

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa

SAINT PAUL UNIVERSITY

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF
MARY O'BRIEN'S "PHILOSOPHY OF BIRTH"
FOR FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ETHICS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (THEOLOGY)**

BY

JOY STEVENS

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

JANUARY 2000



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-57069-X

Canada

Copyright © 2000 by Joy Stevens

All rights reserved

*This thesis is dedicated with love to
Alice Elizabeth Dietrich-O'Connor (1983-1998)
and to Marie-Claire Annette Turgeon -
who, in my mind, have so eloquently shared in the truth that
"In my flesh shall I see God"*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
Method and Overview	
CHAPTER	
1. FEMINISM, DIFFERENCE THEORY, AND MOTHERHOOD: A SELECTIVE OVERVIEW	15
Feminist Theory and the Development of Difference Perspectives	
Simone de Beauvoir: <i>The Second Sex</i> , 1949	
De Beauvoir's Analysis of Motherhood	
Adrienne Rich: <i>Of Woman Born</i> , 1976	
Nancy Chodorow: <i>The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender</i> , 1978	
Luce Irigaray: <i>This Sex Which Is Not One</i> , 1985	
2. MARY O'BRIEN'S 'MOTHER': DIFFERENCE, UNITY, AND CONTINUITY IN <i>THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION</i> , 1981	64
Mary O'Brien and <i>The Politics of Reproduction</i>	
The Foundations of O'Brien's Dialectics of Reproduction	
The Dialectics of Reproduction	
The Impact of Alienation in Thought, Practice, and the Notion of Value	
The Public and the Private Realms	
Creativity and Procreativity	

	Production and Reproduction	
	Alienation and Integration	
	Critical Response to <i>The Politics of Reproduction</i>	
	O'Brien's Response	
3.	SITUATING <i>THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION</i> AMONG THE DIFFERENCE THEORIES	111
	Mary O'Brien and Simone de Beauvoir	
	Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich	
	Mary O'Brien and Nancy Chodorow	
	Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray	
4.	MATERNAL EMBODIMENT, <i>THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION</i> , AND FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ETHICS	156
	Embodiment and its Teleology in the Christian Tradition	
	The "Mother of God" in Ashley's Theology of the Body	
	Critical Reflection on the Contribution of Benedict Ashley	
	A Critique of Ashley's "Mother of God" Theology	
	The Work of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill in Support of a Feminist Theological Ethics of Maternal Embodiment	
	Beverly Wildung Harrison: <i>Making the Connections</i> , 1985	
	Lisa Sowle Cahill: <i>Between the Sexes</i> , 1985; <i>Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics</i> , 1996	
	CONCLUSION	197
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	214

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement I received from a number of key people. First of all, my love and thanks to several close friends who kept the project alive by living out the tempests with me. Sheila Leamen, Joanne Campbell, Alice D'Anjou, and the entire Mother Goddess Circle stood by with abiding optimism. My friend and sister, Sally Oddy, deserves special thanks for staying in touch and steadfastly reminding me of my own debt to maternal origins.

To my companions at the police station, Heather Cameron and Donna Watson-Elliot, I offer thanks and gratitude for unconditional belief in me, energetic support, and sustaining humour. I am especially grateful to Marie Turgeon for modelling faith and love when I most needed it, and to Det. Lyse Fournier whose inspiration, encouragement, and sharp intelligence have inscribed my life.

Prof. Miriam Martin of Saint Paul University guided the early stages of my work with encouragement and sound advice for which I am grateful. I am also grateful to Prof. Heather Eaton of Saint Paul University, who read early drafts and provided valuable comments and good support during critical stages in the project. Profs. Martin and Eaton were kindred spirits in the enthusiasm we shared with respect to the importance of a feminist voice.

Derek Melchin offered editorial expertise without which I would still be typing and

collating. I am thankful for Derek's intelligence, passion for words, and organizational skill.

Prof. Kenneth Melchin of Saint Paul University mentored this work with heroic patience and strength. I will gratefully remember the project in the light of Ken's intellectual and personal integrity. And I will be reminded of the Saint Paul proverb that says, "she who is Ken's student is blessed indeed."

Finally, to my three wondrous daughters, Dr. Jennifer MacDonald, Samantha Stevens, and Kalen Stevens-Heap, I offer my boundless love and hope for the future. Thank you for teaching me how to mother and for accepting my bohemian interpretations of "personal wealth." Your beauty goes to eleven.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the meaning of embodied existence in the discourse of difference feminism and in the articulation of feminist theological ethics. Specifically, the analysis centres on the embodiment of maternity, both as it has been depicted in the tradition of philosophical and theological thought and as contemporary feminists debate its significance.

The salient question guiding this inquiry springs from a set of questions that have been energetically explored throughout the history of philosophy. What is the significance of the female body to the enterprise of intellectual discourse? To spiritual transcendence? To the capacity to reason? To the way in which ethics is perceived and "done"? In general, the tradition has tolerated the inclusion of female embodiment only insofar as it gave flesh to expressions of human depravity. Building on the work of Mary O'Brien, principally in *The Politics of Reproduction*, this thesis extends the original questions by exploring the meaning of maternal embodiment within the theoretical and structural creations of Western thought.

The first chapter outlines the contemporary debate among several feminist writers regarding the place of difference in feminist theorizing. Each of these authors is particularly concerned with the dualistic encoding of Western society that has relegated woman to the periphery of meaning-making. The analysis reveals that, from differing standpoints,

motherhood emerges in their work as the inscribed and fundamentally subverted foundation of patriarchal ethics.

In chapter two, the thesis details Mary O'Brien's philosophy of birth as itself a dialectical encounter with the traditional themes and methodologies of masculine theory construction. The analysis reveals how Mary O'Brien retrieves a universal experience as a theoretical and concrete basis for feminism without rendering it static and resistant to change. O'Brien reworks some of the seminal concepts of philosophy and ethics in order to validate the material experiences with which women are variously familiar.

The third chapter compares each feminist account with Mary O'Brien's work, drawing on strengths and weaknesses and on the complementary links that can be deduced. The use of predecessor theory, the tension between material existence and abstraction, and the feminist quest for subjecthood and autonomy feature prominently in this dialectical encounter.

Finally, chapter four compares a traditionally inspired "theology of the body" by Benedict Ashley with feminist theological views of embodiment offered by Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill. Harrison and Cahill, it is revealed, bridge Ashley's quest to theologize embodied existence with Mary O'Brien's affirmation of birth as a resource for profound ethical insight. The thesis also draws out important links between Mary O'Brien's understanding of maternity and the clarion wisdom of feminist theological ethics.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with making a specific kind of connection between theological ethics and contemporary feminism. The link I propose to make has to do with the body - more particularly, the significance of the female body in the formation of a pervasively dualist world. In making this link, I point to the gap between mind and body, to the utter lack of interaction between the two, which is a hallmark of the patriarchal imagination. Consequently, I abandon the usual imagery connected with women's bodies. That is, I am not interested in the female body as a passive or lower-order organism, as a metaphor, a commodity or a phenomenological lack - the predominant imagery of Western philosophies. I note that in conventional philosophy and theology, it is rare to encounter a virtuous *and* corporeal femininity. Some contemporary feminist theory suggests that this deficiency evolved as a solution to a specific vulnerability in the collective male psyche. According to this theory, men are in fear of female power.

If there is such a thing as a generalized masculine fear, its impact depends upon how a tradition of male observers has perceived the female body in its interaction with other bodies and with the natural world. It rests on the meaning of "female power" to legions of philosophers who were not only male, but often clerical and cloistered. From my own experience, I can testify to an enduring consciousness of female power in my world revealed

in the strength, familiarity, and pleasure brought on by the presence of women around me. It is edifying to compare this sensuousness within the notion of power with masculine versions of the word.

I am surprised by the scarcity of supportive portrayals of women throughout the tradition of philosophy. At the same time, I am aware that as postwar feminism unfolded in North America, the idea of theorizing the female body in genres other than that of the self-help field was rejected. As feminists strove to avoid the equation of femaleness with embodiment, they inadvertently participated in the mindset that sustains the lesser value of things feminine.

The postwar feminist movement broadly attacked the male privilege of social institutions as an intentional mechanism for keeping women less powerful than men. Early critique focussed on dualism as a product of masculine perception and the guarantor of that privilege. Mobilized by issues such as workplace inequality, the feminization of poverty, and increased violence against women, feminists temporarily united in one voice challenging male supremacy. As that voice stratified into specific discourses, however, feminists salvaged the role of the body from the periphery of analysis and placed it at the centre.

I am grateful to three feminist philosophers for rewarding my rudimentary intuitions about female power with provocative theory. First, back in 1960, Valerie Saiving began a then-radical essay with the statements, "I am a student of theology; I am also a woman."¹

¹ See Valerie SAIVING, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, eds. Carol P. CHRIST and Judith PLASKOW (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 25-42. The article originally appeared in *The Journal of Religion* (April 1960).

Today the comparison no longer invokes an oxymoron. In the essay, however, Saiving developed the observation that theology presented masculine perspectives as universal truths. She was troubled by philosophical hypocrisy and bias, and by the recognition that women needed to demand full personhood within the discourses of theology. Saiving offered an additional claim that lingered with me for years before I would find a complementary analysis. It was the insight that a kind of restlessness or uncertainty is a universal precondition of male creativity.

Second, I give credit to the collection of essays compiled by Rosemary Radford Ruether in a 1974 book entitled *Religion and Sexism*.² Though I studied these essays in a night class at Concordia University in Montreal, I am most influenced by the *personal* impact they had. Nothing in my religious background prepared me for the revelations of misogyny buttressing the success of the Christian Church through the ages. During that time in my life, many of my convictions, religious and otherwise, were exposed as by-products of masculine ideology and thus as subtle forms of male violence I imposed on myself. Third, I discovered the feminist praxis of Mary O'Brien. In the late 1970s, O'Brien hypothesized that the realities of maternal and paternal embodiment bear directly, but not irreversibly, on the dualist structure of society. O'Brien's analysis of difference, like no other I had read, seemed to break through masculine abstraction with refreshing explicitness. In her work, I recognized a way to explore intimacy and disunity as abstract alternates of embodied forms. Form and concept are inseparable according to O'Brien's thesis, and the process of human

² Rosemary Radford RUETHER, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

reproduction is said to ground certain male responses. O'Brien celebrates female reproductive power in the context of themes and goals reflected upon in masculine philosophy. This method clearly honours the predecessors while at the same time exposing the inherent flaw in accepting a partial truth as all that can be or needs to be said.

Mary O'Brien's work has forced feminist theory to grapple with the reality that only women give birth. The birth experience touches every human life, but it is accomplished by a woman, and this potential, according to O'Brien, influences how every female person constructs her identity. In contrast to the abundance of psychoanalytic analysis of women's bodies throughout the seventies and eighties, O'Brien's work is grounded in political and ethical vision. Her thesis rejects the concept of birth as a terrifying, traumatizing rupture and separation experience. Instead, O'Brien emphasizes the continuity between mother and infant as a seminal relationship which is richly anticipated in female consciousness.

In addition to the academic influences, my commitment to feminism also obliges me to reflect on experience as I trace the roots of my inspiration to write about feminist theological ethics. My first experience of giving birth, for example, though profound and joyous, is marked by a sobering validation of the medical appropriation of birth: prominent in the photograph of my firstborn laid out on my abdomen is my left arm bound tightly at my side in a thick, buckled leather strap. The objective was to prevent my hands from touching and contaminating the sterile drape across my body. Yet the suggestion that the mother's body, having laboured and given birth, is a contaminant has ancient roots and continues to impress me with its passive violence.

In my professional life, I have been witness to violence against women which is far

from passive. The women who became my clients in a police-based victim crisis unit were often subjected to severe and barbarous forms of aggression. Violence against women is escalating in Canada with the result that thousands of women each year suffer costly emotional and bodily harm, or are killed by their partners. The origins of such male violence are complicated, but they reveal a potential for imaginative cruelty woven through history, I suspect, as inventions of the celebrated will toward power.

Method and Overview

In order to draw out the significance of Mary O'Brien's theory, I place it in dialogue with some major feminist contributions to the literature on motherhood. With the exception of Adrienne Rich's work, these contributions rely on prestigious masculine accounts of the Mother and maternal experience. The more literary approach taken by Adrienne Rich appeals to a variety of discourses and to her repository of personal experiences, which sharply contrasted with the suburban ideology of the postwar landscape. Each chosen author had a substantial following and generated a lasting impact on the future directions of feminist thought.

The questions that I pose in my analysis of each author are conditioned by a curiosity about the way in which difference, specifically that of the female reproductive capability, might be emancipating to women. I examine whether such a biological capacity can be understood from an ethical perspective without slipping into moral superiority or prescriptiveness. The question breaks down into integral steps. For example, what are some of the traditional notions about maternity and birth? How does the female body figure in

these images? What is said of the male body in relation to biological reproduction? What relationship exists between patriarchal ethics and real structures in society? What are the implications of this relationship for women and men? What requires transformation, and what is actually transformable? Finally, how does this exercise translate into ethical and theological claims?

As I proceed with this analysis, there are related issues which I do not take up because they are beyond the scope of the present inquiry. I do not, for example, discuss adoptive or lesbian mothering, or motherhood which is accomplished through reproductive technologies. The lack of cross-cultural analysis here is due not only to length restriction, but also to my aim to be faithful to O'Brien's analytical format with the expectation that my thesis raises questions for later exploration of these and other themes. Moreover, I hypothesize that there is a thematic factor of universality in woman's birth experience. I make no grand distinction between "feminine" and "female," and at times I make use of the pronoun "we" as a claim of ownership of the issues and impacts related to women's lives. I concede that change has begun to take place with respect to issues such as childbirth practices and the dignity of the private realm. At the same time, I write from a Canadian perspective that is impacted by the realization that in Canada women were not "persons" until 1929. Canadian feminism, I believe, is still in a hunger stage. Finally, as I explore O'Brien's understanding of motherhood and power, I am mindful and respectful of a horizon of human choices and lifestyles, many of which do not include parenting at all.

In Chapter One, I examine the rise of feminism in North America after the second world war. Specific categories emerged as feminist thought matured and as many feminists

shifted from the struggle for equality towards a concern for difference issues. From among those feminists I discuss four perspectives, outlining the main questions, methods of analysis and distinctive views on motherhood. Each discussion deals with the significance of maternal relations, and demonstrates the development of feminist thought within previously male-dominated genres. In various ways, each account also clarifies a non-traditional - not always optimistic - relationship between maternity/materiality and female ontology. My second chapter deals exclusively with Mary O'Brien's theory of birth and reproductive consciousness as it is presented in *The Politics of Reproduction*. I examine the foundations of the work, beginning with O'Brien's observation of the social meaning of birth in working class Glasgow in the 1950s and continuing through her claim, ten years later, that the feminist movement lacked recognition of a distinctively female power. O'Brien noted that the feminism of the 1970s had failed to theorize reproductive process as a central aspect of women's lives.

A focal point of Mary O'Brien's theory is the concept of "potency," which is derived from Greek philosophy. Throughout the canon of philosophy and, later, theology, potency was a guarded masculine virtue signifying martial, intellectual and sexual power. The unattainable power to give birth, on the other hand, was "other," mysterious and fearsome. O'Brien suggests that, as man discovered his role in biological reproduction, the significance of paternity became a stronghold over cultural interpretation in general. It co-opted the power of the Mother and, according to O'Brien, made its way into virtually every social structure.

In this chapter, I therefore detail Mary O'Brien's development of the dialectics of

reproduction. In addition to the revision of Hegel and Marx made possible by the theory, I also outline the implications of reproductive consciousness for apprehending concepts such as freedom, continuity, temporality and creativity. From the concept of man the creator to the abstract male Father in Christian doctrine, I examine O'Brien's hypothesis that, in philosophical tradition, issues arising from "lower-order" bodily need and human continuity are exiled to the realm of ahistorical, dualist ontology. O'Brien reverses the negative encoding of female corporeality by describing the largely untapped epistemological and ontological resources of birth experience.

Also in this chapter, I present some critical accounts of Mary O'Brien's work, followed by responses to those critiques. For example, finding the concept of reproduction narrow and confining, some feminists believe that O'Brien inadvertently privileges the male potency principle. Yet O'Brien points out that most women give birth at some time in their lives, and most are adequate mothers. To neglect or abstract this reality is indeed to abandon women to a masculine economy of meaning. On the other hand, a feminist perspective on birth, opposing the patriarchal gaze, contextualizes the experience in terms of the mother's powers and struggles.

In Chapter Three I set up a dialogue between Mary O'Brien and each of the four feminist writers presented in the first chapter. I show how, in the light of O'Brien's theory, the work of Simone de Beauvoir fails to overcome the deficiency imputed to women in existentialist thought. Alienated from her true self by biological factors, de Beauvoir perceives woman's freedom in nothing less than a transcendence of the flesh. Without male theory to guide this transcendence, woman's difference is a pessimistic reality. Thus, de

Beauvoir's uncritical acceptance of masculine existentialism contrasts with O'Brien's revisionist approach to classic methods. On the other hand, Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich share the presupposition that patriarchy is rooted in the historical moment of male recognition of paternity. I discuss the ways in which the authors denounce reliance on the abstract to sufficiently describe a truly human world. Instead, my analysis clarifies their shared aim to politicize real, everyday maternal experience as a foil to patriarchy's all-corrrupt or dreamy representations of maternity. Thus, O'Brien and Rich employ different methods to unpack similarly resourceful interpretations of difference.

The dialogue between Nancy Chodorow and Mary O'Brien focusses on how they each understand the relationship between embodied relations and psychodynamic responses. Chodorow develops a materialist psychology which, based on Freudian theory, explains the repetition of social dualism through internalization processes. In her account of motherhood, Chodorow omits pre-birth experience and concentrates on Western post-industrial mother-infant interaction. In contrast to O'Brien, Chodorow extrapolates a primal bond from this relationship alone, examining neither the gestational experience of mother and fetus nor man's role in problematizing the power of the mother.

Thus, O'Brien and Chodorow present materialist views which differ as to the meaning of the "material base" that fosters social identity. The repeatability of male and female personality formation relates to the social polarization of "public" and "private," according to Chodorow. There is no inherent struggle in this dualism, no conflict to explain the classic creation of worlds male and female in most known societies. In my comparison of the authors' accounts, I show how Chodorow's inattention to biology results in an

unconvincing materialist viewpoint. On the other hand, Mary O'Brien's notion of patriarchy as an edifice grounded by an exiled paternal body connects cognitive and embodied experience with transformative potential. Finally, my analysis reveals how Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray make use of predecessor theories in similar ways. They "suspend" female subjectivity over (in the mirror of) masculine theory and symbolism in order to expose the inadequacy of man's meaning system to reflect upon women's experiences. According to Irigaray, the meaning of sexual difference in the works of Freud and Lacan is sustained by a glaring repression of that ontological "other" which is maternal. Like O'Brien, Irigaray normalizes this "maternal" as originary, creative and autonomous. In privileging motherhood, however, woman is not reduced to it as her only access to creativity. Rather, woman-defined maternity refuses man the chance to reimpose himself within its definition by rooting out the implicit matricide in the patriarchal definition.

For both Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray, difference harbours a powerful maternal which lies dormant in the tradition of philosophy. Both women remind us that the masculine maternal is encoded as a lack, a visible failure of the flesh to submit to a phallic or transcended economy of meaning. They show how the female body, repressed and inarticulate within the orientation of male theory, sustains the fiction of man as Origin. The repressed feminine is moreover the means by which woman is held to man's ontological and epistemological standards. Given no life in the *representation* of political and psychological worlds, the maternal exists as a material substructure renewing flesh without meaning.

O'Brien and Irigaray believe that feminist theory needs to claim, rather than avoid, maternal difference. The debt owed by masculine philosophy to maternity is enormous.

O'Brien points out that man's quest for existential unity is credible only insofar as the ontology of unity expressed in the female process of birth is utterly denied. Irigaray is critical of the psychoanalytical view that posits antagonism and struggle between mother and fetus. Making the mother ontologically incommensurate with her infant, Irigaray shows, is the remnant of a meaning system thought up by trespassers who lack a sensory experience of the subject beyond detached vision. According to both authors, the gap that man experiences as an outsider to pregnancy and birth is reified in social and ethical codes that marginalize mothers and inexhaustibly renew images of men as creators.

The fourth chapter unfolds in four steps. First, I examine the writing of Benedict Ashley as an attempt, from within mainstream theology, to produce a theology of the body. Ashley is critical of the dualism that has filtered through Greek philosophy to present day theological works. He claims that the biblical message is not meant to be static; instead, history and scripture have a fluid relationship. Ashley proposes a theology of the body as a way of illustrating the inseparability of beingness and embodied existence. This is a project, I believe, which is close to the heart of Mary O'Brien's approach to the philosophical issue of unity.

As I analyse Ashley's theology of the body in the second step, however, I note that his adherence to abstract theological concepts encumbers the claim that history and scripture are dynamically linked. The singular aim to correct an omission of embodied reality, moreover, misses the more problematic distortion of female bodiliness that prevails throughout theological discourse. Significantly, I point out, Ashley does not recognize the prior gender struggle rooted in male consciousness which has validated a theological

transformation of birth to female powerlessness.

Next I present the insights of feminist theologians who support the need to theologize embodiment while at the same time recognizing that subversion of the female body materializes in moral theology as persistent dualism. In Beverly Wildung Harrison's work, I draw out the significance of women's experiences of self and the status of these experiences in social and theological contexts. The centrality of personhood in Harrison's writing is consistent with the notion of gender as a moral project, a notion vital to the theory of Lisa Sowle Cahill. Embodied existence is critical to judgment and moral choice, according to Cahill. Consequently, uniquely female sexual and maternal experience must be realistically integrated into theological discourse.

While the authors I have selected share the goal of elevating embodiment to a place of privilege in ethics, I show how the feminist theological perspective (of Harrison and Cahill) resonates with O'Brien's philosophy to most effectively discredit the ontology of otherness attached to woman in theological texts. Women's embodiment is particular embodiment, the authors reveal; it cannot be assimilated into accounts of male embodiment. Neither can it be left to the appetites of dualism and misogyny which have given moral form to theological opinion in the past. I conclude that Mary O'Brien speaks clearly to the issue of woman as not-man, of mother as critically different from both patriarchal Mother and Father. O'Brien's theory accounts for the historical-political drive to subvert the powerful difference of maternity, and to claim the life-force as masculine. Feminist theology is now left with the task of going beneath the "safe" projects of personhood to explicitly theologize the female claim on creation.

Finally, this thesis is not motivated by a guiding hypothesis, but rather by a series of insights regarding the implications of Mary O'Brien's theory as I worked with it. Early on in my research, for example, I recognized the potential of dialectical analysis, as applied by O'Brien, to provide resources for gender-value questions arising from a variety of contexts. With the completion of each chapter, creative applications of O'Brien's thought elaborating on the notion of unity became increasingly plausible. Her "philosophy of birth" outlined ontological, epistemological and ethical implications of male supremacy, I noted. The limits placed on the female horizon of possibility clearly embodied personhood and spiritual issues.

It was my early impression, therefore, that Mary O'Brien's theory contributes to the literature about motherhood by providing a heuristic for dissolving dualisms and for thinking about value in terms of the materiality of human life and the female claim on its possibility. I observed that her creative use of dialectical analysis enabled her theory to sidestep both essentialism and unrealistic universalization and is a valuable strategy for feminist research. Moreover, O'Brien's conviction that male-female apartheid is unworkable and that her efforts constitute an ethics of integration led me gradually to the core of O'Brien's insight: sexual difference *is* the locus of agency and the condition of possibility for transformation in human relations.

Taking this discovery to theological "heights," I was interested in exploring how *The Politics of Reproduction* might contribute to a theology of motherhood by correlating O'Brien's regard for unity and for the quality of the human future with theological concepts. Though O'Brien's work contributes to theological reflection in a number of ways, I examine its resonance with the doctrine of incarnation. It became clear to me that Mary O'Brien

advances *feminist* theological research by reflecting the Christian message of incarnation explicitly on women's embodied experiences.

CHAPTER ONE
FEMINISM, DIFFERENCE THEORY, AND MOTHERHOOD:
A SELECTIVE OVERVIEW

Introduction

In this first chapter, I present an overview of the emergence of feminism in North America with some specific questions and observations in mind. I am interested, for example, in the postwar appearance of feminism in Europe, and in how this particular literature burgeoned into a multifaceted political movement on the North American continent. I note that in the span of thirty-five years, a timeline represented by the authors I have selected, feminist critique produced sophisticated analyses of women's lives in the fields of philosophy, science, history, theology, and so on. During that time, the singular theme of women's equality was also reevaluated by feminists in terms of its adequacy to express the emancipation and autonomy of women.

Women's equality was briefly the all-encompassing feminist cause. Gradually, however, zeal for equality was sidelined by a new impulse in feminism concerned with the practical importance of women's difference from men. Cognitive, emotional and spiritual differences were drawn upon as acceptably different, decidedly not-male. Yet as the theme of physical difference infiltrated the discourse, many feminists denied its relevance and

refused to address it in a fear of biologism. Ultimately in this thesis I will discuss Mary O'Brien's claim that while physical birth is concretely and ethically significant to a deeper understanding of unity between the sexes, this need not imply a biological determinism. But first I examine O'Brien's peers on the subject of motherhood and how they situate it within the feminist debates.

The authors I have selected represent influential moments in the difference discourse. For example, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* applies an existentialist framework to the relationship between man and woman. Among the topics she discusses, Beauvoir includes the dynamics of physical life and motherhood, and hence provides an early feminist philosophical perspective. As I will repeat in my discussion of de Beauvoir's work, hers does not constitute difference theory as such, but it capitalizes on difference explicitly by holding woman to man's definitions and destiny.

My inclusion of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* is intended to explore radical difference theory produced in the budding stages of American lesbian feminism. Rich examines a variety of images of the mother which rely on deep-rooted, traditional misogyny. At the same time, she weaves in personal experiences - a fact which disconcerted many literary critics. Yet *Of Woman Born* continues to be honoured as a complicated and intelligent portrayal of motherhood. The book strongly advocates a difference approach grounded in notions of the female body as autonomous and creative. It is ultimately pessimistic about the potential for unity between women and men.

I selected *The Reproduction of Mothering* by Nancy Chodorow as a compelling systematic approach to motherhood and the ability to nurture. Chodorow continues to be

cited for this work, even though much of its Freudian base has been dismantled. As a category in *Reproduction*, physicality is exchanged for the notion of physical proximity. Chodorow claims that the socialization of gendered psychological experience accounts for the desire to mother. According to this theory, then, mothering is a psychological construction which has little to do with the act of birth itself. There is no analysis of embodied experience, and this permits Chodorow to present difference in clinical and even impermanent terms.

Finally, Luce Irigaray's work, particularly *This Sex Which Is Not One*, is an analysis of difference which, since publication in North America, has enjoyed a large academic following. Irigaray grounds her thesis in female embodied experience so as to deconstruct, principally, the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. Irigaray devises the strategy of "performance" and of "mimicry" to undermine the universality of masculine perspective. She does this by displacing the male gaze, by making woman the subject of male theory and analyzing the incongruencies of this position. Fundamentally, *This Sex* examines the ethical structure of language and the correspondence of that structure to the male body. Irigaray intends to give the female body over to its distinct representation by overmiming masculine encoding and objectifying the phallic origins of language. Here we see the importance of physical existence to the creation of meaning.

