive manner towards what is for it the Divine.

Spirituality and Corporeality in the Space of Transcendence

The gendered body and spiritual comportments are, I argued, necessarily constitutive aspects of the kind of existence we, humans, have. This existence cannot be completely cut off from either the spiritual side of transcendence nor from gendered bodiliness. Both spiritual concerns and gender possibilities or determinations inform, variously, our making sense of ourselves, of the world, and of others. This implies that neither spirituality, nor gendered corporeality can be properly understood independently from one another. There is thus a co-dependence between gendered bodiliness and spiritual concerns, or in other words, between the two aspects of transcendence examined above, that is, between transcendence incarnate and the spirituality of transcendence. None has priority in determining the other, but rather each plays a role in the constitution of the other. A significant modification of one affects the other. Spiritual comportments within the space of transcendence can never belong to a disembodied, genderless being, but only to an incarnate, gendered existence. Thus different gender possibilities correspond to spiritual comportments which are significantly different. There are important differences in specific gender constitution, such as for example, in the sexuality of laics, believers, atheists, or agnostics—whether whether sexuality is affirmed, resisted or merely adumbrated in one’s being. These differences are manifest in their beliefs, commitments, feelings, behavior, or agency. Gender differentiation and spiritual attitudes are interrelated. For example, to the existence within a certain religious space there corresponds a certain delimitation of the possibilities and roles of a gender, say of women. Furthermore, understanding oneself as a woman differs in the case of a Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or of a person living in another religious space; there are important differences between all these cases with regard to a woman’s possibilities of existence and agency.

Even when spiritual concerns take the form of a turning away from or contestation of a religious space, their constitution and development are possible only in relation to the possibilities of gendered embodiment. Negative spiritual attitudes are such that they are expressible and, indeed, always already expressed in one's life, a facet of which is its gender. There can, thus, be significant differences in the contestations of religious space which are marked by gender differentiation. In such cases, the differences between feminine and masculine modes of contestation are manifest in the behaviour, the mental life (feelings, desires, or imagery), sexuality, agency, decisions, or dilemmas of women and men.

Certain modes of spatializing inform, I argued, gendered embodiment and spiritual transcendence. The latter involve a limit of spatializing that corresponds to the extraordinary alterity towards which spiritual transcendence is directed. This limit is primarily a limit of distancing possibilities, a limit of transcendence as oriented towards a radically remote "yonder". Spatializing cannot involve a "yonder" further away than the "yonder" which is presupposed by the radical transcendence enacted by spiritual concerns, and which is thus characterised by an extreme remoteness. It is not possible to talk of a "yonder" beyond that of the extraordinary alterity at issue in spiritual concerns. These concerns enact this limit of the spatializing of transcendence, the limit of the possibilities of what is, or can be, spatialized as remote or distant.

Gendered embodiment and its incarnate transcendence are informed by a different kind of spatializing limit, which corresponds to the distinctive ownness salient to corporeal, gendered specificities. The gendered body is characterized by a spatial proximity, an intrinsic closeness, which cannot be compared against or understood in terms of the proximity of any other kind of spatial thing. Gendered bodiliness is articulated by a spatializing which is primarily de-distancing with regard to the body, and thereby to what is encountered through the body. This spatializing thus involves a limit of the possibilities of de-distancing and proximity.

The interconnection or co-dependence of gendered embodiment and spiritual transcendence can thus be understood in terms of their enacting two limits of spatializing, more exactly the limits of the spatializing's interrelated poles of proximity and farness. They are thus each informed by a spatializing limit which radically prioritizes one or the other of the spatializing poles, of "here" and "yonder." As indicated in the earlier analyses, a diffuse spatial polarizing in relation to proximity and farness—"here" and "yonder"—essentially holds these poles of spatiality together.

Conclusion and a Reformulation of the Issue of the Neutrality of Incarnate Transcendence

Gendered embodiment and the spirituality of transcendence are, I argued, essential aspects of the existence characteristic of the human condition, and they are both informed by certain modes of spatializing. If successful, the argument

concerning the spatial constitution of spiritual concerns contributes in a novel way to the challenging of a whole tradition of thinking, a tradition for which spirituality is a-spatial. The argument offers an alternative to idealized conceptions of spirituality and of gender, which neglects the significance of our worldliness, embodiment, and finitude. I argued that certain necessary limits of the space of transcendence, namely the limit of de-distancing and proximity, on the one hand, and the limit of distancing and farness, on the other, are enacted within gendered incarnation and the spirituality of transcendence, respectively. This view implies that these two aspects of transcendence must be understood as interrelated, and their constitution as co-dependent.

If gendered incarnation is constitutive of transcendence, of our existence and agency, how, if at all, is the neutrality of incarnate transcending possible? Insofar as the gendered body is informed by a necessary limit of spatial existence, the question of neutrality can be reformulated in the following manner: Is the overcoming or the suspension of this spatial limit of human existence possible?

The answer to the question of the neutrality of gender, embodied existence must fend off the view of the possibility of an absolute severing of gendered embodiment; this view is not only naïve but proves to be wrong at a very fundamental level, insofar as it implies the possibility of a move beyond a certain spatial limit of existence and sense constitution; such a move is absurd and impossible. Neutrality can neither consist in something like utter dis-embodiment, nor in allegedly achieving, by playing the “god-trick,” a God’s eye point of view.¹⁷ This chapter can be read as a reminder of the significance of counteracting the powerful tendency of reducing neutrality to gender-blind idealizations that invite hidden male-biased assumptions. This does not, however, imply that the neutrality of gendered bodies in space is, in principle, impossible. If proven to be possible, neutrality must be understood as constituted or occurring within the limits of the space of incarnate transcendence. On such an account, neutrality and the gendered, incarnate transcendence would be equally primitive possibilities of the human condition.

A positive answer to the issue of the neutrality of transcending bodies pursued along the lines sketched above might offer significant resources for tackling the aporia mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The aporia was put as follows: either an investigation concerning some important aspects of the human condition takes into consideration significant particularities of gendered embodiment—but then it seems it has to renounce the aspiration to universal claims; or the inquiry is utterly silent about the variety of gender specificities—but then it does not seem able anymore to do justice to essential aspects of human life. The aporia involves a tension which, for example, the later Iris Marion Young identifies in her own earlier work,

¹⁷See Anderson (1998); see also her discussion of neutrality and her critical dialogue with Taliaferro (2005) and Zagzebski (2004) in Anderson (2007).

more specifically in “Throwing like a Girl”; this is the tension between the assumption of the neutrality of an absolute point of view and her feminist concerns which put the former into question.

If, however, the gendered body and its neutrality are taken to be two possibilities of the human condition which are equally primitive, then the alleged dichotomy between them, and thus between the two poles of the aforementioned aporia or of the tension identified by Young or Kruks is undermined. The aporia and the tension would thus dissolve. On such an account, it might be proven that philosophy does not need to submit to a strong quietism regarding gender specificities in order to be able to preserve its aspiration to absolute perspectives. A weaker, qualified quietism might still serve this aspiration and, at the same time, allow for considerations concerning gender issues with the proviso that such considerations remain within the sphere of a formal inquiry, recognizing however gender’s variability. The perspective of such an inquiry is then not that of a point of view from nowhere or of a top-down, aerial thinking—what Merleau-Ponty calls (as Kruks notes) *pensée de survol* (Kruks 2006, p. 30)—but a perspective from in between specific gender possibilities, a perspective which remains, however, formally undecided in relation to these possibilities and suspended in between them.

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Chapter 15

The Unfolding of Our Lives with Others: Heidegger and Medieval Mysticism

Ben Morgan

Abstract The chapter argues that the aspects of Heidegger’s thought which are most useful to feminist philosophy of religion are not the obviously spiritual terms, like *Gelassenheit* or “releasement” borrowed from Meister Eckhart, but instead the focus on co-existence and shared mood (*Mitsein* and *Mitbefindlichkeit*) to be found in *Being and Time* (1927). At the same time, these concepts represent a missed opportunity, as can be seen when Heidegger’s arguments are juxtaposed with texts of fourteenth-century German mysticism and the milieu and practices from which these texts arose. The medieval texts supply a model for explaining why Heidegger’s arguments about co-existence in the course of *Being and Time* unexpectedly come to privilege isolation and anxiety over being with other people. In particular, they make visible a culturally determined attachment to a model of masculine behaviour, that as well as being implicit in the arguments of *Being and Time* is explicit in the letters Heidegger wrote to Hannah Arendt in the mid-1920s.

Keywords Martin Heidegger · Hannah Arendt · Meister Eckhart · Sister Catherine Treatise · *Mitsein* · Being-with · Subjectivity · Gender roles · Gendered language

Which Bits of Heidegger are Useful for Feminists and in What Way?

This chapter will look at ways in which Heidegger’s thought might be useful to a feminist philosophy of religion, focusing in particular on the idea of “being with” or *Mitsein*, by which he registers the fundamental connectedness of human beings with each other, and challenges models which take the isolated individual as their starting point. That Heidegger’s philosophy should be of interest to a philosophy

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of religion has never really been in doubt, since his thought developed in a productive dialogue with religious texts and with theologians. When he broke with the Catholic Church in 1919, he did so as a result of an intense engagement with the texts of, among others, St. Paul, Luther, and Meister Eckhart.¹ The experience of early Christianity, particularly as it is recorded in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, was, alongside the philosophy of Aristotle, one of the inspirations for his initial formulations of what he called a "hermeneutics of facticity"—the phenomenological unpacking of the lived stream of involvement in the world that was to become the core of his philosophical project. As his work on the arguments that became *Being and Time* progressed, and his attention was drawn away from Paul and St. Augustine to Aristotle and Kant, the relationship with theology continued nevertheless. The text Theodore Kisiel has termed the "first draft" of *Being and Time*, *The Concept of Time*, was delivered as a lecture to the Theology Faculty in Marburg in July 1924. He addressed theologians in Marburg again after the publication of *Being and Time* in the talk he gave on "Phenomenology and Theology" in February 1928. From the later 1920s, the philosophers of Ancient Greece came to replace early Christianity as Heidegger's paradigm for what philosophy should strive for (Caputo 1993). But Meister Eckhart remained a steady point of reference for his lectures from the 1930s to the 1950s, including the lectures on *What is Called Thinking* that marked his return to the university in Freiburg in 1951, after the ban imposed during the denazification process.² At the end of his life, it was the theologian and Eckhart specialist Bernard Welte whom Heidegger asked to deliver the oration at his burial.³ Heidegger's philosophical development was thus in a constant if uneasy conversation with religious thinkers. At the same time, theologians were engaging with his texts from the very start. Rudolph Bultmann, for instance, who worked in the Theology Faculty at Marburg in the 1920s, greeted the publication of *Being and Time* with enthusiasm.⁴ Similarly, in the English-speaking world, it was a theologian, John Macquarrie, who was one of those responsible for the first translation of *Being and Time*.

These links cannot in themselves explain why Heidegger's thought should be of interest to a *feminist* philosopher of religion. Nevertheless, Patricia Huntington has suggested that it is precisely the spiritual side of Heidegger's philosophy that appeals to feminists.⁵ His philosophy can assist in the elaboration of a spirituality of everyday life of a sort which might help feminism break with the patriarchal structures of institutionalized religion because it draws attention to ordinary practice and encourages attitudes of openness and receptivity captured in the term which

¹For Heidegger's reading list on the phenomenology of religion during 1917–19, see Kisiel (1993, pp. 525–527).

²Schürmann (1973, pp. 95–119).

³Welte (1982, p. 86).

⁴Caputo (2006, pp. 329–331).

⁵Patricia Huntington, "History of the Feminist Reception of Heidegger and a Guide to Heidegger's Thought," in Holland and Huntington (2001, p. 10).

Heidegger's borrows from Meister Eckhart's thought: *Gelassenheit*, "releasement" or "letting go." In 1944 and 1945, Heidegger drafted a conversation "Considering Releasement" ("Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit") which presents in more detail what he means by the term.⁶ As an explicit reflection on an idea that Heidegger takes over from the mystical tradition, it might seem a good place to start working out what Heidegger has to offer a feminist philosophy of religion. However, I want to use it to show briefly where *not* to start. We learn from Heidegger by breaking with his thought, "destroying" it, as he hoped to destroy the ontological tradition that had preceded him, to lay bare the living experience from which it emerged. This experience will be scarred and limited, and may not give an especially flattering view of the way people deal with each other. But it's one of the guiding assumptions of this chapter that it is only by engaging with and acknowledging this experience that the history of everyday inhumanity, of which our cultural canon is the indirect record, can be in any way redeemed. It will be my contention that mysticism entails an acceptance of our limits, not a flight from them.

"Considering releasement" takes the form of a discussion between three men walking in the countryside as it gets dark: a researcher, an academic, and a teacher. The teacher is given the lines that steer the conversation in a Heideggerian direction, but the other two are not simply stooges who prove his wisdom, they also help connect the discussion to academic and historical debate. In the course of the conversation, releasement emerges as a way of opening up to the world without preconceptions, so that we can absorb how our environment comes to meet us. It goes beyond the standard philosophical divisions between subject and object, and also beyond the idea of will or wanting. It is a form of waiting, which isn't expecting anything in particular, but which makes contact with the level of life's unfolding, on which more instrumental dealings are dependent but which they simultaneously make unavailable. In the text, the form of the conversation is implicitly offered as an example of the condition of open waiting that the three men discuss. Ideas occur to them in the encroaching darkness without them fully controlling them, and even the word "releasement" itself emerges in the conversation without anyone really being responsible for it (Heidegger 1959, p. 47). The text thus both discusses and embodies a form of flexibility and receptivity. At the same time, it remains very abstract. It operates by exploring connections in language, particularly those arising from the archaic German verb *gegenen*, which means to encounter. It does not analyze the psychological preconditions of the attitude invoked, or flesh out the idea of "letting go" beyond the very general encounter with the very fact of our belonging in the world. It remains a philosophical conversation between three men, which seems ironically indifferent to the details of the world that made the conversation possible, and which therefore seems to fit exactly the complaint made by Tina Chanter that Heidegger's philosophy has at most a theoretical interest in the material world,

⁶Heidegger (1959, 1966).

but is otherwise happy to leave the business of actually taking care of physical and psychological needs to others, about whom it has little to say.⁷

This silence about the human preconditions of letting go is perhaps understandable given the situation in which the text was written. The end of 1944 was the point at which Freiburg was bombed by the advancing allies, and Heidegger, after his brief service for the *Volkssturm* left the city for the rural Messkirch for six months where he ordered his manuscripts with his brother, experiencing what one of his biographers has termed a “pastoral idyll” before returning to clear his name with the French forces who had in the meantime occupied the city (Safranski 1998, p. 333). The conversation on releasement certainly has the air of rural tranquility, and it is understandable in a context in which Germany’s defeat and occupation was imminent that solace might be found in abstract reflection on an ideal self-abandonment. The text needs to be read with this element of escape included. If we, as Heidegger suggests, listen to the text, waiting to hear all that it tells us without preconceptions, then part of what it imparts will be this silenced context, that marks “releasement” as itself an unacknowledged reaction, an escape from something specific into the hope of a non-specific receptivity. Read in this way, the text of “Gelassenheit” has little directly to say to a feminist philosophy of religion because it remains consciously removed from the messiness of human involvement. Indirectly, it can say a good deal about the way philosophical concepts are deployed for purposes that the concepts themselves do not explicitly theorize, in this case the purposes of a coping with momentous changes over which the individuals concerned feel they have little influence. It is an example of a psychological reaction, or a set of behaviors, which it does not itself explicitly thematize.

If Heidegger’s texts could be read only as symptoms of cultural reactions their interest to a feminist philosophy of religion would be primarily historical. I want to suggest one way in which, as well as being symptomatic of ways of behaving, they can offer us tools that help us engage with, and even transform, the way we do things now, or have done them in the past. My focus will be on Heidegger’s discussion of human connectedness in Division I of *Being and Time*: on his ideas of being-with, and of shared mood or *Mitbefindlichkeit*. At the same time, I want to argue that these concepts represent something like a missed opportunity. To do so, it will be necessary to juxtapose Heidegger’s writings from the 1920s with texts that he was inspired by and that have survived from the mystical milieu of Strasbourg and Cologne in the early fourteenth century, in which Meister Eckhart was active. To prepare the ground, I want to start with an apparently minor philological point which goes straight to the heart of the questions of shared human activity that will be the main focus of my argument.

⁷Tina Chanter, “The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger’s Ontology,” in Holland and Huntington (2001, p. 106).

Contexts of Shared Activity

The mystical texts in question are ones which Heidegger read or at least knew of and to which he had access in the Pfeiffer edition of Meister Eckhart, which he consulted for his reading on the phenomenology of religion between 1917 and 1919 before “breaking through” to the topics and style of thought that would occupy him for the rest of his life.⁸ The Pfeiffer edition presents all the texts as being by Meister Eckhart, but subsequent philological investigations have questioned whether they all can be attributed to the Dominican master. The current view is that some of them were written by other authors, some of whom may even have been women, who participated in the wider spiritual culture that shaped and was shaped by Eckhart’s preaching.⁹ As a consequence, many of the texts have been dropped from the critical edition of Eckhart’s work. I’m mentioning this not because I want to say Heidegger was reading Eckhart in an unreliable edition. The interest of the Pfeiffer edition is precisely that it has not completely erased the traces of the texts’ origins and subsequent transmission. It puts Eckhart’s texts alongside those of other writers and so reminds us that they can’t be separated from the shared activity of men and women in fourteenth-century Strasbourg and Cologne. The spiritual and philosophical ideas they promote arose out of this interaction; they are, at some level, tools for negotiating human togetherness, and as well as for understanding and coming to terms with the differences in the way men and women experienced this connection. Although he didn’t know what it was that he was reading, Heidegger had a flavor of this wider culture in the range of texts available to him.

By juxtaposing Heidegger’s arguments with what we know of the whole culture from which Eckhart’s texts arose, we can gain a clearer view of the very powerful arguments in the first part of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger describes his model of the unfolding of human life through our caring and coping and being with other people. The comparison with the mystical texts helps me to describe something like a “window of opportunity”—a form of understanding opened up by Heidegger’s texts, which, in his own arguments, he overlays and obscures with more familiar habits of thought. It could be said I’m using Eckhart and his milieu to assist me in a critical redemption of Heidegger’s concept of *Mitsein*. In following this line of thought, I’m taking up a type of argument that has been made from a number of perspectives, which summarized in a rough-and-ready form runs something like this: Heidegger had something important to say about intersubjectivity in the early parts of *Being and Time* and then blew it in the way he developed his ideas about authenticity and resoluteness in the later part of the book because he returned to the very model of an isolated subjectivity that his arguments about being-with-others-in-the-world had promised to overcome. This is the gist of Habermas’s critique in the

⁸Kisiel (1993, p. 70). The edition Heidegger used was a reprint of Pfeiffer (1857).

⁹Barbara Newman argues that one text in particular, the anonymous “Sister Catherine” treatise, might have been written by a woman because of “its exaltation of the beguine’s all-absorbing love at the expense of her confessor’s churchly prudence” (Newman 1995, p. 172).

Philosophical Discourse of Modernity when he presents his communicative alternative (Habermas 1987, pp. 148–154). It's what motivates Chanter's suggestion that we follow Levinas rather than Heidegger when thinking about intersubjectivity (Chanter 2001, pp. 78–122). It's also behind Hubert Dreyfus's sympathetic re-emphasizing of Heidegger's argument, when he questions the success of Division II of *Being and Time* and draws attention to those passages in the text which stress the necessity of "*das Man*" (the "One" or the "They") and try to work with it, rather than withdrawing from it (Dreyfus 1991, pp. 151–162).

My argument hopes to further develop these critiques in two respects. First, I want to add something to the exposition of Heidegger's arguments about being together, in particular to emphasize the significance of shared mood or *Mitbefindlichkeit*. This will allow me to describe in slightly different terms what changes as Heidegger moves from thinking about the inevitability of human togetherness to developing his ideas about authenticity. It will also show what I think both Habermas and Chanter overlook in their accounts of *Mitsein*. In a second move, I want to put Heidegger's own arguments in the context of the shared activity of men and women during the early twentieth century. The medieval texts are particularly helpful in this respect, because they make particular habits more obviously visible and so draw attention to the sorts of questions it's productive to bring to the twentieth-century writings. Eckhart's sermons, as we'll see, show how he focused on particular everyday habits and attachments of his listeners, while one anonymous text in particular—known as the "Sister Catherine" treatise—conveys a sense of the gender roles through which spiritual longings in the fourteenth century were channeled. These are not the sorts of questions Heidegger was interested in when he turned to the mysticism of the fourteenth century, nor do they reflect an approach that would necessarily have been available to Heidegger in the 1910s and 1920s, although it's obviously shaped by his philosophy. What I'm doing in effect is replacing an intellectual history model of textual comparison with the attempt to re-construct the two cultures from which the different groups of texts emerged. The juxtaposition of the two eras and two contexts is hopefully mutually illuminating, as Heidegger's formulations draw attention to aspects of the medieval texts that in their turn help to deepen our understanding of the twentieth-century philosophy.

Sharing Our Moods

I think many accounts of *Mitsein* don't go deep enough; they don't see quite how fundamentally the idea requires us to re-think our approach to questions of human identity. To illustrate what I mean by this, and to start off my exposition, it's helpful to look at Sartre's critique of the term in *Being and Nothingness*, since it contains both some concrete examples of what *Mitsein* might entail, as well as showing, by default, the assumptions that Heidegger's term precisely undermines. Heidegger argues that, just as we cannot imagine human activity that is not involved with and disclosing an environment or "world," we cannot conceive a human life in

separation from others. We are constitutively in the world with other people, available to them as they are available to us. This is the case even where we encounter their availability in the form of their indifference or absence. Their availability must be seen to have priority. We can only be lonely because at a more fundamental level we are with others, so a person's absence can show up and be painful to us. Or, to put it in Heidegger's words: "Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-With in the world" (Heidegger 1962, pp. 156–157). Sartre gives two illustrations to explain the term. The one is that of a rowing crew, brought together by the rhythm of the oars and their common goal (Sartre 1969, pp. 246–247). The other is "empirical states" of communion between people and "in particular that to which the Germans give the untranslatable name *Stimmung*" (Sartre 1969, p. 247). For Sartre, while these states of togetherness undeniably exist, they can't be given the privileged position Heidegger grants them because they can't help "in resolving the psychological, concrete problem of the recognition of the Other" which for him must be the starting point for any theory of human interaction (Sartre 1969, p. 248). So: on the one hand, Sartre fleshes out Heidegger's account by referring to forms of conscious or unconscious tuning in to other people's movements and intentions. On the other hand, he maintains that problems of how one consciousness recognizes another are of more fundamental importance. What he doesn't consider is that the bodily tuning in might be the basis on which individuals develop a sense of their own and other people's minds in the first place. He can't step outside the attachment to individual identity enough to relinquish its priority. Sartre is a Cartesian thinker, so in the end this attachment is not surprising. However it can be found in other thinkers from Levinas to Judith Butler who, even as they re-think ideas of identity, assume that human beings are fundamentally isolated from each other, and the work of philosophy or ethics is to help them bridge this unbridgeable gap without hurting each other too much.¹⁰ Heidegger's arguments are trying to break with this paradigm, as is made especially clear by his account of communication. We can communicate with each other because we're always already doing things with each other in the common space disclosed by our shared mood. "Communication is never anything like a conveying of experiences, such as opinions or wishes, from the interior of one subject into the interior of another. Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-state-of-mind [*Mitbefindlichkeit*] and a co-understanding."¹¹ Neither Habermas's nor Chanter's account of intersubjectivity allows for this level of energetic, pre-linguistic, and indeed pre-conscious openness to each other. Habermas confines his account of human relations to a communicative practice defined by language. Chanter follows Levinas in claiming that we are ontologically alone, even if,

¹⁰Levinas, in the essay "Substitution" writes of the "presynthetic, pre-logical and in a certain sense atomic, that is, in-dividual, unity of the self" (Levinas 1989, p. 97). Butler suggests humans are open to each other at a very deep level and calls this openness "primary impressionability" but it's clear from her formulations that we are impressionable and vulnerable precisely because we are separate from others (Butler 2001, pp. 22–40).

¹¹Heidegger (1962, § 34, p. 205).

empirically speaking, humans will generally always be with other people (Chanter 2001, pp. 106–108). In contrast, Heidegger is suggesting that we are in contact with each other in a way that precedes both language and human solitude.

If this seems hard to grasp, it's an idea that finds empirical confirmation in recent research in developmental psychology. Drawing on Habermas's early work—ironically, as it turns out, given the linguistic direction his thought later developed in—Colwyn Trevarthen studied what he called “primary intersubjectivity” between infant and carer: the attunement that can be observed from the moment of birth, that—rather than being overcome in the process of development, as a psychoanalytic model such as Julia Kristeva's would have it—is understood to be the basis on which infants develop their sense of their own identity, the identity of others and a world in which they live together with other people.¹² As Peter Hobson, whose work at the Tavistock Institute combines both the psychoanalytic and empirical traditions, argues, we are not separate people who then encounter each other and try to figure each other out. Rather: “It is through emotional connectedness that a baby discovers the *kind* of thing a person is. A person is the kind of thing with which one can feel and share things, and the kind of thing with which one can communicate” (Hobson 2002, p. 59). One possible explanation of autism is that, be it for physiological or environmental reasons, this sort of emotional contact is never able to establish itself between a child and the people looking after it.

The Heidegger of *Being and Time* makes this connection a central part of his arguments of how the world and other people are disclosed to *Dasein*. However, he's also not consistent. Although he makes Being-with so fundamental to his account, he can insist at the same time that a sense of not-being at home in the world has ontological priority over the experience of being at home: “That kind of Being-in-the-world which is tranquilized and familiar is a mode of Dasein's uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*], not the reverse. From an existential-ontological point of view, the ‘not-at-home’ must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon.”¹³ It's not clear how this primordial dislocation is to be squared with an equally primordial being with people. At an ontic level human beings are primarily and for the most part at home, sheltered, and with people from the beginning of their lives or they straight-forwardly die. Even Heidegger admits that “Angst” makes a somewhat abrupt entry into his argument in § 39, observing in the next section that his characterization of the mood and its importance for his argument is initially only an “assertion”.¹⁴ However, the assertion paves the way for his later account of an authentic form of *Dasein*, which confronts the dislocation that the arguments about angst declare to be primordial. Conscience calls us back from the world of our pragmatic engagements

¹²See his essay in Bullowa (1979). For an overview of literature to 2001, see Trevarthen and Aitken (2001, pp. 3–48).

