Nicole Loraux' essay "What is a Goddess?" which places the feminine aspect of a Goddess in the context of her divine aspect and talks about how the divine overwhelms the feminine as a category. "Goddess," which places the feminine and complementary but essential role of God and the feminine in the religion of the Greek cities. John Scheid's essay on "The Religious Roles of Roman Women" is also valuable.

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

_Hypatia of Alexandria_ is worth reading because of the legend which has grown around its subject.

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

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

A very interesting woman emerges—an elitist teacher with students only from the wealthy and well-connected families (including a number of Christians, at least two of whom were to become bishops), practicing a form of Platonism which had nothing to do with the Pagan Goddesses and Gods. Hypatia was well-connected and influential in the city of Alexandria and more broadly, and allied herself with the civil authorities and a moderate faction in the Christian community against the intolerant and fanatical Cyril.

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

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

**FEMINISM AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS**


_by Eva C. Karpinski_

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

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

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

By contrast, the social constructionist paradigm, which Parsons derives from the work of Harriet Martineau, focuses on oppressive institutions that shape women's lives. This approach assumes that the social precedes the individual and determines moral knowledge, behaviour, and decisions. The critique of patriarchy and dedication to social change that characterize this paradigm can be seen in Juliet Mitchell's early work, as well as in the work of Rosalind Coward and bell hooks, or such feminist theologians as Dorothee Soelle.
All three are discussed separately in Aristotle, or it can be used to wom
possible directions for the feminist social constructionism’s anti-human
standing and the need for translation works is essential.” Thedialogic model
voted to a critique of particular para
patriarchal redemptive community;
reness of liberalism. The imagery of
issue of difference as a major weak
nessness had meant to her. The result was
be turned against women’s interests, as for example in Aristotele, or it can be used to wom
en’s advantage, as in Mary Daly’s celebration of distinctly “female” mor

An interesting feature of Parsons’ book is her use of literary narratives at
the beginning of each chapter de
ved to a critique of particular para
digms. Thus Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” allows Parsons to problematize the
issue of difference as a major weak
ess of liberalism. The imagery of
The Wizard of Oz is used to criticize social constructionism’s anti-human
 replacement of the human subject by discourse. Margaret Atwood’s The
Handmaid’s Tale shows the dangers of naturalism in the fundamentalist
context.

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

If the glossolalia of discourses can be seen as one of the problems of liv
ing in a pluralistic world, Parson’s book insists on the necessity of look
ing for common grounds of understand ing and the need for translation
and communication. As she says, “conversation between moral frame
works is essential.” The dialogical model she adopts for presenting the con
flicting claims of different ethical para
digms makes her book exemplary of
the process of forging alliances by
means of constructive criticism.

SIMONE DE BEAOU: THE MAKING OF AN INTELLECTUAL WOMAN
by Deborah Heller

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

Unlike Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir never thought to question the desir
ability of full inclusion in dominant cultural institutions. Born in 1908,
twenty-six years after Woolf, Beauvoir was able to benefit from educational
opportunities that would have been all but unthinkable for a woman just
a few years earlier. The prestigious agrégation examination in Philoso
phy, for example, which Beauvoir passed in 1929, placing second only to
Sartre, had been open to women only since 1924. In her excellent new
study, Toril Moi reminds us that
Beauvoir “belonged to the first gen
eration of European women to be
educated on a par with men,” and
that, as a result, “these women be
lieved that they were being treated as
equals in an egalitarian system.” Such
a belief was not, however, justified by
their actual situation. At the time
Beauvoir began to study Philosophy at
the Sorbonne, as a woman she would
still have been barred from admission
to the more prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, where Sartre was a stu
dent. Beauvoir’s real position in the
educational and intellectual establish
ment remained marginal solely be
cause of her gender, Moi emphasizes,
but her success in crossing many pre
vious barriers to women’s higher edu
cation prevented her from recognizing
this.

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

Beauvoir reading myths of femi
ninity in the Bibliothèque Nationale
may recall Woolf reading similar
pseudo-science in the British Mu
seum some thirty years earlier. “If
truth is not to be found on the shelves
of the British Museum,” Woolf wrote
in A Room of One’s Own (1929),
“where, I asked myself, picking up a
notebook and a pencil, is truth?”
Rather than engage the arguments of
male authorities, Woolf dismisses
them with ridicule. Though pack
aged as an academic lecture, A Room
of One’s Own, is more properly viewed
as a subversive anti-lecture—chatty,
personal, digressive, anecdotal. (She
adopted a similarly subversive format
some ten years later, in her more
bitter feminist polemic Three Guin
nesses, packaged as a personal letter.)

Beauvoir, confronted with the same stereotypic and prejudices as
Woolf, undertakes instead to beat
the professors at their own game. Draw
ing on literature, history, case stud
es, and her own (never explicitly
acknowledged) experience, The Sec
ond Sex presents a vast compendium