Feminist Theory and the Development of Difference Perspectives

Feminism through history has no legacy. There has been no reflection across the centuries on the themes of feminist philosophy. Feminism produced no system-builders and

few luminaries, and it lacked authority to encode culture. We know, however, that Western feminism constituted a vast dispersion of thinkers whose rich thought was left out of history's narrative.¹ There is a concerted effort to return to it, notably among philosophers, historians, and theologians who speak of excavating the *feminine* and the *feminist* past. This distinction is important because it separates the "male imaginary" of Western culture, meaning its base and content, from the brief diversions of feminist resistance. By "feminine," I mean something which men have always controlled: women's socialized experience, what the culture tells women they are experiencing. By "feminist," I mean a response to the feminine - women's questioning of the conditions of social experience from factors exterior to the mode of their internalization.²

We have understood the world through meanings conceived on the foundation of human sexual difference. In the Western philosophical tradition, for example, sexed bodies are converted to meanings related to an unchallenged legitimation of things male. Maleness is the standard for the culture's system of symbols, and for the ethical life in which desires, capacities and accomplishments are valued. Increasingly, feminists are exploring the possibilities of female desire and experience through values that disrupt the political status

¹ Gerda Lerner, the author of eight books in women's history, has chronicled - without masculine periodization - women's struggle under patriarchal thought. See in particular her two volumes: LERNER, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Joan KELLY, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

² I am indebted to my former professor Pamela Dickey Young for these definitions. See, in particular, YOUNG, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 49-67.

quo. They seek, among other things, to subvert the existing economy of expression in normative discourse by exposing the content as dismissive of women. Realizing the goal means countering false mediation of women's bodies and minds with a "different" philosophy. It means separating women's experience from its ideological forms and uncovering political fictions which have fed the cultural symbolism.

Difference feminism, as distinguished from equality feminism, makes use of methodologies that valorize female subjectivity. Difference feminists do not seek one explanation of female experience, but they agree on the notion of female autonomy to the extent that original female difference is an a priori matrix of experiences for measuring and understanding the world. This means that difference precedes the juridical principle of equality and recognizes in the originary forms of being - woman and man - valid autonomous interpretations.³

But difference feminism has not always worked smoothly for women's independence. In both Canada and the United States, nineteenth century maternal feminism was a form of feminism that affirmed women's nurturant qualities as publicly, especially politically, useful. The achievements of maternal feminism were limited, however, because the politicization of women's authority *as mothers* also worked to strengthen a male-defined ideology of

³ In my mind one of the best analyses of a developing collective consciousness of difference is The MILAN WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE COLLECTIVE, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). See in particular the introduction by Teresa DE LAURETIS, "The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: An Introductory Essay," 1-21. See also chapter four (untitled).

motherhood.⁴ In their research on maternal experience, difference feminists today try to negotiate an integrated subject in the face of inadequate male-defined images of mothers, and of the imploding differences that constitute feminism itself.

This chapter deals with the emergence of difference theory in terms of motherhood - in particular, with the reciprocal relationship which began to develop between theoretical feminism and concrete maternal experience. A middle moment here is the reappearance of feminism itself. The discussion begins, therefore, in the "double ambience" of postwar European intellectualism, and American modernism and domesticity. The former, specifically out of France, sparked an influential form of feminism for which the American fifties were unprepared. But by the sixties, stability and optimism in America collapsed into a political atmosphere of distrust toward institutions and their networks. Referred to as the "culture of confrontation,"⁵ it persisted in becoming the radically oriented, plural voice of postmodernism. Postmodernism and feminism should be seen as distinct rebellions, but ones which share a hostility toward mass culture and a profound critique of power. A feminist *zeitgeist*, identifiable by the 1970s, abandoned domestic elements but remained allied with radical social and intellectual projects. The postwar development of feminism

⁴ See LERNER, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, Chapter Six, "Authorization Through Motherhood," 16-37. In Canada a feminism which affirmed women's nurturant qualities as politically significant is described in Linda KEALEY, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1979). See also the developing themes within the women's movement in Canada in Micheline DUMONT, *The Women's Movement: Then and Now*, in the *Feminist Perspectives* series, no. 5b (Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, 1986).

⁵ The term belongs to Andreas Huyssen, whose study of the evolution of postmodernism is vast. See, as one example, HUYSSSEN, "Mapping the Postmodern," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. NICHOLSON (New York: Routledge, 1990), 234-77.

received a great deal of inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir. Growing steadily in popularity, de Beauvoir's connection of a feminist movement with the notion of women's equality took shape in North America as equal rights feminism. Women's emancipation was politicized in terms of woman as man's equal. Categories remained monolithic, so that difference, for more than a decade, referred to that between women and men. There was no vision of the prospective problems for feminist theory that women's differences from one another might raise. But this broad stance also precipitated research on women's traditional roles and on the accepted theories about them. By the 1980s feminism had its own theories of material experience which dismantled great portions of psychoanalytic and materialist thought.

The Second Sex,⁶ which was written more than thirty years before the appearance of difference theories, inaugurated new directions and methods for feminism. In this unprecedented work, de Beauvoir interpreted male *versus* female existence, and drew specifically on the "problem" motherhood posed for woman's transcendence. De Beauvoir's application of an existentialist framework opened new possibilities for thinking like a feminist and also for reflecting on what constituted an appropriate analytic foundation. As I have already suggested, her theory is not properly a difference theory, but it exerted critical influence toward the inception of such theories. In the manner of what some feminists have

⁶ Simone DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. PARSHLEY (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), hereafter cited as *Second*. The original edition comprises two volumes: *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, *Les faits et les mythes*; vol. 2, *L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

called the "Beauvoirian drama,"⁷ women were presented with a scholarly analysis of their experience, but at the same time with an awakening to the conflicts inherent in thinking-like-a-man through the question of women's emancipation.

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*, 1949

The publication and translation of *The Second Sex* marked out radical directions. Simone de Beauvoir's insights about women under patriarchy, developed within an existential framework, produced the first landmark philosophy on female existence.⁸ A major influence was Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenology, particularly his *Being and Nothingness*.⁹ Yet de Beauvoir's unique situation - a woman at the centre of French intellectualism in the 1940s - inspired an original use for the existential context. This originality, we shall see, was not an entirely conscious effort. De Beauvoir's writing in *The Second Sex* combines an air of self-confidence with intermittent hints of uncertainty and marginality, her own condition among France's intellectual elite. Surrounded by masculine

⁷ The phrase is by Meredith W. Michaels. See MICHAELS, "Other Mothers: Toward an Ethic of Postmaternal Practice," *Hypatia* 11 (spring 1996): 57. Michaels uses it in the context of de Beauvoir's take on pregnancy as both a "part-of" and a parasitic experience. Others have discussed the internal ambivalence in terms of the drama in her writing.

⁸ Though de Beauvoir is most often described as the original feminist philosopher of modernity, she denied the label of "philosopher," referring to herself instead as a "literary writer." See Margaret A. SIMONS, "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir," in *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, eds. Nancy FRASER and Sandra Lee BARTKY (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 27.

⁹ Jean-Paul SARTRE, *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). In translation the book is called *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. BARNES (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966).

intellect, she observed a universal "feminine." But she recognized that feminine existed under patriarchy and therefore did not accept the universalization of the masculine. Though de Beauvoir was not always clear about the relationship between the biological, the social, and the psychological, both her writing and her life indicate an awareness of the conflicts that arise from social construction.¹⁰

The main focus of *The Second Sex* is the nature of femaleness - specifically, why the human female is compelled to assume the status of "other." In her introduction, de Beauvoir calls her perspective "existentialist ethics," ethics in which existence is a project of expansion into an indefinitely open horizon.¹¹ But in the situation of women, their secondary status limits them to immanence and to an obstructed capacity to transcend. Women in male-dominated societies therefore lack freedom, and that lack is exploited in patriarchal myths of femininity.

De Beauvoir's greatest condemnation is of patriarchal mythologies which, misrepresenting what is, strike at the freedom to shape one's life. Women who learn to act through imposed rules and definitions (and this means all women) are slavish to a concept of themselves which is designed by men. The difference between women and men is a constructed dichotomy which women have tried to overcome with artificial solidarity, de

¹⁰ See Toril MOI, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 67-68. See also Wittig's essay noted by Moi: Monique WITTIG, "The Mark of Gender," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. MILLER (New York: Columbia, 1987), 63-73.

¹¹ DE BEAUVOIR, *Second*, xxxiii.

Beauvoir's imitative "counter-universe."¹² This gives women access to a dubious freedom, not the *freedom-to* which grounds masculine ethics. Thus, it is man who can aspire to consistent destiny, while woman is entirely contingent.¹³

Before I look at de Beauvoir on motherhood, it is important to examine how she employs existential concepts and the notion of social construction together in the analysis of woman. With Sartre she maintains that existence precedes essence and that a mind/body dualism is inconsistent with an ontology shaped from human freedom.¹⁴ The human condition, to be fully actuated, is a perpetual expansion beyond the self. Thus, humans are constituted and determined by free acts and not by fixed elements such as biology.¹⁵ The human who fails to strive for a destiny beyond the self, who chooses non-transcendence, remains in the realm of facticity or immanence; she or he is in *bad faith*.

But de Beauvoir finds a flaw, the problem of oppression, and she tries to work existentialism around it. Her analysis of a "female condition" now attempts to combine the explanatory power of existentialism with an awareness of the social structures that bear heavily on consciousness and action. Believing she is navigating on the two levels of analysis simultaneously, de Beauvoir tries to investigate an original question: why is the

¹² Ibid., 664. De Beauvoir's counter-universe has only negative connotations. Later, when I take up Luce Irigaray's mimesis, we see imitation as a positive strategy.

¹³ The word "contingent," which de Beauvoir frequently uses, refers to her claim that woman is passive, dependent, and ever-revealing her emergence "...from the flank of the first male." Ibid., 159.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵ Ibid., xxxiii, 41.

"otherness" of woman not reciprocated?

Of the two formulations, existential thought and social constructionism, de Beauvoir clings to the former. In my opinion, she surrenders to its masculine frame of reference and this creates some puzzling conclusions about "oppressed" women: "Woman, like man, *is* her body; but her body is something other than herself."¹⁶ In several passages de Beauvoir points to the female as "victim of the species";¹⁷ as non-creator of value;¹⁸ as closer to animality than the male;¹⁹ as enslaved without an independent subjectivity.²⁰

Near the end of her chapter on biology de Beauvoir offers the explanation she attempts to promote throughout the book. Woman's physical weakness must be factored in with "existentialist, economic, and moral considerations"; together, they account for her limited grasp of the world.²¹ Conversely, if a woman's status is other than secondary and existentially confined, it is because social conditions have come together for her such that she can choose authentic existence. De Beauvoir believes that a "normal" female existence is swallowed up in doing for others, usually in motherhood, and that this selfless life represents a moral flaw.²²

¹⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷ For example, see *ibid.*, 23, 34, 41, 59, 73, 556.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-2, 554.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

²² *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

I submit that de Beauvoir creates an incongruity between existential moral existence and the never-eliminated reality of social oppression. As the weaker "situation,"²³ the female body is located in the context of patriarchy, and existentialism, feminists have shown, depends upon the patriarchy.²⁴ De Beauvoir is not in a position to recognize this because her method conflates nature and "bad faith." Woman is the incubator of life, both passive and prey to natural forces that contradict freedom. But if a woman overcomes the conditions that condemn her to the function (not activity) of childbearing,²⁵ she participates in creative existence devoted to real projects. The framework of analysis contains the presupposition of its result: the female capacity to gestate and give birth wipes out woman's freedom-to-be. Otherness is an existential category, but difference, informing who is "other," is biological.

De Beauvoir's Analysis of Motherhood

It is perhaps not surprising that de Beauvoir collates her themes so that the opening

²³ In referring to the body as a situation, de Beauvoir is insisting that it is not a *thing*. Her purpose is to avoid static notions because, following Sartre and others, "[the body] is the instrument of our grasp upon the world." Beauvoir does not follow up on the fluidity of this image, however. She goes on to describe woman as weak, fragile, unstable and out of control. We can conclude, in fact, that de Beauvoir's woman displays *thingness*; she is rigid in her mediation of the world around her. See *ibid.*, 38.

²⁴ See, for example, the work of Somer Brodrigg which discusses terms such as "nothingness" and "substance" as creations of a masculine orientation: BRODRIGG, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1992), in particular, Chapter 2, "Nothingness and De/generation," 23-38. Brodrigg's critique of de Beauvoir in the same book is of interest. See pp.132-37.

²⁵ DE BEAUVOIR, *Second*, 71.

ten pages of her chapter entitled "The Mother" deal with contraception and abortion.²⁶ For de Beauvoir, motherhood is a state of humiliating service to the species. The mother (even one who strongly desires a baby) is filled with disgust, conflict, and hostility. This is the source of neurotic symptoms such as vomiting or food cravings which pacify her with attention.²⁷ The pregnant body gives only the appearance of creativity and transcendence. But in reality, the mother-to-be is aware of herself as overwhelmed by function and alienated from the creativity that builds culture. By contrast, Man - the "man of action" and the "artisan" - is the true existent because his creative acts originate in liberty.²⁸

Childbirth in de Beauvoir's thought resembles Sartre's nothingness. The perpetual conflict between the mother's ego and the "colloidal" child, a conflict which has threatened her ego with death, culminates in the small death of birth. De Beauvoir claims that a kind of demise of the mother (foreshadowed in the swelling of her abdomen) is finalized in the fatal spaces of Hegelian separation from the newborn. In childbirth, therefore, Hegelian conflict between the species and the individual is never more acute, never darker.²⁹

Throughout de Beauvoir's account, the child possesses no value until "he" steps into the world and transcends mindless repetition in Existence.³⁰ This existence will be justified

²⁶ Ibid., 540-50.

²⁷ Ibid., 556-58.

²⁸ Ibid., 553-54.

²⁹ Ibid., 555-56.

³⁰ Ibid., 72, 573. I note that de Beauvoir occasionally capitalizes a word for emphasis. Thus "existence" is capitalized here, as are "life," "other," "maternity," and many other words throughout *The Second Sex*.

by acts that relate to embodiment only insofar as the body is an instrument for advancing a project. The young child who is yet to assert (his) free being offers no value. If a boy, however, he will be primed to be a leader and a hero. The mother is obligated to devote herself to nurturing the future Man whose world in turn excludes her. In other words, even as the mother (passively) fulfills the status of Other to her husband, she (actively) prepares for the time when she will be Other to her offspring. Mothers, de Beauvoir observes, possess the universe vicariously, through their sons, and it is in this way alone they "take back" and overcome them.³¹

Because transcendence of the body and risk are crucial to existential authenticity, the boy satisfactorily meets the requirements of freedom; this is presupposed. The mother has a different relationship with her daughter. Though some women are content to give birth to girls, most live self-pity and hatred of the feminine condition through them. Accordingly, they recreate the conditions under which they have suffered for being inferior. The daughter, de Beauvoir claims, is her mother's alter-ego. Her maturation and quest for independence invoke resentment; if she achieves independence she has become Other. All mothers, hostile or loving, experience their hopes dashed by the prospect of a daughter's autonomy.³²

De Beauvoir is interested in "real" choice, which leads away from facticity and contingency to "real" creativity. Biology does not create destiny, she insists, and existential value cannot be assigned to biological mothers. Motherhood has to do with flawed freedom

³¹ Ibid., 576-77.

³² Ibid., 577-79.

because the pregnant body is constrained to perishables like vegetation and sod.³³ It gives life like any other animal but is superior in that it does not risk in taking it.³⁴ Alienation is so powerful in de Beauvoir's thought that if life is a competition of egos, the giving of life is annihilating to the giver. The mind-and-body experience of birth (for both parties) becomes, in her analysis, a mechanism for repeating an abstract event.

The conditions in which women live, de Beauvoir claims, preclude them from visibility and cultural participation. At the same time, woman's specificity is marked by the significance and value which culture (existentialism) places on her body. These are her themes. But later she writes, "Nothing is rarer than the mother who sincerely respects the human person in her child" ³⁵ Thus, motherhood, a suffocating other-directedness, is itself the condition of self-absorption, and mothers do not *experience* their children. In de Beauvoir's ontology, then, the mother sees her infant as one who participates in her immanence, and one whose own value will be given in the public realm. But it becomes clearer why she claims that the woman who escapes motherhood escapes being party to the stagnation of culture: while femininity "wars" against independence, and maternity is the reverse of liberty, "The intellectual knows that she is offering herself, she knows that she

³³ De Beauvoir's existentialism joins the patristic notion of fallenness in the pregnant state. "The mother-to-be," she writes, "feels herself one with soil and sod, stock and root; when she drowns off, her sleep is like that of brooding chaos with worlds in ferment." See *ibid.*, 561.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 651.

is a conscious being, a subject"³⁶

After its translation, *The Second Sex* became the only researched text that women had for understanding feminine/ feminist experience. By the 1960s it was widely known and attracting critique.³⁷ By the late seventies, philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis, and theology were generating strong feminist analyses that carried forward the theme of motherhood.³⁸ Few would dispute that de Beauvoir's existential feminism ignited what would become a North American feminist movement. But her perspective on motherhood as a concern within philosophy is perhaps the most interesting detail. De Beauvoir constructs a barrier between intellectual life and maternity, identifying fully with the former. She goes on to hystericize the mother, attributing beast-like qualities to her, and subordinating her to the desires of both man and child. To my way of thinking, de Beauvoir's separateness from

³⁶ Ibid., 761.

³⁷ See Toril Moi's description of how *The Second Sex* was received in MOI, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 179-85.

³⁸ See, for example, Shulamith FIRESTONE, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1970). An interesting Canadian anthology is Margaret ANDERSEN, ed., *Mother Was Not A Person* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1972). Perhaps the most quoted literary analysis of motherhood is Adrienne RICH, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976). For early psychoanalytic studies, see Dorothy DINNERSTEIN, *The Mermaid and The Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976); Nancy CHODOROW, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Theological analyses of Mary and the cult of motherhood are found in Mary DALY, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Rosemary Radford RUETHER, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1974); RUETHER, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); RUETHER, *Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); Carol OCHS, *Behind the Sex of God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

non-intellectual privatized women figures importantly in her critique. Her gloomy mother is a product of the "good life" that has affirmed de Beauvoir's ability to intellectualize and evaluate. Not surprisingly, de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism dooms mothers to a process of repetition antithetical to action and meaning.

Adrienne Rich: *Of Woman Born*, 1976

In 1972, the poet Adrienne Rich began writing *Of Woman Born*³⁹ with the intent to expose the underlying ideology in Western notions of motherhood. Rich claimed that social institutions were falsely normative in their systematic exclusion of women's consciousness. A fundamental premise of her book is that the ongoing *renewal* of patriarchy depends on masculine constructions of maternal self-understanding. Consequently, only when these institutional controls over women's relationships with their children and with themselves are overthrown will the potential in the experience of motherhood begin to emerge.⁴⁰

Rich makes use of a literary-historical approach. As a method for feminist theory this approach diversifies the context in which patriarchal notions of the maternal body, selfhood, and power can be understood. The book begins with a description of the primitive struggle of consciousness between a mother's inner life and her child's ego demands.⁴¹ But

³⁹ Adrienne RICH, *Of Woman Born*, hereafter cited as *Of Woman*.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Foreword, 11-17. The literal definitions of motherhood as experience and as institution appear on p. 13: "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential - and all women - shall remain under male control."

⁴¹ Ibid., 21-33.

this angst, peculiar to motherhood, is not of an existential nature transcending social experience. It is more often an expression of the dissonance in a mother's struggle to focus on her own life while inextricably caught up in the rhythms of others'.

Rich echoes de Beauvoir's sentiments by suggesting that the theft of maternal experience is a loss of *discovery*. In patriarchal society it is men who "discover" and who finalize the discovery by defining. Masculine consciousness, therefore, sets the intellectual polarities of the culture and declares what is worthy of definition. The power of this monopoly is evident in its ability to define what is "rational" and to "[relegate] to its opposite term all that it refuses to deal with . . ."⁴² Thus, male or patriarchal culture, controlling the questions and the circulating depictions of itself, maintains a partial representation of society.

The body as a social construction is central to Rich's analysis of feminine history. She notes that female bodies increasingly represent carnality as patriarchal organization of society strengthens. Under a matriarchal system, the primal power of the female was linked to women's role in procreation.⁴³ In fact, a woman's biological capacity to renew life was believed to be cosmically transformative. Motherhood preceded wifedom, and whether she bore a child or not, a woman's potential (made visible by the menstrual cycle) was

⁴² Ibid., 62. The entire comment on this definition is noteworthy: "Moreover, the term 'rational' relegates to its opposite term all that it refuses to deal with, and thus ends by assuming itself to be purified of the nonrational, rather than searching to identify and assimilate its own surreal or nonlinear elements. This single error may have mutilated patriarchal thinking - especially scientific and philosophic thinking - more than we yet understand."

⁴³ Discussion of the primal mother is taken from *ibid.*, chapter IV, "The Primacy of the Mother," 84-109.

spiritualized as the "feminine principle." This principle, perpetuated in works of art, crafts, magic, and healing, oriented the community's daily life, its religion, and its connection to nature.

When men began to understand their role in reproduction and to assert their right to know their children, the mother's meaning changed. What had been understood as the female dimension of the sacred was repressed and subsumed under monotheism and male divinity. In the evolution of deities from female to male, woman lost all power and autonomy and was eventually regarded as the chattel of the man.⁴⁴ Rich believes that the first claims of paternity emanated from the mystery and taboo around birth. Woman's generative potency became divested of spiritual affinity in the culture's quest to vindicate procreative man. In the new symbol system, the spiritual Father, transcending earth-bound mother, eradicated an entire Mother Goddess axiology. Rich writes, "[Man is saying] I, too, have the power of procreation - these are *my* seed, *my* own begotten children, *my* proof of elemental power."⁴⁵

In a lengthy analysis of ancient and modern birth practices Rich describes the cooption of physical motherhood.⁴⁶ Here we find the "theft of discovery" in medical routines emerging from religious, professional, and ethnic codes. Until well into the nineteenth century, for example, women were expected to suffer passively in childbirth as a remnant

⁴⁴ My discussion of the devaluation of Goddess spirituality relies on *ibid.*, chapter V, "The Domestication of Motherhood," 110-27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, chapter VI, "Hands of Flesh, Hands of Iron," 128-55, and chapter VII, "Alienated Labor," 156-85.

of the Jewish and Christian curse on Eve. Birth pain came to be seen as woman's punishment and, in Puritan America, severe measures were often taken against the midwife who offered herbal analgesics.

The birthing room was the domain of women until the seventeenth century. In ancient Greece and Rome the midwife, often accompanied by a priestess, attended births and was more advanced in the knowledge of obstetrics than a physician.⁴⁷ A physician or priest entered the birthing room only in the case of emergency, usually to implement techniques learned from the midwife. But it was the physicians who began to record these techniques. After the Middle Ages, Rich notes, the names of attending physicians appear throughout the literature, but those of the founding midwives are lost.

Christianity played a considerable role in the management of childbirth. Because of Galen's monotheism, the Church favoured his learning over that of Hippocrates. Galen regarded surgery as an ordinary affair separate from science and medicine. Thus for obstetrical surgery, a barber or a sow-gelder was summoned. By the Middle Ages, the Church Fathers regarded woman's reproductive organs as evil. Men were forbidden to enter the birth chamber, and the midwife was instructed that her first duty was the baptism of the infant, *in utero*, using a syringe and holy water. Christian teaching, along with its prohibition of the dissection of corpses, meant that female anatomy and birth process remained a body of knowledge accumulated by women. With the growth of the male medical profession, however, we begin to see the suppression of women healers and midwives and

⁴⁷ The Athenian midwife was more than a birth attendant, Rich notes. She routinely prescribed aphrodisiacs and contraceptives, gave sexual counsel, and induced abortions. See *ibid.*, 132.

their mass execution in the witch-hunts. Charged with endangering men's genitals and casting heathen charms, midwives all but disappeared.

With the displacement of the midwife and her art, obstetrical instruments came into play. The history of forceps is notable, especially for its initiation of medical marketing and profiteering. The male members of the Chamberlen family, who fled the Catholic Church in France, became well known as birth attendants in England. They arrived at the event carrying a carved wooden chest, the contents of which were secret. Even the mother was blindfolded during her ordeal so that she could not reveal the appearance of the instruments.⁴⁸ The Chamberlens eventually sold their Secret, but when the money was handed over, they delivered only half the instrument.

Another outcome of male-managed childbirth in the eighteenth century was the incidence of puerperal or childbed fever, which was moralized as Eve's curse. For two hundred years, the disease was considered an epidemic, so high was the death count, but the

⁴⁸ At this point in history, barbers, gelders, and medical men alike used primitive methods. Instead of the upright chair, the herbal broths, healing lore, and companionship provided by a midwife, the mother attended by a male doctor could expect bruising and laceration, separation of the pelvic bones (she likely had rickets), brain damage or malformation in a delivered child, hook extraction and dismemberment, or blood infection and death. It was common practice to forcibly drag an infant out, using the mother's vagina and pelvis as a fulcrum. Forceps might have mitigated these circumstances if not for the Chamberlen concern for profit. At one point, Hugh Chamberlen tried to sell his Secret to a French doctor by demonstrating it on a suffering, apparently hopeless patient. The labouring woman (probably a rape victim, Rich notes) was a dwarf with rickets, attempting to deliver her first child. Chamberlen "worked over her" for an additional three hours after which she finally died. As forceps became more common, they were used by men who were inexperienced and lacked the midwife's knowledge of birth anatomy and physiology. With low standards of cleanliness, often wishing to speed the process up, the physician frequently caused damage to vagina, bladder and skeletal structures. My point is to emphasize the avoidable brutality caused by a young and misogynous medical profession, a brutality which became part of the Western heritage of maternal self-worth. See *Of Woman*, 142-51.

numbers increased with medical attendance. In 1861 it was observed that poor women who gave birth in the streets of Vienna had a lower mortality rate than women in the Clinic. The cause was finally found in cadaveric particles carried on the hands of doctors who moved from dissecting rooms to mothers in labour. Transmitted to the birth canal and absorbed into the bloodstream, they were usually fatal to both mother and child. The physician who identified the cause was discredited for "polemics" and forced to resign his post.

Rich's narration provides concrete examples of the logic of "expertise" and appropriation. Consistent with patriarchal power as "power-over," the rising medical profession, in the manner of a claim of paternity, defined birth as its own event. From then on in the maternal narrative, the management of lying-in rooms catered more to the physician's convenience and far less to the mother's needs.⁴⁹ By the mid-twentieth century, little remained of a mother's relationship to herself during birth. It became the doctor who

⁴⁹ Rich lists other unnecessary interventions in addition to the inappropriate use of forceps: withholding information on the disadvantages of obstetrical medication; requiring a mother's hospitalization; induction of labour without clear medical indication; separation of mother from family; bedrest throughout labour; the shave "prep"; professional dependence on indiscriminate use of pain relief; stimulation of labour in progress; delay of labour until physician arrives; lithotomy position with feet in stirrups; routine use of anesthesia; routine use of episiotomy (snipping the perineal tissue to enlarge opening); separation of mother and infant (separate staffs and sometimes separate floors); lack of encouragement in breastfeeding. See *Of Woman*, 179-80. It is interesting to note here an explanation, not provided by Rich, of the origin of the lithotomy position. According to Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, the French King Louis XIV liked to secretly watch his mistresses as they gave birth. When he complained that the squatting position and the birthing stool made it difficult for him to see, court physicians began to use a high table. Table delivery became fashionable and then standard on the basis of the king's, and later the physician's, improved visibility. See RABUZZI, *Mother With Child: Transformations Through Childbirth* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 73. See also, for Canadian implications, Patricia O'REILLY, "Small 'p' Politics: The Midwifery Example," in *The Future of Human Reproduction*, ed. Christine OVERALL (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1989), 159-71.

"delivered" her baby and who claimed even the psychic spaces in which the Mother knew her power and meaning.