¹³Heidegger (1962, § 40, p. 234).

¹⁴The German text is: “Daß die Angst dergleichen leistet, ist zunächst eine Behauptung.” The English translation takes away the term *Behauptung* (assertion): “It might be contended that anxiety performs some such function” (Heidegger 1962, § 40, p. 230).

to face our homelessness and isolation.¹⁵ Resoluteness then means silently bearing the lonely predicament that understanding the call of conscience discloses.¹⁶ Of course, resoluteness doesn't only entail this in Heidegger's argument. It also entails a renewed relation both to the world and to our being with others, which deals with both on their own terms, or as Heidegger puts it "in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves."¹⁷ However, the theoretical insight that the call of conscience could lead us to acknowledge the predicament we're actually involved in gets fleshed out in Heidegger's text primarily as the steadfast confrontation with our isolation. Authenticity seems inexplicably weighted against the being with others that had been so important to the earlier part of the argument.¹⁸

Overcoming Attachments Then and Now

The comparison with the mystical texts of the fourteenth century can help to throw light on this imbalance. For Meister Eckhart, the primordial experience is not one of dislocation, but of absolute connection that he describes in one sermon as a breakthrough beyond even the idea of God, for the idea of God merely marks my distance from divinity: "this breaking through guarantees to me that I and God are one."¹⁹ It returns me to what I always already was before any separation. In another sermon, the breakthrough takes the form of being unencumbered in the moment: "empty and free, receiving the divine gift in the eternal Now."²⁰ Heidegger's 1918/1919 plans for the lectures he never gave on the "Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism" note this experience of connection beyond all images, concepts, and multiplicity in Eckhart and make it the centre of their arguments (Heidegger 1995, p. 316). It is one version of the experience-beyond-theory underpinning religion which it is the task of the phenomenology of religion to give an account of without explaining it away (Heidegger 1995, p. 305). To that extent, the state of Eckhartian surrender is one of the conceptual precursors of the on-going involvement with the world and with others in which *Dasein* finds itself, and to a full acknowledgement of which conscience calls it. But by the time it finds its formulation in the late 1920s, the force that we wake up to as it moves through us has acquired a tragic inflection. It no longer brings a sense of connection, but of isolation. One way to understand this

¹⁵Heidegger (1962, § 60, p. 342).

¹⁶Heidegger (1962, § 60, p. 343).

¹⁷Heidegger (1962, § 60, p. 344).

¹⁸Tina Chanter goes so far as to ask: "does Heidegger's treatment of being-with-others amount to any more than a distraction from *Dasein*'s ontological journey toward its quest for its own authenticity [. . .]?" see "The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology," in Holland and Huntington (2001, p. 95). For a more positive reading of authenticity, which emphasizes its engagement with a shared tradition that takes it beyond individual isolation, see Charles B. Guignon, "Authenticity, moral values, and psychotherapy," in Guignon (2006, pp. 268–292).

¹⁹Eckhart (1979, Vol. 2, p. 275). Pfeiffer (1857, p. 284).

²⁰Eckhart (1979, Vol. 1, p. 58). Pfeiffer (1857, p. 35).

transformation would be to trace the gradual development of Heidegger's ideas, and the different influences and intellectual decisions that lead to the down-beat formulations of *Being and Time* and beyond.²¹ I want to take a slightly different path. The texts from the fourteenth century contain their own analyses of what prevents the individual from reaching the state of connection and assumption-free involvement that they describe with the vocabulary of becoming one with God. These analyses, and the insights they reveal into the spiritual culture of the Rhineland in the later Middle Ages can give us tools for approaching the *parti pris* for Angst and isolation in the arguments of *Being and Time*.

What stops us reaching God, in Eckhart's view, are forms of psychological attachment for which he uses the German word "eigenschaft." These attachments do not take a set form. Eckhart does not claim to know in advance what will stop his listeners reaching God. Rather he proposes an individualized program of self-overcoming, in which we examine ourselves and wherever we find ourselves we take leave of ourselves.²² Eckhart's own preaching seems to have been very attuned to the habits of his listeners. His sermons were addressed to congregations in which visionary states were pursued for their own sake and there was a tendency to adopt grueling regimes of self-abnegation including various forms of self-mutilation, fasting, and sleep deprivation. To give a couple of examples: the autobiography of the Dominican Nun Christine Ebner reports self-castigation with nettles, thorns, and rods, as well as the cutting of a crucifix into her own flesh (Lochner 1872, p. 11). The Dominican disciple of Eckhart, Heinrich Seuse, similarly reports cutting God's name into his flesh, as well self-castigation with hair shirts, an iron chain that causes bleeding, a shirt for sleeping in with nails sewn into it, and gloves with spikes on so if he tried to free himself while sleeping he would only further wound himself.²³ Eckhart was critical of such regimes insofar as they could become an end in themselves, that is to say an unnecessary attachment or addiction. His sermons value Martha's activity—doing things in the world—over Mary's prayer—clinging to contemplation and ascetic regimes. There is, for Eckhart, no special place, and no special practice for reaching God, only the attitude of continuous self-abandonment wherever you happen to be and whatever you happen to be doing.

One of the tracts in the Pfeiffer edition, the "Sister Catherine" treatise, which, as chance would have it, is the text that immediately proceeds two brief tracts of which Heidegger took special notice, gives a further idea of the sorts of assumptions and habits that were seen as obstacles to reaching the state of connection to God in this culture. The text is the account of a beguine who is looking for the quickest way to God. Her confessor tells her she must take leave of everything, and she realizes that taking leave of everything also means taking leave of him, that is to

²¹The origins of Heidegger's ontological thinking in his phenomenological and religious explorations of the late 1910s have been reconstructed in Kiesel (1993).

²²"Nim dîn selbes war, und swâ dû dich vindest, dâ lâz dich; daz ist daz aller beste" (Pfeiffer 1857, p. 546).

²³Bihlmeyer (1961, pp. 16, 39–40).

say, that her spiritual journey will take her beyond the safe space of institutionally predetermined forms.²⁴ Her confessor initially demurs, protesting that such a course of action is not for a woman, but she insists she can withstand as much suffering as a man and he then lets her travel (Pfeiffer 1857, p. 456). When she returns, she is so transformed that initially he does not recognize her. Their conversations continue, and the confessor helps the beguine realize that the last obstacle is her very desire for God. Having grasped this, the woman goes into a meditative trance from which she returns with the exhortation to rejoice with her for she has “become God.”²⁵ At this point the terms of her relationship with her confessor turn, and she starts to teach him what she has learnt and seen. Her talking to him eventually enables him to fall into a trance from which he returns to confirm that all the things she told him of are true, so by the end of the text, the beguine has become the spiritual teacher of her own confessor (Pfeiffer 1857, p. 475).

The “Sister Catherine” treatise thus adds some further facets to Eckhart’s focus on the habitual attachments that hinder the process of self-abandonment, focusing on the roles allocated to each of the sexes, and their institutional underpinning. It also shows the process of transformation occurring through the dialogue. The two figures develop spiritually through their exchange, through their being-together. The obstacles to the sense of being-with-God, in Eckhart’s milieu, were understood to be surmountable where individuals, in and through their relations with each other, and in a questioning and creative response to their institutional setting, re-learned their habits.

If this model is applied to Heidegger’s thought, it suggests that what shapes the transition from the acknowledgement of our inevitable co-existence to the bleaker emphasis on dislocation is not so much an insight into ontological necessity as a set of habitual attachments. Certainly, re-reading the passages on conscience and resoluteness, it’s hard not to notice the particular character type that Heidegger assumes goes with authentic existence. He needs “unwavering discipline” (§ 65, p. 370), does not mind if he seems to be “doing violence” to complacent habits (§ 63, p. 359) or to misguided conceptions (§ 65, p. 374). He values reticence over chatter (§ 56, p. 318; § 57, p. 322) and is self-controlled and collected (the German word is *gehalten*) rather than distracted in the face of anxiety (§ 68, p. 394). These terms represent a collection of attributes that, as other critics have already pointed out, are more often than not assumed to be positive features of masculinity.²⁶ In the text of *Being and Time* they are not explicitly marked as such. But if one turns to the letters that Heidegger was writing to Hannah Arendt in 1925 when he was working

²⁴“Sol ich alliu dinc lâzen, sô muoz ich iuch ouch lâzen” (Pfeiffer 1857, p. 456).

²⁵Schweitzer (1981, p. 334). The Pfeiffer edition does not contain the episode of the beguine becoming God.

²⁶For a treatment of the masculine characteristics unreflectively valued by Heidegger see Tina Chanter, “The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger’s Ontology,” in Holland and Huntington (2001, p. 98). John D. Caputo comments on a penchant not just for masculine but specifically martial virtues: “Everywhere Heidegger looked, he saw a battle. Even his Socrates was a soldier” (Caputo 1993, p. 62).

on the earlier drafts of *Being and Time*, then what is immediately striking is the gendered vocabulary with which, alongside concepts from his developing philosophy, Heidegger attempts to come to terms with what is happening between the two of them. He writes of “the terrible solitude of academic research, that only a man can endure,”²⁷ and “of the originary preservation of [Arendt’s] ownmost womanly being.”²⁸ The interruption of the presence of another into his life is overwhelming, and he tries to understand it specifically in terms of Arendt’s womanliness, her ability to give in contrast to his manly interrogations.²⁹ Arendt to him seems occasionally to embody a freedom that overcomes separation in a form of wordless communication.³⁰ Indeed, he discovers a form of faith—a faith in the necessity of his encounter with Arendt—which is at the same time hard to understand precisely because of Arendt’s womanliness.³¹

The letters reveal how much Heidegger’s responses are shaped by and understood in terms of his identity as a man. Yet, as Hermann Philipse among others has pointed out, gender plays no role in his presentation of the ontological structure of Dasein (Philipse 1999, pp. 439–474). Instead his attachment to a certain model of masculine identity seems to be the obstacle in the way of surrendering to and acknowledging his involvement with others. This sounds like a knock-down argument of the worst sort, explaining a conceptual failing with a crude biographical parallel: Heidegger’s attempt to re-think forms of identity from the starting point of our inescapable involvement with each other breaks down in the end because he cannot relinquish the ideal of heroic, male isolation. Much as I think crudity of that sort can be refreshing, and can clear the ground for new forms of argument, that’s not quite the point I want to make. Instead, I want to make a more Heideggerian move and suggest that the philosopher’s identification with a certain model of masculinity is not an obstacle to the pure experience of being-with, but it is rather the form in which he seems to have experienced togetherness. Gender roles, in this argument, function as a deficient mode of people’s being-with each other, but a mode of being-with each other nonetheless.

Derrida argued something similar in “Geschlecht,” his discussion of sexual difference in Heidegger’s texts of the 1920s. His reading of Being-with emphasizes how humans, in their involvement with the world and with others, are always dispersed beyond themselves. A binary sexual difference is a way of controlling and limiting the energy of this more primordial relationality. For Derrida, this line of argument “opens up thinking to a sexual difference that would not yet be sexual duality, difference as dual” (Derrida 1983, p. 82). In other words, it suggests there is something more fundamental than sexual difference of which gender roles are the socially structured sediment. In a comparable vein, Irigaray’s critique of Heidegger

²⁷ Arendt and Heidegger (1998, p. 11 [10.II.1925]).

²⁸ Arendt and Heidegger (1998, p. 12 [10.II.1925]).

²⁹ Arendt and Heidegger (1998, p. 13 [21.II.1925]).

³⁰ Arendt and Heidegger (1998, p. 26 [24.IV.1925]).

³¹ Arendt and Heidegger (1998, p. 35 [22.VI.1925]).

uses the image of air to draw attention to the malleable and fluid ether between people and between humans and the world that makes their experience of each other, and indeed of space and their environment, possible. “No other element is as light, as free, and as much in the ‘fundamental’ mode of a permanent, available ‘there is’” (Irigaray 1999, p. 8). In her view, Heidegger’s philosophy is fearfully attached to stability, preferring a metaphysical grounding to air’s fluidity, so that in his philosophy “Air remains the unthought resource of Being” (Irigaray 1999, p. 14). Derrida and Irigaray differ in their treatment of sexual difference. For Derrida, the binary is imposed upon a non-binary fluidity, while for Irigaray, the fluidity and openness of air is specifically associated with feminine nature or a mother figure that Heidegger cannot engage with (Irigaray 1999, p. 28). But what interests me is the way the two thinkers use Heideggerian forms of argument to draw attention to a level of connectedness that Heidegger can engage with only through the indirect means of conventionally gendered patterns of behavior. At the same time, neither thinker is much more concrete than Heidegger when it comes to describing the everyday patterns which limit our togetherness, or which skew Heidegger’s arguments towards privileging dislocation over being-with-others, male separation over a shared experience beyond or before the gendered binary. To overcome this lack of detail does not require a form of philosophical argument, but rather a psychological and cultural one that lays bare the learned patterns of behavior which—in the case of Heidegger writing *Being and Time*—make the sense of connectedness seem either false or inaccessible. Meanwhile, to the man writing to his beloved Hannah, it is experienced very intensely through the role of man and woman, albeit in the limited form of an illicit affair the terms of which the man is able absolutely to determine. We don’t need to follow Heidegger in trying to give this double structure a philosophical justification. Indeed, it is the logic of an approach schooled by Eckhart, and the mystics of the fourteenth century, that one could never do such a thing anyway. Eckhart used theology not to construct a system, but as a tool to be flexibly deployed in the service of the more important task of helping his listeners relinquish attachments. Similarly philosophical tools, and this must apply even to the idea of being-together or *Mitsein* itself, do not give us a description of the way the world is, but rather can help us in the ongoing process of acknowledging where we are in the unfolding of our lives with other people.

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Chapter 16

Beauvoir and the Transcendence of Natality

Alison Martin

Abstract 2008 marks the centenary of the birth of Simone de Beauvoir. This paper pays homage to Beauvoir for her faith in the possibility of human transcendence; in the face of adversity and the ambiguities of existence she did not flee from the problems of being human to seek being elsewhere. Yet Beauvoir's concept of human transcendence remains bound to the idea that death is the pivot of human identity—an idea challenged by the philosophy of natality. The concept of natality enables us to re-affirm in a different way Beauvoir's vision of potential human transcendence while at the same time recognizing, as she did, life's ambiguities and conflicts.

Keywords Beauvoir · Natality · Transcendence · Placental relation · Death

The thought of Simone de Beauvoir urges upon us a nobility which is truly human—a nobility that is steeped in an atheist but deeply committed ethics, one that takes from religious discourse the premise that human failure ensures the possibility of moral good. I think the reason her work continues to find new audiences is *partly* explained by the insistent narrative of human potential that pervades her writing: the possibility of change, the validity of action, the desire for good. This insistent narrative is encapsulated in her notion of transcendence: however abject and degraded the human condition may be, human transcendence necessarily gives to existence the possibility of value, even if that value is simply a freedom that thwarts the realization of any essence in Being. In spite of the appalling horrors that were revealed in the 1940s and after, Beauvoir writes at that time not in cynicism and despair, nor in undecided scepticism, but with a renewed and reworked affirmation of existentialist ethics and its transcendent freedom. The style she adopted in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1996 [1947]) is not always suited to contemporary tastes: it seeks not to evoke questions and dwell in the ambiguities of language, but rather to

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make reasoned, conscious judgements grounded in the principle of the sovereignty of human freedom.

Of course, this kind of commitment exposes her to the judgement of posterity, and to errors of judgement. The philosophy of consciousness and the phenomenology of transcendence have been displaced by philosophy's linguistic turn and are often attributed to a somewhat discredited metaphysical humanism. However, even after Beauvoir's "errors" have been dissected, one is struck by the *largesse* of her faith in the inevitability and necessity of human transcendence. Part of her legacy is to have engaged in thought that is neither ignorant of nor deterred by the calamities of history and the impossibilities of perfection, but which still manages to affirm the intrinsic value of transcendence for the radical and progressive cause. For all the critique that has been laid at the door of existentialism, it is Beauvoir's spirit of recognizing the often grim truths of history that will be affirmed here, along with her insistence upon the irredeemable ambiguities of existence. Her model of transcendence—particularly in *The Second Sex* (1949)—poses problems, however, not only for feminist politics but for any politics seeking to transcend cultural systems premised upon the inevitability of conflict. In the way she defines transcendence in terms of negation and the symbolic value of death, Beauvoir ultimately denies the possibility of a mode of transcendence that thwarts domineering negation and its violent potential. The philosophy of natality allows for a discourse of transcendence that lays bare that possibility, while at the same time it can reiterate Beauvoir's claim for the lack of any pre-determination—whether violent or peaceful, optimistic or pessimistic—to an ambiguous existence.

Transcendence and *The Ethics*

Beauvoir's concept of transcendence is consistent but is given a different emphasis at different moments in her work. It is a concept ostensibly devoid of divine reference, yet it functions as a key universal value for the humanism she advocates. In her writing transcendence is the movement which renders the human being *human*; it does not create life but it affirms the existence that ultimately renders historical human being a possibility and an actuality. There's nothing sacred in this; transcendence is not a realm beyond the homogeneity of the everyday. For Beauvoir it permeates all existence, most especially the mundane project. Yet the devout tone in which Beauvoir delivers her discourse on transcendence, along with its function as a generator of existence for-itself, suggests that it represents something humanly divine in her work and indeed transcendence is conceived as an unconditioned value. What is more, Beauvoir is not satisfied with simply setting out the structures of transcendence as familiar to the phenomenological tradition but rather gives to its differing levels of transcendence a qualitative evaluation (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996). It is thereby hailed for its potentially liberational qualities, and on that basis she is able to develop an ethics and pursue analyses of types of human existence that

are normative. Underlying these normative valuations are assessments based on the symbolic value of death.

From the very outset of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* consciousness of death is presented as the condition of human existence, distinguishing man from animal and plant (1996, p. 7). Here it is a Heideggerian facing of death and its concomitant *anguish* that comes to the fore, whereas in *The Second Sex* her emphasis shifts somewhat towards a Hegelian risk-based and heroic *overcoming* of death. But in both texts Beauvoir goes beyond analyzing transcendence as a simple fact of conscious existence and judges it as a symptom of a response to death, giving rise to a distinction between that we might characterize as the *fact* of consciousness and the *quality* of consciousness. This distinction manifests an analogous structure to that of Husserl's phenomenological distinction between the transcendental nature of being *as consciousness* and the transcendent nature of being that *makes itself known* in consciousness (Dahlstrom 2007, p. 30). The purpose of Husserl's distinction is of course to set out a phenomenology of perception, such that transcendental being designates whatever is inherently immanent to perception (such as the sensation of colors), and transcendent being designates whatever is not intrinsically a part of consciousness even though it always appears in the immanence of consciousness. The purpose of Beauvoir's distinction is a philosophy of existence, so from Husserl she asserts that for the being who is conscious, a form of transcendence is immanent, because consciousness gives rise to an intentionality as consciousness *of* the object (1996, p. 14). Transcendence is thus a fact of human existence. Yet there remains the being that makes itself known in consciousness, the transcendence that is not simply immanent but reveals through consciousness the distance of the object—and itself as object—from that which is given. This form of transcendence is the qualitatively higher form, in Beauvoir's analysis.

Beauvoir thus embraces the phenomenological understanding that to be knowingly distinct from immanence is to manifest a differentiation and distance from the plenitude and oneness of being. She accepts and develops the argument that the pivotal concept for human beings is death, i.e., that which throws them from the fullness of given being and into existence. Death as the end to and of existence marks out separation and individuation. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* she cites Sartre's particular argument regarding the inherent negativity of human being, that the human is the being whose being it is not to be (1996, p. 12). This paradox produces the ambiguities of human existence: it is both within the natural continuum and yet separate from it owing to the awareness of mortality. In the face of death—conscious of the object that limits us—humans *are* not another moment in an undifferentiated unity, nor are they simply decaying matter, but they *become* an individual self-conscious subject in an ambiguous relation with others as objects for whom we are in turn an object. Therefore, emerging as this for-itself from the mass of being in-itself the human is defined in relation to what it is not—a natural entity, a simple facticity—and becomes an existence which is not determined by being. From this comes the freedom of the existential subject, a freedom attained by the very movement of transcendence that is given to human consciousness (1996, p. 14).

The distinctive argument of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is the ethics that can be derived from the condition of ambiguity. Beauvoir is not here concerned with the turn to non-transcendentalism ensuing from Heidegger's thought; her response to the colonialist militarism of the 1940s is to defend the existential subject and its freedom against accusations of solipsism and arbitrariness. Transcendence is thus not a self-deluding error of the irredeemably imperious human ego, but a fact of human consciousness, which, when qualitatively affirmed, becomes the key determinant of ethical existence in which the lives of others are paramount.

It is this turn to others that is key to Beauvoir's understanding of transcendence. The freedom that is given in human intentionality remains abstract and unrealized if it is not affirmed in a given situation via concrete projects that express that freedom with some aim. Such an objectification of freedom can only be attained through the transcendence that is not simply given but is affirmed in the future-orientated project or action—the qualitatively higher form of transcendence that thereby discloses some, albeit provisional, sense to existence (1996, p. 26). And, quite critically, that sense can be adopted by others in their own transcendence; indeed, for Beauvoir the achievement of transcendence requires the existence of other free individuals for whom one's project makes sense. That is the foundation of an ethics grounded in freedom: the freedom of one cannot be at the expense of the freedom of another. And from that Beauvoir is able to elaborate a theory of oppression: it exists where the surpassing movement of transcendence is deprived of its aim or forced into the repetitive, mechanical acts of life preservation.

In the face of a transcendent distance from being with its accompanying ambiguity, Beauvoir asserts the now infamous existential choice: to consciously affirm the freedom of transcendence for-itself or to simply accept the transcendence that is given, in-itself. The fact of consciousness facilitates the qualitatively different responses to the surge of transcendent freedom and in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir conforms to an illustrious philosophical tradition by analyzing these responses in the form of human "types." So there is the serious or earnest type who flees into the object and seeks transcendence by defining themselves as a being in the image of a given Being whose unconditioned value determines their being (1996, p. 39). That is, for Beauvoir, a failing—a refusal to accept spontaneous transcendence and its responsibility. The tyrannical type, on the other hand, causes oppression by affirming their transcendence at the expense of others', while liberty comes of the authentic type, who takes on the challenge of transcendent freedom to affirm an object that cannot be realized as a being. Significantly, then, although Beauvoir accepts Hegel's premise for the possibility of ethics—the fall of humankind from the oneness of being—she doesn't accept here any historical re-creation of the plenitude of being, the Hegelian synthesis of the in-itself and for-itself, because we are always at a distance from being; existence integrates but does not surpass negativity in its positive affirmation (1996, p. 13). Mutual self-recognition in absolute otherness and the assimilation of an individual's death to universal spirit are but another denial of the persistent ambiguities of existence.

Transcendence and *The Second Sex*

It is striking that, with the publication of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir's emphasis is far more Hegelian, not in the anticipation of a historically terminal synthesis, but in the stress that is given to the formation of the subject in and through its relation with the other (subject) as object rather than in relation to the object as other. As she famously states in the Introduction, the principles of existentialist ethics do indeed form the basis of her analysis (1949, p. 31), yet moving from the universal subject of *The Ethics*, where the question of gender is raised only momentarily, to the particular analysis of gender entails a shift in her philosophy from principle to history. This is necessary for Beauvoir not only for political reasons—in response to the prominence of Marxism on the intellectual left—but also for theoretical reasons. There is no Being woman, so an ontological approach is senseless, and yet woman has been and is more than a concept ripe for linguistic analysis. Existential analysis renders woman an existence in a *situation*, and focusing on a specificity like gender begs the question of how that category has come to be in that situation. In *The Second Sex*, therefore, Beauvoir attempts the exciting task of bringing philosophical concepts to the history of woman, and of presenting that history philosophically. Naturally, that is extremely difficult to achieve, and at times her analysis can seem somewhat contradictory. She sometimes undermines the subtleties of her own analysis in her desire to sustain one universalist philosophical claim from the mass of historical, literary, and anthropological evidence she presents: the famous Woman is Other. The more empiricist traditions of English feminism have always been relatively at ease in giving each moment of history its due, stressing the significance of historical fluctuations in the situation of women and affirming their achievements (Rowbotham 1979; Battersby 2006). Yet, like many French philosophers after her, Beauvoir accepts the universalist anthropological argument that all human culture is patriarchal: that individuated historical consciousness necessitates a separation from the biological life of the mother (who represents the natural continuum), and entails some form of engagement with death in the culture of the father. The seemingly all-pervasive nature of patriarchal culture invites a universalist assessment of its overarching structures. Hence the tendency of some French feminists to skate over the possibility of unearthing forgotten women's histories, and to thereby bypass the creation of a *tradition* of thought by women.

Consistent with the development of her own work, Beauvoir maintains transcendence's association with the negative in *The Second Sex*: transcendence is *not* to exist in the immanence of a given gender definition. In looking at specific socio-cultural categories, however, Beauvoir readily sees that the subject's will to affirm freedom through the movement of transcendence becomes more complex given that its movement towards self-definition is intimately tied to the defining negativity (rather than presence) of the other. She thus emphasizes the dialectical nature of subject formation and specifically incorporates the Hegelian master/slave dialectic into her account of human relations. Her interpretation is undoubtedly influenced by Kojève's (1947) Marxian reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which renders the

abstruse logic of the German thinker a tragic history play in which the will of the slave (or the worker, for Marx) ultimately triumphs. And in that dramatization classic heroism prevails with its narrative of risk, adventure, and—ultimately—death. For in the movement to transcend what is given as natural life only the consciousness that affirms itself as a value by risking the death of that natural life in the face of another consciousness will prevail as a transcendent self-consciousness, or master/subject. The other consciousness, who did not have the courage or strength to risk negating its own life for the sake of value, remains bound to the slavery of a natural immediacy and is defined by the subject. The movement away from nature to culture thus becomes a wrench that negates the former even in its assimilation, and the relation with other consciousnesses is a struggle for recognition within the terms of that movement.

While Beauvoir cites this drama as the *essence* of subject formation, she does not simply equate the categories of master and slave to man and woman respectively. She states that the master/slave dialectic fails to characterize the relations between men and women (1949, pp. 20, 239), much as Fanon was to do later with respect to the colonizer and colonized (Fanon 1961). In relation to men, women are more like vassals than equal protagonists in a fight for recognition, just as for Fanon the colonized are part of the natural setting for colonial scene. In a sense they both—women and the colonized—function as matter to the transcendent (masculine) subject, as Luce Irigaray argues (1974). Reading retrospectively, it is possible to find in Beauvoir that which Irigaray goes on to analyze: human culture has concerned *l'entre-hommes*, in which women have played the part of nature. On the other hand, Beauvoir does not critique the structures of patriarchal culture in the name of a different gendered dispensation moving to its moment in history. In the very process of analyzing the gender determination of women in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir upholds the gender neutrality of modes of transcendence, because gender has no being beyond the forms of its existence (it is not a sensible transcendental) and constitutes but one element in the determination of existence. As a result, while Beauvoir does not see a master/slave struggle between men and women, she still interprets human history (and women's place in it) in terms of a necessary struggle for recognition, and continues to evaluate the forms of transcendence that entails in a qualitative and normative manner.

If the structures of transcendence are gender neutral for Beauvoir, she nevertheless finds that everyone is allocated a gendered place in that structure given her premise that patriarchy is universal and woman's status is to be the other: men have become transcendence, women have remained in immanence; men have become subjects and for-themselves, women have remained objects and exist for-the-other. The dualism of man and woman thus presses Beauvoir into a somewhat dichotomous interpretation of transcendence and immanence in *The Second Sex*. And the focus on dualities means that women are interpreted as the general, gendered *being* of nature and death, and men the particular *existence* that transcends death, nature, and even gender (1949, pp. 243–250). Given her assertion that men have rendered women the other, we might expect them to be classified as the tyrannical type of *The Ethics*, and indeed Beauvoir's analysis of their psycho-social need *as men* to render

woman as other is extremely critical (1949, p. 26). Yet owing to the form of their transcendence in relation to death, *as subjects* men are generally exonerated in *The Second Sex*.

It is famously women as the other-object whose action is judged wanting: they have failed to assert themselves as subject and failed to risk death for the sake of creating their own value. Much of *The Second Sex* is an attempt to explain this failure. Notoriously, Beauvoir finds the female body a given disadvantage in any potential struggle for recognition: always already the greater physical strength of the male body and its propensity for projection gives it the historical advantage. Women's reproductive role is particularly unfortunate: giving birth only bestows value upon women in societies where nature has yet to be conquered and is still revered, for birth is part of the natural continuum of simply generating life rather than risking it for the sake of a value (1949, p. 112). The tasks that have ensued from the reproductive role and the work historically attributed in history are similarly valued by Beauvoir: they belong to immanence with its life-preserving, repetitive, and uncreative nature.

On the other hand, Beauvoir knows that women have *become*: even if they have clung to the deluded security of a historical state of immanence, no biology can finally determine their existence because transcendence is itself immanent (1949, p. 77). Her assessment of their situation is suffused with Marxism: women's status relative to men depends on historical stages of production. With the advances in technology, no physical discrepancies can disadvantage women in the field of struggle that is work. However, in answer to Engel's claim that the great fall came with the advent of private property, Beauvoir claims that its abolition, while proffering a liberating situation for women, does not guarantee their freedom. She states that the origins of domination lie not in the ownership of property itself but in the historical priority of a seemingly universal will to dominate the other that nurtures an accumulative, imperious consciousness (1949, p. 102). At this point, Beauvoir invokes a pre-determined structure to human consciousness, one that is more domineering and potentially violent than ambiguous. And so the necessity of overcoming the threat of death in the other becomes essential to existence, and it is up to women to assume the risks of freedom and affirm the transcendence of the subject.

Transcendence and Natality

An overarching critique of Beauvoir's assertion that death necessarily constitutes the pivot of human existence and transcendence comes from the notion of natality. Natality as such is not intended to function as a concept that will compete with its apparent Other in the form of mortality. It does not ineluctably produce another competing but mutually reinforcing dualism: death versus birth. Natality can actually function to bring death within the compass of birth as the transcendence that forms part of the condition of natality. Being born, rather than created or thrown into existence, is immanent to human life, but the process is a movement of

transcendence which may be affirmed as a value; the fact of death is a contingent factor in the determination of that value.

In recent years a field of interest has developed regarding the notion of natality (Cavarero 1995; Battersby 1998; Jantzen 2004). A common reference point is Hannah Arendt's thought in *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt explained natality as the condition of beginning that belongs to *vita activa* rather than *vita contemplativa*; humans are natals defined through their appearance to others in the world of action and are not the mortals of a death-defined metaphysics. Arendt shares Beauvoir's insistence upon the freedom of human existence, but that freedom is tied not to consciousness or overcoming death, rather it depends upon the fact of human birth as the arrival of the being for whom existence is a question. Arendt's thought here mirrors Beauvoir's "levels" of transcendence by declaring factual birth a principle of beginning that will later be affirmed as freedom through the corresponding actions of the adult's appearance to others; the transcendence of immanence is later reiterated in a qualitatively different form. Yet neither Arendt or Beauvoir were philosophically predisposed to consider that this movement of transcendence also presents itself in the very physicality of gestation as it occurs in the female body. The phenomenon of the body may be experienced by a subject, but for Beauvoir its biology can yield no positive moment in any dialectic of understanding. As her own analysis of biology illustrates, however, cultural imaginaries of the body are as much the manifestation of knowledges of the body as they are the discursive appropriation of the body to prevalent cultural powers. Interpreting the biological knowledge of the role of the placenta during gestation has not only facilitated a non-conflictual model of inter-subjective relations and displaced the pivot of death in human transcendence, but it may also provide a model of transcendence in immanence.

Re-thinking cultural modalities in relation to a symbolic of the female body is the strategy undertaken by Irigaray, who persistently invokes the feminine as a way of restructuring the relation of transcendence to immanence in accordance with a sexuate schema. And Hélène Rouch, the biologist whose work convincingly reveals the cultural imaginary of the placental relation, does draw upon Irigaray's work (Rouch 1987; Irigaray 1993). However, my contention is that the placental relation is a useful site for re-thinking human transcendence without either entailing the reduction of women to the biological, or indeed assuming that modes of transcendence are necessarily sexuate in accordance with a two-sexed world. Nor does the mode of relation *in utero* analyzed by Rouch belong only to a female femininity. Using the female case as a symbolic model for transcendence does not automatically restrict that case to the female body, unless it is assumed that the female can only embody the particularity of a gendered immanence (the patriarchal assumption so keenly analyzed by Beauvoir). Indeed, interpreting the placental relation as a fact of birth reasserts the existence Beauvoir evoked in *The Ethics*—one that transcends pre-determination and remains bound to ambiguity for all kinds of existences.

Rouch's work (1987) uses knowledge of obstetrical research into the role of the placenta during the gestation period to challenge philosophical and psychoanalytical assumptions about the nature of human existence, and is a powerful illustration

of how cultural imaginaries are at work in scientific discourse, her own included. Her particular objections are to the Darwinian model of competitive survival mechanisms and its military metaphors, and to the common perception of the human foetus as a parasite in the mother's body. It is significant that these interpretations circulate within an imaginary that conceives of beings as either existing in a kind of undifferentiated continuum or state of fusion, or as separate from one another: a bereft (Sartrean existential) consciousness in a culture of competing individuals.

The obstetrical knowledge which Rouch draws upon enables her to reject those interpretations and show that relations *in utero* provide a model in which the entities of mother and embryo/foetus are neither in a state of fusion or separate: they are anatomically separate but physiologically continuous, and the nature of their relation, which is regulated by the placenta, is highly complex and ambiguous. The placenta is not an organ that simply nourishes the foetus, as often assumed. Rather, it has a sophisticated, regulating function that benefits both the mother and the embryo/foetus. Thus it not only provides a selective exchange for maternal material and forms a protective barrier, but it actually takes over important hormonal functions in the mother that are suspended by the state of pregnancy—such as progesterone production, essential to maintaining the *uterine mucosa*—and thereby acts as a center of gravity for generating and distributing hormones to the mother and embryo/foetus, as well regulating itself. Acting as a mediator and facilitator, it ensures the survival of both organisms, defying the parasitical model in which the parasite depletes the host's resources.

According to Rouch, the placenta is thus a mediating space between one and the other who are simultaneously separate and mutually dependent. The placenta ensures that foetal and maternal blood and tissue are never fused or in direct contact with one another; it also ensures the survival of both because it regulates the immune system of the mother so that the newly implanted embryo is not rejected in the way an organ transplant would be. And it simultaneously maintains a sufficient level of immunity in the mother's body to protect her from disease. Rouch concludes that this does not amount to competing mechanisms, or to a parasitical depletion of the host, but rather suggests a model of peaceful co-existence. It would thus support Jantzen's articulation of natality as the condition in which the heroic confrontation with and overcoming of death is replaced by the redemption of loss that ensues from a culture of birth and peace (2004).

Yet it can equally be argued that the placental model provides an instance of *ambiguous* difference always already there in a *transcendence* of becoming—a transcendence immanent in a coming-to-be in the body which is affirmed by birth and to which later relations correspond. The formation of the embryo itself goes beyond its maternal host by being constituted of material from two different existences in a condition of plenitude. This difference that forms the difference of the embryo is essential to the survival of both mother and embryo/foetus, for as Rouch points out, only if the paternal antigens are recognized by the mother's immune system do the localized immuno-depressive actions set in that allow the mother's body to accept the embryo. The form of transcendence that gives difference in otherness thus needs to be recognized for existence to come; what each is *not* does constitute

the other but the negativity cannot be sublated or assimilated, it remains a complex, shifting pattern. Hence the relation provides a highly ambiguous model of a given interdependency and a given distinctiveness through difference.

Given its ambiguity, the negativity of difference is less to be redeemed than perpetually negotiated. The redemption model is culturally prevalent, however, with the advocates of both death and peace staking out their territory in relation to the issue of loss, against Beauvoir's insistence upon the lack of pre-determination to existence. And again the placenta can provide a model for this. It is created by the embryo from its own genetic and cellular material at the point at which the fertilized egg attaches itself to the uterus. The embryo is thus never part of the mother's body, and Rouch emphasizes that the placenta belongs to the foetus, confirming Lacan's point that at birth the child is not cut or separated from its mother's body, but from the placenta: the apparent loss or "death" it experiences is a part of itself. Rather than pursue Lacan's deathly take on the placenta as the primordial object *a* which pre-figures castration and the subsequent desire for compensatory objects, Rouch interprets it as a transitional space that pre-figures a child's later transitional object: a palliative link to the mother that signifies union and separation, and hence heralds a kind of peace.

It may also be seen as a mode of transcendence in ambiguity. For while the foetus may not be separating from the mother's body directly owing to the placenta, the general process of being born still remains a form of separation from the physiological domain of the foetus' host. Yet because this is not a separation from a natural state of fusion, there is no absolute loss (or death); the constituting negativity remains and is affirmed at a different level in the transcendence of life *in uterine*. At present it is generally accepted that the placenta fails to mediate effectively and begins to perish after the full gestation period has been reached. So rather than being lost, we may therefore say that it *gives way* to other forms of transcending mediation at a different level of existence and consciousness which may manifest similarly complex and ambiguous states of separation and dependency. Within the female body and with the very act of birth, then, there are models to suggest that coming-to-be is not a question of merely reproducing a natural plenitude which is then forcibly negated in the death of birth. Birth gives birth to a transcendence that is immanent in the relation to the other: difference is not one instituted through loss but is already there in the movement of becoming. Birth is not, then, an abandonment to freedom, but it is a movement of transcendence reaffirming the transcendence of existence defined by its ambiguous relations within otherness.

Irigaray has defined the placental relation as another instance of the bridge or the mediating relation that is divine: less a link than a creator of solid and void, dispensing with unitary categories (1987; 1993). Yet it would seem that the placenta is indeed formed by the embryo's material difference from the mother, which creates the link to her; thus the difference is as much asserted as simply mediated. So natality can propose a model of transcendence in which a relation-in-difference rather than the domination of overcoming is primary, and it supports Arendt's condition of natality as the beginning of beginning, a revealing of the kind of existence that reveals existence to itself. To reveal and thereby affirm that relation with the weight

of consciousness is to affirm transcendence in the manner of Beauvoir and to give value to existence in relation, within which individuals are formed and die. Yet the ambiguity in the relation between existences means that tensions exist which cannot be resolved in and through a simple model of co-existing entities linked through the transcendence of becoming. As Beauvoir argued, being is not determined prior to its existence, and more than any other concept, natality renders the becoming of that existence historically and culturally particular in specific socio-political domains. Therefore, modelling existence with respect to the placental relation, birth and natality cannot guarantee peace: it can merely affirm that death is not the pivot of, nor conflict essential to, existence. Existence remains to be perpetually negotiated in existence. Looking at the undetermined relation in the face as Beauvoir advocated opens the way to the possibility of a noble transcendence which, by accepting the ever-present possibility of conflicts in history, can ultimately hope to project better beginnings.

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Chapter 17

The Body as Site of Continuity and Change

Paul S. Fiddes

Abstract Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice* directs our attention to the body; it indicates the way that body can be both a place of continuity with culture, resisting change, and a place of openness to something that transcends and renews the present situation. This article considers aspects of recent continental philosophy which grapple with this ambiguity. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the body as *habitus*, for instance, stresses resistance to change. Julia Kristeva hints at a transcendence that comes through the “semiotic” realm, especially through her concept of the rhythmic movements of the *chora*, but the wider the gap is driven between the maternal body and the cultural body of symbols, the more the body becomes resistant to change. For Emmanuel Levinas, the body is open to transcendence in the infinite moral demand of the other, although—as Luce Irigaray points out—change is limited through lack of communion with the other. For Jacques Derrida, the body is the place where something which is “always to come” breaks in to disturb the assumptions, exclusions and sameness of the present; this transcendence can be called “spirit”, expressed through images of movement such as “turning”, “flowing” and “burning”. The article concludes with a theological reflection: the Christian symbols of incarnation and Trinity express a participation of the body in “movements” of divine life (akin to the movement of spirit in Derrida and the choric movements in Kristeva), which hold out a promise of renewal in attention to the other.

Keywords Body · *Chora* · *Habitus* · Incarnation · Semiotic · Spirit · The other · Transcendence

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The Body: Ambiguous Catalyst for Change

In Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock makes a bond with Antonio that touches the Merchant's own body. Shylock agrees to lend 3,000 gold ducats interest-free for three months, but the penalty for failure to repay at the end of that time will be a pound of Antonio's flesh, cut off from whatever part of the body Shylock pleases. When Antonio's ships fail to come home, Shylock takes the case to court before the Duke of Venice, demanding his pound of flesh, to be cut off nearest the heart. Shylock insists on the letter of the law, on the exact details of the written text, and so typifies all legalists: "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law | The penalty and forfeit of my bond."¹ In accord with the Pauline text that "the letter kills but the Spirit gives life"² (for this is a *Reformation* play), Shylock is condemned by his own appeal to the law when he refuses the alternative of offering mercy. Portia points out that according to the letter of the bond he is entitled only to an exact pound and no blood; if he takes a scruple more or less than the weight, or sheds any blood, his own life is forfeit. All this is well enough known to readers and viewers of Shakespeare's plays, as is Shylock's defence of his Jewish ethnicity:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? – if you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? if you poison us do we not die?³

What is not so often noticed is the connection between this moving appeal to common humanity and the notorious bond itself. They both direct our attention to the body. One critic who has noticed this is Terry Eagleton, who writes:

Shylock claims Antonio's flesh as his own, which indeed, in a sense which cuts below mere legal rights, it is.... To refuse Shylock his bond means denying him *his* flesh and blood, his right to human recognition. The bond, in one sense destructive of human relations, is also, perversely, a sign of them; the whole death-dealing conflict between the two men is a dark, bitter inversion of the true comradeship Shylock desires (Eagleton 1986, p. 43).

So Shylock's proposal of the bond, as much as his great speech against anti-semitism, is a cry for Jewish flesh to be recognized as equal to Christian flesh. Shylock stands within a long history of the abuse of Jewish flesh by Christians; revenge certainly motivates his claim on a pound of Christian flesh, but the very agreement gives Shylock a kind of gruesome *intimacy* with Antonio. What stands between them is not the mere currency of exchange, but flesh itself. The body is what they have in common, and when Antonio faces the payment of the forfeit, it is with a curious intensity that Shylock calls his flesh "*my* flesh." At the point of death it is all too clear that we have a common humanity, a fact that Antonio himself has denied in his behavior towards Shylock. This deep insight is, of course, undermined

¹Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.202-3.

²2 Corinthians 3:6.

³Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 3.1.52-5.

by Shylock's own insistence on the letter of the law, which detaches the written text from the body, divorcing the code from the material sign, and giving it authority in its own right as some kind of disembodied transcendental signifier (to use the language of Jacques Derrida in his critique of logocentrism).

I have begun with this dramatic example because, as we are drawn into the play in our imaginations, we feel that the body can be both a resistance to change and the opportunity for openness to something that "comes in" to transcend the present social situation. On the one hand, the body with all its accumulated customs and conventions, its *habitus*, can be the site of mere continuity with the past. The *habitus* of the body continues all the assumptions of either Christian or Jewish identity. Antonio, complains Shylock, calls him a dog and spits on his Jewish gaberdine. Antonio complains that Shylock's whole way of life has been sustained by the system of gaining money; he hates him because he takes usury. But this site of continuity, constructed by the language and practices of society, can become the place for something genuinely new and transformative. Faced by the shock of a body under threat, by the body at the horizon of death, by the body under stress on the boundary between different cultures, all persons involved can open themselves to something unexpected and surprising, a gift which is free from exchange—mercy and forgiveness. The body can be the place for receiving the challenge of what is absolutely Other. It is not just Shylock who fails to take the opportunity; the Christians, led by Portia, resort to legalism themselves as a weapon against Shylock. Portia's legal quibble insists on the letter of the text, and so resorts to the law in an un-Pauline way in an attempt to overcome the law.

The play thus exemplifies the ambiguity of the body as a site for continuity and change. With this paradigm before us I want to consider some strands of recent continental philosophy which grapple with this ambiguity and come to different conclusions about the possibilities of transcendence. Indeed, I have already used phrases from Bourdieu, Derrida and Levinas in my piece of exegesis of Shakespeare—ideas of logocentrism, *habitus*, otherness, exchange, and gift. Exploring these ideas more explicitly, I want to examine first the way that the body may be viewed as resisting transcendence, or putting a brake on a movement of change.

The Body as Resistance to Transcendence

The term *habitus* evokes the social philosophy of Pierre Bourdieu, who borrowed it from Marcel Mauss and used it to express what he calls a "system of structured, structuring dispositions, which is constituted in practice and is always orientated towards practical functions."⁴ This *habitus* is (he explains) an "embodied history," and has "an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, expressions and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially conditioned conditions of its production" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 55).

⁴Bourdieu (1990, p. 52). See Bourdieu (1997, pp. 78–79).

Bourdieu saw the problem of overcoming the dualism between subject and object; human beings seem suspended between a subjectivity where we appear to exercise rational choice, and an objectivism in which we are caught in the structures of society. We are suspended, as it were, on a tightrope held on one end by Sartre and the other by Marx. How can personal agency be understood in this situation? Bourdieu's solution was to view the *body* as the mediating reality between agents and structures, as both subject and object to the self, and the body could be explained by *habitus*.

The body, that is, can be understood as the site in which social structures are internalized in the subject over a length of time. Social customs and conventions are written on the body in terms of its posture, movement and dress, such as the Jewish gaberdeine that Shylock wears, and his cringing manner. Latent dispositions are inscribed on the body, and this *habitus* determines our response to the situation in which we are placed. What is learned by the body, Bourdieu comments, is not something that one has but something that one *is* (Bourdieu 1990, p. 73). The *habitus*, at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences. It produces strategies or moves, enabling the individual self or a social class to cope with unforeseen and changing situations. While these strategies are not a mere reproduction of habits from the past, there is a limited range of possibilities open to the self because of its *habitus* structure, and the future will be some kind of projection of the present. The "upcoming" future (*un à venir*) is a matter of what is probable.⁵ Along a time line, there is thus a tension between "retention" (the *habitus*) and "protention", a practical anticipation of the future. The *habitus* "adjusts itself to a probable future" in commonsense practices.

It can readily be seen that in this amalgam of habit with innovation, change will be at a low level and continuity will be at a premium. There will be a mundane creativity, and revolution will be rare. Dramatic change will only happen when social structures are fragile. The body with its *habitus* will operate as a brake on change; it is not open to what we might call transcendence, the "incoming" of something unexpected and gift-like to the situation. As Bourdieu comments, "the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible."⁶

In the vocabulary of transcendence, faith or belief is an opening in trust to the coming of the altogether Other, a surrender to what is "coming in" and which cannot be regulated. For Bourdieu, however, "belief" is not the turning of the self to what is unknown, but a state of the body, a "pre-verbal taking for granted" of the field or social context in which the body is placed.⁷ Belief is a kind of attunement to the field, a practical faith which is the condition of entry into it, a pre-reflexive,

⁵Bourdieu (1990, p. 53). See Bourdieu (1997, p. 76).

⁶Bourdieu (1990, p. 61). In this conservatism of the *habitus* Bourdieu in fact shows a contrast with Mauss whose term he has appropriated.

⁷Bourdieu (1990, p. 68).

naive compliance with its presuppositions—for example an acceptance of its rites of passage.

Applying the analysis of Bourdieu to the *Merchant of Venice*, it becomes clear why neither the Jew nor the Christians are able to open themselves to the radical change demanded by Portia's appeal to mercy and forgiveness. The social structure of Venice is not fragile enough for revolution, and—if we follow Bourdieu—all that can reasonably be expected is a low-level adjustment of the *habitus* of Jew and Christian to this unforeseen event. Through a strategy generated by the *habitus* Antonio is saved from death, and Shylock keeps half his goods to be inherited by his daughter who has married a Christian, as long as Shylock agrees to be baptized himself. Things often do work out like this; Bourdieu's phenomenological analysis is accurate enough. But the question is whether things *have* to work out this way, or whether a moment of transcendence might after all be possible. Bourdieu's social analysis leans towards social determinism, though we should recognize that the self and its *habitus* does have a limited but real freedom.

I have not begun with Bourdieu simply to reject him; his insistence on the place of the body in overcoming subject-object dualism is invaluable; as in Merleau-Ponty the body is not simply the boundary of the individual but the means by which the self is immersed into the surrounding world.⁸ Other valuable perceptions are the “attunement” of the body to the social field in which it is placed, and his identification of “attentiveness” as a significant practice. But I want to ask whether it might be possible for the *habitus* to experience a genuine moment of transcendence, so that the future (*à venir*, that which is to come) might be more than a mere projection of the present, and may rather be an inbreaking of something genuinely new and unexpected which is “yet to come.”⁹

Another thinker who tends to stress the body as a place of continuity rather than change is Julia Kristeva, and here we turn from social philosophy to psychoanalytical philosophy. On first glance, it would seem that for Kristeva the body, at least the maternal body, is a source from which the symbolic order of things *can* be challenged and disrupted. It seems to offer at least a potential point of transcendence, subverting the domain of linguistic signs. The symbolic order, the sphere of life which is shaped and constructed by language, is under the control of patriarchy, or the law of the Father. So far Kristeva follows the analysis of Jacques Lacan. She agrees that the paternal law is the universal organizing principle of culture, and so the realm of the symbolic is only possible through the repression of primary desires, and especially through a repudiation of the dependency on the mother's body that all experience as young children. In order to emerge into the linguistic realm as a subject, as a separate self, the mother has to be “abjected”. That which was “mother” has become “object” (Kristeva 1982, pp. 8–13).

The body which results from this process of “abjection” is a bearer of the repressive law of the Father. It embodies a continuity with a culture that structures the

⁸Merleau-Ponty (1969, pp. 248–249).

⁹See Bloch (1986, pp. 235–249).

world by univocal meanings; it views all reality through a *sameness* that is rooted in paternal rule, and which (Kristeva avers) is expressed religiously in monotheism. The only moral vision is becoming like the One which is superior to the many (Kristeva 1986, pp. 141–143). But Kristeva now modifies Lacan. There is *another body beyond the law*, the primary maternal body, and this is the source of an aspect of the linguistic realm that Kristeva calls the “semiotic.” As distinct from the symbolic the semiotic is pre-discursive, expressing an original libidinal multiplicity, and it has the capacity to irritate, disturb and subvert the symbolic. There are sanctioned forms of disturbance within patriarchal society in which the semiotic finds expression and in which the maternal body is recovered: these are the experience of childbirth, and the use of poetry. Poetic language relies upon multiple meanings and so challenges the law of unity. For Kristeva there is something “in play” beyond or outside rational discourse, something which goes “beyond the theatre of linguistic representations” (Kristeva 1987, p. 5). Where the semiotic breaks into the symbolic there is a resurgence of infantile drives arising from the sub-conscious which she identifies as *jouissance*. This moment of extreme, disruptive pleasure includes sexual pleasure, but can also be experienced through art and literature. It is an experience which precedes even desire and the dichotomy between subject and object that desire presupposes (Kristeva 1980, pp. 134–135).

Kristeva seems then to be expressing a kind of transcendence, at least with regard to the social-linguistic world. However, there also appears to be the danger in her psychoanalytic description that the body which belongs to culture is always going to dominate over the rather shadowy “maternal body”. In this perspective, in order for the subject to grow up and become aware of its own identity it *has* to enter the realm of the law of the Father, which cannot be broken. The journey or process of the self is thus marked by determinism. The maternal body must be subordinate to the cultural body. Childbirth and poetry can offer moments of subversion, but they seem to be only temporary and finally futile disruptions. The maternal body is defined by very nature as pre-cultural, and so the body which is immersed in cultural life, through which we function on a daily basis and by which we interact with others, appears to be marked more by continuity than by change.