Rich devotes two chapters to the unconscious psychic energy posited by cultural archetypes of mother-son and mother-daughter relations. She claims it is the socialized institutional forms of motherhood which determine the emotional links between mothers and their children. The institution is fed by biased portrayals - penis envy for example, or eros-and-thanatos - that reflect the mainstream cultural stance on female physicality in relation to power.⁵⁰

In mother-daughter cathexis⁵¹ we find "the great unwritten story." Deep resonances between women and their daughters, Rich notes, are minimized in Western representation.⁵² Psychoanalytic thought, itself a product of ideation, projects aberration in women's psychological bonds. Rich also points out that both psychoanalytic and theological doctrines have valued the mother-son dyad as unified and determinative, while the mother-daughter dyad has been trivialized. Freud related feminine inferiority to the female "castrated" state. He posited that the girl in relation to her mother, and the mother in relation to her baby, are

⁵⁰ Here Rich describes variations of these emotional ties, from the mother-seducer in Greek mythology to the bare-fanged "black mother," Kali, in Hindu religion. Fear of the mother, longing to return to her body in burial caves, tombs and hollowed-out ships, sexualizing or demonizing her spirit, caricaturizing her (the mother-in-law, the Jewish mother) and idolizing her (the *Pieta* virgin, or Angel of the Home) all represent masculine constructions, socialized images of mothers to which sons and daughters are variously indoctrinated. See RICH, *Of Woman*, 186-92, 202-03.

⁵¹ The word "cathexis" is used in psychoanalytic parlance to refer to an investment of emotional energy between people.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 225-26.

enraged beings who act out their "lack" in daily life. He further claimed that in both instances the quality of their bonding is pathological. This becomes an entrenched portrayal of mothers and daughters, one which is deeply in service to institutional forms of interpretation.

The appearance of Rich's work in 1976 had an immense impact throughout North America. In the manner of Betty Friedan's gratitude to de Beauvoir for shattering the "mystique,"⁵³ feminist philosopher Jane Lazarre praised *Of Woman* as "...the best analysis I have seen of what we mean when we speak of *patriarchy*," and "... an opening up of my soul."⁵⁴ Historian Gerda Lerner hailed Rich's "woman-centred" approach, particularly the insight that masculine control of women's maternal potential is a causative factor in their subordination.⁵⁵ Theologian Carol Christ, quoting Rich extensively, applauded her analysis of patriarchal "rationality" and her overcoming of dualism both in structure and content.⁵⁶ But there were also critics, like Alexander Theroux, who gave it furious reviews. In his opening paragraph Theroux accused Rich of "monomaniacal lunacies" and "radical

⁵³ See Betty FRIEDAN, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: Norton, 1985), 304-05.

⁵⁴ See Jane LAZARRE, "Adrienne Rich Comes to Terms with 'The Woman in the Mirror,'" in *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81*, ed. Jane Roberta COOPER (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 299. The original article appeared in *Village Voice*, November 8, 1976, 81-82. See also Carol CHRIST, "Motherhood: Spirit and Flesh," *Cross Currents* 28 (summer 1978): 244-47; Gerda LERNER, "Motherhood in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Family History* 3 (fall 1978): 297-301.

⁵⁵ Gerda LERNER, "Motherhood in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Family History* 3 (fall 1978): 297-301.

⁵⁶ Carol P. CHRIST, "Motherhood: Spirit and Flesh," *Cross Currents* 28 (summer 1978): 244-47.

witchery";⁵⁷ throughout the review, *Of Woman* is written off as a diatribe against men. Some (female) critics wrote scathing reviews portraying Rich as a fanatic who could only do damage by questioning motherhood.⁵⁸

The reaction was strong because Rich's analysis, especially her claims about female power and subjective experience, attacked the foundations of power and value. These foundations were built upon power discrepancies and on the division of labour that kept (man's) woman private. *Of Woman* encouraged women to reverse paradigms by translating their own experience, and politicizing the "feminine" as the unfinished "feminist." Many critics thought Rich's vision-unleashed summoned the end of stability. The very suggestion that motherhood needed "liberation" was producing angst about the meaning of *most* women's lives. By the 1980s, the rhetoric against *Of Woman* dissolved and the book was appearing on university reading lists. Rich devoted no further energy to an analysis of male power in her work, turning instead to the development of women's themes.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Alexander THEROUX, "Reading the Poverty of Rich," in *Reading Adrienne Rich*, *ibid.*, 304. The article first appeared in *Boston Magazine*, November 1976, 46-47. See also Helen VENDLER, "Myths for Mothers," *New York Review of Books*, (September 30, 1976): 16-18.

⁵⁸ See Helen VENDLER, "Myths for Mothers," in *New York Review of Books*, 30 September 1976, 16-17; Francine DuPlessix GRAY, "Amazonian Prescriptions and Proscriptions," in *New York Times Book Review*, 10 October 1976, 3.

⁵⁹ For an interesting summary of Adrienne Rich's life and work, see Katherine ARNUP, "Adrienne Rich: Poet, Mother, Lesbian Feminist, Visionary," *Atlantis* 8 (autumn 1982): 97-110.

Nancy Chodorow: *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, 1978

For readers familiar with this period in feminism, the phrase "mothering theorists," brings Nancy Chodorow to mind.⁶⁰ Chodorow is a sociologist whose work led her to question the adequacy of role theory to explain why women mother.⁶¹ She observed that as women's economic role in the family diminished, the common foundation of family structure remained intact: women continued to assume full responsibility for child care. Moreover, sexual asymmetry and inequality were constants across cultural and generational lines.

While sociology fails to explain the sexual division of labour, so too, does Chodorow reject an explanation from biology. Reproduction of gender, she argues, is the outcome of psychologically internalized social structures. Economic and political arrangements produce the familial and extrafamilial worlds to which girls and boys are socialized. It is in the familial world that the earliest factors of gender identity come into play. Thus, psychoanalytic theory will provide the best framework for understanding why women characteristically *want to* mother and why men are less affective and nurturing as they

⁶⁰ Nancy CHODOROW, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), hereafter cited as *Reproduction*.

⁶¹ Throughout her book, Chodorow speaks interchangeably of mothering and nurturing, and this conflation has been noted by others. See, for example, Elisabeth PORTER, *Women and Moral Identity* (North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 86, note 1. She does, however, clarify her stance early on when she writes that "the psychoanalytic theory of the mother-infant relationship confounds an implicit claim for the inevitability and necessity of exclusive mothering by the biological mother with an argument for the necessity of constancy of care and a certain quality of care by *someone* or some few *persons*." The Freudian psychodynamic focuses so intently on biological mothers that the quality of nurturance and the role of men cannot enter the equation. Chodorow does not accept these implications of the theory.

develop.

The theory of choice for Chodorow is Freudian object-relations theory in which specific psychic structures and psychological processes are operative.⁶² The mechanisms of object-relations are of interest to the sociologist because they explain the ways in which the social environment is assimilated and renewed according to hierarchies in place. The creation of meaning in an experience is therefore a psychological event influenced by one's place in the ramified social world and by the quality of the relationships experienced.

The determining relationship in current psychoanalysis is that between the infant and its early caregiver. In Western industrial society, the household has tended to be nuclear and the primary caregiver the mother. Thus the organization and integration of psychic functioning in a child are dependent on the kind of care given by a woman. In general, an infant whose needs are met in the early months experiences continuity with the world and an absence of "object" distinction. This primal stage precedes the object-relation capacity, and consists mainly of the satisfaction of physical needs. When needs are not met, however, the infant becomes prematurely aware of its dependence and separateness. It is, therefore, in the first four months of age that a healthy child gradually recognizes the core self and the "not-me" identity of its mother. Thus, the two orientations to primary identification are the physical experience of body integrity and the origin of self through object-relations

⁶² Freud described psychic structure as tripartite: the id or primary process, the ego or reality principle and the superego or evaluator. The processes are unconscious defenses such as denial or projection, through which a person attempts to control anxiety and reconstruct the psychic environment. Internalization, which occupies Chodorow, is constitutive of a group of processes responsible for the emergence of relational capacities. The "object" referred to in object-relations theory is a person, an aspect of a person, or the symbol of a person. See *Reproduction*, 40-52.

dynamics.

Chodorow is interested in what determines the capacity for nurturance in human development. She hypothesizes that core identity, which emerges from object-relation events, is generically influenced by the mother's very early presence and behaviour. These two factors, presence and behaviour, are enmeshed in schemes of social organization which also reproduce father-absence. Chodorow further claims that mothers relate to their infant sons and daughters differently, and that this difference propels *systematic* responses in the form of gender socialization. With this in mind, her first task is an evaluation of Freudian and post-Freudian accounts of early psychological individuation.

Freud emphasized the oedipal complex of events as the foundation of personality development.⁶³ In this view, the boy at about age three begins to sexualize his attachment to his mother. He envisions his father as a rival, and fantasizes the father's castration and murder. He also fears punishment in the form of his own castration and is pulled between self-love and love for his mother. In psychoanalytic parlance, the boy "changes objects." This means that, in order to complete sexual identity, he must reinvest psychic energy from his mother to his father. Done successfully, resolution takes place in the form of a repression of feelings, rejection of the mother, identification with the father, and heterosexual orientation. In the case of boys, this is a complete and resolute changeover.

The little girl's development is clinically different. Freud believed that a girl sees her mother as having deprived her of milk, then of sexual gratification, and finally, of a penis.

⁶³ The discussion which follows is taken from two chapters. See *ibid.*, chapter 6, "Gender Differences in the Preoedipal Period," 92-110, and chapter 7, "Object-Relations and the Female Oedipal Configuration," 111-29.

The mother triggers feelings of hostility and rivalry, and is blamed for the atrophied state of all females. Anger leads the girl away from the first love object to the second, her father, who has a penis and might provide one for her. Subsequent clinical research has de-emphasized penis-envy, but the dynamics remain the same. Significantly, the girl's turn from mother to father takes much longer, and no break from the mother occurs. There is, in effect, a continuation of the relationship of her infancy and a perpetual "boundary confusion"⁶⁴ between mother and daughter. At the same time, cathexis to her father is less intense, preserving both his separateness and her female sense of self. The extended and often life-long attachment between girls and their mothers became notable, in traditional psychoanalytic thought, for its "abnormality," and evidence of "pathology."⁶⁵

Freud's concentration on the oedipal period was successfully challenged by clinical studies focussing on earlier events. He then concurred that the most important cathexis was that between infant and mother, and that the oedipal configuration was the *final form* these dynamics took. The revised research revealed a greater complexity to the girl's preoedipal stage, but this complexity was perceived, at the time of Chodorow's research, as "prolonged symbiosis," "overidentification," and weak, passive sexuality. Unanimous agreement among Freudians that the pre-oedipal patterns were different, however, suggested the role of gender socialization. Chodorow next claimed that the girl's strong connection to her mother *prepares* her relation to her father - and her relationality in general. This contrasts with the boy's initiation into masculinity through a repressed connection to his mother and propelled

⁶⁴ Ibid.,110.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,108.

independence. The reproduction of gender is therefore an acquisition of object-relations, and has specific links to the nature and quality of care given in the first year of life.

Since the father has been absent throughout the pre-oedipal primary care, the oedipal bond is an extension of the mother-infant relationship, and specific characteristics are clear. First, the girl's change of object remains an oscillation between mother and father. The mother is never given up, and the oedipal bonds, unlike those of the boy, are triadic. Second, fathers do not become the emotionally charged objects for girls which mothers do for boys. These identification processes appear to be systematic. Chodorow, moreover, observes the determinism of psychoanalytic theory in the sense that heterosexual identity is the underlying goal. Psychological development is thus preordained to serve the function of reproduction.

For Chodorow, the sociologist, the significance of the above is in the larger scenario, that is, in the relationship between the inner mind world and ambient social conditions which might account for the development of relationality. Chodorow claims that asymmetrical parenting is the most important *sociological* factor. Exploiting their "likeness," a mother and her infant daughter participate in a prolonged identity process which is uninterrupted by a male figure. They exclusively invest in relational issues, and these issues extend into the childhood years.

On the other hand, the mother experiences her "difference" from her infant son - again, in the absence of a male prototype. Her actions convey the otherness and discontinuity in the relationship; the son responds by disengaging, by burying his feelings, and seeking masculine identity beyond the emotive world. He learns maleness from the culture's images of masculinity, and, most important, he learns that the basic masculine self

is separate. The mother's primary care and the father's remoteness are therefore the gender codes that transmit value and facilitate social arrangements. These arrangements - which are political, economic, and psychological - are only repeatable when the central structure, the nuclear family, is operative.

Women's mothering brands specific forms of femininity and masculinity into society. Femininity, understood as relational need, refers to women's connection to others. Chodorow believes it is unlikely that men can satisfy the rich complement of needs generated in the female psyche. It is reasonable, then, that women create strong relations among themselves, and that they *want to* have a family and invest in the care of a child. In their later lives, they continue to recreate the triadic relations of childhood. The psychosocial process of motherhood, it appears, engages women's relational capacity in ways that men, given the lack of intimacy, cannot be engaged.

In summary, socialization explains perpetuation, but not the genesis of mothering. A social institution must contain the means for its reproduction as both a physical and psychological entity. In Western society, motherhood produces females with strong relational tendencies and males who lack the capacity to form strong bonds. This foundation is laid early on in the mother-infant dyad of the nuclear family. Daughters grow up with the self-definition of a mothering person, while boys are psychologically prepared for the affect-denying outside world. Women's mothering, according to Chodorow, is perpetuated by "social-structurally induced psychological mechanisms."⁶⁶

Chodorow's work has been extraordinarily influential. In the United States, Carol

⁶⁶ Ibid., 211.

Gilligan, who was researching male bias in moral development theory, extended Chodorow's ideas.⁶⁷ Other feminist philosophers working in the area of psychoanalysis or "materialist psychology" have referred to Chodorow's method in their theorizing.⁶⁸ Chodorow herself, impressed by what she saw as psychology's reach beyond the functionalism of sociology, went on to take psychoanalytic training.⁶⁹

In 1981 the journal *Signs* published reviews by sociologists Judith Lorber and Rose Laub Coser, and by Alice Rossi, from the standpoint of biosocial science. In general they found Chodorow's sociological perspective short-changed by its uncritical acceptance of psychoanalytic theory: Lorber noted that *Reproduction* ignored the different patterns and practices of other cultures which Chodorow, in past work, had described; Coser thought Chodorow, in fact, reinforced the exchange theory of sociology; Rossi argued for the contribution of the biosocial sciences to psychoanalytic theory.⁷⁰

Two reviews of Chodorow's book also appeared in a collection of essays published

⁶⁷ See Carol GILLIGAN, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁶⁸ See Jane FLAX, "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Sandra HARDING and Merrill B. HINTIKKA (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983), 245-81; Naomi SCHEMAN, "Individualism and the Objects of Psychology," in *Discovering*, 225-44; Nancy C.M. HARTSOCK, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering*, 283-310.

⁶⁹ See Michele BARRETT, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A British Sociologist's View," *Signs* 17 (winter 1992): 455-59.

⁷⁰ Judith LORBER, Rose Laub COSER, Alice S. ROSSI, and Nancy CHODOROW, "On *The Reproduction of Mothering*: A Methodological Debate," *Signs* 6 (spring 1981): 482-500.

in 1983 entitled *Mothering*.⁷¹ In Pauline Bart's article, *Reproduction* was condemned for its reliance on Freudian symptomatology and clinical evidence. Chodorow's solution to increase the role of men in childrearing was rejected because (as others also noted) men are presented as psychologically unfit for nurturance by the theory itself. "So why should we turn over our children to men even half the time?" she asked. Bart added a final argument, the security of the status quo in *Reproduction*. Chodorow cannot transcend patriarchy, she claimed, and patriarchy is far more threatened by women's bonding (the solution from Adrienne Rich) than by the idea of bringing men into childcare.⁷²

In Iris Marion Young's reading, the chain of causality is so weakly constructed that Chodorow's theory collapses gender differentiation into male domination. Young, who links gender to the symbolic life of a community, affirmed the competence of psychoanalysis to explain gender meaning. But male domination relates to institutional structure and to the meanings that are given power. Chodorow omits an analysis of power, and hence the power of the father to influence his son's personality is overlooked. Thus the boy's turn from his mother to his father may reflect his contempt for powerlessness and his desire to have the father's power. Chodorow can account for gender dualism - even universally - Young claimed, but she cannot explain the formal hierarchal structure of that dualism in Western

⁷¹ Joyce TREBILCOT, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Savage, M.D.: Rowan & Littlefield, 1983).

⁷² Pauline BART, "Review of Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*," in *Mothering*, 147-52. The article first appeared in *Off Our Backs* 11 (January 1981). While Bart exposes a significant flaw in Chodorow's conclusions, she remains suspicious of the ability of men to *sincerely* nurture. She gives the example of co-parenting males whose nurturance turns into a sense of entitlement after divorce.

culture. Moreover, as long as men continue to have the monopoly on authority, children raised by both men and women will continue to associate authority with masculinity.⁷³

Young's colleague, Roger Gottlieb, took a similar approach a year later. He observed that Chodorow failed to notice the systematicity of inequality. In his essay, Gottlieb drew a parallel between the gender blindness of Marx and that of a "unitary . . . class psychology."⁷⁴ Gendered subjects, he claimed, learn more than appropriate desire: they know the rules of domination and submission, and men are the rulers. Women will continue to mother, and mothering will continue to be devalued. The connection between motherhood and its low value is not an outcome of individual psychology; it is endemic to any society in which women lack power in the political sphere. Without this analysis of power, the notion of a transition from individual psychology to mass psychology is over-simplified.

Luce Irigaray: *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1985

The distinct feminist discourse which emerged from the women's movement in Paris after 1968 is known as "French feminism." French feminism began with a strong intellectual base and a focus on psychoanalytic theory and symbolism. In particular, French feminists challenged the relationship between women and language which masculine perspective had created. The morphology or interpretation of the feminine in Western philosophy, they

⁷³ Iris Marion YOUNG, "Is Male Gender Identity the Cause of Male Domination?" in *Mothering*, 129-46.

⁷⁴ Roger S. GOTTLIEB, "Mothering and the Reproduction of Power: Chodorow, Dinnerstein, and Social Theory," *Socialist Review* 14 (September-October 1984): 96. The entire article, including responses from Chodorow and Dinnerstein, is at pp. 93-130.

noted, was reducible to the inverse of the masculine. Thus, the "feminine" entered the language as a negative image of the Subject, as outside and therefore unthematizable. The task was not simply to thematize the feminine, but, as with Irigaray, to "jam" the discursive mechanism with language that "performed" women's difference.

Luce Irigaray's famous doctoral thesis, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, precipitated her expulsion from Jacques Lacan's École freudienne at Vincennes.⁷⁵ In it, Irigaray challenged the authority of the male subject using, with literary license, the model of the medical speculum and even shaping her chapters to replicate the speculum inside the female vagina. A speculum operates by illuminating or imitating the vagina, but this dynamic is only possible by virtue of *its own concave shape*. In the arrangement of the book, Irigaray's theory takes up the first and last chapters and reverses the male/mirror, female/hollow relationship. Three years later, Irigaray produced a series of essays which developed the themes of *Speculum* and, departing from it, included a materialist analysis. This book will be referred to in the following presentation of French feminism.

The "specular logic" of *This Sex Which Is Not One* continues Irigaray's protest against the postulation of a male subject reflecting (on) femininity.⁷⁶ The "logic of the Same"

⁷⁵ Luce IRIGARAY, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. GILL (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.) The original work is *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974.) At the time of writing, Irigaray was a trained psychoanalyst who already held a doctorate in linguistics. An interest in psycholinguistics led to her decision to enter and "disturb" the "master discourse" of philosophy. See Toril Moi's analysis of *Speculum* in *MOI, Sexual Textual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 127-49.

⁷⁶ Luce IRIGARAY, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), hereafter cited as *This Sex*. The original text is *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977.)

(which is her trademark) exposes the incapacity of psychoanalytic discourse to "see" the feminine as anything but its own reflection negativized. At the same time, to avoid a repetition of metaphysics, Irigaray must reject any effort to define woman - that is, to enact a reverse repression seen as constitutive of a "new" philosophy. Deconstruction of the male "specular" economy of meaning entails an exploration of the syntactic laws and unconscious silences of discourse.⁷⁷ In other words, the construction of Western language, by virtue of its maleness, renders most important what is not said and cannot be expressed. Irigaray explores this as a psycholinguistic problem, using a textual application of mimicry or mimesis. Resembling *both* construction and deconstruction, this technique deserves explanation before Irigaray's "mother" is taken up.

Mimesis in Irigaray is the "performance" foundational to her work. To carry it out means to take on and to affirm the male "gaze" of female subordination while at the same time to resist being absorbed into it. The technique uncovers the imperceptible: the repressed "feminine" on which the language depends. By "feminine," Irigaray refers to the expression of female desire and pleasure which supports the logical operation of male-dominated language by remaining inarticulate. She calls attention to a feminist explanation of female sexuality which, as she famously describes, is "not one." The male sexual imagination, with its singular system of reference and meaning, has exclusively inhabited the language. It has force-fed the images and sensibilities of the heterosexual male into mass representation. Irigaray retains the method, but she detaches from its specific libidinal content. Her standpoint is the normative female sexuality which is without entry and

⁷⁷ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 75.

unconnected to possession; it is a female logic of touch. She supplants the masculine specular economy with a different persistent signifier in the form of the contiguous "two lips" of female genitalia.

Irigaray "performs" the act of displacing the masculine in the structured arrangement of *This Sex*. The first two chapters, entitled "The Looking Glass, from the Other Side" and "This Sex Which Is Not One," are a kind of unveiling followed by the manifesto of an underground subject who refuses patriarchal logic. The book ends in an erotic-poetic politicization of female pleasure called "When Our Lips Speak Together." In this final section, Irigaray explodes the singular phallic economy which disperses paradigms like visibility and erection and replaces it by giving language to "exchange eroticism" over entry. The middle chapters critique standard psychoanalytic discourse, including the Lacanian preference for a "rationality of solids" over the moving, facilitating "remainder" of fluidity.⁷⁸ In a different direction, Irigaray produces a material analysis that deals with the economic specificity of patriarchal oppression. Thus, in *This Sex* the world of male theoretical reflection is itself "gazed" through, touched on "both" sides, and enclosed within woman's "two lips."

Borrowing a literary term, the unconscious for Freud and Lacan is governed by a genital *metonymy*.⁷⁹ This means that the penis, as the only sexual organ of value, possesses

⁷⁸ Irigaray advises her reader to consult texts on fluid mechanics to fully grasp this section. See *ibid.*, 106.

⁷⁹ For this notion of metonymy over the more-applied metaphor, I am indebted to Diana Fuss. It was Fuss's article, more than any other criticism, which expanded my understanding of Irigaray's technique. My own observation that the structure of *This Sex* mimes masculine metonymy grew from Fuss's discussion of a feminine syntax as proximity

not only the female vagina, but also the female idea of what is to be desired. Phallogentrism, Irigaray claims, permeates the Western philosophical tradition to the extent that the one form, the phallus, reconstructs female sexuality as "other," the place of "his" accommodation. Psychoanalytic theory, for example, explains sexual difference on the basis of the visibility of difference. Thus, of woman's genital identification she writes, ". . . her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*."⁸⁰ Complicating representation, women are socialized to believe they are the "same" - by which Irigaray means the sameness that necessitates identification with vaginal pleasure, and perceiving their genitalia as "for-him."⁸¹

in Irigaray. See Diana J. FUSS, "Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence," in *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, eds. Nancy FRASER and Sandra Lee BARTKY (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 94-112. The article originally appeared in *Hypatia* 3 (winter 1989).

⁸⁰ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 26. Woman's autoeroticism, Irigaray later points out, exceeds vaginal passivity. As a multiplicity entirely omitted from discourse, it includes, in addition to clitoral caress, "Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on." See IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 28.

⁸¹ Some of the socialization confusing women's sameness and difference comes from science itself, which persists in speaking of the human embryo, for example, as female "by default." This logic is drawn from knowledge of the physiological dynamic by which an embryo becomes female or male. Early in the fourth week of development the site of the clitoris, called the genital tubercle, is the site of differentiation. If the structure ceases to grow and there is no further elaboration, the embryo is female. Male development requires continued growth and the secretion of testosterone. Rendering sexual differentiation in terms of default, as medical jargon continues to do, sets female otherness in scientific "objectivity." For a fuller discussion of the sexing of the embryo, see Keith L. MOORE and T. V. N. PERSAUD, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 5th ed. (Toronto: W.B. Saunders, 1993), 290-92.

In response to these notions Irigaray continuously mobilizes her title claim that woman's sex is not one. It is, rather, ". . . [the] contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched."⁸² Female sexuality is not limited to unitary, possessive instrumentality. The female is coded differently, but that difference is silenced by the oneness of male gender. Masculine culture, as a phallic consciousness, has defensively subverted the multiplicity and self-accommodation of female eroticism.

Having no value until it is appropriated, female sexual pleasure can be nothing more than what appears on the analogous speculum. Irigaray claims that male-centred paradigms are absurd to women, and they are defeated by the postulation of woman's body/thought highlighting the absurdity. Hence woman as the already-known in language is a *speculation* in a not-so-neutral mirror. Irigaray believes politicization of feminist struggle begins with destabilizing the structure of representation in language and ethics. The persuasion of her argument is never toward equality or even the right to speak, but rests in the famous "jamming" of the machinery which has kept the female subject from knowing how to *speak as*, and from being *known as* knowing.⁸³

Irigaray hopes to realize a "differently sexualized" language and social order. The

⁸² IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 26.

⁸³ In later works Irigaray changed her focus and turned in the direction of "the final, and optimal, union of woman and man." The shift was costly in terms of her lesbian feminist following. It propelled other feminists to rethink their support of what they now saw as a self-destructive, apolitical theory of difference. See THE MILAN WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE COLLECTIVE, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 16-17.

new order only comes to fruition through discourse which is not an exteriorization of the male imaginary. According to her, the system of language and symbols which is most threatening to a feminist movement is that of Freudian psychoanalysis. This is because, in Freudian psychoanalytic discourse, the normative male libido disrupts every intimation of female desire.

Freudian theory, as noted earlier, interprets femininity as the resolution of penis envy.⁸⁴ To acquire femininity, the girl relinquishes sexual "activity" in favour of the sexual "passivity" of her castrated state. That is, recognizing her clitoris as a truncated penis, she exchanges clitoral activity for vaginal receptivity. Her desire to have a child under these circumstances stems from her desire to experience her father's penis. She transfers this desire to another man. Hence, femininity is most completely accomplished by the birth of a male infant, and by the extension of this perfect mother-son relationship to the husband. Heterosexuality is normative, all libido is masculine in Freud's description, and the female homosexual is said to adopt a masculine attitude toward her love object. Throughout this confusing account, Freud posits penis envy as part of the normal progression toward femininity.

Freud and his revisionist colleagues never do assign positive value to the vagina. As a passive mouth-anus-equivalent, the vagina only and always represents phallic opportunity. Thus, in Freud's biological teleology, female sexuality does not exist apart from its correspondence to masculine needs and heterosexual orientation. Moreover, clitoral and

⁸⁴ My discussion of Freudian thought and its pervasive influence is taken from IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, chapter 3, "Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look," 34-67, and chapter 4, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," 68-85.

vaginal pleasure are in opposition, and the latter is considered undiscovered before puberty. The "properly feminine" choice, therefore, the one which signifies healthy development, sanctions the vagina, male desire, and an ideology of reproduction. In the end, an analysis of female pleasure as a genuinely distinctive enterprise is entirely impossible without Irigaray's discursive technique: a risky "*crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation*."⁸⁵ This crossing produces the "disruptive excess" on the feminine side⁸⁶ which uncovers masculine representation as univocal and ideological. It facilitates women's return *as subjects* to masculine interpretation, and as observers who have their own struggles in the field of vision. The technique does not create new theory which is equal; it suspends masculine language as a production of truth and exposes its incompetence to define a "feminine." When Irigaray resolves the interpretive dilemma, she does so by occupying the language. Meaning, from man's side of the mirror, is foreign to a woman. As an authentic subject understanding her own "disruptive excess," however, she speaks the "difference" of self-touch, of clitoral sexuality, and the ethics of proximity (over property) represented by the "two lips."