Judith Butler thus protests, surely rightly, that patriarchy cannot be effectively subverted by postulating a body *beyond* the law; it must be subverted from within the body of the law itself. She writes:

It is necessary to cure ourselves of the illusion of a true body beyond the law. If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its [so-called] ‘natural’ past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities (Butler 1990, p. 93).

Indeed, Butler offers an even more devastating critique of Kristeva. Rather than being pre-cultural, the proposed maternal body may—argues Butler—actually be a construct of the symbolic realm itself. It looks as though it is itself a product of the culture which is shaped by the law of the Father, since it is convenient for patriarchy to privilege maternity, to foster motherhood rather than—say—lesbianism. Butler

comments: “The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law’s self-amplification and proliferation” (Butler 1990, p. 93).

In reply to this critique, we might say that another interpretation is possible. While the recovery of the maternal body and its pre-linguistic drives may indeed be a product of patriarchal culture, this process may be more than an *illusion* of subversion. It may actually be an instance of what Butler is seeking, the self-subversion of the law from within patriarchy itself. If the body of culture can subvert itself, then we need not drive such an absolute divide between the maternal body and the cultural body. As Butler herself writes, “the repression of the feminine does not require that the agency of repression and the object of repression be ontologically distinct” (Butler 1990, p. 93). If we follow the interpretation I am suggesting, then the cultural body, shaped though it is by the *habitus* of patriarchy, can be genuinely subverted by its own recollections of the maternal body and can be transformed by giving attention to them.

If we take this less deterministic understanding of the body which is immersed into culture, then we find that Kristeva’s description of the rhythms of the semiotic realm offers rumours and hints of transcendence. She suggests that the language of poetry recovers the maternal body, a field of impulse full of diversity because it precedes the separation of the infant from the mother which results in a state of individuation. Poetic speech is characterized by rhythm, sound play and repetition, movements which reflect primal movements of love and energy. Here Kristeva envisages the semiotic as flowing from a realm that she denotes as the “chora”, taking the concept from Plato’s *Timaeus* where it refers to an unnameable space which exists between Being and Becoming. She develops the concept of *chora* as a womb-like, nurturing space of origin, as the pre-linguistic receptacle of sub-conscious drives and archetypal relations with the mother *and* the father. The *chora*, she writes, “precedes and underlies figuration and. . . is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.”¹⁰ Poetry, in its rhythms of sound and idea, reflects the *chora* which is a place “constituted by movements.”¹¹

This is the space which precedes linguistic symbols; it contains traces of an experience of a love which is prior to the Oedipal order of relations, and of a longing which is prior to the kind of desires that Nietzsche associates with violence. Semiotic recollections of this nourishing space can break through the signifiers of language, and Kristeva notes significantly that this can happen as a religious experience. While the *chora* is envisaged as being deep in the self, it has a dimension of transcendence, because when its signs or traces subvert language they reach towards an altogether “Other” which can be experienced as union with the divine. An example Kristeva offers of this leap is Augustine’s image of faith in God as an infant

¹⁰Kristeva (1996) “Revolution in Poetic Language.” *Kristeva Reader*, p. 94.

¹¹Kristeva (1986) “Revolution in Poetic Language,” p. 92.

sucking milk from its mother's breast, breaking open the usual ordering of symbols where God is depicted as male.¹² In her earlier work Kristeva is dismissive of western religion as monotheistic and unrevisably patriarchal. In her later work she becomes more interested in religious language, though she still finds that Christian symbols are embedded in patriarchy. She is intrigued, for example, by the doctrine of the Trinity which seems to her to be a highly articulated symbolic form revealing fundamental human desires and fantasies (Kristeva 1987, pp. 42–44). She seems unaware of the work of several modern theologians of the Trinity who find this relational symbol to be subversive of strict monotheism, opening up diversity and undermining patriarchal rule by placing the image of giving birth at the heart of divine life. If they are right, then this religious symbol exemplifies the kind of *self-subversion* of the law of the Father for which Judith Butler calls.

Using Kristeva's own terms, we might say that symbols for God are open to subversion by the traces of the fluid, maternal and rhythmic *chora*. Static ideas of substance are replaced by images of movement, of the giving and receiving of love in the interweaving of the divine Persons. This is especially so when the Persons are envisaged *as* movements of relationship rather than as divine individuals who *have* relations.¹³ Drawing on ideas of the *chora*, Kristeva could then have confidence in the subversion of patriarchal symbols from within, whether in religion or society more generally. The rooting of the maternal body in the *chora* should also give Kristeva greater confidence than she shows in the power of the maternal body radically to change the values of the symbolic realm. Exploring images of the *chora* might, more fundamentally, prompt an understanding of the maternal body which is less subject to the conventions and expectations of a patriarchal culture.

Giving more attention to the *chora* in this way would be a change of emphasis for Kristeva, but would still be consistent with her own practice of not simply *identifying* the *chora* with the maternal body; she is not fostering the myth of the "primordial mother", but finds the maternal body to be a site of radical otherness in which the semiotic otherness of the *chora* breaks surface. Kristeva is in fact advancing an account of language in which the semiotic (or pre-discursive) and the symbolic are always interweaving (Robinson 2000, pp. 293–295). She insists on a heterogeneity in which the choric rhythm is *sublated* (in a Hegelian sense of the word) in the symbolic. As Ewa Ziarek puts it, "the semiotic is both a presymbolic and postsymbolic moment" (Ziarek 1992, p. 96). Talk of the semiotic *chora* can thus alert us to moments of real transformation working within the subject and the culture.

Let us return for a moment to the court-room scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, and read it with the help of Kristeva. This is a patriarchal economy ruled by the law of the Father, in which a woman—Portia—has to disguise herself as a male lawyer in order to present a case in court (and the fact that this woman playing a man is played on the Elizabethan stage by a boy underlines the symbolic order). This social-linguistic order is challenged by a piece of poetry, which by its rhythms

¹²Kristeva (1986) "Stabat Mater," pp. 162–163.

¹³See Fiddes (2000, pp. 34–39, 81–84).

and intonations calls for attention to an order of primal love which is superior to monarchical rule:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown...
 . . . mercy is above this sceptred sway,
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself. . . .¹⁴

Like love, mercy and forgiveness stand outside and above the economy of law. Portia goes on to paraphrase St Paul on the nature of justification by grace and condemnation by the law, without explicitly mentioning the Christian story; so this is not versified dogma, but a poetry which can give rise to multiple meanings in the mind of the listener.

. . . therefore Jew,
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
 And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy. . .

Like St Paul, Portia is using the language of law in order to undermine law; salvation comes when the law, demanding condemnation, defeats itself.¹⁵ It is, as I have already pointed out, ironic then that it is not only Shylock who opts for legalism; Portia herself relapses into the economy of law by using a legal quibble to outwit him.

Kristeva thus hints at a transcendence which comes through the maternal body, and especially through the *chora*. But the wider the gap that is driven between the maternal body and the cultural body, the more the body becomes a resistance to change. I have been suggesting that there is more potential for sensible transcendence if the cultural body can be subverted *within* its very *habitus* of the law of the Father.¹⁶

¹⁴Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.180-91.

¹⁵See Romans 3:19-24, 7:4-6; Colossians 2:13-15.

¹⁶Similarly, see Anderson (1998). Anderson draws attention to a range of human experiences which offer analogies to "abjection," where something or someone is judged to be a source of defilement and is rejected or excluded; these moments, she suggests can be points of openness to transcendence and to the spiritual life, and because *men* also can recognize their abjection, the symbolic order can be subverted from within.

The Body as the Focus for Change

So we turn finally to examples in recent philosophy which conceive the body as a site for change, a focus for transcendence. One obvious example is Emmanuel Levinas, for whom our body is the place where we are confronted by the absolute moral demand of the other. Levinas makes the welcome ethical emphasis that we encounter the transcendent in our infinite responsibility for the other person. He challenges the notion that the mind *makes* the world present through representing it accurately in thought and speech; when we attempt this, we simply make “the other” immanent within our own consciousness, and so rob it of any enigmas or excesses.¹⁷ It is reduced to another instance of the same, the sameness of which Kristeva is also critical. Rather, the otherness of other persons *enters* our world on its own account, and impinges on our life in the body. Above all the infinite (or God) turns our world inside out by coming into our world and causing a rupture in our powers of representation. The “in-finite” may be understood as that which comes “into the finite”, and it breaks in through the face of our neighbour, calling us to limitless responsibility for the other person.

There is thus an explicit universalizing of encounter with the otherness of God in the face of all persons. The other person is always transcendent to us: Levinas writes that “A face is of itself a visitation and a transcendence.” However, this is a kind of hidden presence of the absolutely Other, since for Levinas what is present here and now is not strictly the infinite itself but a “trace” of it, as Moses saw the back of the hidden God as he “passed by” (Exodus 33:22–3):

The absoluteness of the Other’s presence... is not the simple presence in which in the last analysis *things* are also present... it is in the trace of the Other that a face shines... Someone has already passed (Levinas 1996, p. 63).

God is elusive, but so is the other person. For Levinas there can be no easy reciprocity between the self and the other, no mutual exchange that would reduce the force of the moral demand. The metaphysical relation to God beyond Being is actualized in relation to a human person with concrete needs, who can never be possessed within the self. Indeed, Levinas uses images of being “persecuted” and “expelled” from oneself by the infinite demand of the other person.

Levinas has come under fire from feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray, who complain that for all his philosophy of otherness he fails to perceive sexual difference, and so fails to recognize the woman as truly other to the man. Levinas has fallen prey, she maintains, to the idea of a male symbolic order so that woman is outside culture and language, and all we have is the male *representation* of women. Levinas’ God is a male God, and the man’s “other” is not woman but a son through whom he comes to himself.¹⁸ Moreover, Irigaray complains that Levinas is not being serious about the body as a place of transcendence. Because there is no true otherness of the woman, there can be no true communion between man and woman,

¹⁷Levinas (1998, pp. 51–59, 153–165).

¹⁸Irigaray (1991, pp. 178–179, 181).

no transcendence through the body in relationship, or “sensible transcendence.” Irigaray writes:

He knows nothing of communion in pleasure. Levinas does not ever seem to have experienced the transcendence of the other which becomes an immediate ecstasy (*extase instante*) in me and with him – or her. For Levinas, the distance is always maintained with the other in the experience of love (Irigaray 1991, p. 180).

For Irigaray this is a solitary love, which “does not correspond to the shared outpouring, to the loss of boundaries that takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body.” This critique would apply to the relation of the self to any other, but for Irigaray it becomes most acute in the case of the woman. What Levinas seeks, she accuses him, is merely “a play with something elusive. . .” (Irigaray 1991, p. 179).

In Levinas’ defence, we can say that he fears that the impact of the transcendent moral demand of the other might be undermined, and there *is* a kind of reciprocal relationship that can become a matter of mere exchange. We also note that Levinas himself describes a kind of “sensible transcendence” which he expresses with a maternal image of the body. As Kathryn Bevis has pointed out,¹⁹ in his later work *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas uses language drawn from the experience of pregnancy to express the threat or trauma that the other makes on the self:

Sensibility. . . is a pre-original not resting on oneself, the restlessness of someone persecuted – Where to be? How to be? It is a writhing in the tight dimensions of pain, the unsuspected dimensions of the hither side. It is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothingness; it is maternity, gestation of the other in the same. Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for other and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks (Levinas 1998, p. 75).

This is not Irigaray’s “pleasurable communion”, but it does take the body seriously as the place where transcendence happens, and applies an image of the maternal body to both men and women. This is not the dualism of patriarchal culture where the man represents the mind and the woman the body. This image of the maternal body functions as the most radical form of responsibility for the other, as the self substitutes itself for the other.

Nevertheless, this is a rather limited bodily image. Transcendence is known only through the experience of being cramped and confined within the body. This is an image of being persecuted in the body by the demand of the other, an experience that both Antonio and Shylock share in *The Merchant of Venice*. However, it has nothing of the ecstasy to which Irigaray witnesses, and which the pairs of lovers experience in Shakespeare’s play. Another continental philosopher, Jacques Derrida, offers a different view of the body as place of transcendence, that is as a place where

¹⁹In her doctoral thesis in progress, “Refiguring the Self: Emmanuel Levinas, Transcendence and Metaphor,” University of Oxford. I am much indebted to conversation with her.

one can experience a movement or flow of life which can—rather surprisingly—be called spirit.

Derrida insists on the embodiment of thought in material signs. There can be no principle, idea or reality that exists independently of the sign which is embedded in the particularities of time and space (Derrida 1982). In the history of thought, various idealizations have been claimed to float free of the signs that indicate them, and from the internal differentiation of signs from each other that gives them meaning. Such disembodied ideals have often been given the term “spirit,” and been envisaged as a controlling subject, an eternal book, or a divine voice. Derrida objects that there can be nothing outside the text, understanding the term “text” to apply not only to what is written on a flat surface, but to the whole sign-system of the world. The whole physical world is sign-bearing and this is especially true of the human body. It is an illusion to try and escape from the sign, to postulate a realm of idealizations that are signified by signs in time and space but which are not entangled in the differential network of signs. That is, there can be no transcendental signified.²⁰

Derrida does, however, have a place for a kind of transcendence, a quasi-transcendence. The body is the place where something “other” breaks in, always upsetting our neat conceptions of what might be possible or impossible, and calling us to act justly towards the others we know. Derrida draws on several images of movement to express this kind of transcendence, such as “coming”, “turning”, “flowing” and “burning”. The focus is on the cry “come”, which appeals to an event which is always “to come” (*à-venir*), and which cannot be thought under the usual given character of an event (Derrida 1995, p. 127). This is not the *avenir* of Bourdieu, a mere projection of the present. *Viens*, come, calls for a break, for something new that shatters the horizon of the same and which points to “the event of the other”. This is not an event which exists somewhere outside everyday space or time prior to being actualized; it occurs in no place, but is always incoming, disturbing the present with a call to include what we have excluded, whether in written texts or in human society. This cry “come” is “the apocalyptic tone newly adopted in philosophy” (Derrida 1992a), an apocalypse without apocalypse. As echoing throughout the Apocalypse of St John, for instance, the invitation “come” evokes a final unveiling of meaning which is always postponed; “come” resists any assimilation to ideology because one cannot deduce its origin and the issuing authority; it cannot be made into an object to be categorized and it points to a place that cannot be described. The apocalyptic tone of every text, Derrida suggests, is the appeal to “come” and find more within the superabundant store of meaning generated by the movement of *différance* behind and within it.

Images of “turning” and “flowing” have been influenced by Derrida’s reading of the poet Hölderlin, by way of Heidegger (Derrida 1989, pp. 75–82). In his meditation on the flowing of the river Danube, Hölderlin suggests that we are always dealing with a movement of turning and returning which has the restlessness of

²⁰Derrida (1981, pp. 19–20); see also Derrida (1976, pp. 49–50).

never being at home. The poet himself associates this with the “sighing and suffering” of divine love. Derrida comments that the Hegelian return has been transformed poetically into a journey which is “always to come.” There is no timeless reality of spirit into which all material objects are being gathered up, but (he says), “the sending remains for humanity a future (*avenir*) or the to come (*à-venir*) of a coming.” Again, “returning itself remains to come. . . of coming in its very coming” (Derrida 1989, p. 78). Associated with the movements of turning and flowing is the symbol of burning, as the poet cries “come now, O fire.” Derrida here identifies what he calls “archi-originary movements of spirit”—spirit not as a timeless principle which transcends the body, but as a movement in which the body can find itself participating. The inflaming movement of spirit is a promise, a promise of coming, a “yes” that is basic to language, and that lays within all signs and signifiers in the world. It is, as Derrida puts it, “a coming of the event. . . which we must think in order to approach the spiritual, the *Geistliche* hidden under the Christian. . . representation” (1989, p. 94). Like Kristeva, Derrida names the mysterious, ungrounding origin of this movement as the *khora*, but it is clear that this is not and never was any actual place: it is a no-place, a desert place, an empty place (Derrida 1992b, pp. 106–108). It symbolizes an otherness which breaks open all boundaries and upsets rigid ideas about what is inside or outside the reality established by language. It is necessary to speak about this “place” of the other in order to keep signs open to the promise.

The image of flowing appears in a different context in Derrida’s dialogue with St Augustine in his autobiographical text, *Circumfession*, and significantly in direct connection with the body. While Augustine calls for God to circumcise his lips inwardly and outwardly, and so enable him to write about “dark secrets” of the creation in the book of Genesis, Derrida determines to circumcise (deconstruct) the written text itself, including Augustine’s own text.²¹ If the *Confessions* are circumscribed (“written around”) or circumcised (“cut into”) then many other histories, books and truths are enabled to appear. Thus he addresses himself: “You are waiting for an order from God who . . . finally allows you to speak, one evening you’ll open the envelope, you’ll break the seals like skins, the staples of the scar, unreadable for you and for the others, and which is still bleeding. . .” (Derrida 1999, 48, pp. 257–258).

Writing for Derrida is “cutting” into the skin of the author and the text at the same time. Derrida thus desires a fluidity of writing “across the cut,” a liquid writing like blood flowing from a wound in the skin or from circumcision. True spirit is not a transcendent subjectivity, or a transcendent set of principles in the divine mind, but a writing which is open to the other, a flowing style which will overcome the split between subject and object, or between spirit and letter, that has been created by “onto-theological metaphysic.” It is an “an easy, offered, readable, relaxed writing” (Derrida 1999, 42, p. 220) but it can only be achieved by cutting deeply: he quotes Catherine of Siena: “Let us enter the cellar opened in the flank of the crucified Christ, while weeping with anguish and pain over God’s wound,” and then adds:

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.ii.3; Derrida (1999, pp. 239–241).

“I unmask and de-skin myself while sagely reading others like an angel, I dig down in myself to the blood . . . how to circumscribe, the edge of the text . . .”

Derrida celebrates the spirit as the promise of an incoming of the unexpected and the unknown. It is a promise that can be known like a movement of coming, flowing and burning in which we participate. To return to the *Merchant of Venice*, this is the promise that the lovers know as they take the risks of love, symbolized in the three caskets at Belmont. Any suitor wishing to marry Portia has to choose one of three caskets—gold, silver, and lead. The lead casket carries the threatening words: “who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath.”²² Fortunately, Bassanio chooses this casket which invites the chooser to risk all. The unlikely outward form of the dull lead contains inside the portrait of the lady. The one who chooses correctly has to enter a world of risk in which all values seem to be subverted.

A Theological Coda

I have been observing that in some recent continental thought, the body can be both a brake on change and a catalyst for change. Bourdieu’s body as *habitus* and Kristeva’s body “under the law of the Father” stress continuity rather than novelty. Levinas’ persecuted body and Derrida’s lacerated body envisage the body as open to the disturbing challenge of the other. In the Christian tradition, this vulnerability and exposure of the self through embodiment is signified by the term “incarnation”, and so I want finally to pick up some threads of our discussion from a theological point of view.

To use the theological word “incarnation” means at least this: that the movements of coming, turning, flowing, and burning which are experienced *in the body* can be identified with movements of divine life. This need not mean that God is being postulated as what Derrida calls a “transcendental signified.” The symbol of the Trinity, which has fascinated Kristeva, points to interweaving movements of relationship, of giving and receiving in love, in which God makes room for the whole world to dwell. These movements can be described in a multitude of ways—as, for instance, being like a father sending out a son on a mission of love in the hope and promise of the spirit, or like a daughter turning in love to a mother. They are transcendent, not because they belong to another order of being, but because they are larger, deeper, wider, more inexhaustible than our own. Incarnation affirms that one person in historical embodiment has indwelt these patterns of movement in such a way that all others are enabled to do so too. By participating in them, it is being claimed, we experience the kind of coming, flowing and burning to which Derrida refers. We find we are caught into a flow which transcends us and turns us towards the demand of the other. This is not a “transcendental signified” because there is no absolute subjectivity here, supporting the domination of human subjectivities,

²²Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, 2.7.9.

but only movements of relationship. Further, because these movements embrace the world within them, they are never disembodied, never without signs.

This is truly subversive of patriarchy and other kinds of attempts at world-domination. In contrast to Kristeva's body beyond the law, these self-subversive movements are experienced within the body of culture, the body under the law. Moreover, in contrast to Bourdieu's view of the *habitus*, this is a practice of the body which is open to radical change. Transcendent movements of giving and receiving can challenge and interrupt bodily practices, while such movements can also be learned and become a continuity of style. Marcel Mauss, developing the concept of *habitus* early on, thought that spiritual experiences could be learned just like physical experiences such as walking and running. He writes: "At the bottom of all our mystical states there are body techniques. . . there are necessary biological means of entering into 'communion with God'" (Mauss 1979, p. 122). For Mauss, the inability to enter into communion with God is thus the result of untaught bodies.

This is spirituality in the sense of attention to the other, to our neighbours and to an infinite Other. Kristeva shows us that such openness to the other can happen deep within the self, in the maternal rhythms of the *chora*. Transcendence happens within the immanence of the body, and openness to the other here means allowing the other to make her own contribution to the relationship, so that the self receives as well as gives. The Stoic substitution for the other that Levinas urges is not the whole story. Finally, while we began with a critique of Bourdieu, let us recall his insistence that the *habitus* of the body is attunement to a field. In my proposal of a trinitarian transcendence, the body and its practices are attuned to a field of relationships; but these movements of love are universal, unlimited to any particular culture since the field is God's self. The interweaving and interpenetration of movements of loving relationship set up a "field of force" in which bodies are held and with which they can resonate. We can learn to detect these movements, to hear them and to see them.

Perhaps then we may return finally to the lovers in the *Merchant of Venice*, sitting in the moonlight, lamenting that they so often *fail* to hear this music which flows through the universe:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sound of music
Creep in our ears – soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony. . .²³

It is true that Lorenzo's speech goes on to express the Platonist view that the body, with its "muddy vesture of decay" inhibits us from hearing the celestial harmony in our souls. This would support a reading of the conflict between Antonio and Shylock as exemplifying the resistance of the body and its *habitus* to change. But the play as a whole gives us grounds to hope that the body *can* be a place of radical change, and can be the very means of attuning us to the rhythms of life and love that both transcend and embrace us.

²³Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.54-7.

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Chapter 18

The Problem of Transcendence in Irigaray's Philosophy of Sexual Difference

Patrice Haynes

Abstract In this chapter, I argue that Irigaray's attempt to articulate transcendence-in-immanence, through her notion of a sensible transcendental, unwittingly leads to a conception of sexed embodiment that cannot properly account for the relation between the two of sexual difference, which is so central to her project. By exploring the metaphysics underpinning Irigaray's sensible transcendental through an analysis of her novel philosophy of nature, I suggest a way of approaching her idea of "becoming divine" more in terms of *Naturphilosophie*, rather than Feuerbachian projection by which it is so often considered. However, I contend that Irigaray's vision of nature's primordial sexual difference—through which a sensible transcendental can be realized—results in a gulf between male and female subjects such that the two are unable to work towards the mutual recognition necessary for love and social transformation. In response to this problem, and in dialogue with Rowan Williams and Pamela Sue Anderson, I suggest a conception of transcendence in terms of critical thinking, or "thinking in dispossession," in order to facilitate the work of mutual recognition between embodied subjects.

Keywords Sensible transcendental · Transcendence · Nature · Sexual difference

Why do we assume that God must always remain an inaccessible transcendence rather than a realization – here and now – in and through the body?

(Irigaray 1993, p. 148)

Introduction

The classic construal of theistic divine transcendence is generally rejected by feminist philosophers of religion. Conceived as radically other than the material world, many feminists argue that the transcendent God of theism all too easily invites

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the devaluation of materiality and embodiment. Typically, feminists maintain that avowal of the absolute supremacy of divine transcendence, in contradistinction to material immanence, institutes a hierarchy between God and the material world such that the latter is downgraded. Given the customary association, certainly in western culture, of the female body with the constraints of bodily immanence, the hierarchical distinction between divine transcendence and material immanence inevitably encourages the denigration and disgracing of the female body.

Of course, theists could rightly complain that the depiction of God presented by feminist philosophers of religion is little more than a caricature, one that overlooks theologies of creation which signal God's desire for the material world, and, in Christianity, the significance of the incarnation through which bodiliness and matter is affirmed and redeemed in Christ who is God made flesh. Nevertheless, caricature or not, the point for many feminists is that the prevailing image of divine transcendence warrants critical scrutiny because it remains potent in western culture, supporting a "rhetoric of ascent" (Lowe 2002, p. 242) that has persisted from Plato through to Jean-Paul Sartre, and which promotes a vision of transcendence as liberation from the prison of bodily immanence, a prison often represented by the female body.

In view of this, it is unsurprising that the dominant trend amongst feminist philosophers of religion, as well as feminist theologians, is towards rethinking divine transcendence in immanent or materialist terms. As Nancy Frankenberry observes, "Significantly... contemporary women's articulation of a relation between God and the world depicts the divine as continuous with the world rather than as radically transcendent ontologically or metaphysically. Divine transcendence is seen to consist in total immanence" (2004, p. 11). The work of the French philosopher and psycholinguist, Luce Irigaray, emerges as an important resource for feminists seeking a materialist alternative to classic theistic conceptions of divine transcendence. In particular, her enigmatic notion of a "sensible transcendental" ("*transcendental sensible*") is seen to refuse the opposition between divine transcendence and embodiment. Indeed, the concept aims to articulate transcendence-in-immanence, specifically, transcendence in and through the sexed human body, rather than a flight from it.

In this chapter, I explore Irigaray's notion of a sensible transcendental and its role in women "becoming divine", which, she famously contends, is crucial to the project of realizing a culture of sexual difference. Specifically, I aim to show how her novel philosophy of nature constitutes a metaphysics of sexual difference which, I maintain, importantly informs her account of a sensible transcendental. By highlighting the metaphysics underpinning Irigaray's sensible transcendental, I hope to offer a fresh approach to her theology of becoming divine by moving beyond the terms of Feuerbachian projection by which it is so often read. With Irigaray, the category of transcendence is conceived not as a break from sensuous nature and materiality, but as "inscribed in a place" (1993, p. 39), the place of "sexuate belonging," meaning—roughly—belonging to both a body and a psyche through which one is determined, and becomes determining, as a specifically sexed subjectivity (see Irigaray 2009). For Irigaray, sexuate

belonging provides the corporeal scene wherein transcendence—becoming divine—can be achieved.