Irigaray's criticism of the work of Jacques Lacan extends "specular" logic to his understanding of discursive practice.⁸⁷ Lacan's claim that "[e]very reality is based upon and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁷ My reading of Irigaray on Lacan is taken from *This Sex*, chapter 5, "Cosi Fan Tutti," 86-105, and Chapter 6, "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids," 106-118.

defined by a discourse"⁸⁸ prompts Irigaray to evaluate the location of "woman." This ultimately reveals the circularity of seeking some theme or reality in a language whose logos depends upon its exclusion. Woman is in the discourse, to be sure, but not *as woman*. Female reference in Lacanian language, though intended to express nothing-to-say, expresses what Irigaray calls the "remainders" of the operation of that language. They are remainders because they are left over, even after exhaustive explanations of what "woman" desires. Real female sexual pleasure, which would invert the psychoanalytic imaginary, is Lacan's "not-all." This is an ethical investment for him. The subtending female libido cast as a sexual "not-all" cannot "come" to the edge, and will never violate discursive/symbolic boundaries.

Lacan's Other, "the dear woman," also typifies the not-all of knowing,⁸⁹ and this seals her inferior value. Moreover, it is not a worthwhile project for Lacan to explain positively what or how women do know. The female unconscious is "charitably" (his word) constructed from male consciousness, and psychoanalysis, as a legitimate discourse, can determine what constitutes knowledge. Lacan ultimately imputes God-like capacities to the (male) psychoanalyst: he gives woman the means to see and speak, he turns her out in his image. On the other hand (and psychoanalysis is aware of this, Irigaray claims), the notion of woman-as-receptacle carries the recognition that masculinity is dependent and tenuous. What if she stops hol(e)ding? The mention of female pleasure constitutes a critical symbolic inversion. It is for this reason that woman is kept from knowing and ordering

⁸⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

herself in language.

When Irigaray compiled the essays of *This Sex*, she included a material analysis first published in 1978 as "Le marche des femmes."⁹⁰ In this article the theme of woman's otherness is discussed from the perspective of commodity exchange. Many feminists, including Irigaray, challenge the anthropological notion that women have been exchangeable because they have always been scarce.⁹¹ Irigaray points out that (male) anthropologists and historians have ignored the fact that the infrastructure of every historical system of exchange is composed of women's bodies. Grand narratives of economic evolution detail wars, politics and commerce, but fail to mention the (re)productive use value and trade in women. Thus every organization of production has depended upon one condition of that organization: *transaction among men* which guaranteed the consumption and circulation of the female sex.

Irigaray adopts the Marxist analysis of commodities as an interpretation of the value of women in patriarchal cultures. Women are commodities which men need for the reproductive use value. The exchange of women depends upon men's abstraction of women's actual bodies, and upon the determination of their value according to men. This value is arrived at when "woman" as a collective concept is reduced to a common feature (such as the phallus) in the symbolic economy of the consumer. In this, woman becomes a "plus or

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, chapter 8, "Women on the Market," 170-91. In relation to it, see chapter 9, "Commodities among Themselves," 192-97.

⁹¹ An interesting example of this literature is Geraldine FINN, "Natural Woman, Cultural Man: The Anthropology of Male Hysteria and Father Right," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 24-28.

minus quantity," according to Irigaray.⁹² Her value relies on the fact that, in the scheme of valorization, she is the product of man's labour. Among themselves women-commodities have no relation, only the commonality that their value is assigned; it is "speculated" by men in terms of male desire alone. In normal social "commerce," then, "The value of symbolic and imaginary productions is superimposed upon, and even substituted for, the value of relations of material, natural, corporal (re)production."⁹³

Motherhood, according to market logic, makes women world currency. This is true even though the mother is no longer exchangeable. Mothers are invested with value uniquely - as private property, as generators of a labour force, as guarantors of the social order, as the ideal carriers of the need/desire of men. Mother and child are useful *natural* forms that man, in his commerce with men, claims to transcend. But to maintain communal order, a man must "mark" them with his name and keep the mother out of circulation. He must relate to them on his (which is the standard) level of value.

All the while, what circulates, or does not circulate, is symbolic. The mother's "specular" value is, in fact, world-symbolic, since all patriarchal societies exploit her. Irigaray juxtaposes Marx's "meta-physical character of social operations"⁹⁴ with the "marked" non-circulating status of the mother. All structures, from economic to sexual, refer back to original appropriations of the mother's body. A patriarchal economy therefore *gives meaning* to a mother in the form of her (useful) mimetic expressiveness. She, of all women,

⁹² Ibid., 175.

⁹³ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 180.

crucially mimics man's needs and desires by being the (amorphous) place where man engenders himself. In the phallocratic economy, the mother, paradoxically, can never be the formative principle.

Feminism in North America was slow to receive Irigaray's work and even today the bulk of her writing is untranslated. Margaret Whitford, author of *The Irigaray Reader*, believes that Irigaray's absorption in the issue of difference put her ahead of the feminist movement and its lobby for equality.⁹⁵ Later on, as they came to know her writing, many feminists criticized the blurry line between difference and biologism which they claimed undermined her theory. Monique Plaza, for example, blamed what she saw as Irigaray's over-acceptance of Lacan.⁹⁶ Shoshana Felman faulted deconstructive method as necessarily parasitic upon the metaphysical.⁹⁷ Toril Moi suggested that Irigaray's mimetic use of Marxist materialism reinforced patriarchal logic.⁹⁸

Irigaray's supporters, from a variety of backgrounds, have produced resourceful readings of her thought. From psychoanalysis, Jane Gallop found that Irigaray's critique of Freud through his own psychoanalytic method demonstrated an important technique for

⁹⁵ Margaret WHITFORD, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 27.

⁹⁶ Monique PLAZA, "'Phallic Power' and the Psychology of 'Woman,'" *Ideology and Consciousness* 4 (autumn 1978): 4-36.

⁹⁷ Shoshana FELMAN, "The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics* (winter 1975): 2-10.

⁹⁸ Toril MOI, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 141-42.

feminist analysis.⁹⁹ In philosophy, Carolyn Burke, Margaret Whitford, Moira Gatens, and Somer Brodribb have discussed the strengths of Irigaray's contribution, especially her method and the substance of her ethics.¹⁰⁰ Regarding method, an analysis of which provides the best clarification of her stance, two compelling articles come to mind.

English professor Diana Fuss applauds Irigaray's deployment of metonymy and essentialism as devices for reversing phallogormorphism. Fuss writes, "Metaphor operates along the axis of similarity whereas metonymy operates along the axis of contiguity."¹⁰¹ The implication of Fuss's observation suggests the Irigarayan contribution to ethics. When Irigaray posits a feminine syntax through an essentialist metonymy, she is transforming ethical terrain by replacing possession and visibility (the phallus) with the ethics of contiguity (the "two lips") - an ethics which comes initially from a feminist separatism ("women among themselves").¹⁰²

Ping Xu, a linguistics and literature scholar, claims that "the accusations of

⁹⁹ See Jane GALLOP, "The Father's Seduction," in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley Nelson GARNER, Claire KAHANE and Madelon SPRENGNETH (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). This text was originally published in GALLOP, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn BURKE, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," *Feminist Studies* 7 (Summer 1981): 288-306; WHITFORD, *The Irigaray Reader*; Moira GATENS, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 111-21; Somer BRODRIBB, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1992), 89-118.

¹⁰¹ FUSS, "Essentially," 103.

¹⁰² IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 166.

essentialism concerning Irigaray largely come from ignoring her use of mimicry"¹⁰³ Ping Xu explores aggressive and defensive mimicry as an attack on phallocratic power and a non-assimilation in the logic of the Same. Irigaray's elaboration of female sexual specificity, he notes, becomes a sexed means of expression not unlike the strategy of Western tradition itself. It constructs a world and facilitates the silencing of the "one" world. It throws the tradition off-guard by being nothing new. Thus, when Irigaray writes through the positing of essentialism or mimesis, the tradition can *do* nothing; the ground has been taken. But it is possible to *hear* a different imaginary.

Conclusion

In the above analysis, which represents only a small fraction of the contribution of each author to feminism, I have focussed on the significance of embodiment to the authors' understanding of motherhood and feminist ethics. I have shown how de Beauvoir negativizes motherhood on the basis of its physical processes - from swollen breasts and abdomen to episodic vomiting and animal-like birth. Woman's different physicality hinders her capacity to act as a transcendent being. Physicality transcended, however (as in the pursuit of intellectual projects), is the key to equality with men. In the light of her broad influence, de Beauvoir's outright rejection of the physical realm may well account for the abandonment of such themes in the feminism of the 1950s and 1960s.

The works of Rich and Chodorow are contradictory with respect to embodiment.

¹⁰³ PING Xu, "Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism," *Hypatia* 10 (fall 1995): 76-89.

Adrienne Rich, like Mary O'Brien, centres on the vast imagery relating to the female and the maternal body throughout western civilization. Woman's body was considered powerful because new life emerged from it, according to Rich. Men's fear and eventual appropriation of female power resulted in a profusion of dualistic institutions which control society by generating its operative definitions and symbols.

Chodorow, on the other hand, offers no materialist analysis. In order to comprehend women who become mothers, Chodorow applies a social theory to the psychological energy produced within the heterosexual nuclear family. The mother's body is significant in that it satisfies an infant's needs and inaugurates the infant's recognition of "me" and "not-me." Pursuing the Freudian account of human interaction, Chodorow posits that the power of the female body produces frustration, resentment, and rage which husbands and offspring differently, yet undeniably, experience. Biology is an inadequate category for discovering womanhood not only because Chodorow's mentor negates the female body, but also because Chodorow, the sociologist, is committed to a disembodied and unconscious sociology.

Luce Irigaray attempts to replace male-dominated symbolism in an act of mimicry which is explicitly reliant on the female body. It is Irigaray's belief that women need to be represented in normative meaning systems, and that this representation relies on the assertion of experience. Irigaray thus interrupts the masculine economy of meaning by countering the well-documented phallic elements of psychoanalytic theory with meanings linked to the female genitalia. The female body literally crashes through the orderliness of male theory, suffusing it with vivid images of that body's fluidity and playful sexuality. Thus, female embodiment is a crucial consideration for ethics, not only because it is timely in terms of the

development of feminist theory, but also because its normativity shatters the misogyny handed down by western philosophy.

In Chapter Two, my aim is to explain Mary O'Brien's theory of birth with due attention given to its theoretical roots. My analysis of *The Politics of Reproduction* will also lead towards certain questions which have been generated by the summary of the above authors, and which concern the role of the body in meaning production. Specific attention will be focussed on the problem of essentialism or biological determinism, which some critics claim is unavoidable as an outcome of O'Brien's theory. O'Brien's short response to the charge is that childbirth *is* biologically determined, and women need to bond together and recognize the power of their bodies as both an ethical and political affirmation. As I explain O'Brien's theory, I will attempt to clarify this issue, and to illuminate O'Brien's contribution to the difference debates.

CHAPTER TWO

MARY O'BRIEN'S 'MOTHER': DIFFERENCE, UNITY, AND CONTINUITY

IN *THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION*, 1981

Introduction

In this chapter, I will carefully analyze Mary O'Brien's theory with respect to its theoretical origins as well as to how O'Brien navigates traditional theory to avoid essentialism. In terms of the equality-versus-difference discourse which is her milieu, O'Brien is an avowed difference feminist. This means that her work celebrates women's differences from men in the belief that difference accurately expresses the knowing and experience which validate a spectrum of feminist claims. What O'Brien's critics often fail to consider is the fact that her theory ultimately unites women and men by privileging the meaning of birth as a human commonality.

Does this mean that O'Brien's theory cannot escape the premise that therefore all women should give birth? Many feminists have struggled with the theory of birth, and denounced it for this reason. In addition, critics have rejected *The Politics of Reproduction* based on its reputation as either a theory of birth or a theory of reproductive consciousness. (Indicative of their inseparability, O'Brien uses both terms.) As I examine this work, I will situate it within both the difference debates and the discourse on essentialism, the latter

constituting a current challenge to feminist theory construction.

There are, however, some observations that can be made at this point to help locate Mary O'Brien's work among those of the above authors. First, like Simone de Beauvoir, O'Brien claims that the female body is immensely important to cultural thought and individual action. Separating de Beauvoir from O'Brien is the latter's dialectical use of predecessor theory and her positive connotation of the body as important. Second, O'Brien admires Adrienne Rich's work openly, but again she differs in her formal and systematic (as opposed to literary-historical) appeals to the tradition. Third, O'Brien is critical of the abstraction and male dominance in Freudian theory, though she applauds Chodorow's effort as a pioneering feminist standpoint. Finally, Irigaray, like O'Brien, focuses on the potential of female bodies. Yet Irigaray valorizes a "disruptive excess" which, unlike O'Brien's commitment to the "material base" of existence, offers a body made possible by intellectual tasks.

Mary O'Brien and *The Politics of Reproduction*

Mary O'Brien began her career as a midwife and a political activist in the industrial side of Glasgow in the 1950's. In this working class setting, plagued with poverty, overcrowding, malnutrition and industrial disease, childbirth was a public and unifying affair, an honouring of femininity and the power of the female body. As the local midwife, O'Brien's role was that of "a privileged participant in a quintessentially social celebration of

the strength of being female."¹ She carried this image of community with her when, in 1957, she emigrated to Canada and took the position of Director of Nursing in two Montreal hospitals. In 1970 O'Brien abandoned nursing for political activism. She helped establish the Feminist Party of Canada in the '70s and subsequently took up graduate studies in political science at York University, Toronto. What would later evolve into her renowned theory began with the mental comparison O'Brien made between the Scottish celebration of birthing and the lack of connectedness expressive of North American feminism. In the Scottish communal experience, O'Brien observed a "lived unity" between childbirth and the community's shared perception of it.

Feminism, as O'Brien encountered it, lacked a profound sense of female power, a consciousness and theory of which she believed could energize the movement. Equally, O'Brien had become dissatisfied with what she called "male-stream" tendencies in traditional political theories. She began to direct her attentions to a critique of the tendency to abstract and objectify experience. That which was offered as objective, she observed, often betrayed an unnatural distance between the thought and the thing theorized. This distance was discernible in the "masters": for example, in classic reflections on Being, as in the spectacle of the "thrown" or the "breaking away" existent.² At the same time, O'Brien was struck by the staying power of the masculine norm by which male experience had come to represent

¹ Mary O'BRIEN, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 10.

² The "breaking away" concept belongs to Hegel whose analysis of human reproduction will be examined. The "thrown" existent is a concept from Heidegger. These terms exemplify the abstraction of birth process in male theory to which O'Brien objects. See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 31.

the cultural ideal. Feminism needed a strong theoretical base with the same endurance, she believed, but also one which supported the cohesion that a unity of thought and world could provide.

Between 1976 and 1979 O'Brien completed her doctoral thesis and produced a number of articles systematically studying the relationship between political theory and reproduction.³ The development of her thought in this period is consistent with the growing interest in motherhood among feminists. In the deepest sense of the word, however, O'Brien "radicalized" the relations of reproduction, comparing how they had been theorized with the ways in which she understood them. She also departed from postmodern feminism, with its preference for social inscription and a "rhetorical body" over physicality.⁴ O'Brien proposed a reclamation of the female body within theory in the understanding that bodies are inseparable from the dimension of consciousness. Her philosophy is an interchange with tradition, a dialectical encounter which borrows from male-stream methodology, and at the

³ Some of these articles expand on her dissertation, while others incorporate O'Brien's increasing interest in the development of reproductive technology. See Mary O'BRIEN, "The Politics of Impotence," in *Contemporary Issues in Political Philosophy*, eds. William R. SHEA and John KING-FARLOW (New York: Science History Publications, 1976), 147-62; "Hegel: Man, Physiology and Fate," G.R.O.W. Paper no. 12, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1977); "The Dialectics of Reproduction," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 1 (1978): 233-39; "Reproducing Marxist Man," in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche*, eds. Lorenne M.G. CLARK and Lynda LANGE (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 99-116; "Introduction to Political Theory: A Feminist Perspective," *RFR/DRF*, Special Section, 8 (March 1979): 1-2; "The Politics of Hysteria," *Canadian Woman Studies* 1 (1979). O'Brien also presented a paper, "Marxism, Motherhood, and Metatheory," at the Canadian Association of Learned Societies, Saskatoon, 1979.

⁴ For an analysis of O'Brien's place in this literature, see Bev THIELE, "Dissolving Dualisms: O'Brien, Embodiment and Social Construction," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 7-12.

same time exposes the biases.

Mary O'Brien's thesis introduced change in feminist theorizing, with its systematic approach to a universal human constant, the process of birth. Published in 1981, *The Politics of Reproduction*⁵ is an ambitious project conceived by its author as a "philosophy of birth."⁶ The philosophy is developed to fulfill three central aims. The first is to provide a theoretical base for feminism, one which, O'Brien points out, is only derivable from women's experience. The second is to expand her insight that the instantiation of male supremacy in Western culture has something to do with the necessarily social relations of human reproduction. The third is the suggestion of specific tasks for women and men toward transforming the relationship between the public and private sectors, and between the human and the natural worlds. Throughout the work, Mary O'Brien proposes that "reproductive process is not only the material base of the historical forms of the social relations of reproduction, but that it is also a dialectical process, which changes historically."⁷ Holding all this together is O'Brien's regard for the power and value of her predecessors' work which is antecedent to, and borne out in, her critical analysis.

⁵ Mary O'BRIEN, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), hereafter cited as *Politics*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13, 20, 24, 198.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21. As will be explained later on, O'Brien's notion of "dialectics" follows Hegel's interpretation of a dialectical process of change. In it, concepts (or their reified forms) pass into and are preserved or fulfilled by their opposites.

The Foundations of O'Brien's Dialectics of Reproduction⁸

The philosophical tradition is virtually silent about human birth, noting it only as a "lower" biological event indistinct from animal birth. Birth as symbolic or theological is absent from the classical canon, although the moment of sexual intercourse is well-analyzed. O'Brien observes that the celebrated maternal symbol of pre-Christian agrarian society and its attendant feminine principle lost meaning at some point in unrecorded history. Somewhere in the cycles of culture, the connections between human birth process and consciousness changed dramatically.

According to O'Brien, experience and consciousness are unified, and it is this unity which supports the historicity of reproductive process. The drama that reduced birth from an inspirational to a pre-rational level was a transformation in "male reproductive consciousness." Male consciousness began to apprehend physiological paternity and to impute ontological and epistemological "truths" to the discovery. In other words, man's first recognition of the male contribution to fertility initiated a reordering of symbols and new interpretations of the notion of "potency." O'Brien refers to this event as the first significant historical change in the process of reproduction, precipitating, she believes, extreme shifts in culture. The second significant, indeed radical, change has been brought about by modern contraceptive technology. This later change delivers an impact upon demographic patterns. However, O'Brien sees a more substantive impact on choice. Because it results in material changes in human relations, she regards contraception as a vastly unexplored phenomenon

⁸ The preface to O'Brien's theory and the explanation of the theory are taken from her second chapter of *Politics*, "The Dialectics of Reproduction," 19-64.

that continuously calls for ethical mediation by women.⁹

The contested aspect of masculine political theory is its internal ethic of male supremacy. But O'Brien does not discard such theory because it is evidence of the way in which male experience becomes normative. If event and consciousness of event are unified, as O'Brien and others maintain, then the lived reality of men, at some point, produced the consciousness that they are superior. O'Brien observes that the search for unity between doing and knowing is significant in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and long lines of successors. The link between praxis and social change is indeed the arrow of history, but such praxis has been, until recently, the prerogative of the male. Feminism has shown that the first achievement of history is the validation of its chronicler, and that there has been almost no historical recording of female experience. Women create history when the tradition is taken seriously by them, when its premises are challenged and often transcended. Mary O'Brien's ideas in *Politics* constitute an ongoing dialectic between Hegelian and feminist consciousness, and between Marxist and feminist materialism. O'Brien begins with a reading of Hegel.

Hegel was convinced that reason is the active force of history, and that its most

⁹ O'Brien's "contraceptive technology" refers to modern day technological solutions which she claims are "self-regenerative," yet still in a primitive form. This second transformative stage gets some significance from quantification in the sense that it constitutes a worldwide market. O'Brien does not explore the history of contraception because its legacy of potions and pessaries had no collective impact. Shari L. Thurer makes this point in THURER, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 117. For a well-documented history of contraception, including political and clerical opinion, see John T. NOONAN, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

progressive reification is the life of the state. The human rational faculty transcends nature both in its high appreciation of community and in the exercise of self- and world-consciousness. But the "human" with these capacities is necessarily male, since the work of reason takes place in the realms of civil decision-making and productive labour. The domain of the family and of household labour is cut off from, and opposed to, the public sphere because it is much less "rational." The ethical character of the family relates to female morality which is constrained by the "particularity" of reproductive function. The changing relationship between public and private is led by ongoing transformation in economic and political organization; the family *derivatively* changes form and shrinks in meaning as the realm of politics gains dominance. Hegel recognizes the labour of production as the natural mediation of man's relationship with nature (and other men). Productive labour is a unification of rational consciousness and creative activity rendering the ethical superiority of political life a foregone conclusion. The labour of production brings negation to the individual, but it is followed by "his" rebirth into public citizenry. Procreative labour, on the other hand, has no significance in a society governed by Hegel's contention that what men do in the polis constitutes the most profound advance toward human progress.

In his early writings, Hegel examined the relationship between sexual intercourse and self-consciousness, and this work is central to the technical aspect of O'Brien's theory. In Hegel's philosophy, consciousness resists negation and separation from itself. Yet negating dynamics are inevitable in the course of history. Hegel reasons that the structure of consciousness is dialectical, that mind and world oppose one another, and that the reality of an object can be measured, as it were, by its strength of resistance. Man's struggle against

annihilation is expressed as a struggle of wills, and in the end it is the synthesis of reason and history which resolves struggle and effects history's completion. In the necessarily social act of copulation, individual consciousness experiences a threat. The two identities submerged in sexual passion briefly lose their distinction from one another, and from their physical act. The "seed," at this point, cannot unify this separateness. The child "breaks free," however, as "a new self-consciousness which affirms the continuity of the species."¹⁰ This contest for unity takes place in abstraction because biology, as pre-rational according to Hegel, is a subversion of the real.

According to O'Brien, the young Hegel, in his rush to synthesize oppositions, wrongly attributes equal power to the lovers as each "contributes a seed." The two donors lose their identities in one another, but more significantly, they lose their human distinction to pure physicality. Yet immortality is confirmed in the new seed, the new self-consciousness. Thus, reproduction, Hegel claims, is an abstract dynamic comprised of "unity, separated opposites, reunion."¹¹ The regeneration in procreative process is a repetition of thought, as the "undifferentiated consciousness" bursts forth in new potency. O'Brien claims that Hegel commits an error in speaking of the child who "breaks free" because freedom, here, negates nature and sublates sensuality in higher reason. Hegel's account, therefore, reveals male experience. The mutual annihilation of the lovers veils man's real negation which is his concrete exclusion from the remaining process of reproduction.

¹⁰ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 28.

¹¹ O'Brien quotes from Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*. See *Politics*, 28.

O'Brien agrees that the process of reproduction is dialectically structured, but male and female participate unequally, she notes. The unity of the "seed," which Hegel perceives in abstraction, is material and concrete. It is not reason, therefore, but gestation which confers reality, yet this is a "lower" moment which men do not experience. When Hegel "elevates" reproduction to "pure" and equated thought, according to O'Brien, he overlooks the gender component of the material relations that ground the process: "Man is negated not as lover but as *parent*, and this negation rests squarely on the alienation of the male seed in the copulative act."¹² Paternity as a material process gets cut short, then rationalized and reified in the artificial continuity created by politics.

Hegel does not analyze maternal experience or a consciousness of continuity associated with female biology. Biology is meant to be transcended even though the bloodlines of paternity earn special protection in the institutions of family, property, and so on. For Hegel, the mother's role in procreation is indistinct from that of an animal, and it is less important than the labour unifying man and nature which is done by legislators, poets, and philosophers.

In Hegel's metaphysics, therefore, reproduction results from the "work" of copulation, and the product of the work is the child. Reproductive labour is not a mediative labour for him because its physicality renders it brute and uncreative.¹³ O'Brien notes that Hegel's notion of copulation as "work" is consistent with his theoretical construction of labour,

¹² Ibid., 29 (italics in original).

¹³ As O'Brien explains, "Hegel held the remarkable view that the only thing comparable to work in the reproductive process is copulation, for it is in "love" that the race is reproduced." See *ibid.*, 31.

mediation, and transformation. But he ignores the gendered, temporal aspect of reproductive process as the child gestates. Men need principles of continuity outside biological continuity, O'Brien explains, "Because they are separated from genetic continuity with the alienation of the male seed."¹⁴ The temporal aspect of gestation is present to both male and female consciousness, but as Hegel's analysis reveals, it is present differently.

For Hegel, the relationship that exists between productive (even slave) labour and the natural world is the creative force in history. No other labour has the capacity to mediate man's alienation from continuity, or to sustain justice and reason in historical process. O'Brien claims that production, composed of willed acts to fill man's ontological void, is a historically created mediation. She posits birth labour as the synthesis of Hegel's oppositions in that this labour transcends the function of production and integrates human and natural worlds in various ways. The separation of mother and child at birth, for example, is mediated by physical labour throughout which a mother knows what she is doing, and knows that the child is hers. Moreover, female reproductive labour unifies not only mother and infant, but also the social world and nature, linear time with cyclical time, and human generations. Such experiential unity structures consciousness, differentiating female conscious process from the male consciousness of disconnection. Thus, against Hegel's claim that unity is achieved in the natural exercise of political life, O'Brien proposes that unity is achieved more authentically in female reproductive labour, and that this unity gives structure to female consciousness which Hegel fails to differentiate.

Mary O'Brien turns from her critique of Hegel to the materialism of Marx. At the

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

outset she claims that she "accepts Marx's view of a dialectical logic of necessity grounded in material process as essentially correct."¹⁵ Human consciousness is dialectically structured because it reflects the universal process of labour in productive existence. The wheels of history turn on the human need to eat, according to Marx, and opposition, referred to as "contradiction," arises from the division of labour. Thus, Marx inverts Hegel by insisting that history is the history of material production which moves forward by the necessity to "reproduce" oneself on a daily basis. The work of an individual correlates with perceived needs, perceived tasks, desires and actions, and production and consumption are inseparable. It is productive labour, therefore, which is the epitome of unified thinking and doing, and reason's job, in this case, is rational regulation of the process.

For Marx, labour produces value. Value inheres in the product itself, and also in the social aspect, the sets of relations created around production. However, Mary O'Brien criticizes Marx for failing to consider the notion that production has *become* social, and that through history, solitary productivity has also been normative. Marx's notion of value relates to the realm of economics where necessity stands for the need to "make a living" in the narrowest economic sense of the term. It also alters the idea of continuity, since Marx claims that man makes history by the tools of production, and that the tools of past labour connect man to his ancestors. Thus, the dialectical structure of history situates the worker in its midst, and the locus of contradiction is class struggle. Marx believes that "[r]eproductive relations do change historically, . . . but only as reflections of a change in productive

¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

relations."¹⁶ In Mary O'Brien's view, Marx misses a prior struggle which is located in the realm of gender.

O'Brien points out that there are two poles of necessity. They are production and reproduction, and each is structured dialectically. In Hegel's dialectics, the threat of negation haunts the copulative act but is resolved in a metaphysics of the family. Thus, the universal family form is never abandoned even though each particular family dies out. Man transcends the family, Hegel claims, because in his dialectical understanding of history, nothing can be lost. The family is preserved, transformed and "transcended" by social institutions, such as law or religion, which normalize male control. In the end, alienation of the male seed, which so concerned Hegel, is cancelled by the powers of the state, and male supremacy transcends all particularity.

Marx's dialectical consciousness is produced by the universal experience of hunger, the work of feeding and the transformed relations among fed, yet hungrier, people. Continuity is expressed in the continuation of the product of production; the product of consumption is a reproduced "living" but not a life. From these two thinkers, then, eating, family life and indeed the discourses of progress are completed and preserved in the public realm of politics and economics. The prior labour that brings forth the human in birth escapes them because it is female experience which, in their view, has no redeeming value. It is profoundly unreal in the light of masculine lived-world affairs.