It is my contention, however, that Irigaray's re-conception of transcendence unintentionally creates, among other problems, a gulf between male and female such that the two are unable to towards the mutual recognition necessary for love and social transformation. Because I believe this schism between male and female subjects has its roots in Irigaray's philosophy of nature, I shall offer an overview of her account of nature as inherently sexed. I will then go on to show how her picture of transcendence retains a quite traditional emphasis on distance and inaccessibility, but this time figured between the two of sexual difference rather than humanity and a supernatural God. The trouble is, I argue, she is then unable to offer a cogent account of how mutual recognition between male and female subjects might be established. I take seriously Pamela Sue Anderson's contention that a guiding ideal for feminist philosophers of religion should be the "struggle for mutual recognition" between different subjects (Anderson 2006, p. 3). To this end, I argue that within the realm of material finitude the transcendence of distance, namely, the distance of the embodied other who is irreducible to me, must be coupled with the transcendence of critical thinking, which, following Rowan Williams is "thinking in dispossession" (1995).

Contra the understandable yet overly zealous guarding of sexuate belonging which characterizes Irigaray's project—and which, I hold, ultimately weakens it—I shall tie the idea of transcendence not simply to distance but to thinking in dispossession, that is, to critical thinking. According to Gillian Rose, "If actuality is not thought, then thinking has no social import" (1995, p. 214). Bearing this in mind, feminist philosophy of religion must advance a form of critical thinking that can serve as the basis for social transformation. Such critical thinking (the transcendence of thought) must enable, as far as possible, mutual recognition between subjects, including the two of sexual difference.

Materializing the Transcendental

Before going on to outline Irigaray's philosophy of nature, I will first discuss how her transcendental project serves as a response to Kant's transcendental idealism—which starkly exemplifies the classic dichotomies of western philosophy, for example, intelligible/sensible; transcendental/empirical; transcendent/immanent, etc. At this point, however, it will help to distinguish between the terms "transcendence," "transcendent," and "transcendental." The term transcendence is usually defined in contradistinction to immanence: whereas immanence means to remain or dwell within certain limits or bounds, transcendence means moving beyond or surpassing limitedness—the limits of the body, or the limits of what can be known or experienced. The term transcendent is related to transcendence; however, it specifically refers to that which exists beyond and apart from the material world as such. The

word commonly refers to the radical otherness of God whose reality exceeds all categories. Finally, the term transcendental is to be understood in its modern Kantian sense rather than that of scholastic philosophy. Thus, by transcendental is meant, roughly, the conditions of all possible human experience. As we will see, Irigaray's notion of a sensible transcendental invokes all these three distinctions. Importantly, however, she rejects a two-world ontology whereby a transcendent, supersensible realm (populated, say, by Platonic Ideas or, arguably, Kantian things-in-themselves) exists separately from the sensible world, while nevertheless serving as the ultimate basis of physical objects in time and space.¹ Irigaray's metaphysics is immanentist insofar as she denies any reality beyond that of the sensible world.

Two main approaches characterize Irigaray's transcendental enquiry: critical and constructive. The critical approach seeks to disclose how a sensible transcendental is configured, yet denied, within a phallogocentric framework wherein woman is only recognized as the other of the same (i.e., man). In her critique of the history of western philosophy, particularly as detailed in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray undertakes a critical transcendental project by drawing attention to the male subject's negation of his material/maternal origins and conditions. From Plato to Kant to Freud, "a break with material [and maternal] contiguity" (1991, p. 123) is, according to Irigaray, the primary move of western thought to date, enabling the establishment of autonomous, self-defining male subjectivity. Irigaray seeks to expose the antithetical relation to material conditions—in other words, a sensible transcendental—which silently drives the story of man's self-engenderment. Her critical point is that to the extent it remains under the sway of phallogocentrism, western philosophy is such that *only* the female body constitutes a sensible transcendental. For Irigaray, this is not because a sensible transcendental *is* just the female body. Rather it is a consequence of the phallogocentric regime whereby the female body comes to symbolize the corporeal per se and so signifies that which must be negated in order for man to effect his own genesis as the rational subject.

In her constructive approach to transcendental enquiry, Irigaray wants to rethink a sensible transcendental beyond the limits of the male specular economy in which the female body, as Margaret Whitford notes, "must always be for men, available for their transcendence" (1991, p. 153). Irigaray's goal is to refigure a sensible transcendental so that it is no longer the disavowed female body enabling man's transcendence, his becoming. Instead a sensible transcendental is to be affirmed

¹Of course, Kant's transcendental idealism insists that the sensible (i.e., phenomenal) world has the transcendental subject as its basis. Nevertheless, Kant invokes a noumenal realm of things-in-themselves, which is the unknowable ground of appearances. Without the distinction between noumena and phenomena, Kant holds that "we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears" (1929, pp. xxvi–xxvii). Kant's conception of noumena is deeply ambiguous in that it could refer to either a transcendent materiality or something more akin to Platonic Ideas. According to T.K. Seung, this ambiguity in Kant's theory of noumena is a consequence of the theory drawing on two very different sources: the Cartesian-Lockean tradition (whereby noumena would signify unknowable material substances) and the Platonic-Leibnizian (whereby noumena would signify intelligible yet unknowable, at least for human minds, entities beyond space and time). See Seung (2007, pp. 24–25).

as the sensuous relations between *two* distinct modes of transcendence or becoming, with each mode always operating in recognition of the subject "whose body's ontological status would differ from my own" (1993, p. 157).

In this chapter, I question whether Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference can actually accomplish the goal of mutual recognition between the two of sexual difference. Indeed, I will argue that her re-conception of transcendence prevents such recognition. However, this re-conception is importantly informed by Irigaray's constructive transcendental project. Concerning this project, Clare Colebrook rightly notes that "Irigaray's method is to open the transcendental to its empirical determination" (2000, p. 111). Of course, for Kant such a move would be utterly wrong-headed since the transcendental is precisely what must be *presupposed* for the possibility of any empirical determination. Contra Humean scepticism, Kant is keen to secure knowledge of an intelligible, rationally ordered external world independent of the subject. However, seeking to avoid recourse to a dogmatic metaphysics (whether idealist or materialist), he embarks on what he calls a "transcendental enquiry," namely, a critical enquiry into the a priori conditions that make our experience and knowledge of objects, including sensuous bodies, possible. For Kant, these *a priori* conditions—deemed transcendently ideal and located in the transcendental subject—are necessarily non-empirical. However, they remain within the range of knowledge as that which the perspective of critical enquiry must admit as the necessary preconditions of all possible experience.

Given Kant's vision of transcendental philosophy, how could it make sense to "open the transcendental to its empirical determination?" For Irigaray, it could be argued that Kant's transcendental method is in the end *unable* to maintain its strict separation from pre-cognitive, and thus contingent, materiality. Indeed, Diana Coole importantly questions "whether [in Kant's philosophy] the epistemic conditions of knowledge can be deduced independently of empirical, psychological or ontological assumptions, any of which might reintroduce contingency or dogmatism" (2000, p.41). When Irigaray labels Kant's transcendental idealism a "transcendental illusion" (1985, p. 210), it is because she believes that the paradoxes and ambiguities which haunt his philosophy belie his attempt to seamlessly tie transcendental subjectivity with knowable objects, without succumbing to idealism (whereby things are only representations), or resorting to metaphysical claims regarding the unknowable source of phenomena. Whereas Kant's system can only affirm the origin of appearance in terms of a "transcendental object=X," the indeterminate object-in-general—an inert, material otherness—Irigaray's materialism aims to make explicit the constitutive powers of nature, which, as we will see, she insists is inherently sexed. For Irigaray, the transcendental conditions determining the empirical world, including embodied subjectivity, are *felt* natural forces, not logically deduced idealities. The transcendental is, therefore, material: a sensible transcendental. Moreover, when re-conceived according to an ethics of sexual difference, a sensible transcendental is not the female body serving only to ensure the achievement of male subjectivity, but rather the sensuous relations between two differently sexed subjects who are becoming, supposedly, in light of each other.

For Irigaray, then, a sensible transcendental affords a sensuous, corporeal ground for the becoming of men and women in a way that confounds “the opposition between immanence and transcendence” (1993, p. 33), an opposition strikingly exemplified in Sartre’s existentialist philosophy. It also offers philosophy a horizon of possibilities such that space, time, the self, the natural elements, the divine, etc., may be re-imagined in light of sexual difference. Before going on to explore how Irigaray’s sensible transcendental opens up new ways of thinking about the divine, I wish to address the question why she privileges sexual difference in her conception of a sensible transcendental. Colebrook suggests that this is because sexual difference is *historically* significant; for Irigaray, “philosophy has always been founded on the necessary exclusion and negation of the feminine” (1993, p. 122). The exclusion of the feminine is necessary only for a philosophy circumscribed by a phallogocentric framework; however, this circumscription is not itself necessary since it is (arguably at least) conceivable that philosophy may be practiced in non-phallogocentric ways. Sexual difference is thus prioritized by Irigaray because it is the difference that traditionally makes philosophy, and its account of the subject, possible.

However, Colebrook is critical of Irigaray’s emphasis on sexual difference in thinking a sensible transcendental because it once more predetermines embodied otherness in advance. To overcome this problem, Colebrook, taking her cue from Deleuze, suggests that while sexual difference can be emphasized as a first move towards acknowledging a sensible transcendental, sexual difference must in turn be deconstructed so that it can extend to the recognition of multiple corporeal differences (2005, pp. 155–157). However, I believe that Irigaray’s idea of a sensible transcendental is not just a contingent, socio-historical determination open to deconstruction, but is the basic and irreducible ontological reality of sexual difference. In the next section, I will outline Irigaray’s philosophy of nature in order to clarify what is meant by the ontological status of sexual difference, particularly as this will acquire religious import in her rethinking the divine as a sensible transcendental.

Irigaray’s Philosophy of Nature: Two Sexuate Rhythms

According to Irigaray,

The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least *two*: male and female. This division is not secondary nor unique to human kind. It cuts across all realms of the living which, without it would not exist. Without sexual difference, there would be no life on earth. It is the manifestation of and the condition for the production and reproduction of life (1996, p. 37).

For Irigaray, “Sexual difference is an *immediate* natural given” (1996, p. 47; emphasis added), it is not, therefore, a socio-cultural construction. Moreover, she attributes sexual dimorphism not just to human beings but to the entire realm of nature. For Irigaray, no aspect of reality is unmarked by sex: “Plants, animals, gods, the elements of the universe, all are sexed” (1993b, p. 178). At first, her vision of nature seems bizarre and implausible, particularly from a scientific perspective. However,

in her important studies on Irigaray's philosophy of nature, Alison Stone argues that Irigaray's account of nature is not ungrounded fancy but has a *phenomenological* rather than *scientific* basis (2006, pp. 110–112). For Irigaray, epistemic priority must be given to our sensuous, lived experiences of nature. By contrast, scientific inquiry strives for a detached, objective grasp of the world guided by the principles of logic and mathematics. Thus, Irigaray writes: "The most transcendental theory is rooted in subjective experience. . . . A theoretical truth that forces us to abandon all subjective reference points is dangerous" (1994, p. 30). For Irigaray, a transcendental theory of nature is not a purely logical enterprise which aspires to establish the formal a priori conditions of experience. Rather, it aims to uncover the necessary sensible conditions of human embodied life, and the empirical world more generally, by way of our lived experiences.

But it seems far from obvious that our everyday experiences of nature ineluctably lead us to deduce an all-pervading *sexual* dimorphism as its transcendental condition. However, for Irigaray, sexual difference is not to be narrowly understood in terms of biology alone: the presence of sexual difference throughout nature refers not to biological features relating to reproduction but to two distinctive rhythms. According to Irigaray, these two rhythms are "sexuate" insofar as they structurally mirror human sexual difference. The idea that nature is bi-rhythmic is somewhat obscure. Roughly, Irigaray means that natural processes contain two distinct "poles" which "alternate" with each other in a continuous cycle, a cycle characterized by two discrete yet mutually supporting rhythms regulated by each pole. Examples of such bipolar rhythms are day and night, summer and winter, the ebb and flow of fluids (water, sap, blood) and air (1993b, p. 108). Importantly, as Stone points out, while interchanging with each other, these two rhythms never turn into one another but rather engage "in a kind of breathing" (2006, p. 90), one rhythm ascending while the other descends according to a regular cycle.

Irigaray's philosophy of nature is an elaboration of a metaphysics of sexual difference, one in which human sexual dimorphism and natural bipolarity can be thought in light in of each other. Indeed, for Irigaray, the transcendental conditions determining the sensible world and corporeal life are two sexuate rhythms. These rhythms operate immanently within the sensible world, regulating along distinct sexuate lines of becoming the genesis, form and growth of all natural phenomena, from inorganic things to men and women. Whereas Kant posits the a priori conditions of experience in a dimension other than the empirical world (*not* a supersensible dimension but the ideality of transcendental subjectivity), Irigaray's transcendental conditions are *caught up* within the sensible world they determine. As we noted earlier, for Irigaray the transcendental is sensible: a sensible transcendental. This enigmatic notion is not only theological, as we shall see, but ontological: the sexuate rhythms inherently determining processes of materialization, including the sexed bodies of men and women.²

²It would be interesting to compare Irigaray's philosophy of nature, and the theology she develops from it, with the process theology inspired by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne

Irigaray's ontological picture is dynamic; it excludes inert forms and structures and instead emphasizes becoming, movement and creativity. Importantly, these are not generalized notions because they are always expressed in two specific modes: male and female. Irigaray's conception of nature invokes pre-Socratic thinkers such as Empedocles, for whom nature, or *phusis*, is an on-going, open-ended process of genesis, growth and realization, a process by which things appear and thus come into existence. Mindful of the highly eclectic range of sources from which Irigaray weaves her philosophy of sexual difference, I want to suggest that her conception of nature and divinity develops themes from romantic and idealist philosophies. Such philosophies claim that nature is spirit in a process of becoming conscious. Conversely, spirit is deemed conscious nature. Of course, while the German idealists viewed nature and spirit as ultimately constituting a single absolute, for Irigaray, the absolute is not one but two: the irreducible difference that is sexual difference cultivated to the point of divinity.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this brief summary of Irigaray's philosophy of nature. Worryingly, for many feminists, it is clear that for Irigaray sexual difference is a natural determinant rather than socially constructed. Potentially, there are deeply conservative political implications with this position which most feminists would want to avoid. However, I do not wish to enter here into the long-standing debate concerning the question of Irigaray's essentialism; rather the point I wish to highlight is the radical otherness of men and women who, given Irigaray's conception of nature, embody distinct sexuate rhythms. Irigaray is a philosopher of immanence—there is nothing beyond the natural world. However, transcendence is re-situated within nature by way of sexual difference, such that men and women become radically other, each one transcendent to the other. Indeed, concerning this otherness, Irigaray states, "From birth, men and women *belong to different worlds*, biologically and relationally" (2000b, p. 96; emphasis added); consequently, "their way of experiencing the sensible and of constructing the spiritual is not the same" (1996, p. 38). In what follows, I explore how the radical otherness between men and women is crucial to Irigaray's revaluation of the divine. I then go on to argue that her formulation of transcendence betrays her commitment to the mutual recognition between the two of sexual difference.

Becoming Divine: Towards a Different Transcendence

For Irigaray, the immanence of nature not only contains the transcendental conditions of empirical determination, life and growth, but it is also the site of divine incarnation. Not a supernatural, transcendent divine coming to take flesh but rather (as will become clearer) the intensification of embodied sexuateness in the establishment and ongoing perfecting of a culture of sexuate difference, the process of

which has proved appealing to feminist philosophers of religion such as Carol P. Christ (see Christ 2003).

which is no less than the subject becoming a divine woman (or man). Importantly, in rethinking divinity in terms of transcendence-in-immanence, Irigaray insists on a distinction between two types of transcendence which intersect each other: "a horizontal transcendence" and "a vertical transcendence" (2009, p. 24).

A Horizontal Transcendence

Irigaray laments that "We've generally located transcendence between the 'sky' and us. We should learn to lay it between us. Each one of us is inaccessible to the other, transcendent to him/her. The most irreducible space is between woman and man..." (2000b, p. 58). By emphasizing the radical otherness of God, traditional theism, according to Irigaray, posits a vertical transcendence between God and humanity. God is thus imaged as a pure ideality reigning over and above the material world. Irigaray holds that, so figured, vertical transcendence simply bespeaks the "corporally absent" God of patriarchal culture. While she will retain the idea of a vertical transcendence, though, of course, redefined in accordance with her philosophy of sexual difference, Irigaray insists on the affirmation of a horizontal transcendence. By this is meant acknowledging a "transcendental dimension" between each other as irreducible, sensuous subjects, with the difference between men and women being the most irreducible difference of all (2008, p. 3).

Put simply, the transcendental dimension between men and women is the radical otherness of male and female "sexuate belonging" (of body, of psyche, of culture, of world). For Irigaray, such belonging is not conventional but has its basis in the natural, cosmic order. By formulating the radical otherness between men and women in terms of horizontality, Irigaray wishes to emphasize the non-hierarchical nature of sexual difference—in contradistinction to Simone de Beauvoir who, Irigaray argues, conceives woman's otherness negatively in relation to man. The transcendental dimension between men and women, therefore, "maintains the duality of the subjects and of their worlds" (2007, p. 285). It thus makes possible the prospect of love between men and women: "*It takes two to love*. To know how to separate and how to come back together" (1993, p. 71; emphasis added).

For Irigaray, love is central to becoming divine. Before seeing how this is so, it will help to have an idea as to *what* Irigaray means by becoming divine. A wealth of commentary exists on Irigaray's provocative notion of divine women and the need for women to engage in becoming divine. In this chapter, however, I will understand Irigaray's "becoming divine in the feminine" to denote a woman endeavoring to achieve transcendence within the immanence of her sexuate belonging, where transcendence is not overcoming her bodily immanence, but rather radically *intensifying* her embodied sexuateness. Roughly, the intensification of sexuateness is what Irigaray refers to as the "cultivation" or "spiritualization" of the body in its sensible immediacy, by which she means (in addition to invoking themes from eastern religious traditions) something rather Hegelian: a woman's immediate, natural sexuateness must be made "self-conscious," as it were, through its cultural expression. Female being, which is always becoming, must be "rationalized," it must

establish a world—values, art, discourses, religions, etc.—in accordance with the female body.³ Thus, on my reading of Irigaray, women are becoming divine insofar as they are *creators* of a distinctly female world, one that affirms their female bodiliness.⁴

For Irigaray, the movements of becoming divine are the movements of love: self-love and love of the other “who does not share the same world” (2007, p. 287). Self-love, according to Irigaray, is to establish and maintain one’s integrity and autonomy as a sexuate being; it is to secure a space for oneself while remaining open to others. Additionally, self-love calls for the cultivation of sexed sensible immediacy, and so it is essential to becoming divine. Irigaray argues that patriarchal culture denies women their self-love. Hence, in seeking to encourage female self-love, she will emphasize the role of the self-affecting female body, utilizing, for example, the image of the two lips touching.

However, Irigaray maintains that self-love must always be in conjunction with love of the other of sexual difference. It is by recognizing the sexuate other that the subject is able to gain a sense of her (or his) own sexuate specificity: “The other of sexual difference returns me to my sensibility and to a necessary cultivation of it, while still respecting its tie with corporeality” (2000, p. 93). Yet I wonder how, given their radical otherness, the two of sexual difference might ever recognize each other in love and in becoming divine in light of each other?

Since encountering Irigaray’s works, I have been troubled by her location of transcendence in the radical otherness of the other of sexual difference, albeit an otherness internal to the immanence of nature. Among my worries is that she “ontologizes” a state of alienation—rather than divine love—between men and women. Drawing on Hegel’s conception of mutual recognition, Kimberly Hutchings warns feminists that “relying on a notion of radical alterity actually closes off the possibility either of recognizing difference or of identifying the conditions of possibility for such recognition” (2003, p. 160). Is there a way to explain how the two of sexual difference in Irigaray’s philosophy might achieve mutual recognition given their radical otherness? Certainly, Irigaray is all too aware of this difficulty:

How to listen to the other, to open oneself, horizontally, to the other’s sense, without preventing the return to oneself, to one’s proper way? What words, not common *a priori*, will be able to assist, even mark out a path? (2002, pp. 58–59)

One possible response to this problem of mutual recognition may be found in Irigaray’s contention that nature constitutes a “third term” or “bridge” enabling a

³Perhaps this failure to “rationalize” sexual difference through culture is why Irigaray writes “It would seem, then, that human kind has not reached the age of reason. It is still suspended between divinity and animality [i.e., sensible immediacy]” (1996, p. 36).

⁴Although Stone only briefly touches on Irigaray’s references to the divine, I think she would broadly agree with my interpretation here. Stone notes: “Referring to Hölderlin she [Irigaray] writes that we should ‘not wait passively for the god to come, but [instead] . . . conjure him up among us . . . as resurrection and transfiguration of blood, of flesh’—*that is, as a culture that is continuous with nature*” (2006, p. 153; emphasis mine).

degree of mediation between men and women. The following comment is instructive: "Nature also represents a third in the relationship with the other-man. *It allows me to respect him and myself* by endlessly going from it to him and from him to it" (2000b, p. 118; emphasis added). An argument for thinking nature as a term of mediation between men and women might run thus. According to Irigaray, the sexuateness of nature is something human beings can establish on the basis of their lived experiences of the bipolar rhythms regulating natural phenomena, for example, night and day, summer and winter, etc. Human beings have, Irigaray suggests, a phenomenological capacity to ascertain nature's inherent sexuateness. In recognizing non-human nature's sexuateness, a woman could then recognize her own natural, sensible being as one informed by a distinctive sexuate rhythm orchestrating her growth and becoming, and "seeking" realization in a female culture. In affirming her own sexuateness, a woman may, somehow, simultaneously attain something like a "transcendental feeling" Irigaray (2009, p. 18) of the other of sexual difference. That is, an indirect perception or affective sense of the male other who is transcendental because although he is unknowable, he can be obliquely "felt" or "perceived" as a differently sexed subject who is the sensible condition of a woman's recognition of her own bodily specificity.⁵ It seems that sexed nature as a whole could facilitate the recognition of otherness between the two of sexual difference.⁶

I am not confident that feminists can go very far with the task of critically appraising the concrete conditions of women's and men's lives—a task necessary for the transformation of society—on the basis of something as vague as Irigaray's "transcendental feeling." However, let us assume for now that this feeling is sufficient for recognizing the other of sexual difference.

A Vertical Transcendence

Irigaray's notion of a vertical transcendence emerges from her subversive miming of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, and is the idea of a divine in the feminine, as well as in the masculine. Famously, Irigaray argues, "if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity" (1993b, p. 64). A number of Irigaray's readers criticize her adoption of Feuerbach's model of the divine as merely a human projection, a mirror, which reflects the subject's ideals and wishes, thereby motivating the subject's realization of these ideals for his or herself.⁷ One main worry seems to be

⁵In her recent and inspiring essay, "Transcendence and Feminist Philosophy: Avoiding Apotheosis", Pamela Sue Anderson highlights Irigaray's reference to a "transcendental feeling" as puzzling and somewhat uninformative (2009). I began to wonder what Irigaray might mean by the phrase and explored it as informed in some way by Kant's transcendental philosophy.

⁶Perhaps this is why Irigaray will claim that "nature is a place of re-birth" (2000b, p. 118) for men and women: through nature we can return to our sexuate belonging.

⁷See for example Jones (1993).

that by denying the divine any ontological reality outside of female (or male) subjectivity, Irigaray repeats the logic of the same when thinking divinity, since with her the divine is not a true other of the subject.⁸ My contention is that her appeal to Feuerbach cannot be fully understood without reference to her philosophy of nature, since, for Irigaray, nature's sexuateness carries deep religious import.

Interestingly, Stone claims that, for Irigaray, "Human self-cultivation satisfies nature's (not consciously held) need for self-realization, in a way that confers upon men and women a duty toward nature to engage in such self-cultivation" (2003, p. 65). Stone is interested in the potential here for an environmental ethics. I, however, think this insight offers a way to show how Irigaray moves beyond a straightforward adoption of Feuerbach's "reduction" of the divine to a function of the sexed subject. I have understood the process of cultivating sexed sensibility to be synonymous with becoming divine men and women. Given this, if it is the case that nature instinctively seeks its realization in sexuated human culture, then, in doing so, we could say that nature seeks its *divinization* through human subjectivity and culture. Irigaray might therefore be suggesting that in becoming divine men and women—human beings—serve as the medium by which nature can realize its potential for divinity.

The point of Irigarayan becoming divine, then, is less about women and men constructing (whether consciously or not) gods in their own images, in order to succor their becoming, and more about acting faithfully to the ontological reality of sexual difference. On my reading, the object of belief in Irigaray's philosophy of religion is ultimately the ontological reality of sexual difference to which we must be faithful.⁹ Sexual difference is not a human determination, but the fundamental distinction of nature, where nature itself seeks its divine or spiritual consummation in human sexuate culture. Although, as far as I am aware, Irigaray does not explicitly assert the idea of nature's divinization, she hints at this, for example, when she writes: "Between his words and the cosmic universe, a harmony invites her to an alliance which does not require it to renounce itself... A *general* transubstantiation is at work. *All of nature is changed*" (2000, p. 116; emphasis added). Despite the brevity of these remarks, I hope to have suggested an alternative way of thinking about Irigaray's divine in the context of her philosophy of nature, particularly as this recalls the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling and Hegel.¹⁰

⁸Conversely, there is also the worry that Irigaray does not take Feuerbach "theology is anthropology" thesis more seriously as a *critique* of theism. Here the problem is that Irigaray seems merely to duplicate traditional theism, except now with a divine specifically for women, which, rather troublingly, serves to maintain a rather conservative view of women and the normativity of heterosexuality.

⁹Amy Hollywood raises the question of how an unreal object—namely, a consciously projected feminine divine—can inspire belief. I am suggesting that Irigaray's feminine divine is the cultivation of the reality of female sexuateness as a natural given. "That humans give themselves divine representations as supports of becoming, very well, but what are these worth if they do not favour natural growth, drawing upon it as well" (2002, pp. 147–148).

¹⁰For a discussion on how Schelling's philosophy can inform a reading of Irigaray see Stone (2006, pp. 193–215).

So for Irigaray, transcendence-in-immanence can be found “horizontally” in the radical otherness of the sexuate other (and, less pronouncedly, in the irreducible singularity of a subject who belongs to the same sex); and also “vertically” as two distinct, yet open-ended, horizons by which men and women can work towards becoming divine. Moreover, I would say a vertical transcendence refers to the very process of sexuate becoming, the cultivation of sexual difference. These two transcendences are interrelated because becoming divine can only take place in love and recognition of the other of sexual difference—it is through encountering otherness, and letting otherness be, that the specificity of the subject's sexuate belonging is made determinate.

I have proposed that Irigaray's call for becoming divine is a call for the cultivation of sexed sensibility, the creation of distinctly male and female worlds, that is, a sexuate culture through which nature's inherent sexuateness is most fully realized, indeed, divinized. Ultimately Irigaray's goal is this: “never a completeness of the One, but two worlds open and in relation with one other, and which give birth to a third world as work in common and space-time to be shared” (2002, p. 10). This is a provocative vision. However, I fear that Irigaray's construal of transcendence can only preclude the birth of the “third world” she refers to. Indeed, I maintain that transcendence is a problem for Irigaray not least because its insistence on the radical otherness of men and women both mystifies the (social, historical, and natural) reality of concrete men and women, and risks exhorting the two sexes to retreat into the immanence of their own sexuate world.

Sexual Difference and Transcendence: The Problem

My critical question is whether Irigaray's vision of transcendence-in-immanence ends up mystifying embodied relations between human beings such that feminists are unable to discern how society might be transformed in emancipatory ways for women (and all those who are oppressed)? I fear that her stress on the radical otherness of men and women denies the possibility of mutual recognition between subjects—in this case, between a man and a woman. Without such mutual recognition no concrete transformation of society can begin.

Recent work by Anderson importantly highlights the goal of mutual recognition as one that can inform a feminist philosophy of religion so that it is not simply poetic meditations on becoming divine—helpful, perhaps, for an individual woman seeking to resist her experience of oppression under patriarchy, but, on its own, ineffectual in the collective work of eliminating the material conditions producing a woman's subordination (see Anderson 2006). With the goal of mutual recognition in mind, I will suggest that, rather than casting the sexuate other in terms of absolute otherness, feminist philosophers of religion might recognize the transcendence of critical thinking.

Here, I am particularly inspired by the Hegelian philosophical theology of Rowan Williams for whom critical thinking is “thinking in dispossession.” In other words,

a form of thinking that is “the constant rediscovery and critique of the myth of the self as owner of its perceptions and positions” (1995, p. 17). Thinking must aim to transcend the immanence of its conceptions and determinations of materiality; not turning individuals into immutable objects nor absolutizing otherness so that the other becomes unthinkable. The subject of critical thinking must engage in a ceaseless re-learning of herself (or himself) by way of the attempt to recognize others in their sensuous particularity. Transcendence is then the effort of mutual recognition between subjects for the sake of love and the just society.

According to Williams, “thinking in dispossession insists on an ontology of some sort, capable of holding together the reality of difference and the imperative of work (i.e. reconciliation)” (1995, p. 20). I think this is right. Moreover, Irigaray insists that feminists cannot afford to dismiss ontology (e.g. Irigaray 1994, p. 32). However, can Irigaray’s philosophy of nature provide the ontological context in which mutual recognition between subjects is possible?

As we have seen, Irigaray argues that the rhythmic bipolarities pervading nature can be regarded as *sexuate* because they reflect to a greater or lesser extent human sexual difference wherein nature’s inherent *sexuateness* is most emphatically expressed. Stone explains that, for Irigaray, ontological sexual difference represents two poles in nature’s self-differentiation and that the normative claim to be read off from this is: “the good society must encourage not merely the expression, nor even merely the all-pervasive expression, but the all-pervasive maximization of sexual difference” (2003, p. 73). In cultivating their *sexuate* sensibility men and women must increasingly *diverge* from one another in order to remain in concert with, as well as further realize nature’s drive to amplify its sexual dimorphism.

Rather than inviting the establishment of a shared world for men and women, Irigaray’s philosophy of nature seems to call for a greater enforcement of their differences. And yet we know that she is keen to secure a loving union between the two sexes. How can love and intersubjectivity be possible for men and women who must seek to intensify their differences? Interestingly, Irigaray points out that within man’s economy of the same, the relation between men and women is figured as “A + non-A = the whole,” such that woman is merely the negative other of the self-same male subject. Against this, she proposes that we think the relation between the sexes as “A + B = One,” where the One is a union that maintains the difference of the two—man and woman—rather than sublating this difference (2002, p. 106). It could be suggested that with Irigaray man and woman constitute a *polarity* where the two relate together as “mutually augmenting contraries” rather than a master/slave dialectic.¹¹ This would accord with certain eastern traditions such as Tantric Buddhism and Taoism, where the universe is seen to be governed by two basic forces—for example, the Chinese *yin* and *yang*—which are envisioned as male and female principles.

In her later works, Irigaray increasingly draws on ideas from eastern philosophies in order to develop her *sexuate* cosmology whereby the element of air attains

¹¹ See the postscript entitled “Creative Polarity Beyond Tantrism” in Trimondi (2003).

a spiritual-erotic charge. According to Irigaray, air is the “universal matter of the living” (1996, p. 148). Alongside nature more generally, Irigaray highlights air as a medium by which both the unity and distinctness of the two of sexual difference is maintained. She refers to a “culture of breath” (1996, p. 148), suggesting not just self-affecting bodies but the two of sexual difference joining together in the oneness of breathing, through which their distinctive rhythms harmonize with each other, bringing the two together and then separating them in a mutually affecting dynamic. For Irigaray, when the two of sexual difference do draw near the response should be one of wonder rather than appropriation of the other. Wonder desists judgment of the other and instead causes man and woman to pause in sight of each other, to be surprised and drawn together, to ask: “Who art thou?” (1993, p. 74).

Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference manages to capture a vital truth about love and transcendence; namely, love requires distance and so the maintenance of transcendence, of who or what is irreducible to us, and so beyond us. Such truth is expressed well by Simone Weil who writes “To love purely is to consent to distance, it is to adore the distance between ourselves and that which we love” (1997, p. 58). I fear, however, that Irigaray's attempts to account for how love might enable mutual recognition between male and female subjects are, in the end, inadequate for a feminist politics and thus a feminist philosophy of religion—which, I hold, must seek ways in which it can best contribute to the concrete transformation of women's lives. With Irigaray it seems that intersubjective relations between men and women are to be established through hazy notions such as a “transcendental feeling” of the other and air circulating in the right way. Furthermore, the passion of wonder, by itself, will simply leave us mesmerized by the encounter with the sexuate other, yet unable to transcend this state in order to effect social changes. It seems that the conditions for recognition of the sexuate other proposed by Irigaray can, at best, allow a woman to determine the specificity of her sexuateness, and at worse imprison her within the immanence that is the absolute sameness of her sexuate belonging. I do not believe it is going too far to say that, despite her intentions, Irigaray's ideal of sexual difference can only deliver the estrangement of the two of sexual difference. Indeed, the risk of Irigaray's vision of a sexuate culture may be encapsulated by rephrasing Rudyard Kipling: “Oh, Woman is Woman, and Man is Man, and never the twain shall meet.”¹²

Love needs work. That is, in addition to the transcendence of distance there must also be the transcendence of critical thinking, or thinking in dispossession, by which we advance the difficult task of mutual recognition. Irigaray appreciates this in her own way.¹³ But I think her extreme vigilance in maintaining the difference between the two of sexual difference—pushing this to the point

¹²This reworks the opening lines of Kipling's poem “The Ballad of East and West”.

¹³“The unity of the relation between two subjects is a creation, a work of the two elaborated starting from the attraction, the desire which pushes the one toward the other without the relation being then already conceive as ‘with the other’” (2002, p. 78).

of their separate divinity—creates an insurmountable bridge between male and female subjects such that the hope of mutual recognition is but an impossible dream, since our theoretical, especially ontological, commitments cannot support this. In a telling remark, she states “To include the other in my universe prevents meeting with the other, whereas safeguarding the obscurity and the silence that the other remains for me aids in discovering proximity” (2000, p. 151). The safeguarding of the other’s obscurity and silence is necessary up to a point, but if feminists wish to avoid the standstill of political quietism, then the risk of mutual recognition and intersubjectivity must be taken. Intersubjectivity is a risk because, as Anderson reminds us, in its actual practice we, especially oppressed groups and individuals, are vulnerable to the loss of autonomy (see Anderson, 2006).

Conclusion

Refusing the divorce of divine transcendence and embodied immanence that is supposedly characteristic of traditional theism, many feminist philosophers of religion seek ways to articulate transcendence-in-immanence, thus forming new concepts of divinity. In this chapter, I have explored Irigaray’s attempts to recognize transcendence-in-immanence through her provocative notion of a sensible transcendental and its role in becoming divine women. I hope to have shown how focusing on her philosophy of nature offers a new way to grasp the metaphysics and theology of a sensible transcendental. An important result of this is that Irigaray’s intriguing idea of becoming divine can be viewed not simply in terms of Feuerbachian projection, but more along the lines of *Naturphilosophie* where nature as a whole seeks its divine realization.

However, I argued that by figuring transcendence in terms of the radical otherness of the two of sexual difference, Irigaray’s concept of transcendence is problematic. Aside from whether we are convinced by her theory of nature, and aside from the unmistakable heterosexism resulting from the normative status of sexual difference in her work, I have held that Irigaray’s metaphysical commitment to ontological sexual difference, along with the political and spiritual prescriptions that are drawn from this, struggles to provide the conditions for mutual recognition between sexed subjects. Indeed, my contention is that Irigaray endorses the transcendence of distance at the expense of a critical thinking that would enable us to transcend social inequalities and oppressions. Importantly, my aim in this chapter has not been to discourage feminist philosophers of religion from creative engagement with Irigaray’s provocative notion of a sensible transcendental. Rather, I only wish to caution feminists from hastily embracing Irigarayan transcendence without first ascertaining whether its promise of the divinized female body rests on mystifying the embodied relations between women and men, such that mutual recognition between the two cannot be established, without which the concrete transformation of women’s live cannot begin.

Acknowledgments I would like to thank Pamela Sue Anderson for her helpful comments on the first draft of this chapter.

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Chapter 19

An Ethics of the In-Between: A Condition of Possibility of Being and Living Together

Anne-Claire Mulder

Abstract In this text, I argue that the recognition of the space between the one and the other is a necessary condition of being and living together in peace. Departing from Luce Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference, I will address the issue of the recognition of irreducible difference in the relations between women. I will show that Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference goes hand in hand with an aesthetics of recognizing the irreducible difference of the other. This recognition and respect creates an in-between space/time in the intersubjective relation that will enable the subjects to flourish together and individually. Pivotal to these ideas is Irigaray's argument that the subject is disappropriated by the fact that it belongs to a "gender": a horizon of meaning or universal that is marked by (linguistic) gender; thus that "belonging to a gender" constitutes the limit to the *I* or her/his irreducible difference.

However, "gender" cannot function in the relations between women as a marker of difference. I therefore suggest that irreducible difference between women might be thought through as a multiple belonging instead: as constituted through the intersection of different axes of differentiation—history, genealogy, resources—that function as limits to the subject. Although theories of intersectionality enable us to theorize the differences between women as irreducible difference, they do not address the issue of recognizing this difference. To answer this question, I argue for an ethics and aesthetics of the respect of the in-between space/time in intersubjective relations.

Keywords Ethics · Irreducible difference · Gender · Theories of intersectionality · Irigaray

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Introduction

In the Babylonian Talmud, in the Berachoth tractate, one can find the following midrash:

From what time may one recite ‘*the Shema*’ in the morning? From the time that one can distinguish between white and blue.

What is the meaning of ‘between white and blue’? Shall I say: between a lump of white wool and a lump of blue wool. This one may also distinguish in the night. It means rather between the blue in it and the white in it. It has been taught Rabbi Meir says: the morning sh’ma is read from the time that one can distinguish between a wolf and a dog. Rabbi Akiva says: between an ass and a wild ass. Others say: from the time that one can distinguish his friend at a distance of four cubits. Rabbi Huna says: the halacha is as stated by the ‘others’ (Berachot, 9b).

The issue which lies behind this midrash is the question when one can speak of the break of day. This is an important issue, because of the obligation to say the *Shema* at daybreak. As is clear from the final verse of the midrash, the discussion is settled by the Rabbi Huna in favor of those who say the day breaks when one can distinguish the face of the other, as another version of this midrash has it.

I quote the midrash because its last sentence tells a story of an encounter, highlighting the space between the one and the other, thereby evoking the figure of the in-between, of the interval in the encounter. It speaks moreover to the imagination, because it suggests that the day breaks—and the night ends—at the moment that one distinguishes the face of the other. As such this midrash conveys the subject-matter of this text: notably that the respect of the space between the one and the other, constitutes a condition of possibility of being and living together. This respect of the in-between ought to shape the modes of human being-with-the-other, not only of a particular encounter with the other but also, and more importantly, of and in the constitution of a collective subject, of the “we, women and men,” the “we, women” and the “we, men.” This implies that this ethics of the in-between ought to be an indelible part of the horizon of meaning of a collective subject within which and in relation to which a person makes meaning out of life.

Whereas the text of the midrash gives a picture of this important notion at a symbolic level, the context of the midrash illuminates that the notion of “horizon of meaning” encompasses more layers than that of the symbol, the narrative or image. For this halakhah, and therefore this ruling with all its possible interpretations, is passed on from generation upon generation as part of the teachings surrounding the ritual of the *Shema*. It is part of the body of knowledge that is transmitted in and through religious education, because this ritual is considered to be a defining part of Jewish identity. Therefore this halakhah can be seen as part of the horizon of meaning within which and in relation to which a (Jewish) person makes meaning out of his life.

However, my appropriation of this halakhah is not without difficulties, because this ritual does not define generic Jewish identity, but *male* Jewish identity. For the positive commandments—the “thou shalt” commandments—are all directed at men. As Rachel Adler points out, this turns women who follow these commandments into

“honorary men.”¹ Thus the context of the midrash I put forward as emblematic of the ethics of the in-between, which is the subject matter of this text, undermines the very intentions of this idea. For whereas this ethics is directed at developing and maintaining horizontal relations between subjects, and at respect for the differences between them, the midrash is part of a system which sets up a hierarchical difference between the sexes and effaces the full subjectivity of women. Although the easiest solution to this dilemma would be to forego retelling this midrash, I decided to use it, because it is an example of a story figuring an interval between the one and the other, which is embedded in the horizon of meaning of a collective.

In the following pages I will develop my thesis that an ethics of the in-between is a condition of possibility for being and living together (peacefully) as a collective. I will develop this thesis by thinking further upon Luce Irigaray’s work on the ethics of sexual difference. In my view, the notion of an in-between is one of the key aspects of her ethics of sexual difference, because it gives shape to the notions of limit and of connection in the encounter with the other. Luce Irigaray shows that the recognition of the transcendence of the other amounts to the acknowledgment of the limits and limitations of the subject. She argues that this recognition is conditional to the generation of a collective “we” and of flourishing together and individually. Whereas the term “an ethics of sexual difference” expresses Luce Irigaray’s position that the transcendence of the other lies in her or his sexual difference, the term “an ethics of the in-between” emphasizes that this respect for the transcendence of the other is expressed in or actualized in the respect and guarding of the (space) in between the one and the other, be it an other of the same or of different sex. This shift in emphasis reflects my intuition that Luce Irigaray’s thoughts about the recognition of or the respect for the other are not only relevant to the relations between subjects of different sex, but that they ought to be adapted to think through the communications between and communality of women as well as of men, although I do not address the relations between the latter. However, the importance of this figure of the in-between tends to be overlooked, because it is so embedded in and marked by Luce Irigaray’s notion of sexual difference. Therefore I want to show its relevance for thinking through same-sex relationships and the possibilities of a collective of women in which the differences between women are recognized. By elaborating this notion of an ethics of the in-between I aim to contribute to the reflections upon the concept of the transcendence of the other, woman,

¹Rachel Adler writes: “Ultimately our problem stems from the fact that we are viewed in Jewish law and practice as peripheral Jews. The category in which we are generally placed includes women, children, and Canaanite slaves. Members of this category are exempt from all positive commandments, which occur within time limits. These commandments would include hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah [...] and saying *Shema*. In other words, members of this category have been ‘excused’ from most of the positive symbols, which for the male Jew, hallow time, hallow his physical being, and inform both his myth and philosophy” (Adler 1983, p. 13). Adler points here to the androcentric foundation of Jewish tradition and the difficulties to change such a tradition; demanding equality means tacitly acknowledging this status of honorary men. Affirming difference implies either complying with the traditional images, or a radical change within the tradition. See also the studies of Plaskow (1991) and Adler (1999).

within the context of sexual difference as well as to the practice of this respect in an ethics of the in-between.

The first part of this text is devoted to the elaboration of the idea of an ethics of the in-between by exploring Irigaray's thoughts on the notion of the in-between in the encounter with the other. I will begin by exploring Irigaray's contention that the recognition of the transcendence of the other is the key to this ethics. I will show that this gesture of recognition pivots around the acknowledgement of limits and limitations induced among others by the belonging to a gender, highlighting that linguistic gender is an important aspect of this belonging. I will then proceed to elucidate the process of the generation of the space in-between through the recognition of the transcendence of the other, arguing that this recognition is carried by the passion of wonder.

In the second part of this text I will explore this notion of recognition in the context of the relations between women. I will first describe briefly Luce Irigaray's diagnosis of the troubled relations between women as well as her solution, notably the generation of a horizon of meaning in the feminine, emblemized in a female divinity. I will show that this solution constitutes part of the problem of the recognition of the transcendence of the other between women. For as this worldview is marked by the feminine (linguistic) gender, linguistic gender can no longer function as a marker of the transcendence of the other. I will then argue that theories of intersectionality² can help to think through the idea of the irreducible difference of the other between women, because they illuminate the fact that the limits and limitations to knowing the other are not only due to the fact of belonging to a gender but to the belonging to other histories and genealogies as well.

In the conclusion I will argue that to safeguard the differences between women as well as between women and men, this ethics ought to be an indelible part of the horizon of meaning or shared world view of a collective subject within which and in relation to which a person makes meaning out of life. It means that it would subtend the way of being a collective and be entwined in the different modes of being and living together. For such an ethics structures the relations between subjects, as well as the relations between subjects and the world around them.

An Ethics of the In-Between

The Transcendence of the Other

As I wrote above, the "ethics of the in-between" departs from the idea that the recognition of and respect for the transcendence of the other is key to the good life for all,

²The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberley Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1989). It has subsequently been developed in many directions. In the Netherlands the most outspoken theoreticians of intersectionality are Helma Lutz and Gloria Wekker (Lutz 2002; Wekker 1996; Wekker and Lutz 2001).

of living together creatively and peacefully. The concept of “the transcendence of the other” is intimately connected to the notion of the irreducibility of the other. This latter notion articulates the idea of a difference which refuses whatever appropriation by the other or whatever reduction to the already known and expressed.

In *I love to You* (Irigaray 1996, pp. 103–108) Luce Irigaray pictures the relation between these two notions as follows:

I recognize you, thus you are not the whole; otherwise you would be too great and I would be engulfed by your greatness. You are not the whole and I am not the whole.

I recognize you, thus I [...] cannot completely identify you, even less identify with you.

I recognize you means that I cannot know you neither by thought nor by the flesh, the power of a negative prevails between us. I recognize you goes hand in hand with: you are irreducible to me, just as I am to you. We may not be substituted for one another. You are transcendent to me, inaccessible in a way (...) I will never be you, neither in body nor in thought.

Recognizing you means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as before something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine, a mine that will never be mine (Irigaray 1996, pp. 103/104).³

This long quotation describes the encounter with the irreducibility of the other in different ways. On an experiential level it evokes the concrete reality of the irreducibility of the other: the moment of a halt in the approach of the other, because of the occurrence of a distance between the *I* and the *You*; the moment that the feeling of closeness disappears or turns out to be illusory; the experience and/or acknowledgment that identification is not possible, the recognition that one can know the other only up to a point flows in. It is the acknowledgement that the other does not suit me, that an excess resists any gesture of appropriation (Irigaray 1993a, 74).

In the quotation, the irreducibility of the other is also characterized in more epistemological terms. Thus Luce Irigaray points out that the other resists the gesture of identification, being assimilated to something already known. She states, moreover, that the other cannot be fully known by the subject, because the knowledge of the subject is not sufficient to know the other, nor will s/he be able to know the other (fully) in and through the perceptions of the sensible matter that is the flesh (Mulder 2006, pp. 107–114). It is this opacity of the other, which presents itself as a mystery to the subject, a mystery or transcendence which induces the experience “not me.”

³I have modified the translation of two sentences in this quotation, notably the translations of “*je ne peux te connaître ni par la pensée ni par la chair*” and “*je ne serais jamais toi, ni en corps ni en pensée*” (Irigaray 1992, pp. 161, 162). Alison Martin has translated these sentences as follows: “I cannot know you either in thought or flesh” and “I will never be you, either in body or in thought.” In both cases I have made the negation stronger by translating it as “neither by thought nor by the flesh” and as “neither in body nor in thought” to highlight the limitations of the subject in knowing the other. Neither thought nor flesh renders full knowledge of the other. I want to thank Agnes Vincenot for pointing this out to me.

Lastly, Luce Irigaray characterizes this transcendence of the other in more psychoanalytic terms. It resists the fantasmatic desire to identify oneself with the other, to imagine being the same as the other, to confuse the one and the other. This is impossible, because the one and the other will never occupy the same space, have the same history. The transcendence of the other also resists the fantasmatic idea that the other can be a substitute for an important relation of the subject (a father or mother), because s/he cannot take the place of this other and play her or his role.

All these characteristics of the transcendence of the other illuminate the idea of limit and limitation of the subjects in the encounter. They underline that neither the one nor the other “are everything, the whole—defining, circumventing, circumscribing, all by itself, the properties (and value) of any thing, of everything” (Irigaray 1985b, p. 80). This recognition of limitation, of not being the whole, generates in turn diffusion, (a) distance and distinction between the one and the other, so that the relation between them can become an inter-subjective relation, a relation between two subjects, non-hierarchical, symmetrical.

Belonging to a Gender: A Limit to the I

Luce Irigaray's use of the personal pronouns *I* and *You* might suggest that “the transcendence of the other” must be understood on the level of the individual subject. However, the transcendence of the other is (also) the effect of belonging to a larger collective, which transcends the individual subject: a gender. Luce Irigaray writes about this:

The *mine* of the subject is always already marked by a disappropriation: gender. Being a man or woman already means not being the whole of the subject [. . .] as well as not being entirely one's self. The famous “I is an other”, the cause of which is sometimes attributed to the unconscious, can be understood in a different way. *I* is never simply *mine* in that it belongs to a gender. [. . .] I am objectively limited by this belonging (Irigaray 1996, p. 106).

This passage introduces the idea that the limitation upon the subject's knowing, doing, naming is not set by the concrete reality of the other person, but by the subject's belonging to a larger collective and its horizon of meaning, in relation to which the subject situates herself as well as the other, and makes meaning out of his particular life.⁴ Both this collective and its horizon of meaning are marked by one of the two genders: masculine or feminine. This belonging means a disappropriation, writes Luce Irigaray, a not-owning-oneself, the acknowledgment of a difference between *I* and *mine*—between what is given to the *me* by nature (*mine*) and what the *I* must become, between I am born a wo/man and I must become this

⁴When writing about the generic subject I will henceforth alternate between his/her. This means that it is possible that in one sentence the subject is referred to as both “herself” and “himself.”

wo/man that I am by nature (Irigaray 1996, p. 107). This means that the subject is not asserting her autonomy, his self-possession, when s/he uses the personal pronoun *I*, but is assuming her position in relation to this particular, gendered horizon of meaning, a horizon of meaning which expresses and gives form to the irreducible difference of either sex.

To understand this train of thought it is necessary to explain Luce Irigaray's (psycho-) linguistic theories on the working of grammatical gender in the constitution of subjectivity and identity, which she developed in the Sixties.⁵ These theories are as important to her ideas about the irreducible difference of the sexes as her psychoanalytic views on the repression of female desire or her philosophical analyses of the effacement of sexual difference through the operations of the logic of the One/the Same.

In these (psycho-)linguistic theories Luce Irigaray argues that the (linguistic) identity and subjectivity of the subject are marked by the gender of the third person singular or plural. In French, for instance, a group of two women and one man is always referred to by using the third person plural "*ils*" (a clear example of effacing sexual difference by reducing difference to "one hierarchy"). The consequence of this grammatical rule for the subjectivity of the female members of the group becomes clear when members of this group say: "*Nous disons, faisons, désirons*" (we say, do, desire). For on the linguistic level, this *nous* refers to a masculine *ils*. This description of the manner in which the linguistic gender of the third person plural determines the implied gender of the first person plural goes *a fortiori* for the third and first person singular. As the subject of the dominant discourse is masculine, a He, the ambiguity of the gender of the *I* in sentences as *I do, will, desire*, will be disambiguated (as a rule, and often unconsciously) by assuming that this (speaking) subject is a masculine subject. This implies that this rule asks of the female members of such a mixed group to assume the gender of the dominant subject, i.e. to speak *as if* she is a masculine subject, which amounts to a denial of her subjectivity, of a subjectivity in the feminine. Luce Irigaray demonstrates that this dominance of the masculine subject in grammar is expressive of the dominance of this subject in all of discourse; that this discourse knows only One Subject that describes all by itself "the properties of anything and everything" (Irigaray 1985b, p. 80). To enable women to become a speaking subject according to their gender, Luce Irigaray advocates the generation of a sexed universal, a collective horizon of and for the female sex, marked by a gendered third person singular, a She. Irigaray's argument that women need a representation of the divine in their (grammatical) gender can be

⁵I refer here to her book *To Speak is Never Neutral* (Irigaray 2002a). Most of the texts in this collection of essays were first published between 1966 and 1971, i.e. before the publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*. For a description of the trajectory of these linguistic theories in her work, especially on the relation between these theories and her views that women need a horizon to become a subject, see: Mulder (2001, pp. 49–73).

seen as part of that argument, i.e. that women need a horizon of meaning in the feminine, a wrap of language to ward of the dereliction that accompanies the absence of a feminine generic (Irigaray 1993d, p. 15).⁶

This elaboration of the linguistic theories underlying Luce Irigaray's position that the subject is always limited by or situated through the body of knowledge and the horizon of meaning of her or his gender, adds another layer to her thoughts on the recognition of the transcendence of the other. It colors and deepens the notion of the mystery of this other to the subject, because it interprets this mystery as the effect of this "other" horizon of meaning, this other genealogy or history upon the subject.⁷ It also sets off her thoughts on the idea that the generation of a collective asks for another dialectics than the Hegelian in which the differences between the one and the other are elevated or effaced into a synthesis, into a (new) unity or collective *one*, expressed in a collective subject *we*. She rather points out that the generation of a *We* must be understood as an *oeuvre*, the result of communication, of exchange, of seeking and finding mediations that enable these communications and exchanges (Irigaray 1996, pp. 105, 107). She calls it an *oeuvre*, because the generation of a collective subject entails hard work. It asks for working through the negative, of developing and engaging in a practice of acknowledging and respecting both the limits and limitations set by (the presence of) the other upon the subject as the way this acknowledgment affects the subject. In short, it asks for an ethics of the in-between, understood as thinking through and elaborating upon the condition of possibility of a collective, a "we," in which the alterity of the other is not effaced.