O'Brien shows how the production of food and the reproduction of people are processes which are dialectically related to one another. People need to be born and fed

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

through labours which inseparably create and transform history. The raw power operative at both poles is necessity. But neither Hegel nor Marx is concerned to analyze a fundamental (though mediating) process which men cannot experience. O'Brien emphasizes that this is not a prejudice on their part. The prevalent world view as produced in and by the social relations of male supremacy and theory reflects what men do. Hegel and Marx are aware that the structure of consciousness relates to primordial ties with nature, but their actors are reared and reasoning men. From within masculine paradigms, they do not contemplate the unified seed in the womb. Their analyses of the seed emanate from political consciousness which fails to integrate family consciousness and the unifying labour of human birth.

The Dialectics of Reproduction

O'Brien speaks of two world-historic changes in the process of reproduction. The first significant change was the discovery of paternity, and its resultant transformation of male reproductive consciousness. The second, more recent historical change was initiated by the development of contraceptive technology.¹⁷ These changes brought about new historical "forms" of reproductive consciousness. O'Brien specifies that the period of time which is of interest to her is the one most prevalent through recorded history: "That form . . . which falls between the discovery of physiological paternity and the development of mass contraceptive technology"¹⁸

Paternity throughout this period is understood in numerous ways. Aristotle thought,

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 45.

for example, that the mother contributed nothing but the unexpelled menstrual blood to the child's development, while the father imparted essence and soul. The principle of human continuity for both Plato and Aristotle was intellectual discourse. In the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, Christian doctrine celebrated masculine potency, and eliminated earlier feminine dimensions of spiritual presence. The Church Fathers, repelled by physicality, spoke of copulation and gestation by divine proxy. A modern future-minded father is a property owner who passes his name and goods to his sons. These developments represent resourceful efforts to impose order on what O'Brien claims is male contingency and the emergent problem of paternal uncertainty. Thus, it is O'Brien's aim to produce a theory which is grounded in female reproductive experience. O'Brien demonstrates that this experience is all the more relevant to theory in the light of its suppression among the forms and structures of the male potency principle.

Conventional physiological theories have tended to describe distinct stages in linear time as indicators in a sequence. But because these markers are insufficient for non-linear dynamics, O'Brien identifies "moments" in the reproductive process. "Moments," she claims, grasp "the sense of determining, active factors which operate in a related way at both the biological and conceptual levels . . . [Each is] a non-isolated *event in time*" ¹⁹ The biological event, in other words, has an indissolubly cultural aspect, and this relationality supports dialectical analysis.

The scope of the reproductive process, according to O'Brien, begins with ovulation

¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

and ends when the child is "no longer dependent on others for the necessities of survival."²⁰

This expansive definition embraces the range of relationships that are necessitated by the inseparability of genetic and social history. The moments of reproductive process are as follows:

- 1) the moment of menstruation
- 2) the moment of ovulation
- 3) the moment of copulation
- 4) the moment of alienation
- 5) the moment of conception
- 6) the moment of gestation
- 7) the moment of labour
- 8) the moment of birth
- 9) the moment of appropriation
- 10) the moment of nurture²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ I note, as others have, that O'Brien omits a "moment" of lactation. A case could be made for its inclusion in either "labour," "nurture" (as Robbie Pfeufer Kahn does), or "birth." Although lactation mediates separation and is a "labour," its time sequence weakens an argument for "mediating labour." Nurture is "genderically shared," according to O'Brien, and this can refer to the category as genderically shared while an aspect of it is not. See *Politics*, 47-48. In my opinion, a plausible explanation of lactation sees it as part of birth. In normal circumstances the newborn is suckled at birth for the benefits gained by both mother and baby. The immediate reciprocity of this maternal process renders it a continuation of the "moment" of birth, expanding the time span of natural unity and accenting living continuity. Even as a potential act, lactation is part of the unified female consciousness.

In addition to the benefits to the mother's uterus and to the infant's nutrition and immunological status, breastfeeding has important instinctual-social components. The

These moments exhibit a variety of elements confirming that reproductive process is not "mere" physiology. Some of the moments are invisible, some are social, some involve will, some are not immediately grasped by consciousness, and some involve power. While more moments require the mother's physical presence, history has envisaged procreation as the domination of the male seed. O'Brien refers to the historical development of the notion of paternity as male "potency" (originating in Aristotle's *potentia*) which transcends the dynamics of biology: "Potency is a masculine triumph over men's natural alienation from the process of reproduction . . .";²² it is contextualized in history. The universally male consciousness of alienation is exaggerated by the Hegelian *notion* of oppositional forces that threaten each other's negation in order to survive and create. The idea that male involuntary biology underwrites *potentia* requires mediation. Men resolve the dilemma in the public realm, where ideological paternity is objectified in social institutions, their attendant rights and secondary ideologies. But historical creations and symbols require

infant's cry among babies' cries is identifiable to the mother and will precipitate "let-down" of her milk. The child enters the world and social interaction through the mother's body and, by this route, gradually enters the language. Thus, breastfeeding is also a way of knowing and communicating with another. See Robin May SCHOTT, "Resurrecting Embodiment: Toward A Feminist Materialism," in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, eds. Louise M. ANTONY and Charlotte WITT (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 171-84, particularly pp. 179-80; Robbie Pfeufer KAHN, "Mother's Milk: The 'Moment of Nurture' Revisited," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 29-36; Kathryn Allen RABUZZI, *Mother With Child: Transformations Through Childbirth* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), particularly "Lactation and Bonding," 144-48; Iris Marion YOUNG, *Throwing Like A Girl And Other Essays In Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), chapter eleven, "Breasted Experience," 189-209, especially "III. Motherhood and Sexuality," 196-200.

²² O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 49.

strong centralizing principles and points of consensus. In O'Brien's theory, the paternity grounding social organization from the Greek polis through every later instance of brotherhood and solidarity is a social necessity strengthened by cooperating men who confer on each other the authority to define and redefine continuity.

Female reproductive consciousness is rooted in different experience. Maternity is more than abstract to the menstruating girl, and it presents no uncertain lineage to the labouring mother. The biology of human birth is not separable from meaning, and the communally understood signs of female unity have two poles: the "negative" sign of menstruation, and the "positive" sign of pregnancy. All women understand these signs, not as personal psychology, but as cultural consciousness. The continuity of the human race is, normally, part of woman's consciousness in that she comprehends her visible menses in terms of her potential to give birth. This consciousness exists, moreover, whether or not she gives birth, for she is, after all, born of woman. Unlike man, then, for whom continuity becomes an abstracted self-projection in linear time, woman knows and understands her unity with natural process, and this knowing goes on, unceasingly, in cycles of time.

The reproduction of a person is a necessarily social process, though certain of the components are solitary. Copulation and nurture are genderically shared but, unlike ovulation or conception, their control is manipulable by power and will. Ovulation and conception are involuntary and, in the context of temporality, "not immediately apprehended by consciousness."²³ The exclusively male moments are alienation (which, for O'Brien, is

²³ Ibid., 48. The unconsciousness attributed to ovulation is disputable, since many women experience discomfort and can tell which ovary is discharging. Conscious or unconscious, however, this information does not change the precision O'Brien intends.

biological) and appropriation, man's political solution. The involuntary female moments - menstruation, ovulation and pregnancy - represent "pure" Hegelian opposition, but simultaneously they constitute "the integrative potency of all women."²⁴

Specifically, four moments remain for further analysis. They are - in the intended sequence - alienation, appropriation, nurture and labour. The male moments of alienation and appropriation stand in opposition to female labour in reproductive process. Nurture, which is shared, constitutes the *social synthesis* of this opposition, but nurture creates renewed opposition between the public and private spheres. The male experience of discontinuity is not a "particular" neurosis but a universal separation from reproductive process which is replicated in the structure of male consciousness. In the context of her claim that male consciousness is divided, O'Brien asks, "What exactly are men alienated from [and] what do men do about it?"²⁵ The answers are concealed in the real divisions and oppositions that men build into history.

The Impact of Alienation in Thought, Practice, and the Notion of Value

The discovery of physiological paternity revealed men's alienation in three important ways. First, it revealed that men are simultaneously included in and excluded from reproductive process. The Hegelian roots of this awareness were described earlier. Second, the moment marked the discovery of the two poles of freedom, known as freedom *from*

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ Ibid., 52.

(nature) and freedom *to* (subdue it). Finally, men learned of their separation from continuity *over time*. O'Brien argues that men lack an experiential link both between conception and birth and between the generations. But both of these intervals are mediated in female reproductive labour. Again, a mother knows she was born of a woman's labour and, moreover, that her child is her own. Continuity for the father remains a mere idea until public declaration makes it real. Hence, the experience of separation breaks through male consciousness as its shape and form. Divided by alienation, male consciousness as normative consciousness conceives the world in dualized forms.

Paternity comes to one kind of fruition in the "right to" - or, in Marxist language, the appropriation of - the child. The moment of "genderically shared nurture"²⁶ is complicated by man's problematic freedom to choose. A father is free from necessity in terms of the experiences of birth and lactation. He is also free to acknowledge and assert paternity in the public realm where paternity takes different social forms. The claim of paternity is tied to a parallel right to the mother and her labour against other men's claims; it is sustained by the mother's segregation in the home and by her lack of freedom to choose maternity. Thus, the rights that stake out the widening distance between the public and private realms require value-laden social legitimation. Man's separation of self-as-a-thinking-subject from self-in-the-natural-world demands a formula for his reintegration into solidarity, and this, for O'Brien, arises within the cooperative male community. Throughout Western systematization, as man's labours and profits supercede the value of giving birth, a political force gradually comes into play. The conversion of paternity the idea, to paternity

²⁶ Ibid., 47-48, 58.

as mastery and permanence, is achieved in the network of structures known as patriarchy.

In O'Brien's view, Marxist-Hegelian philosophy makes theoretical attempts to mitigate the problem of paternal uncertainty. They are, therefore, philosophies about value in the patriarchal context. They describe and define the "good mother," for example, according to the goals of patriarchy. O'Brien is critical of this mother who is said to be "natural" (or close to animality), morally defective, and suited to functionality. Her affinities for childbirth and nurturance are mobilized by a lower ethic, which is grounded in the child's dependency, rather than in a nobly initiated act. The "good father," on the other hand, is morally elevated because his duties arise from a higher realm of "goods" inspired by the foresight to stabilize his paternity. The "good mother" may be a dramatized physical presence, but a "good father" can be "good" from the other side of the world, through the economics of responsibility, which is the reverse side of father-right. These are constructed images of patriarchal parenting, devised to lock power and legitimation in the paternal sphere of influence.

Coincident with the creation of a private sphere has been the appropriation of women's labour power, an appropriation that many feminists have addressed. But these feminists have not always meant the same thing by "labour" or "labour power." As early as 1898, Charlotte Perkins Gilman had published *Women and Economics*²⁷ in which she

²⁷ See Charlotte Perkins GILMAN, *Women and Economics: The Economic Factor Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898). An edited version of this work appeared, not surprisingly, in 1966 and continues to be widely acclaimed. See GILMAN, *Women and Economics*, ed. Carl DEGLER (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

uniquely analyzed the economic position of nineteenth century women.²⁸ Gilman included a discussion of mothering labour, meaning child care, and she developed some ontological and philosophical aspects, but no concise theory. Her work was enjoying renewed popularity at the time of O'Brien's writing, as was the school of Marxist thought in connection with feminism.

In the 1970s there was much discussion of domestic labour in the home, and of the "reproduction and value of labour power" as these might apply to women's lives. Marx assessed labour power only in terms of the man's capacity and relation to capital. Women workers in the public sphere were valued for their labour power, but theoretically it was indistinguishable from that of men. And because Marx regarded the power of production in the domestic realm to be derivative of production in the public realm, "women's work" was assigned little value. Feminists who were interested in Marxism began to question the adequacy of its economics, particularly with respect to its silence on the relations between women and men.²⁹ But feminists at that time were also wary of biologism, and hence few

²⁸ Though some of Gilman's anthropology has been corrected, her book is clear and remarkably advanced for its time. Gilman challenges the historically inferior economic status of women as wives, housekeepers, and mothers. About the latter she writes, "The working power of the mother has always been a prominent factor in human life. She is the worker *par excellence*, but her work is not such as to affect her economic status." See GILMAN, *Women*, (1966 ed.), 21. Gilman does not attempt to quantify women's work as later feminists do; she instead faults the "sexuo-economic relation" between women and men as having deleterious effects on women's psyche. The result is a "mis-mothered world" which can be turned around both economically and spiritually by communal life and mothering. See *ibid.*, 286-94, 328-40. Later Marxist feminist approaches to women's labour, specifically around O'Brien's time, began to list and quantify women's domestic labour. There was no analysis of the value of reproductive labour until that of O'Brien.

²⁹ See, for example, Ann FOREMAN, *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977).

were inspired to write about female reproductive labour. O'Brien's combined interest in childbirth and Marxist theory produced an analysis of "labour" (indissoluble from labour power) which assigned a strong role to physiology. At the same time, she regarded the confinement of mothers and children to the private realm as a decree of the state, which legislates their privatization as an investment in both the product and the means of production.

There are several aspects to the importance of "labour" in *Politics*, some of which bear repeating. When women labour in giving birth, they are connecting or mediating the gap between the human and natural worlds, a gap which men only fill in the realm of ideas. O'Brien views women's labour as a tangible mediation of *immediate* separation in contrast to men's immediate separation which is resolved in abstract relations. In other words, the philosophical quest for universal continuity between humanity and nature is completed in the actual, temporally unified and ethical labour of giving birth. Women labour with a consciousness of unity between themselves and their creation involving all the implications for continuing and conserving the human species. They may, therefore, be the most qualified labourers toward solutions for alienation in both places of necessity, the public and the private realms. O'Brien claims that traditional ethics, composed of deductive and axiomatic principles, cannot recognize man's "freedom from necessity" as alienation.

All labour produces value. However, the new needs and values created by productive labour are not commensurate with the new needs and values created in reproductive labour.

In Marxist language, the value of the "product" is two-fold: it has a market value, and a value in terms of created sociability. O'Brien points out that the corresponding value of

reproductive labour is quite different. Children have had, and continue to have, market value in terms of their lives as labourers, sexual objects, and extra reproducers. This value is a historical development dependent on created sociability and relations of appropriation. But it is incommensurate with the more profound meaning of value in the reproductive realm. Reproduction involves a primarily and necessarily social labour, one which produces a child of immanent, non-exchangeable value. O'Brien's term for it is "synthetic value" which "represents the unity of sentient beings with natural process and the integrity of the continuity of the race."³⁰ Value in the framework of patriarchy is supported by ambivalence toward life, the legitimacy of domination, and the certainty of death over every action.

Reproductive value is also grounded in the temporal organization of birth. O'Brien observes that birth-oriented time represents an extreme shift from the traditional philosophical frame of linearity and mortality.³¹ In the process of reproduction, O'Brien isolates three time sequences: linear time, cyclical time, and episodic time.³² With the exception of the moments that women share with men (copulation and nurture) women's moments unfold in cyclical time. Sexual receptivity is episodic for both men and women, but reproductive receptivity changes in the female cycle. Cycles embody women's notion

³⁰ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 60.

³¹ On the subject of temporality, Frieda Forman's work was inspired by O'Brien. See the collected essays co-edited by Forman, to which O'Brien also contributed: Frieda Johles FORMAN with Caoron SOWTON, eds., *Taking Our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989). See also the comments of Robin May Schott, who argues that mistrust of embodiment in theory is partly due to postmodernity's inability to recognize woman-centred time consciousness: SCHOTT, "Ressurrecting Embodiment," 175.

³² O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 61.

of time and produce a consciousness of continuity with the species and with nature. Alternatively, men create *principles* of linear continuity to deal with their alienation from developing life. Embedded in these principles, social meanings and ideologies that are turned into social rules and structures authenticate man's status in the history of paternity. These same social structures which rationalize paternity frequently borrow from the terminology of natural time. Hence, in the "body politic," or the "constitution" of economics, religion, and law, we find materializations of continuity, stability, and the doctrine of organicism.

Contraceptive technology is an ordering or "rationalization" of the reproductive process altering both the social relations and consciousness of the process. Women with access to the technology have the option, like men, to divide genetic continuity from sexuality and from their own standpoint and experience to participate in the development of history. However, O'Brien points out that contraceptive technology is only an option for "particular" women because not all women have the religious, cultural, or financial support to make use of it. If they did, moreover, its use would not confer problem-free "liberation." Technology, for O'Brien, remains a male preserve, and contraceptive technology is not an innovation with only women in mind. It is driven by a contempt for nature - by the "thing relations of the marketplace"³³ and the ethics of mass production. The challenge of contraception first belongs to women who must work out its mediations collectively (since technology cannot be mediated individually). As the second vital (and unfinished) change in the material relations of reproduction, women need to negotiate the meanings of

³³ Ibid., 205.

contraception without dishonouring the power of their bodies and without accepting the validity of economic determinism or biological essentialism. Women can, in the Marxist sense, own their reproductive labour power, and work out its value together. O'Brien regards this task as a challenge to the entire organization of "goods" in male-stream ethics.

The Public and Private Realms³⁴

O'Brien expands her thesis in the following chapters by analyzing the internal forces of historical oppositions. Western philosophy, having set nature (woman) and reason (man) in opposition, casts this opposition as a narrative of private life versus public nobility. Parallel to the opposition of nature and reason is the dualism of social roles prescribed by the perceived antagonism between nature and morality. Though the family is historically entrusted with the socialization of children, the tradition saw nature as inimical to moral stability. Hence, philosophers explained the grounding of moral authority in the family as paternal. Paternal authority is that which transcends private necessity in order to deduce the criteria of family-based morality from public realm activity. "Paternity" became largely a political concept, and the "goods" derived from paternal morality reflected political aims. O'Brien shows how this interpretation of paternity has encouraged men to understand fatherhood as a purely abstract state.

The taxonomies and hierarchies of Western philosophy have devalued and

³⁴ The remainder of my analysis begins in O'Brien's third chapter. In the second chapter O'Brien criticizes some of the existing feminist theory and illustrates the need for a feminist philosophy of birth. Of particular interest is her critique of Simone de Beauvoir's work. This will be taken up in a later chapter, when I connect *Politics* with current literature.

reinterpreted the internal relations of private life. More recent social philosophy, however, focuses on the nature of the relationship between the public and private, and the nature of change occurring in and between them. Theorists speak of the "vector of influence" in terms of a one-way channel privileging "official" public norms; the conditions of the private sphere are interpreted as derivative. O'Brien (with many others) claims that conventional analysis fails to reflect actual lived relationships and struggles that predate the issues that attract public debate. In much of the feminist research, the social vector of influence is said to move in both directions, thus thematizing a gendered subtext and contesting roles thought to be clear and rigid.³⁵ The historical family is at the centre of various ideological struggles, which, for O'Brien, are derived from the generic struggles of the male potency principle. Mothers were given no alternative to the isolation and disempowerment of life in the private realm. Married mothers, moreover, were deemed to be "legitimately" maternal as they conserved the values that sanctioned female privation.³⁶

Creativity and Procreativity

Lived reality is the resource for theory, the reflecting "fact" from which value is derived. Throughout philosophy, according to O'Brien, the prevalent concepts of man are grounded in unanalyzed material reality. We learn about the theorist from what is valued in

³⁵ For a cogent feminist analysis of social theory and gender and this vector of influence, see Nancy Fraser's critique of Jurgen Habermas: FRASER, "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 113-43.

³⁶ See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 110.

the theory. In traditional theory, man's experience is, at the same time, prescriptive. In O'Brien's view, when all people are forced to subscribe to narrow experience as the norm, the blind spot of a few becomes the ideological vision of the masses. The traditional notion of paternity rests on such an ideology.

Philosophers of Greek antiquity ideologize man by awarding him two natures, while woman has one. Female nature, immersed as they believe in the corporeal and the pre-rational, is disruptive to public life. The man in the polis is carried by second nature above the functions and appetites of flesh: he is "more" than biological, yet harmonized with animal nature by his "natural" gift of reason. Reason permits man to abstract reality from the *concepts* of history and creativity, and the Greeks were eager to build upon this rational essence and potency. The purpose of a social structure is organization (by men) and stability. In the context of man's alienation from reproduction, his abstraction of the process produces new "bodies" - for example, law, philosophy and literature - and it guarantees a superior rebirth and form of continuity. O'Brien points out that in Greece (and even today) "legitimate" institutions have the appearance of being "natural" because they reify man's natural desire by transforming it into a rational embodiment of human destiny.

The Greek tendency to cast the world in misogynous metaphysics has (at least) two important sources. First, O'Brien points out that the Greeks did not invent male supremacy. They encountered it, and were obliged to justify it in the organization of "natural" polity which excluded women. "Grounding" the polity are metaphysical principles of continuity which conflate the idea of beginnings with the meanings and realities of male rule. In the second place, the subordination of women is justified by the Greek aversion to "vulgarity"

such as sex and birth. Plato, who is particularly fearful of sexuality, applies a metaphysical solution to man's procreative dilemma. Eros and death are the life-force for Plato, and, as in his *Timaeus*, female sexuality corrupts man's potency and philosophical skill.³⁷ The intellectual process overshadows biological process so completely that Plato writes of "form" and "formlessness" to depict the reality of birth. Plato's inversions, O'Brien claims, permit him to plunder reproductive process by claiming that it is the father who gives life, and the mother who contributes the sex-act. This mother "receives all things" and, in Plato's mind, is a "formless being" who gives birth metaphysically to "a series of triangles."³⁸ In Greek society, physical continuity has no meaning, although "structure" clearly does. The polis is the structure given to man's second transcendent nature, while maternal process is concealed behind social and political barriers. This suppression is the result of the first radical transformation of reproductive relations which, in *Politics*, is the discovery of physiological paternity. O'Brien claims that man's recognition of his role in procreation ultimately moved Western history toward the overthrow of matrilineal society.

O'Brien posits, therefore, that the logic of male supremacy has a material base in the changed relations of reproductive process. One of Western culture's most repeated forms of the changed relations is the defence of male power in theological discourse. The potency of the father-force, so powerfully expressed in the Christian trinity, is a universal declaration of man's inclusion in life-giving process. According to O'Brien, Plato initiates the

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 127.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125. The discussion of Greek ideology follows O'Brien's analysis of parts of the *Timaeus* and of Plato's banquet in the *Symposium*. See pp. 125-33.

philosophical development toward a God who is Father of a "sexually untainted Son."³⁹ By Hegel's time, his "unity, separated opposites, and reunion," worked out in the earlier manuscripts, appears to be a theologized metaphysics explaining separation of the Son from the Father, and his return to the Holy Spirit. The Christian synthesis of death and rebirth depends on a distortion of actual reproductive process, O'Brien claims. This account eliminates female experience by transcending the continuity of cyclical time, and by casting female embodiment in flesh-and-blood-denying masculine symbols. The "natural" appears in history, variously, as polis life, the abstracted body, rational excellence, and even the subjugation of nature. But O'Brien claims that what is natural, all the while, is man's discontinuity, and his conversion of material experience into the "tyranny of the abstract."⁴⁰

Production and Reproduction

The dialectical structure of both processes, production and reproduction, relates to the struggle to preserve freedom from labour. In the economic realm, the struggle is waged between upper and working classes, and in the domestic realm, between women and all men. This latter struggle refers to generic opposition which is evident in artificial forms of the continuity principle in the public realm. O'Brien explains that it is in the sphere of production that the concept of continuity is "properly" realized, according to Marx. Biological continuity is regressive, he believes, while cycles of the "self-made" man

³⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁰ See the article of similar name, "The Tyranny of the Abstract: Structure, State, and Patriarchy," in Mary O'BRIEN, *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 45-60.

transcend those of individual, biological lives. However, Marx also claims that process is dialectical because it is "an active series of negations and mediations."⁴¹ O'Brien observes that the processes of reproduction and production exist in a dialectical relationship, and that both forms of labour mediate the separation between people and nature. Only reproductive labour, however, is *necessarily* social and can mediate the gap between historical and cyclical time.

In O'Brien's analysis, uncertain paternity through history takes on the certainty of materiality in Western kinship and economic relations. It brings about the passage from tribalism to modern family forms, and from the virtues of the polis to a rapid rise of the state as "defender of private property." These rites of progress inaugurate the principle of "Father Right," which engenders an appropriation of women's labour power and a defeat of the prior "Mother Right." Philosophers point to "natural" economic factors which precipitated the "world historical defeat of the female sex."⁴² For Marx and Engels this defeat is a peacefully attained, natural transition which weaves the family through property relations and ties it to the state.⁴³ Property, as the increasingly significant currency of continuity, needed to remain with the male members of a community to establish and guard Father Right. These developments are neither natural nor economic for O'Brien, but are inspired in history by the dialectical opposition between man's abstraction of his detached paternity and of woman's

⁴¹ O'BRIEN, *Politics* 168.

⁴² To illustrate the persistence of the tendency to cite economic conditions as the cause of the defeat of Mother Right, O'Brien refers to George Thomson's *Aeschylus in Athens* (New York, 1967). See *Politics*, 144-57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 143-44. The presumption by Hegel, Marx, and Engels that the patriarchal family is a spontaneous and nostalgic development is discussed again by O'Brien on p. 175.

actual unity in the process of reproduction.

The rise of man the warrior has a special kind of relationship to separation and potency through the meanings given to blood. Before the discovery of physiological paternity, blood as matter signified new life, kinship, and individual death in cyclical time. Woman's ability to bleed without injury was magic, as was man's discovery that the power of his seed could stop the bleeding.⁴⁴ In early Greek society, however, blood and blood loss took on a more public signification with the "spilling of blood." The blood of war idealized new elaborations of "blood" in the agreed-upon, universal nobility of killing. Birth blood, an impossible male experience, comes to be disvalued as particular and historically uneventful. The alliance of blood with noble and patriotic death prevails through history and is renewed daily in the creed of the modern army. The basis of this "fierce brotherhood," according to O'Brien,⁴⁵ is a real material contradiction in the form of man's experienced disconnection and his lack of objective ground on which to visualize himself as an agent of birth. Blood, for man, takes two opposed forms, which must be negotiated to ensure his axiological potency. The resolution between the life-giving and the death-dealing is man's second birth which, through rational equation, frees him *from* primitive labour *to* participate in second nature possibility. The transcendent freedom that permits man to loathe birth and choose to kill is explained by O'Brien's theory that the potency principle renders man

⁴⁴ For a feminist analysis of historical meanings of menstrual blood, see Louise LANDER, *Images of Bleeding: Menstruation as Ideology* (New York: Orlando Press, 1988).

⁴⁵ This phrase comes from O'Brien's description of man's fraternity as "[t]he brotherhood of man, so fiercely achieved, so fragile, so contradicted by reality" See *Politics*, 157.

universally *unfree*, forced by his biology to seek "existence" among principles and ideals.

The potency principle is evident in pre-capitalist society in forms of property that nevertheless lacked the full regenerative capacity of modern capital. Capital, O'Brien notes, is "capable of self-regeneration . . . without recourse to sexuality and without any need for females."⁴⁶ In other words, though it is predated by gender struggle, it also represents, to a large degree, a resolution of the paternity problem. Institutions such as hereditary monarchy and primogeniture, for example, are not practical solutions under the capitalist mode of continuity. Moreover, the uncontrolled creation of commodities, with their attendant needs and values, transforms - or as O'Brien claims, "dehumanizes" - the material relations of both production and reproduction.⁴⁷ The market solutions of capitalism - produced, reproduced and generalized - strengthen a generalized alienation from nature. The productive realm takes on new struggles under the new continuity principle of self-regeneration, and the family, ruled by economic determinism, shrinks. These developments, O'Brien believes, render imperative the need for a feminist synthesis of both poles of necessity.