Creating an In-Between in the Encounter of the Other

In the above I already explained that recognizing the difference of the other brings it about that the subject stops in her or his tracks when s/he encounters the other. This very moment of drawing oneself to a halt before the mystery of the other creates a space, an in-between the two.

Of this space Luce Irigaray writes that it is "a space of freedom and attraction between them, a possibility of separation and alliance [. . .] The *interval* would never be *crossed*" (Irigaray 1993a, p. 13). In this quotation two important aspects of the in-between are mentioned, that it can be figured as a space and that it guarantees the

⁶On the meanings of the word "dereliction" see Whitford (1990, p. 205, n. 2), and Mulder (2006, pp. 75, 183–185).

⁷Implicit in this exposition is Luce Irigaray's idea that there ought to be two universals, two gendered horizons of meaning in relation to which a subject makes meaning out of life. This idea sets off the notion of the transcendence of the other. It also raises questions with respect to the relations between these two irreducibly different subjects. In her work these relations are thought through in terms of love-relations, hence the figure of the nuptials, and symbolized by the divine couple.

possibility of separation and alliance. It was this figure of the space between that attracted me to the midrash. Pondering it, it seems significant that the time of daybreak is measured by the length of the space between the subjects of the encounter. It underlines on the one hand the spatiality of the “in-between” between the subjects: the idea that the in-between separates them. On the other hand, the scene pictured in this one sentence of the midrash evokes the dynamic of an encounter: the (tentative) effort to find means to bridge this space, to turn this space into a shared space, and the experience of “daybreak” when that happens.

This in-between can be imaged in different ways, for instance as the space that remains when two hands or bodies touch. It clarifies the idea that no matter how intimate the encounter between them, there will remain some space between them that cannot be dissolved or crossed. The recognition and respect of this in-between ensures the singularity of the subject—and her or his freedom. The meaning of the notion of the (space) in-between as interval that cannot be crossed and as medium of the alliance can be further illuminated by calling to mind the skin between two touching bodies. The skin can be seen as a membrane, which separates these bodies, and guards the individuality of the touching subjects. It is, however, also the matter in and through which the subjects are connected, in and through which they communicate, commune with each other.

Thinking of the membrane between subjects explains therefore that—although limitation, boundary and separation are very important elements of the space in-between—the idea that it is also the space of the alliance between subjects is of no less significance. It serves as the connection between them. It “couples” them. Not in the traditional sense, however, not as a hyphen would do, turning them into a unity or into identical entities that mirror each other, but rather as a meeting-ground, a space which cannot be claimed by either subject as her or his space, because it is a shared space, “owned” by both in the sense that they both partake in and of this space. It is the space of their interactions, of their communications: the space of the generation of a *We*.

This space should not be understood therefore as an empty space between the subjects—a kind of no man’s land. Rather it must be seen as the site where the hard work of “working through the negative” takes place, the negotiating of boundaries and limitations, the effort of not-identifying with the other, of not taking her as a substitute for someone else, of not falling into the trap of thinking that one fully understands the other. This hard work of negotiating the negative is not only toil, however, it is also creative and generative: generating new forms of communications between the subjects; creating different expressions of and forms for their communion, for what they share and what they partake of in their inter-subjective exchanges.

Thus the toil of the respect for and attention to the in-between would create different form of *We*, a mode of living together in freedom that could be seen as a co-creation of two or more subjects rather than as a synthesis in which difference is elevated into a unity (Irigaray 1996, pp. 104, 105).

The Passion of Wonder

Luce Irigaray points out that this space in-between is generated and maintained by the passion of wonder. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, she writes:

[Wonder] means that we would look at the other, stop to look at him or her, ask ourselves, come close to ourselves through questioning. *Who art thou? I am and I become* thanks to this question. Wonder goes beyond that which is or is not suitable for us. The other never suits us simply. An *excess* resists. [...] Attracting me toward, wonder keeps me from taking and assimilating directly into myself (Irigaray 1993a, pp. 74, 75).

This quotation evokes the previously quoted passage from *I Love to You* that *recognizing* the other means “accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as before [...] freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine” (Irigaray 1996, p. 104). It shows that the passion of wonder, symbolized by the question “Who art Thou?”, is instrumental in this process of recognizing the alterity of the other. This question indicates both the willingness to encounter the other, to communicate with her as well as the surprise before him. It describes thus the paradox of moving to and stopping in one’s tracks before the other. This latter movement turns the space between the subjects, which was hitherto common space, into a specific in-between. This explains how the question “Who art Thou?”, both expressive of and symbol of the passion of wonder, is instrumental in the creation of this in-between space. Asking this question, the subject draws to a halt before the other. Asking this question, the subject invites the other to share (something) of herself with the subject, to unfold himself, to speak (of) herself; thus it invites the other to turn the space between into a shared space.

“*I am and I become* thanks to this question,” writes Luce Irigaray. This is true for both subjects of the encounter. It moves the one of whom is asked “Who art Thou?” to unfold himself, to reveal who she is in her difference—without losing his singularity thanks to the in-between which guards it. In this process of unfolding s/he also discovers herself, as it induces self-reflection and the question “who am I?” It opens this subject to himself, to the other who s/he is (also). And this process of self-reflection brings about (a) change in her however subtle, so that s/he is and becomes who s/he is, differently. A similar process unfolds within the subject who puts the question “Who art Thou?” before the other. This subject is also moved to reflect upon himself, to contemplate what has moved her in the encounter of the other, what has struck him as new or different. This process of contemplation and introspection can bring about the recognition of the desire to introject the other, to identify or identify with this other, and the acknowledgment that the otherness of the other resists this desire. The recognition of these limitations moves the subject to take up her difference, to change, thus to become who s/he is differently too.

Luce Irigaray deems the passion of wonder of great importance. She does not value it as an emotion, but as a passion, a mode of relating to the world. She develops her thoughts in her reading of Descartes’ book *The Passions of the Soul* (Descartes 1931 [1649], art 53, 358. Quoted in Irigaray 1993a, p. 73). Descartes describes wonder as the first of all the passions, because it is the first passion, which arises in the

encounter with the unknown other or unknown object. This means that wonder precedes the reaction of the subject to this other as well as the mode of relation towards him/her/it: love or hate, desire or rejection. Luce Irigaray adds two arguments to those of Descartes. She argues that wonder is the first passion, first, because it is the force that motivates the subject to move, to grow, to create, and secondly, because the passion of wonder is a power that “beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as object” (Irigaray 1993a, p. 13).

Especially this latter argument explains why Luce Irigaray sees wonder as the first passion. It enables the creation of the space between, an in-between. It thus creates the conditions under which this other can be experienced as new and different each time one encounters this other and it thereby safeguards the freedom and the autonomy of the other. For this very reason, Luce Irigaray values wonder, “this first passion” as “indispensable not only to life, but also or still to the creation of an ethics” (Irigaray 1993a, p. 74).

This last sentence brings me back to the beginning of this paragraph. The context of this sentence makes clear that she refers here to an ethics of sexual difference. Key to this ethics is the recognition of the transcendence of the other, a recognition that revolves around the respect for the in-between in relation to the other. Thus I would argue that the ethics of the in-between, which I develop from Luce Irigaray’s thoughts on an ethics of sexual difference, is aimed at a mode of relating to the other that respects his or her freedom and autonomy, and more than that. It aims at a mode of relating that invites this other to explore and unfold her or his difference, to become and to flourish in this difference.⁸ Her suggestion that the individual becoming wo/man is precisely dependent on the becoming and flourishing of the collective underlines once again the importance of attentiveness to the in-between in this process of creating a *We*.

An Ethics of the In-Between in the Collective of Women

The ethics of the in-between I described above turns on the recognition of the alterity of the other. This alterity, excess or rest makes her or him out as another subject—irreducibly different to the self. To some extent this idea seems a truism: it answers to the (daily) experience of the unexpected strangeness of familiar others, to the refutation of expectations of similarity between a subject and an other, to the experience that the other is not-me. On the other hand, experience also testifies to the ease with which differences between subjects are denied, repressed, wiped out, consciously or unconsciously.

This double experience of the recognition of the other is not restricted to the relations between subjects of different sex. It is also a theme in the discussion of the relations between same sex subjects, especially within the women’s movement and

⁸The idea of becoming as flourishing has been thoroughly developed and discussed by Grace Jantzen. See Jantzen (1998).

in feminist theory. In the latter debates the discussions circle around the problems involved in speaking of and speaking for a “we, women.” The most important problem of this notion “we, women” is the danger of effacing the differences between women in and through the establishment of such a collectivity.

In *This Sex which is not One*, Luce Irigaray’s has analyzed and described this process of the effacement of difference as the effect of the logic of the One/the Same. In and through this logic one subject or groups of subjects are seen as (representing) the whole—defining, circumscribing the properties (and values) of anything, of everything. Luce Irigaray argues that this logic of the One/the Same pervades the structure of (most) Western discourse. It is therefore instrumental in the power of discourse to subordinate the other subject and/or alterity per se, and to cement the position of the dominant subject of (a) discourse, be it a masculine subject or a white one, a middle class or a European/American subject. As this logic is so intricately bound up with (the power of) discourse, it is not strange to presume that it also operates in the discourses developed by (feminist) women, causing difficulties and rivalry because it effaces the differences between them.

Although Luce Irigaray addresses the difficulties of the relations between women in her work, she does not elaborate them in terms of the pervasiveness and power of this logic of the One/the Same, but in terms of the effect of the dominance of the masculine subject on and in the relations between women. She attributes these difficulties firstly to the absence of symbolization of the mother-daughter relation, and of a female genealogy.⁹ Secondly, she argues that this lack is caused by the absence of a divinity, a horizon of accomplishment for women (Irigaray 1993c, p. 62) or of a transcendence in the feminine (Irigaray 1993d, p. 15).

I will first describe these two insights and their interrelatedness, before I will return to the problematic involved in the recognition of the transcendence of the other woman by a female subject.

The Rivalry Between Women

Luce Irigaray devotes ample attention to the difficult relations between women. She uses the word *polemos* to describe their troubled nature, indicating the violence involved in the confusion-fusion between them (Irigaray 1993a, p. 102). She attributes these troubles to the absence of a symbolization of the mother-daughter relation; to the lack of narratives, images and practices in which the desire to be *with* the other is expressed and given form. Because the order of discourse is dominated by the mother-son relationship, there is only one place for (a) woman in this

⁹The difficulties of the mother-daughter relation, the absence of a female genealogy and the possibilities to change these difficult relations are a recurrent theme in Luce Irigaray’s work. It would carry us too far afield to mention all the texts in which she addresses them. For commentaries upon and references to her work on these issues see among others Vincenot (1990, pp. 47–88), Whitford (1990, pp. 75–97); Muraro (1994, pp. 317–335); Mulder (2006, pp. 68–94, 142–149).

discourse and in the desire of men: that of the woman-mother. This has the effect that mother and daughter turn against each other in a rivalry over this position. Luce Irigaray describes this mechanism in *An Ethics* as follows: “if we are to be desired and loved by men, [in a discourse that is dominated by the mother-son relationship] we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be *same*. All of which destroys the possibility of a love between mother and daughter” (Irigaray 1993a, p. 102). She finds traces of this mechanism in narratives as well as in psycho-analysis.¹⁰ The rivalry between mother and daughter spills over into relations between women, because there is only one place for (a) woman in dominant discourse—the place of the woman-mother. This is expressed in the desire to be the substitute for the other, to take her place, and in anxiety that the other will take her place and so on. It is expressed in nagging calculations such as: just like me, more than me, less than me just like everyone else—calculations to keep each other in place. This picture of the pattern of communication between women illuminates the disastrous effect of the logic of the One/the Same upon the relations between women. They become unable to communicate or to commune with one another, unable to share with the other; to ask, thank, appeal, question the other (Irigaray 1993c, p. 170). These modes of expression speak of a *with you* and presuppose a space between the one and the other; a “third” term that enables the *I* and the *You* to distinguish between themselves.

This idea of a third term can be interpreted on two levels (Mulder 2001, pp. 58, 59). First, it refers to the site of permutation and identification in the structure of communication. As I explained above, this site enables the *I* and *You* to shift the positions of sender to listener in the communication. But more importantly, it enables them to speak, to be spoken of and referred to as gendered speaking subjects, because this site is marked by the grammatical third person singular, thus by the personal pronoun He or She. Secondly, it functions as the object of exchange, the “what/what about” in the communications between the one and the other. As such “the third term” can also be interpreted as the horizon of meaning by means of which and in relation to which a person interprets the world around her and positions herself within this world. It directs her or his process of becoming a subject as well as his or her behavior and modes of relations with the other. In response to her analysis of the troubled relations between mothers and daughters, and therefore between women, Luce Irigaray contends that women need such a “third” term: such a site of permutation and identification as well as such an object of exchange in the form of a house-of-language or horizon of meaning, in their communications. She also asserts that this “third” term ought to be gendered in the feminine.

¹⁰To name but two of the narratives on this subject referred to or quoted by Luce Irigaray are the film *Maternale* and its script by Giovanna Gagliardo (Irigaray 1981, pp. 60–67) and the stories of Mélusine (Irigaray 1993c, pp. 57–59). In her interpretation of Freud’s text *Femininity*, she unravels the basis of the rivalry between mothers and daughters within Freud’s Oedipal structure (Irigaray 1985a).

A “God” in the Feminine

In the text “Divine Women,” she presents this idea of a third term or transcendence in the feminine in the thesis that women need (a) divinity, to become free, autonomous, sovereign, to become subjects as women. She also argues that such a divinity or horizon of accomplishment in the feminine would enable them to communicate with each other in an inter-subjective relation without fusion-confusion (Irigaray 1993c, p. 62).

She develops this thesis by taking up Ludwig Feuerbach’s interpretation of the notion “God” in his famous book *The Essence of Christianity* (Feuerbach (1989 [1854])). Feuerbach described God as the reified or objectified essence of man, or better, as the objectified or reified attributes and qualities which a group of human beings conceives as essential to the humanity of human beings at a certain time and place, as absolute perfections to and of their being in the world. This implies that in the work of Feuerbach and Luce Irigaray the word “God” does not refer to a transcendent entity or reality, but to a site in (philosophical) discourse, which is designated the site of the absolute.¹¹ This “God,” representing the ultimate, must be understood as the horizon of accomplishment of a collective, and as such S/He gives direction and orientation in the process of meaning making and in becoming a human subject. Luce Irigaray uses Feuerbach’s interpretation of “God” to argue that women need to externalize those qualities, attributes and values they hold to be essential for female subjectivity and identity in order to become female subjects themselves. In her view, women have to think of qualities, attributes and values of female being-in-the-world, they would call divine or see as a perfection, as essential for the existence of women as female subjects. In other words, she calls upon women to claim this discursive site for themselves and for their gender. She asks them what qualities of their gender would make them divine women, and to externalize and project these upon “God,” to appropriate this “Word” and to fill it with female imagery, with stories that portray those values that they deem to be essential to the being-in-the-world of female subjects, that constitute what they see as perfections of their gender.

As horizon of (female) accomplishment, this “God-woman” would then constitute an objective in the process of their becoming, directing the process of becoming divine women, or, “to generate the human, the divine within us and among us” (Irigaray 1993c, p. 60). As horizon of meaning, as sediment of the qualities, values,

¹¹ Any positive argument for a God in the feminine by Irigaray must be read against the background of her critique of a theistic interpretation of “God” in the order of representation. She takes up Derrida’s critique of metaphysical philosophy that there will be a final presence or being which functions as the ultimate Ground of Being: God, foundation of the chain of representations. She adds to Derrida’s critique that this God is a substitution of the presence of the mother, thus that belief in such a transcendent God presupposes a matricide. This background means that when Irigaray argues for a God in the feminine, she uses the word “God” in a post-theistic sense, as a linguistic sign, an existence in the symbolic, a *site* in the structure of discourse, notably the site of the absolute or the ultimate (Mulder 2006, pp. 346–348).

attributes of a woman or of a collective of women, the stories and images of this “God-woman” would enable the subject to situate herself vis-à-vis this horizon of values, and to incarnate them.

Although Luce Irigaray does not introduce many images, values or attributes of “divine women” or the divinity of women in the text “Divine Women,” she asks the question: “Does respect for God made flesh not imply that we should incarnate God within us and in our sex: daughter-woman-mother” (Irigaray 1993c, p. 71). This rhetorical question illuminates the importance Luce Irigaray attaches to the symbolization of the mother-daughter relation for the flourishing of women as female subjects. She interprets and retells stories about divine mother-daughter couples and of the dramatic effects of the severance of their relation. One example of such a couple is Demeter and Kore/Persephone who stand for a mother-daughter couple that guaranteed human food supplies as well as the power of the oracle (Irigaray 1993c, p. 191). In *Je, Tu, Nous* she recommends, moreover, that women place images of the Mary and Anna, Mary’s mother in their homes to remind the onlooker of the female genealogy of Mary: that she was born from a woman, and not alone in the world (Irigaray 1993b, p. 47). Both these representations of (divine) mother-daughter couples point towards a mode of relation between women in which they are not caught in rivalry but are supporting each other. An image of the Anna–Mary couple, which is interesting in this context, represents Anna as the one who teaches Mary to read by handing her a book (Guenter 2004, pp. 111, 112). This image can be seen as symbolizing the (necessity of a) third term in the relations between mother and daughter, between women. It represents the object of exchange in the structure of their communication, enabling them to differentiate between themselves, and to shift between I and You all the time, using modes of expression as thanking the other, appealing to the other etc. Thus they generate and acknowledge space and the difference between them. This book can also be seen as symbol of the horizon of meaning, the *Speculum Mundi*, or worldview from the standpoint of women, the transcendence in the feminine that women need.

This elaboration on Luce Irigaray’s ideas on the mother-daughter relation illuminates the function of the horizon of meaning in the communication between women. It would not only constitute an objective to their becoming, it would also constitute the object of exchange in the structure of communication, the third term, that would enable them to differentiate between themselves, to voice different points of view, different standpoints about the mother-daughter relation for instance. As third term, a God-She would generate space between them, enabling female subjects to share without fusion or confusion between the two, while also bringing them together in dialogical space ‘binding’ them, however lightly and temporarily perhaps, in a “we, women.”

To add another layer to Luce Irigaray’s call upon women to claim the site of the absolute and ultimate for their gender, this so-called third term refers also to the site of permutation and identification in the communication, the site in relation to which the gender of the speaking subject is determined. In the above I already explained that this issue is intimately linked with grammar and grammatical rules. Luce Irigaray analyzes this correspondence between God and grammar by showing

how man has given his own gender to God and the gods, by calling God “He”, thereby giving the site of the absolute his gender through grammar (Irigaray 1993b, pp. 31, 68). This analysis underlines the importance of the issue of grammar and grammatical/linguistic gender, because it suggests that not only God has a gender through the operation of linguistics, but also that grammar has or takes on some of the characteristics of the transcendent God, notably that it is or is seen as unmovable and ubiquitous. This means that Luce Irigaray’s call for a God-woman must also be understood as a call for a “God-She,” a transcendence marked by the third person feminine. This highlights how claiming the site of the absolute and ultimate, implies giving it the female gender: calling “God” She, using the feminine personal pronoun as a generic. Such a feminine generic would not only enable the female subject to situate herself as such in the symbolic world, in the world of speaking subjects, it would also function as a universal of and within the collective of women.

Multiple Belongings

I return now to the issue of the ethics of the in-between in the collective of women, and especially to the notion of the transcendence of the other, woman. When discussing the idea of the transcendence of the other, I explained that “gender” functioned as a disappropriation to the subject: s/he had to recognize and acknowledge that s/he belonged to a gender, that s/he could not circumscribe the whole and that her or his speech-acts were marked by that gender. Especially in the communications between subjects of different sex, this belonging to a gender brought the negative between the subjects to light, the recognition: “You who will never be me neither in body nor in thought.”

However, this “belonging to a gender” will not have the same effect of disappropriation in same sex relations as it has in relations between subjects of different sex. There are at least two reasons for this. First, in same sex relations, the speech-acts of both subjects are marked by the same gender. This implies that the negative between the subjects does not, cannot appear in the guise of linguistic gender. As such, “gender” does not contribute to the process of differentiation between *I* and *you*, because all female subjects would be identified as *I_f* and *You_f*.¹²

Secondly “gender” not only refers to linguistic gender, but can also be understood as *pars pro toto* for the house-of-language, the horizon of meaning that women need to become a subject. In this context, “belonging to a gender” means that the subject finds orientation and meaning for her life in relation to a horizon of meaning, an ultimate environment, a transcendence in the feminine. It implies that “gender” refers to a worldview held by a collective, even that this worldview binds this collective into a “we, women” (or “we, men”). This understanding of “gender,” and of “belonging to a gender” runs the danger of being based upon the universalization of one particular worldview or one understanding of female subjectivity and divinity. Such an

¹²The sign “*f*” in subscript indicates the gender of the speaking subject.

understanding of “gender” is rightly criticized for its exertion of hegemonic power that effaces differences between women, showing that what is affirmed as God or divine of and for women has been the result of a subtle power play concerning the issues of what we women are, want to be, or want from life.¹³

How to elaborate the concept of the transcendence of the other_f—understood as her mystery, a freedom which cannot be appropriated—within the realm of the collective of women, in which the subjects in the inter-subjective relation already “belong to a gender,” a collective or collectively held worldview; or, how to value the alterity of an other within a context, where “gender” in all its manifestations—sex, style, practices, linguistic gender—is not the decisive marker of the alterity of subject, nor refers to “gender” of the third term which enables the speaking subject to shift between *I* and *You*?

In my view, feminist theories of intersectionality are extremely relevant to this issue. Within these theories, individual as well as discursive identity is presented as constructed upon and through the intersection of more than one axis of differentiation: gender, race, class ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality to name the most significant axes.¹⁴ This means that the identity of a (single) subject is not only marked by her or his belonging to a gender, but that this identity is the product of the intersection of categories of differentiation: constructed out of the (oral) histories of (grand-) mothers and fathers, the (half-forgotten) practices and manners of a group, of attitudes and values, which are each and all expressive of a worldview and value system. Thus “belonging to a gender” takes on a different hue when it intersects with race or with class and race, or with religion and sexuality and so on. It accounts for the differences in experience of being a woman as well as for the different answers to the question what it means to be a free, autonomous and sovereign subject, or what shape such a freedom would take. For these particular experiences and answers are produced by acting and reacting in situations, in which “belonging to a gender” constitutes only part of the multiple belongings of the subject. Ultimately it accounts for the differences in the stories about a “God” in the

¹³In feminist theory, this effect has often been labelled—and severely criticized—as “essentialism.” The issue, however, is not that speaking of a horizon of meaning in the feminine posits an essence of woman, but that it can exert hegemonic power and thus contribute to the (political) power of one group of women over others. See also Schor (1998, especially p. 42). This critique has led to a preference for the particular over the universal and to a disinclination to claim the universal by naming, oneself, the world—and God. However, the gesture of claiming the universal can also be seen as a strategic gesture with immense political value. Accepting this view of the political power of universals in the feminine implies that women disempower themselves when they keep undermining the idea of a collective subject in the name of defending particularity and/or the plurality of female subjectivity.

¹⁴In one of her (Dutch) texts Helma Lutz distinguishes fourteen categories of differentiation notably gender, sexuality, race/color, ethnicity, nationality, class, culture, religion/ religiosity, health, age, residence/origin, North-South/East-West, state of societal development. She lists more-over the basic dualism operative within each category: thus the basic dualism operating within the category “gender” is male-female, within “sexuality”, it is hetero-homo and within “race” it is black and white (Lutz 2002, p. 14).

feminine, which women tell each other as well as for the differences in insights about the qualities and values that make up the humanity/ divinity of women, which these stories of “God-She” express.

This turn to theories of intersectionality to think through the notion “the transcendence of the other_f” follows from my effort to elaborate further what I consider to be Luce Irigaray’s intention behind the concept of “the recognition of the alterity of the other,” notably that the subject’s knowing, doing, naming is limited; and that this limitation upon the subject’s subjectivity is not only set by the concrete reality of the other person, but also by the subject’s belonging to (a) larger collective(s). Luce Irigaray writes about this belonging:

I is never simply mine in that it belongs to a gender. I am not the whole: I am man or woman. And I am not simply a subject: I belong to a gender. I am objectively limited by this belonging (Irigaray 1996, p. 106).

These lines can be seen as an elaboration of what she writes earlier in the same text:

I recognize you signifies that you are, you exist, you become. With this recognition, I mark you, I mark myself with incompleteness, with the negative. Neither you, nor I are the whole, nor the same, the principle of totalization. And our difference cannot be reduced to one hierarchy, one genealogy, one history. It cannot be weighed in more or less. That would be to annihilate it (Irigaray 1996, p. 105).