In O'Brien's critique, Marx claims that the family is a derivative economic unit subsumed under the necessity for a supply of workers. Yet this dependence on a steady growth of working class people is equally a dependence on mothers to nurture, preserve, and value their children. O'Brien is not claiming that women's labour, and indeed their place in history, should be plugged into a quantitative analysis of productive "value." This was touched upon earlier. There is a great deal of feminist research to show that value is much

⁴⁶ Ibid., 158-59.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 160.

more than an economic determinant. In the recognition of affective, genetic and ethical value, O'Brien points out, "Feminism presents and represents a fundamentally different experience of the relation of people and nature than that posed by male dualism."⁴⁸

Women create and recreate their children, but Marx posits that history and the conditions of freedom are advanced by productive labour. Productive labour, he claims, unites men with nature, with other men, and with their product. His understanding of species continuity (like that of Hegel) is rooted in a recognition of the integration between natural and social worlds in sexual relations. Maternal labour, for both Hegel and Marx, is not an integrative interaction with nature. In O'Brien's theory, however, the dialectical structure of maternal labour invalidates the "facts" of the masculine dialectic of history. The labour of women in the productive realm, moreover, is defined by struggle with the owners of production, and with the economist principle of continuity that both men and women are conditioned to accept.

When Marx privileges the relations of eating and drinking before those of bearing and nurturing he is setting the stage for later meditations in *Capital* which analyse production in terms of continuity and consciousness. Consciousness, Marx claims, is a product of the economic realm precisely because capital is disguised as the "progenitor" of consciousness.⁴⁹ Capital both objectifies generativity and contains the means for its self-destruction. But Marx, according to O'Brien, understands that capital is not, in itself, regenerative. Marx credits the worker with real ties to continuity, and in so doing, he

⁴⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 177.

reduces species continuity to an economic construction.

O'Brien's discussion of Mother Right, mother-blood, and the false continuity of capitalism reveals how man's "need" relates to the power of regeneration and to the rites, negations, and emulations of birth that the masculine record of history conceals. But the Marxist analysis of class interest, with all its limitations, offers an astute observation about the normative politics of need by claiming that continuity constitutes both the principle and the practice of class regeneration. At the same time, O'Brien argues that Marx is blind to the larger quest for continuity which is responsible for the creation of prior male supremacy. Marx and O'Brien agree that symbols of continuity must function publicly, but while Marx looks approvingly at the patriarchal family as a "natural" necessity, O'Brien sees it as one result of the natural gulf between fathers and their uncertain children.

Alienation and Integration

In her final chapter O'Brien connects feminist vision with praxis; Marx's contribution is his re-focus of ethics. O'Brien writes:

Thus, since Marx, the principles of good society have been challenged to ground themselves in history rather than in human nature; or, more correctly, in history understood as the working out of the dialectical relation of man's world and the natural world.⁵⁰

The "working out" of history's contradictions is achieved through a unity of theory and practice which analyses "what men do" and is referred to as "praxis." Marx claims that what men do in the realm of production confirms his hypothesis that history has a material base.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 186.

He focusses on the universal reality of material necessity in the biology of human metabolism. Necessity in this instance is the universal need to eat and to carry out that praxis which will reproduce the worker-self on a daily basis. Marx attempts to legitimate human action over human nature, and in ethical terms, he establishes material reality as a reference point for historical progress and decline. Dialectics, then, is the logic of challenge for mediating material necessity in creative ways. However, O'Brien points out that Marx does not know he is writing prior to the second critical material change in the relations of reproductive process, and at a time when procreativity is still imagined as *precreative*.

Marx turns to biology, nevertheless, and to observations about male supremacy that rely on the legitimacy of the biological. O'Brien notes that ruling men have required women to retreat inside the private realm, without considering the possibility that a dialectical unpredictability can lurk in its material base. The new transformative moment, brought about by the potential for contraception to control reproduction, means that the masculine monopoly on rationalizing continuity can no longer be given validity.⁵¹ This "second revolution" is incomplete, however, because technological innovation and the masculine

⁵¹ There is a double entendre contained in this conclusion. First, O'Brien refers to the Marxist meaning of rationalization as intentional control of productivity. Second, the use of the term "rationalization" evokes its more common meaning, the attribution of reason or motive. In this sense O'Brien implicitly returns the reader to the first chapter and to the Marxist analogy of the architect and the bee. What accounts for their difference, Marx had pointed out, is that the architect raises a structure first in imagination; the bee is a creature of pure instinct. Women in the process of giving birth are also portrayed through history as instinctual animals lacking in rational will. Of course, O'Brien wants to stress birth's unity. The mother visualizes her child and knows that she passes her/him to the human future: "Unlike the bee, she knows that her product, like herself, will have a history." Thus, the rationalization facilitated by contraceptive technology, while it points in one direction to quantitative control, is also the material ground of ethical orientation which, for the first time, has become the jurisdiction of women. See *Politics*, 37-38.

appetite for mastery have raced ahead of practical ethical guidelines. The actions of people as they work out the principles of "good society" now include, and focus importantly on, the praxis of women as they mediate a new material consciousness. In addition, a theory of ethical society must wrestle with the reality of the changed feminist consciousness of reproduction. This is imperative for feminist theory, according to O'Brien, as it develops in dialectical relationship with the early accounts of materialism. Feminism therefore is itself connected dialectically to historical meanings, both realized and unrealized, with respect to free sexuality, planned or chosen parenthood and scientific participation in the human future.

The significance of contraceptive technology in terms of O'Brien's analysis relates to women's created option to participate in the elaboration of a second nature of sorts. Like men, women need to establish the values to be honoured as destiny opens a second door to the createable future. But unlike men, women embark upon the task in an ambience of suppression. In O'Brien's view, women approach the enterprise of shaping the ethical world under the weight of previous centuries in which their thinking and speaking were effectively "crippled."⁵² The provision of a second nature, moreover, does not make women "like men" because reproductive labour power still belongs to them. The knowledge that they can gestate a child is present to consciousness and women know that their labour power produces a value which is greater than its cost. A liberating power in women's second nature is

⁵² Ibid., 194. O'Brien's observation in full is as follows: "Unlike men, we must advance upon this speculative, normative and practical enterprise within a historically specific ambience in which the ways in which we speak and think are crippled by centuries of human hobbling through history on one leg of dialectical reality, supported by the problematic crutch of the potency principle."

present insofar as the maternal capacity to create value is itself valued in accordance with women's experience. Thus, the second nature "revolution" that O'Brien has in mind implores women to consciously integrate "freedom from" and "freedom to" in procreative choice. In male-stream theory, these forms of freedom, in the context of procreation, have been set in opposition so that history is a partial and self-referential account of alien birth.

In her discussion of the dimensions of the collective feminist project, O'Brien specifies norms and strategies toward the consolidation of women's existing kinds of civic power. This consolidation, she believes, is urgent in the light of the proprietary characteristic of technology and capitalism, and the new uncertain base of reproductive relations. Women who are mothers are also workers, consumers, and voters. In the domestic sphere the transformed dialectic of necessity has begun. Women are transforming private life by addressing the process of reproduction in its material and abstract forms. Following the Marxist claim that history creates consciousness, women have begun to reject isolation and to participate in consciousness-raising among themselves. They have also begun to socialize their children in ways that will clarify the meanings of motherhood, and transform the alienation between public and private realms.

The Politics of Reproduction was written as a feminist perspective and a feminist method of inquiry offering more and different questions than the philosophical tradition has yet provided.⁵³ Clearly, the segregation of women is a patriarchal phenomenon and the coherence of its critique rests in comprehending the stakes involved in the separation of public and private domains. The cohesion of feminist agency, in posing such questions,

⁵³ Ibid., 23-24, 62, 185, 196, 201.

tolerates - indeed requires - some universality, but such universal insight must transcend the excesses of biologism. O'Brien moreover claims that genderic apartheid is oppressive and unworkable⁵⁴ and that liberation "depends on the reintegration of men on equal terms into reproductive process."⁵⁵ Men's integration into nurturance is an important movement that attracts respect for the materiality of daily living, and presents obstacles to the numerous forms that social dualism takes. The notion of shared nurturance is also a return to O'Brien's taxonomy of the ten moments of reproductive process. There, O'Brien believes, in the sociability of sexual relations and parenting, women and men begin in earnest to nourish truly human value.

Critical Response to *The Politics of Reproduction*

The release of *Politics* in 1982 coincided with the general critique of abstract universals characterizing postmodern thought. In feminism, struggle and criticism had taken a multitude of forms, and by the 1980s, feminism appeared to exist somewhat in harmony with postmodernism. Thus, O'Brien's work would be radical to the tradition of philosophy, and equally so to mainstream feminism. At a time when O'Brien was completing her theory of birth and universal consciousness, the prevailing methods of inquiry leaned on disparate values, negated boundaries, and a rejection of embodiment.

Politics attracted attention from disciplines within both the arts and the sciences. Throughout the '80s, for example, medical ethicists were applying O'Brien's thought to the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 210.

area of reproductive technology. At the same time, the anthropological attraction of *Politics* had to do with the viable connection anthropologists made between the cultural significance of reproductive process and the construction of primitive society.⁵⁶ O'Brien's work was honoured in 1986 by the American Ethnological Society;⁵⁷ in 1989 by a special issue of *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche feministe (RFR/DRF)*,⁵⁸ and subsequently by numerous feminist authors who have worked with and applied her insights. She has presented her work throughout the United States and Britain, and her ideas are well known in parts of Australia. There are several reviews of O'Brien's theory which are especially relevant because they raise issues that I will take up in a later chapter.

In 1982 the journal *Signs* published a critique of *The Politics of Reproduction* coauthored by Sandra Harding and Shakuntla Bhaya. The emphasis in this review is on O'Brien's aim toward a "scientific feminist theory," a "scientific feminism," and a "scientific 'philosophy of birth.'"⁵⁹ The authors see the value of O'Brien's theory in its articulation of

⁵⁶ See Rona ACHILLES and Mark LIPPINCOTT, "The Dialectics of Reproduction: The Third Revolution?" *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 72-75; Geraldine FINN, "Natural Woman, Cultural Man: The Anthropology of Male Hysteria and Father Right," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 24-28.

⁵⁷ American Ethnological Society, "The Politics of Reproduction: Case Studies Reflecting on the Work of Mary O'Brien," *108th Annual Spring Meeting* (Wrightsville Beach, N. C.: April 26, 1986).

⁵⁸ See "Feminist Theory: The Influence of Mary O'Brien," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989).

⁵⁹ See Sandra HARDING and Shakuntla BHAYA, review of *The Politics of Reproduction*, by Mary O'Brien, *Signs* 8 (winter 1982), 361-63. The emphasis noted is in keeping with Harding's long academic career devoted to the links between science and feminism.

the possibility of new science (in place of the feminist euphemism, "science-as-usual").⁶⁰ A new theory of the "laws of change" emerges in *Politics*, and this, along with its analyses of traditional and feminist works, is regarded as its strength as a feminist contribution. There are also weaknesses, they point out, such as O'Brien's failure to include lesbian feminist analysis, an unclear connection between biology and consciousness ("[I]s O'Brien a biological determinist? Or is she an idealist?"⁶¹) and an unanalyzed relationship between the contraceptive revolution and capitalism. The question of biologism which they raise becomes surprisingly moot, they suggest, as O'Brien's consolidation of rational control of reproduction perpetuates, or appears to perpetuate, the male potency principle.

This last point is central to the highly critical section on O'Brien in a 1986 article by Reyes Lazaro.⁶² Lazaro understands contraceptive technology in *Politics* as an endorsed historical phenomenon, meaning that O'Brien favours the historical over the natural, and ultimately a mastery of nature. The problem, she believes, originates in unavoidable biologism and universalism which render *Politics* ahistorical. Related to this charge is Lazaro's claim that O'Brien fails to give historical analysis to the ten moments of reproduction. The omission glosses over female reproductive alienation which occurs in natural process in history. O'Brien's contention that not *all* women experience alienation

⁶⁰ Sandra Harding went on to write extensively on the political agenda that has set science and feminism in opposition. See, for example, HARDING, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ HARDING and BHAYA, review of *Politics*, 363.

⁶² See Reyes LAZARO, "Feminism and Motherhood: O'Brien vs. Beauvoir," *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 87-102.

from the process in effect creates the very dualism that her thesis rejects.

There is agreement between Lazaro and O'Brien on the enduring existence of a male principle of continuity, but for Lazaro it is grounded in the relations of production. This explanation supports the growing numbers of men who disengage from their children, she claims. She relates the high incidence of single-mother households to the fact that children are no longer a labour force or a guarantee of care in old age. Consequently, fathers are leaving.

Finally, Lazaro observes that there is no analysis of motherhood as *socially* alienating to the mother in *Politics*. Men's freedom from reproductive labour is conjoined with freedom to assert paternity. But without technology, women lack control over their reproductive destiny. At the same time, the panacea in technology which O'Brien seems to promote does nothing about the fact that it is still an ingrained cultural form of motherhood which is imposed on women. Thus, an alienating freedom - Rousseau's "forced freedom" - characterizes women's reproductive status with or without technology.

Two conflicting reviews of *Politics* appeared in *RFR/DRF* in the 1982-3 issue.⁶³ In Geraldine Finn's positive analysis, natural need and historical mediation of that need, in the light of history's general devaluation of women and birth, is a plausible ground of patriarchy. Finn explains patriarchy in *Politics* as a regulatory mechanism uniting kinship and polity in order to mediate the "mystery" of procreation. She disagrees with critics who claim that O'Brien "opts for" technology and thereby makes women "like men." Men are involuntarily

⁶³ See Geraldine FINN, review of *The Politics of Reproduction*, by Mary O'Brien, *RFR/DRF* XI (December/January 1982-3): 441-43; Susan Moller OKIN, review of *Politics*, in *ibid.*, 443-44.

alienated from reproductive process; their resultant "freedom" is an indicator of their overall alienation from women, children and other men. For women, "biology leaves them with a choice for reproductive labour, which is . . . integrative . . . ,"⁶⁴ and such freedom is not a measure of alienation, but of liberation and the consequences of praxis.

Susan Moller Okin, however, is sceptical of the integrating potential of reproductive labour. She believes that history shows such labour to be anything but mediating. The historical evidence of physical risk in childbirth, and the high mortality rates of mothers and infants would seem to support this. At any rate, men have laboured mediatively, she writes, as farmers, hunters, sailors and participants in family life.

Okin urges O'Brien to get beyond birth in her analysis because she finds the preoccupation with the moment of birth to be rife with "biologically deterministic bias."⁶⁵

She essentially rejects O'Brien's entire thesis when she compares birth and nurture:

However, pregnancy and birth are of minor importance in terms of both the labour involved and the impact on human consciousness, when compared with the day by day, year by year, reality of nurturing a child⁶⁶

Okin looks more to historical settings, to the patriarchal organization of society which has sustained women's exclusive role as nurturers, for an explanation of the formation of consciousness. She claims O'Brien's approach is unconvincing because the context of reproduction is too narrow.

The feminist reception of O'Brien's theory most generally took exception to what

⁶⁴ FINN, review of *Politics*, 442.

⁶⁵ OKIN, review of *Politics*, 444.

⁶⁶ OKIN, review of *Politics*, 444.

critics saw as biological essentialism. But authors also suggested other points of interest in *Politics*. Lorraine Code, for example, wondered where women who do not have children, or are past having children, fit into O'Brien's picture.⁶⁷ Heather Jon Maroney, spoke of the "tightrope" involved in constructing a feminist theory that attempts to validate, without glorifying, the mother role.⁶⁸ Denise Reaume expressed concern over the ways in which the contraceptive revolution might alter male reproductive consciousness.⁶⁹

A recent theological analysis of the work of Mary O'Brien commends *Politics* for reclaiming the female experience of birth from existential immanence.⁷⁰ Phyllis Kaminski points out that O'Brien creates a realistic portrayal of women's difference by including a universal aspect without insisting that it is experienced in exactly the same way by all women. Applying O'Brien's thought to a reading of the pope's Apostolic Letter on women,⁷¹ Kaminski discovers only fleeting harmony: They agree that the man is "outside" the process of pregnancy and birth, but their agreement ends here. The pope's account privileges

⁶⁷ Lorraine CODE, review of *The Politics of Reproduction*, by Mary O'Brien, *Atlantis* 9 (spring 1984): 118-20.

⁶⁸ Heather Jon MARONEY, "Embracing Motherhood: New Feminist Theory," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* IX (hiver/printemps 1985): 40-64. This article also refers extensively to the work of Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow.

⁶⁹ Denise RÉAUME, review of *Politics*, by Mary O'Brien, *Queen's Quarterly* 91 (February 1984): 474-77.

⁷⁰ See Phyllis H. KAMINSKI, "'Reproducing the World': Mary O'Brien's Theory of Reproductive Consciousness and Implications for Feminist Incarnational Theology," *Horizons* 19/2 (1992): 240-62. This article also makes reference to Mary O'Brien's collection of essays. See O'BRIEN, *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

⁷¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, "Dignity and Vocation of Women," Vatican translation (Sherbrooke, Qué.: Éditions Paulines, 1988).

dualism, patriarchal values, and a language of mystery. Hence, woman as mother is more suited to private existence as a figure of empathy and nurturance who is blocked by those same elements in her nature from a richer role in the church. Kaminski believes that a theoretical encounter with bodies, particularly the realism of O'Brien's maternal body, is an essential nuance to feminist theology and to theologies of incarnation. The notion that the maternal body is revelatory is a theological insight about all embodiment since, through it, all people are connected to unending cycles of birth and renewal.

O'Brien's Response

Reyes Lazaro's claim that O'Brien fails to analyse female reproductive alienation is true to the extent that *Politics* is an analysis of the experience of a majority of women. Most women in Canada give birth in their lifetime,⁷² and most are adequate mothers. O'Brien shows awareness of the exceptions to this by acknowledging that a mother can be unfeeling⁷³ or violent.⁷⁴ But the solution to this problem lies not in the alternative feminist claim that the liberation of women depends exclusively on economic or political analysis, a claim which ignores the significance of gender and childbearing experience.

O'Brien further claims that, in taking stock of their own birth experiences, women resist the images of motherhood that are forced on them by patriarchy. Thus, in O'Brien's

⁷² See STATISTICS CANADA, "Fertility: The Nation," catalogue number 93-321 (Census 1991). As of December 1998, the information contained in this report remained current.

⁷³ O'BRIEN, *Politics* 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

view, the concern of a feminist theory cannot be to discuss women's alienation from birth. It is instead to resist the socialized expectations of motherhood in favour of real unexaggerated experience. The real experience of reproduction, according to *Politics*, is a dialectical process of physicality and consciousness that needs to be explained by women themselves.

This assertion leads into the question of essentialism raised by O'Brien's critics. Throughout *Politics*, we are reminded that biology, as the ground of theory, is not new to philosophy. O'Brien gives the examples of Marxism, Freudian psychology and existentialism. Each of these theories is founded on the necessity of a biological process, yet man, within the theory, has escaped essentialist labels. In theory, man transcends the biological realm; that is, he mediates his separation from nature in various kinds of historical praxis which include the control of definition and structure in society. In man's theories, woman is given no such relationship with the natural world because her connection is said to be unmediated. Woman reproduces the species, and therefore, woman *is* biology.

O'Brien reasons that, while reproduction, like eating, is biologically determined, woman's role in reproduction does not limit her existence to giving birth. Western society is one that has not assigned value to the process of birth in its philosophy. This is because man long ago recognized his "outsider" relationship to reproduction. By undervaluing it and, at the same time, dwelling on the female connection to the process, man undervalued woman. The mechanism by which this occurred is the rendering of "biologically determined" process (where it refers to woman) to mean a fact-value blur that becomes essentialist. Thus, Susan Moller Okin's charge of "biologically deterministic bias" in *Politics*

plays into the male perspective that degrades and "transcends" biological determinism when the process in question is female.

Western society has followed the philosophical example of devaluing the feminine. Therefore, O'Brien claims that the avoidance of essentialism depends on *giving value* to women's role in procreation. Women collectively are called upon to describe their unique experiences of birth from the perspective of value. Indeed, motherhood is a powerful access to the socialization of a generation and thus to transformation in the dialectics of reproductive process. By assigning value and dignity to the female "moments" of reproduction, the new consciousness militates against the singular voice of disinterest (if not disvalue) offered up by masculine ethics. In the long range, the onus is on ethics and its various disciplines to begin the project of rooting out ideologies which have stigmatized historical material reality.

Conclusion

In the following chapter, I will bring Mary O'Brien into dialogue with the feminist authors presented in Chapter One. This exchange is intended to clarify their similarities and differences, and to bring out the specific contribution which O'Brien makes to the discourse of difference. I will show that the ongoing debate around the significance of difference raises some difficult questions and that feminist theories respond most adequately when they attend to the totality of women's experience. It is expected that new questions will also arise to form the trajectory for additional research on the meaning of difference.

CHAPTER THREE
SITUATING *THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION*
AMONG THE DIFFERENCE THEORIES

Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to explore what I have called "originary female difference" in order to show how this difference is "an a priori matrix of experiences for measuring and understanding the world."¹ I present the works of a range of difference feminists and compare their understanding of female experience with that of Mary O'Brien. Each of these writers has a distinct approach to the meaning of difference, and each has been influential within the literature of feminism.

The survey in chapter one investigated the experience of motherhood from existential, literary-historical, psycho-social, and French feminist points of view. Not surprising is the fact that the body plays a different role in each theory even though the subject, motherhood, is shared. For example, the body in existentialism represents a kind of immanence beyond which each human being strives; in the psycho-social view it grounds instincts and drives upon which behaviour is predicated and internalized. In chapter two I outlined Mary O'Brien's approach, in which human birth mediates human consciousness and

¹ See chapter one, above, "Feminism, Difference Theory, and Motherhood: A Selective Survey," 2.

embodiment in genderically specific ways.

In this third chapter, I compare each feminist account with Mary O'Brien's theory. Drawing on their strengths and weaknesses, and on their responses to the approach taken in *The Politics of Reproduction*, I intend to refine these various positions on the role and meaning of the female body in the enterprise of theorizing. As the authors respond to each other, the underlining inquiry reveals how critically or uncritically each adopts the vision of masculine predecessor theories. The advantage of a critical feminist focus is its ability to wrest the female body from masculine scrutiny and make it its own focal point for an analysis of ethical resources. Thus, O'Brien's critical evaluation of Hegel and Marx exposes, in female experience, new paradigms for describing and perceiving the world.

Mary O'Brien and Simone de Beauvoir

Both Simone de Beauvoir and Mary O'Brien wrote extensively about motherhood, relying on the groundwork of predecessor theory. This latter term refers to theory which has held a position of great authority. In de Beauvoir's case, for example, the prior theory was existentialism - more specifically, the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre. Mary O'Brien's predecessors were G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx, both of whom appealed to her in terms of their treatment of the material world and its relationship with nature. To generalize or find commonality in the works of de Beauvoir and O'Brien, however, is difficult because they handle the meanings of patriarchy so differently. De Beauvoir offers a scathing portrait of biosocial motherhood as utterly lacking in transcendence, while O'Brien rethinks the female body and the process of birth as a resource for ethics. Clearly, each constructs a view

of the maternal on the basis of distinct ideas about being female in their respective historical and cultural settings.²

In *The Second Sex*, more than three decades before Mary O'Brien, Simone de Beauvoir set out to construct theoretical foundations for feminism. De Beauvoir's guiding theory is existentialism, which she employs creatively to explain women's actual and potential experience. Consistent with the existentialist focus, de Beauvoir presents female difference as "otherness." At odds with the traditional view, however, she argues that woman can indeed participate in the quest for authentic existence by refusing to cooperate with man's portrayal of her. Yet by offering no critique of the existentialist system itself, de Beauvoir's feminism reduces freedom and good faith to the level of necessity to live authentically "like a man." Her failure to question existential standards of authenticity means that *The Second Sex* endorses the capacity of a masculine value system to orient women's ethical and symbolic lives and even to theorize feminism.

Mary O'Brien also set out to lay some theoretical foundations for feminism, but her critical engagement with Hegelian and Marxist philosophies dismantles the male supremacy upon which each depends. For O'Brien, thought and experience are inextricably connected to the extent that the consciousness set out in theory is said to unconsciously reproduce

² Some recent interpretations of de Beauvoir's work take issue with the determinism claimed by past critics. The analyses which are offered in this paper correlate with the reception of *The Second Sex* in America and the readings that were current when Mary O'Brien was writing. For more contemporary interpretations, see Sara HEINAMAA, "What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference," *Hypatia* 11 (spring 1996): 20-39; and the collection of essays in Margaret A. SIMONS, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

elements of the philosopher's circumstances. In their theories, consequently, Hegel and Marx provide some insight into the development of philosophical discourse as such. Their contributions gain a place by adhering to the values and rules of an a priori philosophic order. They endorse the notion that men are the producers and women the receivers in the theorizing of value. In Sartre, Hegel, and even Marx, indifference to women's perspective is expressed in the correlation between the lack of importance given to women's lives in their work, and the exclusion of women as their perceived audience. From a feminist point of view, their theories invoke human experience with a specific bias because they are consciously and unconsciously motivated by projections of a masculine status quo. O'Brien articulates and criticizes this "immanent masculine" throughout *Politics* in an effort to undermine it. Simone de Beauvoir, on the other hand, tends to situate the "feminine" within the status quo.

In her own reading of de Beauvoir, O'Brien notes how an uncritical acceptance of existentialism creates problems for feminist analysis.³ The most serious of these is gender hierarchy, which de Beauvoir accepts as an ontological division. A dispersion of Hegelian and Sartrean thought in *The Second Sex* influences the notion of female biology as a barrier to female transcendence. Never questioning this, de Beauvoir is obliged to devalue female subjectivity and autonomy. She must buy into women's "natural" inferiority as the first instance of proposing an ethic of female authenticity. That is, she claims that women exist in the moral tension of having to choose between their bodies and their minds, when culturally it is their bodies alone which offer "femininity." Women's low status in history

³ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 65-76.

can be elevated through the process of imitating male aspirations and "true" male consciousness. Not freedom, however, but circularity is the result. Both history and the imaginable future are driven by "truly human" masculinity as the prior condition for defining what counts as history-making.

The starting principles of de Beauvoir's feminism thus contrast with the basic presumption of an ethic of embodiment in O'Brien's work. De Beauvoir simply accepts the postulates of existentialism, while the significance of Hegel and Marx for O'Brien rests not only in explicit theoretical content but also in their implicit understanding of power and historicity. These implicit realities mask the need for reflexivity in their claims, a need which is noted and fulfilled by feminist critique in general.⁴ The failure of Hegelian and Marxist ethics, according to *Politics*, can be attributed to gender-blind notions of labour and productive man.⁵ In her unravelling of this failure, privileged male experience regarded as human experience is the Subject of history and designer of its inquiries. Female experience

⁴ See, for example, Liz STANLEY and Sue WISE, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103-10, 191-93, 200-03; Lorraine CODE, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), particularly chapter one, "Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?" 1-26; Dorothy E. SMITH, "Women's Perspective As A Radical Critique Of Sociology," in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra HARDING (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 84-96.

⁵ In her study of the kind of political man that evolves from Marxist materialism, Christine DiStefano points out Marx's various uses of the term "sexual division of labour" in *The German Ideology*. His meanings include the heterosexual act of sex, sexual differentiation in biological reproduction, the nurture and care of children, and sexually differentiated labour in household and community production. The sexual division is moreover natural, "deontologized," and philosophically unimportant because it is subsumed under the more interesting duality of mental and manual labour. See Christine DiSTEFANO, *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 120-21.

is indistinct and contingent, and man's relationship to woman in patriarchal organization is proprietary. *Politics* is a feminist inquiry into the nature of masculine authority, particularly as it manifests itself in the modern "rational" polity.

De Beauvoir and O'Brien agree that woman has been denied access to the universal, but they understand the observation differently. For de Beauvoir, access to the universal means access to the legitimacy of maleness. All women lack this access because of the natural dualism of the existential world. Retaining Sartre's images of dangerous female corporeality, de Beauvoir limits woman's biology to negative aspects of humidity, darkness and internality - the realm of the "particular" existent. While female physicality evokes agitation and heaviness, the penis or phallus symbolizes possession and transcendence. Man's projections of himself above nature relate directly to his organ, and in this *metonymical* ethic, woman is complicit. Drawn downward by her own body, woman must aim for the masculine telos which is inscribed in authentic human consciousness.

De Beauvoir's status as a female intellect in a time of postwar domesticity is perhaps the basis for some inconsistency in her theory. By "woman's work," for example, she refers both positively and negatively to life in the private realm. "Maternity" means the domestic trend that came with peace and the plight of mothers bearing up under multiple unchosen pregnancies. The latter situation, de Beauvoir claims, traps female life in timelessness and perpetual conflict. Her awareness of social conditions, however, does not avoid the contradiction inherent in claiming that woman's inferiority is supported by biological evidence, and that woman can choose to change her fate. It is attractive in *The Second Sex* to reject motherhood and to work like (read "harder than") men to achieve authenticity.

Taking existentialism to be everyone's emancipation, de Beauvoir misses the opportunity to explore self-contained female or maternal subjectivity.

For O'Brien, woman's denied universal refers to an actual universal in female experience and to the social relations that *re-present* it. Female biology can sustain and reproduce the species, and female consciousness carries this as potential and actual in experience. But cultural transmission of this notion is complicated by male consciousness, according to *Politics*. Intimacy with creation is a need which men have abstracted and raised to theological heights through the symbol of the de-natured penis, the phallus. The philosophical tradition inverts female biology to not-male, and often to unsalvageable evil - an evil that originates in images of the womb and its ability to nourish life.

O'Brien further believes that when man learned he played a lesser role in producing a human future, he made *knowledge* of the future a universal mark of humanness. He devised economic and political continuity as viable life forces and reduced the female body to low and contingent status. Many feminists claim that a shift took place from mother-honouring society to patriarchy, and that matrilineal teleologies were at some point rendered meaningless. O'Brien regards the transition to patriarchal epistemology as a mediative process invoking Man the Creator in the place of female potency. De Beauvoir, it has been noted, is happy to dwell in the abstraction of French intellectual circles and has trouble escaping existentialist notions of "value." But in Hegel and Marx, O'Brien observes lifeless abstraction *and* flawed attempts to correct it. Both authors retain dualism in their efforts to describe reality. In O'Brien's view philosophy is man's interpretation of the world, and consequently, it is marked by alienation and war on nature.

In *The Second Sex*, female anatomy determines woman's understanding of herself as passive and conditional. The female sexual body, which is superior to a maternal body, is nevertheless still influenced by Sartre's "holes and slime."⁶ Moreover, de Beauvoir capitalizes on the theme of danger in her equation of the female vagina with a carnivorous plant and a child-eating swamp.⁷ A voracious child also brings danger into pregnancy, which de Beauvoir depicts as a cave harbouring a devouring parasite, representing the failure of female humanness and value. Woman's affinities with nature are a burden because nature is a power which makes her carnal and greedy, and in need of man's governance.

In sum, I argue that the *historical* current is never fully integrated in de Beauvoir's thesis. De Beauvoir recognizes social pressure as a factor of women's complicity in their oppression. Hence, as Moira Gatens observes in de Beauvoir's work, "Man has taken advantage of woman's greater involvement in mere species being, making of her the absolute Other, and woman, giving in to the temptations that confront every existent, has often been complicit in this."⁸ "Ideal" history supercedes real history so that the process of birth is, *by consensus*, otherness. The end result is a historically necessary rejection of a naturally necessary physical renewal. De Beauvoir's Woman will choose to repudiate her body in

⁶ MOI, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 168. Associating the female sexual organ with blood, slime, sickly humidity, or a "moist and feminine sucking" attests to the uncomplicated misogyny not only of Sartre but also of the contemporary intellectual trend to which Sartre and de Beauvoir were loyal.

⁷ Engaged in Sartrean analogies, de Beauvoir does not consider the active role she here attributes to passive female sexuality. See *ibid.*, 169.

⁸ Moira GATENS, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 56.

order to acquire life and knowledge that are, by existential standards, progressive. By contrast, for O'Brien, acts in history have an antecedent and conscious act of birth and - something veiled in the tradition - otherness can refer to male anatomy. The "necessity" which precedes sex, death, and metabolism is birth - in which it is the *female* who is "essential" and the *male* who is passive.

De Beauvoir does not alter women's sexual or maternal deficiency. Women, for her, are rendered inferior by coital position and by the existential suspension of pregnancy. *The Second Sex* claims both social construction and physiology place women at a disadvantage, and the human quest is ever a search for patriarchal freedom. "Bad faith" is hence a trait of all female existence in the form of woman's alienation from herself as a thinker, and of the putative stasis of biological life. Reversing bad faith and assuming new identity come from *acts* of authenticity. The existential woman is foreign to stasis because she has shed the passive and functional roles of existence too close to nature. In this account, the same logic that pins woman in man's system is the agent of her liberation, and a woman-defined woman has no intelligibility.

De Beauvoir's questions are radical, but in the light of Mary O'Brien's work, I suggest that her method is restrictive. Because the normative consciousness is egoistic and competitive, woman only begins her journey when she transcends herself in the intellectual sense. Freedom is the human condition above and in possession of the world of facticity. Worse, I would claim, it is the recognition of a human destiny described by men. There is no female knower, and femininity and (especially) maternity reduce to bodies, to possessions without will. The transcendent consciousness which in fact replaces *being* in *The Second*

Sex is narrow, linear, and unrelated to the rhythm and cyclicity of women's lives. Alienation between thought (as transcendent consciousness) and the body (as maternal) renders the devaluing of women normative and even constitutive of the existential human project.

We see in de Beauvoir the dualism identified with Western thought that has been especially destructive to conventional attempts to describe motherhood. In the light of so much subversion of female bodies, I suggest that O'Brien's contribution to feminism is to bring out the ethical dimension in the connection between human possibility and birth. The obvious here is profound because it is not a corporeal blank slate but a phenomenologically lived-body which mediates meaning. In other words, the body and all its modes of process and perception are ineluctably linked, and the prime example of such unity is birth. In a context similar to that of Merleau-Ponty's "body-as-it-is-lived-by-me," O'Brien posits an active knowing and form-giving - indeed, an active narrative in maternal embodiment.⁹ The tradition's attempts to transcend the body of the mother are attempts to control and limit the ethical meanings of female species-potential about which philosophy in general has brooded. O'Brien invites us to understand the existential project of transcendence as constituted by meanings which men have needed to coin in order to assuage their own biological-turned-ontological alienation. For O'Brien, the project of freedom would be well served by the recognition that no human is free without having been freed, by another's risk, into the world.

⁹ O'Brien briefly alludes to Merleau-Ponty's "lived body" chiefly to claim it is indubitably a male body. See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 198-99. For an interesting analysis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, see Elizabeth GROSZ, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), particularly chapter four, "Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh," 86-111.

De Beauvoir implores women to reach beyond carnality and passivity, beyond the humdrum of "kettles and gardens," to the liberty of the abstract.¹⁰ This would seem to suggest that the prerequisite for any female existentialist is repression of the association between her lived body as a female body, her authority as Subject, and ethics. Ironically, it is not feminist but Sartrean motivation that seems to drive *The Second Sex*, and a collection of female Others is the audience. Thus, in her elevation of existential ethics, de Beauvoir rejects the same female plenitude which is a source of ethics in *Politics*. She is trapped in a discipleship that forces her to affirm a "natural" order of dualism, a sexed ontology in which her own freedom is elusive.

In the copious evidence attesting to the "condition" of woman in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir never seems to stare back, never seems "free" to question the integrity of a Sartrean-feminist voice. O'Brien would argue that de Beauvoir proves that even feminist theory can feed on the normative core of domination in women's lives. It can indeed depend on female oppression as the sturdy plank on which an existentialist, and thus surreal, liberation will take place. Further, I argue that de Beauvoir's theory falls apart at the suggestion of woman's intellectual freedom because her "feminist" is, and must be, a circumscribed being. It is interesting that, following divergent paths, both de Beauvoir and

¹⁰ In *The Second Sex* kitchens, kettles, children, and gardens are feminized targets because they hold women to a particular relationship with nature. The analogies perhaps express de Beauvoir's own ambivalence with respect to natural, social, and philosophical causation. Because the existential perspective permits no contradiction between woman and nature, her text further aggravates woman's negation. Thus, she is urged to "face nature in its nonhuman freedom." See DE BEAUVOIR, *Second*, 788-91.

O'Brien set out to facilitate woman's "createable future";¹¹ in my opinion, however, O'Brien's trajectory is the more promising of the two.

Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich

The place of Adrienne Rich among the difference theorists is well defined. Rich's project was one of radical criticism of the patriarchal frame of reference attached to motherhood. Thus, in order to understand what essentially constitutes and derives from the maternal role, Rich debunked and rejected masculinist perspectives. In contrast to feminist contemporaries such as Chodorow and O'Brien, then, Rich was clearly not in any position to borrow heavily from the classic systems of meaning. Her vision in *Of Woman Born* is one which is consciously freed from the commitments of predecessor politics and hence, in the world of theory, different.

Recognition of birth and motherhood as socially constructed phenomena, and of the role of physicality in such construction, links *The Politics of Reproduction* with *Of Woman Born*. O'Brien and Rich were writing at roughly the same time, and though we know of no communication between them, O'Brien tells us she is aware of Rich's research.¹² Both authors signal the importance of the historical moment when the cultural and symbolic meanings of the Primal Mother radically changed. This occurred in the wake of male recognition of paternity. The result - patriarchy - is an abstraction and a devaluation of women's power of reproduction, an abstraction of factual and fundamental gender difference.

¹¹ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 194.

¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

Patriarchy is also, therefore, a declaration from man as Father that his potency creates history. The "Power of the Father," explicitly a theme in male philosophy, is largely factored into the cultural grasp of the nature of power and of how a valid and definable subject is expressed in discourse and social interaction. Thus, the "institution" of motherhood which concerns Rich, and the "natural" segregation of mothers which concerns O'Brien, are expressions of masculine experience. They reify man's sense of powerlessness in the knowledge that he cannot bear life. They also reveal that patriarchy is both content and method in Western ethics, and that primarily men have profited from building gender hierarchy based on the generation of the species into history.¹³ Considering *Politics* and *Of Woman* together, these accounts reconstruct the historical conversion of sexual difference into a power differential of patriarchy which underscores a preference for the intangible and the transcendent. They propose cultural theories in which birth and nurture, seen apart from patriarchal imagery, are recognized in a positive radical sense as *the* human originary experience.

O'Brien's method shadows that of traditional philosophers whose theories are foundational to Western politics. For the construction of feminist theory which in the '70s struggled toward legitimacy, the appeal to prior theory serves a patronymic and grounding function. More importantly, however, O'Brien's exploration of the nature of women's

¹³ Gender hierarchy has grounded misogyny in history, Rich shows. Yet the claim of misogyny often invites male protest because it debunks one form of power by showing it to be based on emotion. In a footnote, Rich responds to the protest: "Misogyny is not a projection of women who hate men," and she backs the statement with evidence from male authors. In the light of similar protest, O'Brien defends her position on male reproductive consciousness. Throughout *Politics* she stresses that it is not an anxiety neurosis she has lifted from Freud. See RICH, *Of Woman*, 114; O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 52.

presence and absence in theory exposes specific bias in the traditional standpoint. That is, *Politics* shows quite clearly that women have not been left out, but that reason and morality have been defined against them. Thus already ethically constituted, woman *qua* woman and mother *qua* mother are absent from classic philosophy. They are outside the process of meaning formation but not outside the power dynamics that define, limit, and marginalize them. From a feminist political view, the predecessor theory setting the stage in *Politics* exposes historical forms of power that are invisible within the discourse itself. Birth as a specifically female power can inhabit meaning, according to O'Brien, when women collectively recognize the unjust forms that the potency principle has taken.

Rich's literary-historical route rejects the patronymic function. Patriarchal theories of motherhood (constituting most of the literature when Rich was writing) express men's historical will that power associated with women *should* be regarded as unnatural and even demonic. In patriarchy, women encounter male power as normatively oppressive and traditional notions of motherhood as constructed in man's image. Moreover, many feminists have observed that the notion of female power is an enduring threat to man. Discourses of power are designed to keep women out, and the role of feminist theory with respect to them is deconstructive. Rich therefore flatly rejects the authority of male theory to guide or represent women's lives. The revision of such theory is a by-product of the study of real motherhood, with the improvement of women's lives as the goal of analysis.

Both Rich and O'Brien make use of personal narrative. From early diary excerpts in *Of Woman Born*, the self-consciousness and alienation experienced by Rich as a young mother contrast with O'Brien's celebration of birth from the perspective of a midwife. Rich

intends to disrupt the institution of motherhood by politicizing real conditions and experiences that are not reducible to a maternal ideal. To see motherhood in numerous contexts is to wrest control of the possibilities within motherhood from exclusively male evaluation. *Of Woman* examines mothers' lives with the prior assumption that an understanding of motherhood is critically important to an understanding of both creative and destructive forces in women's lives, and ultimately of female personhood.

The Politics of Reproduction, on the other hand, celebrates a philosophy of birth grounded in the inclusion of body processes essential to the act of giving birth. From the vantage point of ethical acts, birth is conspicuously absent from Hegelian and Marxist accounts of the production of value even though, relevant to Hegel, the context is always one of risk. Social contexts, for O'Brien, come together under the ethically significant universality of the first order of history-making which takes place in a woman's body. Understanding the potential for feminist unity in terms of *Politics* and *Of Woman* is therefore a matter of exploring the role of this universality in terms of the multiple stories of motherhood. In theorizing maternal life and will, and particularly the mother-daughter link to continuity,¹⁴ these theories project the notion of exclusively female-embodied existence as value.

Thus, the biological potential of motherhood, whether or not it is reified, is a resource for feminist theory which must no longer be obscured by male theory. This potential is important to feminist ethics as an experiential continuity among women, one which past theories, through notions of power, have attributed to the lives of men. Referring to a

¹⁴ See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 59; RICH, *Of Woman*, 118.

universal category of identity in the light of its numerous manifestations analogizes the postmodern philosophical dilemma in which generalization is regarded as totalizing and attention to particulars as relativist. For both O'Brien and Rich, the historical repression of motherhood(s) is linked to male fear of "*dependence on a woman for life itself . . .*"¹⁵ If this is true, it suggests a need for different discourses in which maternal identities, along with biology, can be rethought. It also suggests that man's singular impression of the Mother has suppressed the potential social contexts of female consciousness in which motherhood can be seen to give rise to distinct values and perceptions.

Only women have the capacity to gestate, give birth, and nourish with their bodies, and to know with certainty that a child is their own. The institution of motherhood is man's way of laying claim to this universality and of infusing the consciousness of duality into thought about human sociability. The relationship between the potential meanings of their bodies to women and the meanings attached by the politics of, for example, philosophy or medicine betrays vested power which has inculcated women as well as men. Moreover, because a particular viewpoint has controlled politicization of women's relationships, these relationships as uniquely female connections to one another and to their children are devalued in patriarchy. When entrenched philosophies of motherhood are themselves politicized, Rich and O'Brien concur that feminist theory can more fully explore an exclusively female identity that transcends particulars and in many cases even particular cultures. Second, they agree that this identity does not impose sameness, referring instead

¹⁵ This central point of *Politics* is reiterated by Rich. See *Of Woman*, "Foreword," 11.

to diversity which precludes abstraction and respects process.

The power to define for the culture is also the power which assigns and withholds value. Since maleness has coined the standards of value in the philosophical tradition, femaleness has embodied the totality of otherness to a male-embodied ethos. Man, as the spirit and soul of culture, was in the Greek fashion opposite and superior to woman-as-body. The maternal body was especially problematic to the Greeks because it defied form, activity, and reason.¹⁶ Numerous philosophies have continued notions of the maternal body as evidence of the sex act, as all-sex, or conversely as the sign of the Mother who transcends sexuality. Both Rich and O'Brien observe that a strong influence on the Western cultural consciousness of embodiment has been the flesh negation of Judeo-Christian tradition rooted in Greek thought.¹⁷ They also show how it is not bodies which theory should avoid, but rather concepts that enslave us in them as narratives of patriarchy.

Rich thus envisions liberation in terms of women coming to recognize "the corporeal ground of our intelligence."¹⁸ In the conventions of philosophy, the textual female body as a "known" object expresses an economy of power short-cutting women's viewpoints and

¹⁶ For a summary of Western philosophical thought on the role of the body, see Elizabeth GROSZ, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), particularly part I, "Refiguring Bodies," 3-24.

¹⁷ See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 126-29, 150-51; RICH, *Of Woman*, 128-29, 134-39, 168-70. Two excellent accounts of this negation are found in Rosemary Radford RUETHER, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford RUETHER (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 150-83; and Eleanor Commo McLAUGHLIN, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Woman in Medieval Theology," in *Religion and Sexism*, 213-66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

defining the roles women could take as particular kinds of bodies.¹⁹ Submitting to male theories of value, women have abandoned many intrinsic powers and epistemic resources. They have cut off the potential for female-specific channels of knowing in everyday experience, channels that were validated in matrilineal societies.²⁰

O'Brien makes the same point that "knowers" have been men, the language male, and the "known" women. Yet for O'Brien, the archetypal experience of knowing is that of procreation because the epistemology of culture is grounded in the "moments" of reproductive process. In other words, the corporeal ground of human intelligibility lies in the act of copulation, which men have interpreted negatively and mediated with dualism. She insists that this is not a far-fetched notion in the light of the magnitude of the philosophical "problem" of species continuity or of the extent to which authors have gone in thematizing the material necessity of death, sexuality, and economic potency. Both Rich and O'Brien thus recognize alienated paternity as in some way entrenched in epistemologies and ontologies. Women, too, are socialized, and their reward for nourishing male power has been a place of honour in the "natural" division of labour.

Finally, maternity and sexuality are integral to female identity, according to both

¹⁹ Power as power-over is central to Rich's analysis. See, in particular, *Of Woman*, 57-73. With respect to women's body-based roles, the repertory through history is information we obtain from what men have written. "Woman" is on the record, often the Church's record, as a virgin, a harlot, a wife and/or sentimentalized mother. Rich makes the rather depressing claim that women, through centuries of "emotionally suckling men," have been told in return that they were "polluted, devouring, domineering, masochistic, harpies, bitches, dykes and whores." Western culture has not so harshly stereotyped male possibility, and he is quite free of body subversion. See *ibid.*, 217.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 57-61.

authors. In heterosexual-dominant culture, their separation contributes to binary interpretations of the female horizon, as with the asexual Mother. Patriarchal organization has prevented women from expressing anything but heterosexual desire and from choosing the conditions of their pregnancy and birth. By laying claim to women's sexual and maternal bodies, patriarchy has removed or redefined great portions of their experience, indeed changing the meaning of female existence. In *Of Woman*, Rich sets out some of the conditions of female experience which are lost to, or concealed by, patriarchal accounts:

Childbirth is (or may be) one aspect of the entire process of a woman's life, beginning with her own expulsion from her mother's body, her own sensual suckling or being held by a woman, through her earliest sensations of clitoral eroticism and of the vulva as a source of pleasure, her growing sense of her own body and its strengths, her masturbation, her menses, her physical relationship to nature and to other human beings, her first and subsequent orgasmic experiences with another's body, her conception, pregnancy, to the moment of first holding her child.²¹

The connection between motherhood and sexuality is *enhanced* by the advent of contraceptive technology. This is not true simply because this technology gives power of timing and choice to the mother - power which is, of course, desirable. At a deeper philosophical level, the meaning of "freedom" is at stake for O'Brien. Early in *Politics* she claims that "the confusion of sexual freedom with freedom in general has not only damaged the solidarity of women, but is based on an inadequate conceptualization of the nature of sexuality."²² O'Brien's entire thesis rests on the notion that women need to define the terms of their freedom, that "freedom" within the confines of patriarchal motherhood and

²¹ Ibid., 182.

²² O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 8.

"freedom" to commodify heterosexual relations are still men's ideals. Contraceptive technology, in creating a social equalization with men, does not make women's freedom identical to men's. The voluntarism of paternal biology obviates decision-making; it is women who are entrusted with the task of ethical mediations of a technology which was created in the first place for a market, and not for the betterment of women's lives.²³ It is only women, finally, who can foreclose on the passivity of "handing over our minds and our bodies to male authority and technology" ²⁴

To summarize the dialogue between Rich and O'Brien, I would argue that the similarities of their positions within the difference debates is overwhelming. Both authors condemn male-defined motherhood, not only because it is factually inadequate, but also because it has provided the ground for centuries of female oppression. At the same time, they indict the Christian church for its complicity in this widespread oppression. They agree on the profound significance of the "theft" of childbearing experience, from its subversions according to early Greek thought, through centuries of official Christian repulsion, to the seventeenth-century flocks of medical "experts" dispatched to the lying-in beds of women. In addition, it is important to note that Rich and O'Brien value the potential for women to have close relationships with one another in spite of the derision that their intimacy often brings.

While Rich and O'Brien concur on the centrality of gender difference both as the ground of oppression and as the potential for unity, their specific methods differ. This was

²³ See *ibid.*, 21, 142, 160, 201-202, 205.

²⁴ RICH, *Of Woman*, 185.

touched upon at the outset of the discussion. Thus, one could speculate at Rich's annoyance with the notion of a feminist theory that seems to imitate the steps of its masculine predecessor. Rich's multidisciplinary critique is one which resists male casuistry and its habitual power-over analyses. At the same time, Rich explores the importance of economic, racial and radical lesbian forms of criticism.

O'Brien, on the other hand, so skilfully imitates the "masters" by using the ethical framework of Hegel and Marx to draw out the absence of female experience in history. Our predecessors assist us in the creation and conservation of meaning, O'Brien tells us. But they are to be approached dialectically. Dialectical analysis is a term which is appropriated from the tradition, and which, in O'Brien's view, most adequately grasps the concept of active history for feminist purposes. This is because dialectical strategy points beyond known territory toward ever-expanding opportunities and horizons for inclusive action and meaning.

Mary O'Brien and Nancy Chodorow

Like Mary O'Brien, Nancy Chodorow shaped her signature work by questioning the adequacy of prevailing masculine theory. Also like O'Brien, she was struck by the lack of interest shown by the tradition (in her case, sociology) in mothering and the relations of the family.²⁵ Chodorow crossed disciplines and turned to psychoanalytic theory to explore why women mother. The end result is a revision of that part of Freudian psychology which had emphasized the dynamics of the oedipal period of personality development. Chodorow

²⁵ On this issue, Chodorow is critical of Durkheim, Tönnies, Weber, and Parsons. See CHODOROW, *Reproduction*, 12.

looks instead to the pre-oedipal stage which, in all known societies, is female-dominated.²⁶

O'Brien and Chodorow ask different kinds of questions, and they presuppose different aspects of mothering. In *Politics*, for example, specific aspects of motherhood are said to link dialectically with the emergence of patriarchal culture. To O'Brien this means that the resources of the experience of motherhood were often "discovered" as weaknesses, that such "discoveries" could determine social power distribution, and that the Western value system may significantly relate to these dynamics. O'Brien claims that this is a cultural phenomenon, the result of how men have projected a male dilemma based on reproductive process into the course of history.

Chodorow's account is different in that it explicitly relies on the psychology of the individual. The mother and infant exist in a symbiotic²⁷ and preverbal kind of relationship in which physical presence and gender become meaningful in the psyche. Physical presence, however, refers to care and not childbearing. Nurturing is an activity, while pregnancy and parturition are not.²⁸ Thus, most of what Chodorow says about why women mother is extrapolated from the infant-care situation. This alters the Freudian account of sexual cathexis in two basic ways: first, it decentralizes the male body as the standard for sexual development; second, it places emphasis on some positive aspects of femaleness. Mother-

²⁶ Ibid., 3. Chodorow also engages this claim in a 1979 article: CHODOROW, "Motherhood, Male Dominance, and Capitalism," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed., Zillah EISENSTEIN (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

²⁷ For an explanation of the nature of the psychological symbiosis, see *Reproduction*, 61-62, 102-103.

²⁸ Ibid. 16.

infant bonding in this new light, according to Chodorow, produces systematic development in the form of two basic gender types. The relational sense of self associated with femaleness and the disconnected sense of self, which is said to be male, are generalizable in the population and perpetually renew woman-mothering society.²⁹ Women's mothering therefore provides the concrete foundation of personality development and renews a psycho-social status quo. The separation of public and private aspects of society is also relevant as the environment that stabilizes the identification process.

Counted among the early "mothering theorists," O'Brien and Chodorow develop materialist views. This means that they challenge political and ethical meanings which patriarchy imputes to sexual differentiation. They contest Western translations of sexual difference which render femaleness into "not-male" and cast public society as the product of an ethics of individualism. Women, who are responsible for early social reproduction, generate the kind of labour force that will sustain the political realm and its alienation from the home. This is an agreed-upon point between the Marxist and Freudian accounts, but the authors disagree on the nature of the space which in fact constitutes the split between public and private.

Chodorow works out a materialist psychology in which the external social world is processed by individual psychodynamics. Because *The Reproduction of Mothering* is an effort to transform social relations, fluidity between the spheres of production and

²⁹ While placing positive emphasis on femaleness is one way of interpreting Chodorow, some feminist critics claim that *Reproduction* engages the "mother-blaming" common in the psychoanalytic literature. See, for example, Pauline BART, "Review of Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*," in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce TREBILCOT (Savage, M.D.: Rowan & Littlefield, 1983), 147-52.

reproduction is anticipated. But while Chodorow indicts male domination through history,³⁰ *Reproduction* does not fully integrate men's dominance; hence, male dominance loses the historical constancy she claims it has. Confining the material base of the reproduction of mothering to the mother-infant relationship, Chodorow describes a universal and thus repeatable drama unaffected by physiology, public/private dynamics, or the pervasiveness of male supremacy. Mothering emanates from "social structurally induced psychological processes,"³¹ while "[f]amily organization, child-care and child-rearing practices, and the relations between women's child care and other responsibilities change in response particularly to changes in the organization of production."³² The social vector of influence in effect moves erratically because women's mothering is explained by the internalization of social factors that preserve the organization of the economy, one of which is the unanalyzed problem of a gender-power differential. In the end result, female mothering elicits more connection to men's absence from family than to the self-evident and ethical consequences of man's dominance throughout history.

Materialist analysis for O'Brien begins in the act of procreation, which expresses the most necessary of social relations. Hence, *Politics* is not an attempt to encode the dynamics of nurturance, since there are important events antecedent to this stage. Child-care is the "genderically shared" moment³³ that accompanies a physiological process about which two

³⁰ CHODOROW, *Reproduction*, 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

³³ O'BRIEN, *Politics* 47-48, 58.

points are significant: first, the process is heavily reliant on female bodies, and second, this physiology is never isolated from male or female consciousness. Nurturing, as shared, enters the theory in an albeit calculated fashion as the final form of the social synthesis of "pure" male/female opposition.³⁴ The originary significance of Chodorow's object-relational mother reflects back, but not prior, to mother-infant care. From this we can say that the reproduction of the sociality of mothering is Chodorow's object of analysis, while the sociality of reproduction, with assigned meanings and symbols, concerns O'Brien.

Having said that the organization of the economy factors unevenly in Chodorow's thought, I would say that O'Brien's synthesis gives some clarity to the link between the domestic and economic realms. *Politics* is famously critical of the Marxist tendency to reduce reproduction to an economic construct. An economic view of living conditions was a popular focus for Marxist feminists who tried to apply materialist analysis to women's household tasks. O'Brien, aware of this trend, anticipates some ethical problems with the economist model of women's "labour." Marx's neglect of reproductive labour, for example, missed not only the use value which women's nurturance produced but also the human value created by the labours of birth. His analysis of proletarian struggle is correct, according to O'Brien, but it overlooks an antecedent struggle of generic oppositions. Production and reproduction form a dialectical relationship in *Politics* in which conditions for social transformation are potentiated, preserved, and fulfilled, finally, by the annulment of

³⁴ O'Brien believes that the construction of feminist theory in *Politics* necessitates a repetition of the calculation and artificiality that characterize the predecessor theories. Her use of these theories is dialectical in that the feminist viewpoint "crosses the line" by preserving something quite unintended in the original voices. See *Politics* 51, 161.

male/female opposition.