This latter quote opens the possibility of broadening the idea of “belonging to a gender” to belonging to one or more collectives, thus to belonging to a gender as well as a race, an ethnicity, a religion, a class, by sexual preference etc. For in this quote Luce Irigaray makes clear that it is the postulation of a whole, of the same, that reduces (irreducible) difference to a single horizon of meaning. It is precisely this principle of totalization that is undermined through theories of intersectionality, because they show that sexual difference as well as the mother-daughter relation gets a different hue in and through the intersection with other collective histories. The point of connection is therefore the idea that belonging to (a) larger collective(s) means a disappropriation, a not-owning-oneself. This means that in using the personal pronoun *I*, the subject is not asserting her autonomy or self-possession, but is taking up or referring to an other: to her gender(ed horizon), to her (female) genealogy in which more than one (personal) history intersects, as well as to the history of a collective or to histories of the collectives to which she belongs that mark her subjectivity and make up her particular identity.

Theories of intersectionality make it therefore possible to perceive and recognize the nature of the negative of the other woman that operates between the *I* and the *You* in a context where subjects belong to the same (linguistic) gender, and where “gender” can not and does not mark their irreducible difference. They clarify that the excess that resists appropriation is the effect of the location of the other subject in the force field of different axes of differentiation on the one hand; on the other hand it is caused by this subject’s individual process of internalizing and interiorizing the different social forces, which intersect upon her embodied location in the world and become inscribed in her body and flesh. They thus show how the transcendence of the same-sex other asks for similar acknowledgement as the

transcendence of the other of different sex. And to recognize this transcendence implies attention to and care of the space between two or more subjects of the same sex in their intersubjective encounters. Hence my proposal for an ethics of the in-between.

As I explained above, guarding the “in-between” is primarily an expression of the recognition of the transcendence of the other and of respect for her freedom. This respect is shown by giving her the space to unfold herself in her difference and to offer time to become and flourish. But this in-between is not only the space and time that separates the subjects and thus protects their differences; it is also the space they share, the space (and time) in which they share, communicate and co-create a *We*. I call this *We* a co-creation to indicate that it is the product of the communications of the *I* and the *You* in which they have managed to make the in-between into a creative space while recognizing and working through the negative between them. The pronoun *We* does not only refer to the linguistic sign with which this co-creation can be presented but also to the more tangible products of the creativity which is set free by working through the negative: the images, thoughts, stories, practices generated together as well as by each of them. All this indicates that respect for the in-between is a necessary condition of a mode of living together in peace and creativity.

The Ethics of the In-Between: An Indelible Part of the Horizon of Meaning

The question then becomes how to ensure that the transcendence of the other—hence the in-between—will be recognized and respected in the daily practices of the many encounters between women. Or, how shall this ethics of the in-between be practiced in daily life? For although theories of intersectionality provide a sound theoretical basis to think through the alterity of the same-sex other, it is as difficult to recognize this transcendence as it is to recognize the transcendence of the other of different sex, perhaps even more difficult because the sameness in gender in all its manifestations—sex, appearance, style, practices—might lead to the presumption of being (the) same or similar.

This ethics is not easy to practice. For one, the deep-seated desire to make the other “mine,” to own or possess objects including the other, to appropriate the other’s qualities or knowledge or to use her for my growth and glory, all these are important obstacles in the development of this ethics. And for another, the passion of wonder, which plays an important part in the creation of an in-between in intersubjective relations is not easy to practice either. Wonder—not once, but time and again—asks for a sensibility of the senses as well as for an attentiveness to the other that is at right angles with the pace of contemporary (urban) life. It asks for a sensibility of the flesh, for being in tune with the perceptions of the five senses so as to be able to register that the other has touched you as different—different in the sense of unknown, strange, new as well as different in the sense of changed, “other.” This

sensibility, or the development of such a sensibility, is not easy to come by in an urban environment with its bombardment of noise and fumes and its pace of movement directed at steering clear of physical contact with one another. Wonder—and thus the recognition of the transcendence of the other—also asks for time: time to perceive that the other has touched you as different, time to ponder the emotions this other evokes in you, time for the other to respond to the wondering question “Who art Thou?”—more time than routine has allotted to this encounter.

These obstacles highlight that the ethics of the in-between I pictured above must be given shape in a conscious practice of respecting the in-between. It demands the development of a different life-style, a different practice of encountering the other subject than the current one, because it is directed at modifying and re-directing deep-seated modes of behavior and desire. These can only be changed through the observance and performance of an intentional practice of taking time to be attentive, paying attention to the practice of breathing, of taking time and space to be silent (Irigaray 2002, pp. 49–73).

Because the practice of this ethics asks for such a conscious effort of shaping one’s life style according to this different rhythm of life (Mulder 2003, p. 40–50), it is important to keep in sight that a key value of human being-in-the-world and human sociality is at stake: notably the respect of the in-between between the one and the other. To call it a key value makes clear that it is essential to human being and becoming, to the flourishing of the human subject both individually as collectively; essential, because human being-in-the-world is a being-*with*-the-other from the beginning. To shape this being-with-the-other in such a way that each can become more “completely” human requires this “respect of the in-between.” That would make this value a “perfection,” to use Feuerbach’s terminology. With this word he points to the idea of completeness, of the ultimate of human being, worthy of the predicate “divine” or the thought “of God”.

By presenting “respect for the in-between” as a perfection of human being-in-the-world, I place this value in the domain of “God-talk” or in the domain of the ultimate and of ultimate meaning. I do this to make clear that this ethics ought to become an indelible part of the horizon of meaning of the collective, for only then will it be part of the (cultural) identity of subjects and become inscribed in their modes of behavior. This implies that this ethics should become anchored in stories, images, in bodies of thought as well as in everyday practices and modes of behavior vis-à-vis the other, just as the midrash points to a practice as well as to a central value in Jewish tradition. To make this ethics an indelible part of a horizon of meaning asks for a mobilization of the imagination and the memory, for narratives of moments of wonder before the alterity of the other, memories of experience of the in-between, for stories that teach the basic principles of this practice, for practitioners of this life-style. Taken together, they map this ethics of “the respect for the in-between” and offer the subject an image of “God” she can imitate and incarnate in her practice of being-in-relation with the other in order to flourish and co-create a flourishing community.

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Chapter 20

Creating a Space for Practical Wisdom: The Dance of Transcendence Incarnate

Laurie Anderson Sathe

Abstract I argue that women’s practical wisdom and the dimensions of knowing, imagining, and acting in the world are shared goals of theorists in feminist philosophy of religion and theorists in feminist critical pedagogy. In this chapter I seek to create a space, for reader and writer, to weave together the voices of Pamela Sue Anderson, Michèle Le Doeuff, bell hooks, and Maxine Greene in a conversation to nurture women’s practical wisdom. This interdisciplinary dialogue, the first involving these four theorists together, creates a space for women to transcend the status quo in thinking critically and practically. Transcendence comes about when generating a certain sacred ground on which women come together, figuratively and literally in written word, shared images, dreams, and dialogue, to imagine the new. The dance of transcendence incarnate, for me, describes a community of flourishing women acting confidently and freely in a world-engaging movement of life. As in a dance, transcendence involves individuals in community engaging mind and body, the cognitive and the practical, where each person becomes a subject embodying practical wisdom. Hope emerges as women learn together in textual and actual dialogues.

Keywords Practical wisdom · Transcendence · Intellectual virtues · Agency · Feminist critical pedagogy · Feminist philosophy of religion

Women’s practical wisdom and the dimensions of knowing, imagining, and acting in the world are shared goals of theorists in feminist philosophy of religion and theorists in feminist critical pedagogy. The latter—as a contemporary field of study that looks at how to educate women to be critical thinkers and agents of change—resonates with the former. As Pamela Sue Anderson argues, “Guided by reflexive, imaginative and interactive capacities for discerning truth, a feminist philosophy

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of religion would aim for practical wisdom” (2004, p. 88) and I argue the same aim exists for feminist critical pedagogy. With this in mind, I seek to create a space, for reader and writer, to weave together the voices of Anderson, Michèle Le Doeuff, bell hooks, and Maxine Greene in a conversation to nurture women’s practical wisdom. This interdisciplinary dialogue, the first involving these four theorists together, creates a space for women to transcend the status quo in thinking critically and practically.¹ Transcendence comes about when generating a certain sacred ground on which women come together, figuratively and literally in written word, shared images, dreams, and dialogue, to imagine the new. The dance of transcendence incarnate, for me, describes a community of flourishing women acting confidently and freely in a world-engaging movement of life.² As in a dance, transcendence involves individuals in community engaging mind and body, the cognitive and the practical, where each person becomes a subject embodying practical wisdom. Hope emerges as women learn together in textual and actual dialogues. This virtual movement in space crosses disciplines. Feminists then move as if the spirit of a dance changes each self and the communities in which each of us lives. What is more sacred—or more spiritual—than the realization of this creation as a space for practical wisdom!

Critical pedagogy focuses on educational practices for change. In feminist hands, critical pedagogy would and does generate collaborative practices; feminist pedagogues teach students to recognize and to address the injustices women face daily in their communities and their everyday worlds. While feminist critical pedagogy has its origins in sociology, it finds support in the feminist philosopher’s attempts to cultivate intellectual virtues that will change those social markers preventing women from being recognized as trustworthy knowers and doers.³ Anderson describes intellectual virtue, where “virtue is essentially a disposition; and intellectual refers to the motivation to know as the virtues’ most basic component” (2004, p. 88). Through a focus on cultivating intellectual virtues philosophers can realize a shape for practical wisdom in the realm of education.⁴ Practical wisdom emerges as women develop the intellectual ability to know their reality, to imagine possibilities to transcend the status quo and to act in the world to bring about change.

¹Pamela Sue Anderson has considered bell hooks and Michele Le Doeuff together in her work. I add Maxine Greene, a contemporary philosopher of education and critical pedagogue.

²This concept I draw from the Continental Philosophy conference “Transcendence Incarnate: The Corporeality of the Spiritual and the Spirituality of the Corporeal.” Somerville College Oxford, September 10, 2007.

³Paulo Freire is recognized as the father of critical pedagogy developing liberation education in Brazil with a primary focus on educating those marginalized on the basis of class and race. Feminists, such as bell hooks and Maxine Greene have recognized the androcentricity of his work and add a feminist perspective to critical pedagogy.

⁴Anderson establishes the goal of “finding a shape for practical wisdom in feminist philosophy of religion.” I was inspired by her work and what I perceived to be a common goal of developing women’s practical wisdom in feminist critical pedagogy.

Women as Knowers

A conversation about women's wisdom is sacred when it joins in with the age-old effort to dispel the (religious) imagery of women's knowledge as evil—for instance, in the interpretation of Eve's act of seeking knowledge as inherently sinful. This myth has historically influenced women's access to education. Gabrielle Suchon, a seventeenth-century philosopher, was a strong advocate of women's education and intellectual development. She inspired Le Doeuff and those, like us who followed, to “incite women and girls to wake from their slumbers, and pull themselves out of the ignorance in which they spend their lives” (Le Doeuff 2003, p. 35). Maxine Greene provides for us the image of Virginia Woolf's awakening as she searches unsuccessfully for positive historical images of intellectual women. Greene implores, “Might it not have been at this moment that Virginia Woolf decided this reality was unendurable and moved on to her demand that one should have a room of one's own?” (1995, p. 49). In response to this awakening, Woolf turns to her own intellectual development and the writing that would inspire generations of women to read, reflect, and write. Suchon and Woolf's words come to us from the depths of history to encourage us to continue the work they started in moving women from ignorance to wisdom. Certainly women have made progress in entering institutions of higher education as students and acquiring positions in academia as scholars influencing what is considered knowledge. However, in *The Sex of Knowing* Le Doeuff discourages us from becoming complacent by describing not only the historical discrimination that women experienced in seeking to develop their intelligence but also the contemporary issues we experience that perhaps are more subtle. Sexual harassment, preferential educational opportunities for men, tenure issues, and publishing hurdles prevail in academia. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* hooks joins in a spirit compatible with Le Doeuff's, asking us to analyze the experiences of women not solely by gender but also based on race and class. Where Le Doeuff draws a line back to a historical connection to women before us, hooks creates an inclusive circle of women for today and the future based on race, class, sexual orientation, and religion. She appeals to us to see who is missing from our classrooms and institutions and to seek ways to be more inclusive. She also asks that we make critical thinking and intellectual opportunities available in the communities in which we live. hooks illustrates that Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* provides a “guide and anchor” for all women even if when writing it Virginia Woolf could not have imagined black women writing. Black women saw that their reality was unendurable and that education was an avenue to freedom. In a world where their voices continue to be silenced, hooks continues, black women build from a “literary history where even the threat of death could not silence our passion for the written word—our longing to read, to write, to know” (hooks 1999, p. xiv). Their passion dispels the images of women seeking knowledge as evil to images of virtue.

The urgency of Anderson, hooks, Le Doeuff, and Greene's call for women to live up to their intellectual potential is revealed in their description of the ethical and political implications of an education. These theorists argue that it is right and fair to develop women's intellect. Le Doeuff appeals to a sense of justice, “. . . freedom,

knowledge, and authority are good things, it is therefore unjust to deprive women of them” (2003, p. 39). hooks reveals a connection to fairness, “Most women are deprived of access to modes of thought that promote the kind of critical and analytical understanding necessary for liberation struggle” (2000, p. 115). She treats intellectual development and the skills of reasoning as crucial for personal transformation and our hope for political change. As we develop the skills to see our reality with a critical lens women gain knowledge of the dominant social forces creating that reality.

With a slight nuance in their focus, feminist philosophers and pedagogues both analyze and seek the promise of women’s knowledge in feminist epistemology and feminist pedagogy. Le Doeuff describes feminist philosophy as an epistemology of hope and Greene describes feminist critical pedagogy as a pedagogy of possibility. Women’s knowledge transcends disciplines and provides an opportunity for an interdisciplinary dialogue. Together we seek to answer the following questions from a feminist perspective: What is knowledge? Who has the power to know? How is knowledge produced? These are crucial questions for unearthing the hegemony embedded in the structures that have become the norm, the rules that we follow. Those recognized as knowers create the rules that are often biased toward those in power. Women need the critical skills to see these structures and oppressions but also the knowledge and power to replace them. Embedded in this discussion is a broader understanding of knowledge and the power associated with knowing. When women’s knowledge is valued and when they are seen as knowers, women gain power and authority. As Anderson argues, “Once cognitive power includes the ability of the human knower to reflect critically upon what is known, how it is known, and who possesses it, then the reliable acquisition of knowledge—by both women and men . . . can become a gender-inclusive virtue, aiming at (practical) wisdom” (2004, p. 92). In both feminist epistemology and pedagogy the emphasis is on educating women to develop the skills to critically assess how knowledge is produced and to become producers of knowledge. The feminist philosopher and pedagogue see the hope and possibility in valuing women’s knowledge.

Women Imagining the Possible

Transcendence incarnate involves both conceiving new possibilities for women (e.g. new images of women as knowers) and creating women who *are* confident knowers and doers. Philosopher and pedagogue agree that power lies in a vision of women developing their cognitive abilities, reaching their full potential and thriving as full and equal participants in the world and in their communities. Women need to develop their intellects to become a formidable force in replacing images of ignorant females so that they might first imagine and then become producers of knowledge and agents of change. In describing a place where women can transform themselves, their sexual identities as much as their cognitive and conative pursuits, we move closer to realizing fully the incarnate lives of women: Drucilla Cornell describes bell hooks’ life in such terms. Cornell argues that “women have for too long been

judged capable only of passive imagination and the ability to mimic the persona deemed proper for women” (1998, p. 11)—but hooks imaginatively recollects herself in, what Cornell calls, “the imaginary domain.” This is a place where hooks claimed herself as her own person and could imagine herself differently than the script written for an African-American woman from the South. Here transcendence becomes incarnate.

Greene argues for new images of women: “we want to discover how to open spaces for persons in their plurality, spaces where they can become different, where they can grow” (1988, p. 56). The duality of changing the philosophical imaginary (the philosophical images of woman as knowers) and the social imaginary (the social images of women as change agents) together creates spaces for practical wisdom to thrive.

Le Doeuff seeks to transcend the philosophical imaginary, which has associated women’s wisdom with evil or seduction. For example, she creates new images of Eve seeking the fruit of the tree of knowledge as good.⁵ She imagines “How beautiful Eve is as she emerges from her holy rigidity—in one hand, knowledge of the world, and in the other self knowledge and, from her elbows to her knees, the birth of beauty and the first stirrings of charm” (2003, pp. 67–68). Woman’s inner beauty and intellect are revealed as she steps confidently forward to imagine the new. Le Doeuff sees how women’s thinking may be limited by self-images of unworthiness embedded in the social constructions of female intellect. Le Doeuff refers to the experience of Christine in *The Book of the City of Ladies*:

Thought may be blocked by a negative imaginary and freed by an interlocutor (in this case a lady [of reason]) who provides the beginning of a magical cure. Christine drinks her consoling worlds like dew, and then this Lady, an allegory of rational dialogue—two people are therefore involved—takes the time to talk with her inviting her to grasp the tools of interrogation and to use them. It is by being an active subject, questioning and building for all women, that she will rediscover her own dignity (Le Doeuff 2003, p. 137).

Three allegorical figures representing the virtues of reason, rectitude, and justice visit Christine in her despair over the negative images of women in her readings. These wise and virtuous women come to give her encouragement and to ask her to create a city that nurtures women. This city encompasses a feminist ideal which seeks to demonstrate the indispensability of women’s contributions to the “continuation of human civilization in the political, cultural, spiritual and practical spheres” (de Pizan 1982, xxxiv) A community of flourishing women as described in *The Book of the City of Ladies* values women’s knowledge and wisdom. Le Doeuff sees that the ideal of the city of ladies becomes a safe place in our imaginary (2003, p. 136). It can be a place to imagine the possible. hooks writes that Janie, a character who finds her voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “has more than a room of her own, she has the capacity to live fully in her room—to resurrect, to reconcile, to

⁵For more on philosophical imaginary, see Le Doeuff (1989).

renew. . . a space of infinite possibility” (1999, p. 190). A space for female imagination in the philosophical imaginary sees women’s knowledge and skills of reasoning and imagining as good and needed in the world.

The social imaginary encompasses images and stories that create the social structures of our lives and interpret our reality. Androcentric stories perpetuate images of women as passive. Women transcend the dominant social imaginary as they develop critical and imaginative skills and new ways to interpret their reality. As Greene illustrates,

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or ‘common-sensible’ and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet (1995, p. 19).

Women’s practical wisdom begins as they imagine the possible and feel the stirrings of agency. Agency involves a sense of empowerment, that women’s actions can make a difference. For Lois McNay, agency is “the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structured inequalities” (2000, p. 10). It is this agency that repopulates the social images of women as passive to ones of active involvement and responsibility. Moving into or within the public space is to enter the field of possibilities and the ability to imagine a better alternative. Greene states that “only a subject, after all, can choose—can decide to break from anchorage and insert himself or herself into the world with a particular kind of identity and responsibility, a particular mode of valuing what lies around and of straining toward what ought to be. The straining and the imagining ought to be part of the dance of life” (1995, p. 71).

Women as Agents of Change

Practical wisdom requires the ability to move from critically assessing barriers to imagining possibilities and in this way, to become constructive agents of change. Greene posits that the feminist goal is for women to break through the structures of their world and create something new. “It does not matter if those structures are as everyday as constraining family rituals, as banal as bureaucratic supervisory systems, as shabby as segregation practices” (1988, p. 17). The distinctive nature of this practical wisdom means that it cannot be separated from action, and more constructively, from acting in the world for change. The philosophical underpinnings of practical wisdom in the sense of *phronesis* go back to Aristotle’s account of human virtues (Aristotle 1980, p. 27, 1103a). In a very practical sense, Aristotle’s wisdom becomes relevant today when “Maxine Greene invites us to ‘do philosophy,’ to struggle with ideas, with the arts, with the events of the world, with the daily newspapers and our idiosyncratic chance encounters—all in order to become more aware of ourselves and our world, more aware of our inter-subjective predicaments, and then, importantly, to act on our awareness” (Ayers 1998, p. ix). Le Doeuff

shares the view that philosophical thought is not self-contained or separated from contemporary life. As Penelope Deutscher explains Le Doeuff “interweaves discussion of the history of philosophy with discussions of everyday feminist issues (such as laws and mores covering contraception, abortion, postcolonialism and equal opportunity in France)” (Deutscher 2000a, p. 293). Le Doeuff applies a critical lens to contemporary laws and institutional public policy concerning women revealing where apparently “progressive ‘women friendly’ measures on the part of public institutions. . . often indirectly reconsolidate male bias” (ibid). In this manner, Le Doeuff encourages feminist philosophers and pedagogues to be ever critical of the rules, and norms that are often established by androcentric values and ideals. Women must transcend the perpetual hegemonic structures and create a new social imaginary that envisions women empowered as having both personal and social agency.⁶

Women’s practical wisdom is needed to create a more just and fair world. By definition, practical wisdom always involves goodness, fairness, and morality, which align with the goals of social justice driving the feminist movement. In returning to both hooks and LeDoeuff each of them appeals to a sense of justice and fairness: we are reminded to make wise, ethical changes for the goal of women and their relations to men. hooks builds on the work of Paulo Freire who provides a way for men and women to bring the ethical to our critical analysis and application of practical wisdom. He conceives of the practical as praxis in the sense of reflection and action. He further divides praxis into two categories: normative praxis (reflective doing) and true praxis (reflective ethical doing); the latter aligns with practical wisdom. In true praxis, then, practical wisdom would be applied to the world in order to transform it for the better (Allsup 2003, p. 4). A feminist movement for social justice can then be seen as a model of practical wisdom.⁷ According to the critical pedagogy of Nel Noddings, “Logically, we do not need a moral reason for adopting strong critical thinking, but practically most of us do, and without a moral purpose, even the strongest critical thinking may be rudderless” (1998, p. 93). With a focus on social justice, feminism provides the moral compass for women seeking practical wisdom where women become independent moral agents of change.

While feminism provides the compass for social justice, feminists are divided as to the approach to implementing practical wisdom and obtaining justice and equality. The coming together of cognition and action is the essence of practical wisdom, and yet this is also the crux of the difficulty in developing practical wisdom through

⁶According to Peter McLaren, “Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the mass media, the political system and the family” (McLaren, 1998, p. 177).

⁷Anderson argues that “For feminist philosophy, authentically conceived and strongly objective theistic beliefs of women would not come from psychological need alone, nor from epistemological ignorance but, significantly, from a rational passion for justice” (1998, p. 213).

a feminist lens. In the feminist movement, a problematic fracture between cognition and action can be seen to divide feminist academics who (mainly) analyze the issues affecting women and those who actively initiate change. hooks describes this historical context: “From the onset, women’s liberation movement participants have struggled to unite theory and practice, to create a liberatory feminist praxis . . . That struggle has been undermined by anti-intellectualism (on the one side) and by elitist academics (on the other side) who believe their ‘ideas’ need not have any connection to real life” (2000, p. 113).

What I am proposing here—in creating a space for practical wisdom—will thrive in the holistic merging of the mind and body. This merging happens as women develop individually and collectively, imagining and initiating change. In her philosophical writings, Le Doeuff seeks to build a bridge between academics and activists via their shared interests in contemporary issues. In an interview with Penelope Deutscher, Le Doeuff lists some of these issues: “sexism in textbooks, the position of women in philosophy, or of girls in the schooling system, peace and women, [and] reproductive rights today” (2000, p. 238). To resolve these issues Le Doeuff would never leave her theory without her practice. Of course, there is a need for a theoretical approach to these topics: debating with academics adds an intellectual component to the resolution of sexist issues. Women intellectuals can in this way also provide a platform for the voice of women activists. Activists in return provide the concrete understanding that comes from experience and the insights gained from their activities. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a writer, politician, and activist, embodies the merging of cognition and action. In her autobiography, *Infidel*, Ali expresses her passion to free Muslim women from the “mental cage” of patriarchy in which they live. Her goals are for the women both to become aware that their experiences of innocent or excessive suffering are unacceptable and to be confident that their ability to reason could develop “a vocabulary of resistance.” Ali contends that “People who are conditioned to meekness, almost to the point where they have no mind of their own, sadly have no ability to organize, or will to express their opinion” (2007, p. 295). Despite a childhood with the inadequate education provided for girls in Somalia, she went on to acquire her master’s degree in political science. She broke from the confines and abuses of her childhood to become a politician in Holland seeking to remove the legislative barriers that impact immigrant women and a writer breaking the silences of all Muslim women by telling her own story. She saw that the determinism of certain Islamic practices toward women limited their ability to *imagine* a life in which they had equal opportunity to men. In reading her writing, women around the world can share in her story and perhaps be inspired to be agents of change for Muslim women.

Dance as a Metaphor for Women’s Wisdom

We return to a space where women can come together to incarnate what we imagine to be a better world for women. Both Greene and hooks provide images of embodied practical wisdom as a dance. Greene refers to Henri Matisse’s painting, “Dance”, to

imagine women in a public space, “where visions should take shape” and women “feel themselves part of the dance of life” (1995, pp. 62 and 72).

hooks also imagines a dance as she performs her writing, “The moment when I whirl with words, when I dance in that ecstatic circle of love surrounded by ideas; everything can be both held and left behind—race, gender, class. It is this intensely intimate moment of transcendence that is the experiential reality that deepens my commitment to a progressive politics of transformation” (1999, p. 45). I have created this space of transcendence incarnate with hooks, Greene, Le Doeuff, and Anderson, which I hope will continue to grow so that we can share in this dance with others as we not only dream and imagine, but begin to create the future where each and every women’s practical wisdom can flourish. This dance is a metaphor for a community with a different kind of boundary. Appropriating the imagery of Matisse’s *Dance* in creating the space for wise women who move in a circle, who are always in a flowing movement, enables constantly different shapes. Like an amoeba, these female figures dance together changing themselves and their worlds. This is a feminist picture for our ever-shifting global environment: hands unclasp and welcome new members into their philosophical circle. In their dance, feminist philosophers and pedagogues carry in their hearts and minds images of women who lived before them: their female inheritance encourages their movements and informs their practical wisdom.

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