Chodorow and O'Brien hypothesize different epistemological dynamics. In *Reproduction*, there is movement from the specific and apparently mechanistic workings of individual psychology to the preservation of social systems. In *Politics*, on the other hand, O'Brien describes a cultural phenomenon of alienation in relation to reproductive process which results in societies composed of male-dominant, male-cooperative social schemes.

In Chodorow's case, *Reproduction* generalizes the early nurturing process as both cause and effect of socio-economic arrangements.³⁵ The pattern of early nurturing is generic, and it accounts for (female) relationality and (male) autonomy as its products. Since the mother is an omnipresent figure and the father is absent, the material base of a social identity is bodily reciprocity between mother and infant. In the scheme of psychoanalysis, interaction within the dyad is meaningful in its immediacy, with no debt to past experience. Maternal and infant bodies form a relationship as "blank slates" which lack a memory of safety, fear, or pleasure. *Reproduction* therefore eliminates past sense experiences and the complex intrauterine bonding which is well-known to prenatal psychology.³⁶ The Freudian

³⁵ I have not tried to erase the discrepancy in *Reproduction* which renders materialist psychology dependent on the organization of production *and* the early nurturing process as both cause and effect of socio-economic arrangements. The nature of the link between the sexual division of labour and gender differentiation is unclear, mainly because change as a process in *Reproduction* is absent. We can conclude that Chodorow's theory is only workable where the conditions of patriarchy are already well-installed. Roger Gottlieb has made similar observations. See Roger S. GOTTLIEB, "Mothering and the Reproduction of Power: Chodorow, Dinnerstein, and Social Theory," *Socialist Review* 14 (September-October 1984): 93-119, particularly pp. 94-108.

³⁶ See, for example, Thomas VERNY, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, with John KELLY (New York: Dell Publishing, 1981), chapter four, "Intrauterine Bonding," 73-95.

mother is moreover absorbed in ego dynamics and is deprived of any credit for an ethic of nurturance, preservation, or human futurity. Lacking this context for bonding, then, two persons form repeatable kinship in which, following *Reproduction*, they cleanly discover sameness and difference and the basics of human society.³⁷

The outer world which is the object of internalization in *Reproduction* is also stripped of inevitable conditions. What transpires between mother and infant is systematic, leaving no room for a consideration of factors such as culture, abusiveness, low levels of education, medical complications, poverty, or for that matter, extreme wealth. "Pure relationality" in the pre-oedipal stage moreover influences later sexual identity, although Chodorow explains this outcome as secondary. The emphasis is on the alternative forms of relational potential in early interactions, forms of potential that are impacted primarily by mother-presence and less so by father-absence, and which themselves impact upon sexual development.³⁸ However, the "pure relationality" of object-relations is a false universal leaving unclear the role of socio-economic factors or of the psychogenesis of deviant sexuality.

Given an uncompromised mother-baby relation, the theory still does not explain the relation of this dyad to the organization of a social (as opposed to economic) world. A father's reliable absence is relevant to the chain of causation described by *Reproduction*, but it cannot be psychologically or ethically evaluated. Similarly, a mother's social isolation is

³⁷ The dynamics of immediacy are more interesting in the light of Chodorow's awareness of a unique consciousness of continuity between a woman, her own mother, and her children. See *Reproduction*, 204.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 166-67.

characteristic of pre- and post-industrial society, Chodorow points out,³⁹ but how this isolation figures into the production of relationality remains unexplored. Chodorow intends to demonstrate how the female-dominated character of the domestic realm is critical to the gendered makeup of both realms. Yet it is the public sphere that exerts control in *Reproduction*, since women have had no alternative but to bear children and release them to the realm of "work." Men, on the other hand, have possessed the power through institutions to ensure that women remained in the home. Accordingly, Chodorow's account of the reproduction of personality lacks an awareness of fluid developmental contexts in which value shifts and conditions of change are possible. The mothering described in *Reproduction* is a construct of patriarchy which subsumes economic and psychoanalytic categories, and determines the political constitution of only one Motherhood.

Chodorow supports fathers' participation in nurturance⁴⁰ in spite of her finding that males develop non-nurturant qualities. Father-absence, as noted, is not fully explored, and the reader of *Reproduction* finds no account of its relation to the disvalue of nurturance in the public sphere. The psychoanalytic focus also eliminates the contribution of siblings or other family members; mothering is under the sole constraint of ego energies.⁴¹ Finally, "gratification" of the infant in psychoanalytic parlance has no ethical component, meaning

³⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 214-19.

⁴¹ In a later article, Chodorow alludes to the social analysis which she herself deems is missing in *Reproduction*. See Judith LORBER, Rose Laub COSER, Alice S. ROSSI, and Nancy CHODOROW, "On *The Reproduction of Mothering*: A Methodological Debate," *Signs* 6 (Spring 1981): 482-514, particularly pp. 500-14.

that the mother *as a person* is effaced. Her agency is the product of psychic dynamics, while the moral component of her personality is inert. Ostensibly lacking a *maternal* will, Chodorow's mother is the object-relational "good enough" mother who leads one to suspect that she reproduces what psychoanalysis says about her.⁴²

In *Politics* paternity is an abstract struggle to survive, and patriarchy, it is worth repeating, constitutes mediation of that struggle in political terms. The exiled paternal body, as O'Brien sees it, constitutes the material basis for historical repetitions of dualist societies in the West. Prior to the father's absence in the nurturant period is the redundancy of male corporeality after copulation. Macrocosmically, men have experienced their estrangement from species continuity and have assuaged it with public forms of power. The pervasiveness of phallic paradigms through philosophy suggests that the enduring context of political power has been latent fatherhood. This account complements the psychoanalytic notion of internalization with historical and philosophical dimensions. In the vision of *Politics*, male supremacy has to do with the inception of female otherness not in the nurturant, but in the copulative stage.

The starting point for both Chodorow and O'Brien is the fact that women mother. Yet as the authors set out to analyse women's mothering, each has a distinct focus for formulating questions. Chodorow's method rests on a suspicion of biology as an edifying category for an explanation of mothering, and such a stance effectively criticizes O'Brien's

⁴² See Janice DOANE and Devon HODGES, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). See, in particular, chapter 2, "The Uneasy Search for Alternatives," 33-52.

emphasis on embodiment. Chodorow argues that many previous theories about biological motherhood have supported notions of a maternal instinct that collapsed into essentialism. She understands the core dynamics of women's mothering as psychological internalization of social arrangements. Biology, a fixed entity in this particular debate, sheds very little light on the question of why women mother.

I argue that Chodorow's rejection of biology constitutes an important discrepancy between the authors' approaches. By focussing on the internalization of social relations, Chodorow circumvents the notion that biology must serve the reproductive function. In other words, Chodorow accepts the clinical findings of the psychoanalytic tradition - even those based on the body - but she does not accept the hegemony of biology in the discussion of why women mother and what it means. The journey toward motherhood is, for the most part, an abstract process, more cognitive than corporeal. I suggest that Chodorow would perceive this as an advantage over O'Brien's theoretical reflections about birth.

At the same time, both O'Brien and Chodorow describe how the male detaches from "difference" in order to achieve individuation. "Difference" is in reference to the nurturant realm which cannot inform masculinity, and disconnection from the mother is man's first principle of power. They describe female relationality, pathologized through history, as a practical source of reason and value. They also reveal how predecessor theories are held together by negations of female meaning and by a "human" telos based on men's desires and achievements. Power in such theory operates to merge woman-mother with man's identity and acts, leaving no space between them. Chodorow and O'Brien, however, return to the significance of the maternal, and particularly to the maternal self-in-relation, as an ethical

model.

Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray

The resorption of the feminine in history and in its master texts is of interest to both Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray. Though their methods are different, they retain strategies in common in their effort to expose masculine representation and its treatment of "the feminine." They hold out or "suspend" female subjectivity in the face of male-oriented economies of meaning - Hegelian-Marxist philosophy in O'Brien's case, and psychoanalysis and symbolism in that of Irigaray. The "thick" result is two-fold: the authors produce theories which oppose both the traditional philosophical and the postmodern feminist tendencies to theorize "above" or without regard for the body as female⁴³ (thus, even as feminist texts they are radical⁴⁴). They also show that when the female body is understood as consciously unified with its own capacities and desires, the sufficiency of a masculine standpoint to interpret experience in an embodied world is weak.

Central to the texts that interest O'Brien and Irigaray are the sexual subtexts which determine the organization of rationality and meaning. Philosophy's "gaze" is that of a male

⁴³ It has been noted that Mary O'Brien's work is an outstanding Canadian example of feminist theory which broke feminist silence regarding the biology of the female body. See, for example, Bev THIELE, "Dissolving Dualisms: O'Brien, Embodiment and Social Construction," *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 7-12.

⁴⁴ On this point O'Brien is perhaps more radical, since *Politics* opposes the North American feminist research trends of its time. Irigaray, on the other hand, writes from within the French feminist movement, which was at that time in the process of exploring the connection between women's bodies and cultural symbolic expression.

subject who intends to be anonymous but is reflexively knowable in the structures and symbols he negotiates. The central revelation about this subject, in both *Politics* and *This Sex*, is the correlation between his denial of maternal origins and his historical preference for "pure thought" and duality. The male orientation of philosophy and language is sustained by the repression of female, and especially maternal, flesh and by metaphorical man as Origin. Essential to the life of the metaphor has been both a marginalized and inarticulate female body. O'Brien claims that the maternal body and birth express a transcendent form of unity which men convert to masculine power through the institutions of the public sphere. Irigaray's account of the female body as an articulation of sexual autonomy responds to the Levinasian metaphysic of alterity.⁴⁵ Irigaray also claims that sexual difference inhabits language only covertly as the substitution of the phallus for female desire and the power of the womb.

O'Brien and Irigaray develop accounts of female difference which are somewhat complementary. In the first place, they understand the meaning of "difference" as that which rejects the traditional notion of otherness. In so doing, man is no longer woman's ontological standard. At the same time, they acknowledge an epistemological interval between man and woman in which woman, like "him," can take her place as assimilator, speaker, and actor. For O'Brien, the mother becomes a subject, while Irigaray posits the imaginary of the sexual woman defining her own experience. "Woman" and "mother" are

⁴⁵ The meaning of alterity in Levinas' work involves a revived Hebraic concept of absolute difference, which becomes vital to Irigaray's ethics. For Irigaray, alterity refers to "the other [who] cannot be represented in terms of any sameness of self . . ." - thus, to an irreducible, distant difference. See Kate INCE, "Questions to Luce Irigaray," *Hypatia* 11 (spring 1996): 122-40, particularly p. 123.

excluded from *self*-representation and coded as objects in mainstream philosophy; the constructed "feminine" deals with uncontrollable difference and is made coherent only as an inferior otherness. Female difference is an alterity that overflows the male imagination and renders its meanings strikingly univocal.⁴⁶ Sexual difference without male hegemony invokes the idea of the interval as "place" where each is a subject speaking and thinking. When the masculine is no longer "everything," no longer defining every value, the economies of space, time and meaning become economies of exchange. *Politics* and *This Sex* complement one another by describing the irreducible double horizon of women's lives, motherhood and sexuality and by drawing on their themes of continuity for feminist ethics.

Neither theory regards the outcome of heterosexual relations as necessarily procreative, but the radical autonomy of the mother in *Politics* is shared by Irigaray insofar as both woman and mother transform their "thingness" in male representation. According to Irigaray, the separation of sexuality and reproduction (which is rejected by O'Brien⁴⁷) permits the articulation of an already sexed and sexual body: "We are women from the start. [W]e don't have to be turned into women by them."⁴⁸ Woman's plural sexuality is suppressed in culture, and yet given a language it grounds and normalizes female autonomy.

⁴⁶ There are two readings of Irigaray's works (principally of *This Sex*) which further clarify the concept of alterity. See Ofelia SCHUTTE, "A Critique of Normative Heterosexuality: Identity, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference in Beauvoir and Irigaray," *Hypatia* 12 (winter 1997): 40-62; Claire COLEBROOK, "Feminist Philosophy and the Philosophy of Feminism: Irigaray and the History of Western Metaphysics," *Hypatia* 12 (winter 1997): 79-98.

⁴⁷ See O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 8.

⁴⁸ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 212.

By the expression of a female sexual "specificity," Irigaray undermines what she calls the "sexual indifference" that grounds the logic of "every" discourse.⁴⁹ This sexual indifference allows man to eradicate ties with nature and to emphasize, at the level of cultural norms, relations among men.

Maternal consciousness central to *Politics* preserves that consciousness which is inseparable from the cyclical female body: it is directed toward unity with nature in terms of the capacity to nurture life. O'Brien alludes to a "natural" relationship as one which expresses coexistence with, as opposed to domination of, nature. Maternity is, of course, not the only alternative to dominance, but it is the empirical ground of species subsistence ubiquitously "forgotten." Man's dependence on female origins is a fact of existence excluded from serious representation. The association between female bodies and nature is subverted in the tradition of philosophy, and actual male contingency (man's *disconnection*) is obscured by the superimposed problem of female "functionalism" by which woman is destined to reproduce. In the language of representation, *Politics* exposes the specular and metaphysical makeup of the discourse in which male supremacy is sustained primarily by unrepresentable mothers. Because psychoanalysis and other traditions influence the connection between nature and representation, the "natural" for Irigaray remains a social construct until the female sex is discursively liberated by women. Irigaray is, however, very much aware of the natural interval between ejaculation and the birth of the child.⁵⁰ It is back to this place, the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰ Alice Adams notes that Irigaray has already discussed this interval in *Speculum*. See Alice E. ADAMS, *Reproducing the Womb: Images of Childbirth in Science, Feminist Theory and Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 155.

womb, that man endlessly goes in language. He creates the "specular" economy of meaning which evaluates the child as a penis in order to wipe out maternal power. But the mother as guardian of the social and signifying order is irreducible to it and would speak against it in her own language. "Red blood" is necessary for reproductions of Freud's scenes, but it is also the possibility of a way out of the economy of the Same.⁵¹ In an article which she wrote shortly after *This Sex*, Irigaray claims that women are always mothers in their various modes of creativity, asserting that "we must reappropriate this maternal dimension that belongs to us as women."⁵² The maternal dimension is not predefined, however, but is intended as a rich universal, a potency unspoiled by the prescription of particular action.

Both authors make the claim that ethical life is inseparable from embodied life and, furthermore, that ethical codes are tied to the embodied ethos of a society or culture. No maternal instinct joins female biology to specific "natural" choices, although females recognize their specific biology as potentially maternal. Maternity requires a context of freedom of choice, according to O'Brien,⁵³ so that motherhood can begin its separation from patriarchal law. Woman must also refuse the status of the metaphorical "womb" which

⁵¹ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 77. Irigaray uses the term "red blood" to refer to the connection between all women, the female genealogy. See Margaret WHITFORD, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), "Glossary," 16-19.

⁵² See Luce IRIGARAY, "The Bodily Encounter With the Mother," trans. David MACEY, in *The Irigaray Reader*, 34-46. The article also appears as "Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother," in IRIGARAY, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. GILL (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7-21. Originally, this work was presented at the Fifth Conference on Mental Health in the Province of Quebec, "Women and Madness," Montreal, 31 May 1980.

⁵³ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 59, 192-93.

ensures that she *receives* her value and has no viewpoint, except as it is "marked by an essential dispossession."⁵⁴ The receiving womb, moreover, can reproduce its content: "The receptacle would thus in some way know everything - without knowing itself . . ."⁵⁵ As the Other in the mirror, then, woman as receptacle has no existence outside man's axiology. Irigaray points out that in the psychoanalytic view, women cancel their contingency by producing a male child. Still under the law, however, they remain bearers of "his" value. Thus grounded by men's bodies, the dualisms of patriarchy ensure that women embody and feed back man's desire. *Politics* and *This Sex* clearly suggest that the body/mind dichotomy in Western thought projects man's apprehension concerning the power of female bodies. Patriarchy, they suggest, structures the *aporia* which exists between paternal embodiment and the self-sufficiency of woman's "two lips" and womb.

Contraception provides women with new options related not only to the social division of labour, but also, and significantly, to women's collective self-understanding. According to O'Brien, the transformation of sexual relations brought about by contraception "permits women . . . to turn a 'masculine' perspective on sexuality . . ."⁵⁶ Echoing Irigaray's mimesis, *Politics* suggests that contraceptive technology enables women as subjects to cross *inside* male representational boundaries. Contraception as a historical innovation holds out "an objective equalization with men, but not an identity with men."⁵⁷ Women have an

⁵⁴ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁶ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 191.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

opportunity to take on the roles of sexual Other, and even to commodify sex. They can act like men, but female consciousness-as-subject is "elsewhere" (Irigaray's term) and can only mirror male identity and logic. Women can bring about their own unveiling, their capacity for expression, when they enter exclusionary masculine logic only to discover an operative feminine. All women carry an autonomous consciousness and a logic that disrupts the economy of the logos. Access to technology cannot make women identical to, or epistemologically like, men. Because women have always nourished the operations of masculine systems,⁵⁸ they have the resources to "transcend them, to build upon them the conditions and realities of their own transformation."⁵⁹

Like the discovery of paternity and the development of contraception, psychoanalysis also represents a Western transformation in consciousness. Freud's explanations of the body/mind relationship provided new contexts for thinking about motivation and action. In the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis, the language of the unconscious and the "mirror stage" of identity (which becomes Irigaray's "speculum") extended psychoanalysis to include cultural fantasies like "not-all" woman. Lacan's claim, moreover, that "[e]very reality is based upon and defined by a discourse"⁶⁰ traps woman in the male imaginary, according to Irigaray, and reorders her as his malleable theme. Yet the feminine is alive within his logic and can (re)enter it (him) as a dispersing subject, here parodying the double jeopardy of woman's sexual and teleological resorption. Woman must

⁵⁸ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 76-77.

⁵⁹ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 196.

⁶⁰ IRIGARAY, *This Sex*, 88.

be disruptive but not destructive, she must mime the phallic imaginary as she remains exempt from its law.⁶¹ The return as subject to man's signifiers permits Irigaray's woman to *experience* alterity in relation to the epistemologies and ontologies produced in the master dialogue (with itself). Freud's "maternal" as dangerous and libidinal, for example, or Lacan's phallic woman emerge in mimicry of the text as the grammar itself. Fundamentally, Irigaray contends that man's system of representation, like O'Brien's bifurcated social world, is held in place by various expressions of the drive to murder the Mother.⁶²

The important work done by Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray challenges philosophical explanations of "the feminine" which are unsupported by real existence. The materialist view of productivity as necessity, and the low status given female bodies in psychoanalysis survive in current versions of woman as sex-act or in myriad use-value roles. Viewing women from the "One" standpoint, they are both saying, enables political and symbolic returns of "him" as normativity. They mean that only a male vision of the world is given back in structures and ideologies. Moreover, it is male biology that grounds power as possessive, and male desire as the "human" teleology. O'Brien and Irigaray are intent on reclaiming the "excess" of women's sexual and maternal experiences for the subject-function in discourses which men have dominated. They claim that man's accounts of female identity express the "triumph" of the phallus only paradoxically by returning man (and culture) obsessively to sameness - which refers to the image of his own lack.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 68.

⁶² In her introduction to a collection of Irigaray's essays, Margaret Whitford examines unacknowledged cultural matricide as the cornerstone of Irigaray's work. See WHITFORD, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1-15, 23-29.

A point of critical difference between O'Brien and Irigaray exists, as I suggest in the above, in the quintessential appeal to maternal or sexual experience. Since writing *This Sex*, Irigaray has continued to explore sexual difference primarily from the point of view that female equality demands representation of female sexuality in symbolic systems. This is not to say that the maternal relationship has not been significant to the later writings. It suggests that Irigaray consistently roots the maternal in the sexual in *This Sex* and has continued to do so in her later career. Alternatively, I suggest that O'Brien treats patriarchal maternity as the groundwork of female sexual subversion. Thus, Irigaray's critical response to *Politics* might conceivably be based upon the following explanation of their difference.

O'Brien analyses gender relations through reproductive rather than sexual dynamics. This is an effort to debunk masculinist assumptions about the paradigmatic authority of the sexual relationship. As long as men have derived many of their ethical paradigms from the imagery of human sexuality, sexuality has provided a rationale for male supremacy. O'Brien claims that a more progressive ethics of care can be derived from the lifegiving mother, and thus, it is the whole and inseparable process of reproduction that offers models of hope in a world of antiphysis and oppression.

Irigaray agrees with O'Brien in that a maternal feminine can only be understood through female experience. Reproduction, on the other hand, has justified women's oppression and therefore cannot be deemed to represent freedom in and of itself. Historically, women have been reproducers as a matter of imposed sexual and social obligation; the substance of this obligation is male sexual domination in both physical and symbolic forms. That is, in Western culture, the atomistic male, the Father, and the Mother

are all received at paradigmatic and symbolic levels of "for-him" representation. There has been no independent, singular female symbolic because it requires universal recognition of a powerfully self-reliant "for-her" sexual identity. Woman must be more than "his" receptacle, yet this suggestion is contrary to patriarchal establishment and its consequent reduction of female flesh. According to Irigaray, a vast agenda of male filiation (which is blind to its debt to the feminine) is vulnerable to the sexual awakening of woman to herself and to other women. This is the first stage of emancipation, so to speak. In my view, Irigaray regards this as an *a priori* movement in the struggle for gender equality and all that this struggle means to every aspect of female identity.

Finally, this discrepancy, as a basis for political criticism of one another, is not merely a chicken-and-egg debate. Though O'Brien's vision encapsulates a "politics of reproduction," her analysis expands into the ethical and spiritual investments of such a project. The relationship between giving birth and giving new life to community and to the natural environment is spelled out, as are the spiritual implications of mutual respect, empowerment, and commitment to a human future. O'Brien emphasizes women's roles in these accomplishments as they have transpired in the past, as they exist in the present, and as they will be played out in a just future.

Similarly, Irigaray's focus, as a critique of *Politics*, is not an argument for sexual autonomy in any simplistic way. Language has long been an instrument of male sexual normativity - to the extent that any exploration of meaning is an exploration of the male body and its implicit, sexually codified power. Positive power is not encoded with any notion of a feminine principle, and therefore the female body is, in the cultural

consciousness, a place of storage for man's imagery. In Irigaray's work, the implications of this use-value are far-reaching. To be female is to be without any expression of experiential meaning. To have a female body, whether pregnant or not, is to bear an illusory form and context for living in the body. Irigaray advances the ideas of autonomy, self-love, and self-fulfilment as tasks that are essential to the development of an ethical female identity.

Conclusion

To this point in my thesis I have described the specific discourse of difference in the evolution of postwar feminism. My analysis showed how de Beauvoir's postwar account of female difference borrowed from existentialism and explained what "woman" is through its system of values. The theme of woman as man's "other" expressed a value difference which de Beauvoir believed characterized society. In other words, she considered female difference to be a problem inherent in social valorization. However, de Beauvoir's account of motherhood blurred social and biological elements with the result that women's circumstances were said to be transformable when women transcended their biology. Her intellectual work thus failed to transcend the value system of the master theory which subsequently became a methodological trap.

Because of this, postwar feminism was unlike the North American surge of maternal feminism less than a century before it. By the 1960s North American feminists became interested in the role of social construction.⁶³ Women's difference was de-emphasized,

⁶³ My discussion of the development of the themes of feminism is in some conformity with Hester Eisenstein's introduction to a classic anthology. See EISENSTEIN, "Introduction," in *The Future of Difference*, eds. Hester EISENSTEIN and Alice JARDINE

women were now seen as equal, and gender was considered a learned phenomenon. The purpose was to increase women's participation in public roles, as Chodorow advocated in her analysis of gender and mothering. Such an approach, however, blocked the growing concern among feminists that equality was too often translated as equal treatment leaning perilously into sameness and leaving no room for effective responses to issues related to domestic violence, childbirth practices, maternity leave, and so on. Chodorow borrowed heavily from predecessor psychology and abandoned key aspects of women's experience that would have influenced the kinds of questions needing to be asked.

With the publication of Adrienne Rich's work, woman-related issues gained more political ground in the same way that maternal feminism had come together in the nineteenth century. Rich understood women's equality as normative and helped to bring about unity by proclaiming women's sisterhood, by stressing shared experience, and, at the same time, by honouring their differences from one another. When women read *Of Woman Born*, they identified with ordinary circumstances which Rich had shown to be predefined by a social environment comprised of male institutions.

Mary O'Brien and Luce Irigaray entered the debates with the purpose of reevaluating women's difference from men. Their contributions were among those that touched off more than a decade of "difference feminism." Difference feminism regarded (and continues to regard) difference as antecedent to, and as a resource for establishing, equality. I have argued that O'Brien's work took this discussion a step further by suggesting that women's role in giving birth, and the lack of importance attributed to that role throughout culture,

(New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), xv-xxiv.

provided evidence that man's primal self-consciousness betrayed *his* otherness. The central focus of O'Brien and Irigaray, however, remained the value of feminine difference, in terms of the ethical directions derivable from women's experiences. These authors reveal, through specific methods, the damage done to women by so-called gender-neutral theories.

I have also described a new quality in feminist writing which is displayed by both Irigaray and O'Brien. Both authors "perform" difference by superimposing woman in the subject role of male theory. I argue that this technique prompts the recognition that women's experience is radically incompatible with how men have organized it in "theory." In the final analysis, the concept of performance enables "woman" to cease being the silent complement to the operation of man's "more" creative nature. This development is fundamental to an understanding of the feminine as intended by Luce Irigaray and Mary O'Brien.

In the remainder of the thesis, I focus my discussion on the meaning of motherhood as it is expressed in well-validated Christian writings, notably, Benedict Ashley's *Theologies of the Body*.⁶⁴ While I hold each of the writings mentioned in privileged esteem, I am interested in the traditional views of embodiment precisely as they are organized for theory. In keeping with the momentum of the difference debates and with O'Brien's particular contribution, I am critical of the lack of "performance" and realism in accepted Christian portrayals of female embodiment. I moreover observe that the lifeless role frequently associated with maternity is a factor of the masculine, and therefore limited, hermeneutic of the theorist.

⁶⁴ Benedict M. ASHLEY, O. P., *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, Mass.: The Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Centre, 1985).

Yet given that human beings exist in bodies in a world of bodies,⁶⁵ a realistic analysis of motherhood needs to deal with the meanings of the mother's embodiment. To date, the maternal body has been woefully and perhaps willfully neglected by both traditional and feminist writers in theology. We have discussed the historically negative attitude toward the female body throughout Western philosophy and how this has fed Christian theological imagery. Equally relevant is the reluctance of mainstream, postmodern feminism (and thus feminist theologians) to analyse maternity and birth. This reluctance is largely due to ingrained political scepticism toward generalization. I note that feminists tend to fear the logistic trap of essentialism so insidiously that this fear is an impediment to intelligent analysis of maternal embodiment.

At the same time, it is in feminist theological ethics that we can find recognition of the prophetic challenge in work such as that of O'Brien. Writers like Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill contend that all aspects of women's lives are relevant to feminist analysis. They criticize spiritualization or abstraction of the body when this occurs at the expense of its physical integrity.⁶⁶ And though they do not explicitly analyse maternal embodiment as such, their work provides justification for renewed courage and clarity as feminist writers commit to analyses of the body.

⁶⁵ I allude here to Benedict Ashley's opening statement, "I exist and live as a body in a world of bodies." See *ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Beverly Wildung HARRISON, "Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice," with Shirley CLOYES, in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. ROBB (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 115-34; Lisa Sowle CAHILL, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), particularly chapter four, " 'The body' - in context, An interlude and a proposal," 73-120.

To continue, then, my aim is to carry the notion of motherhood as a specific kind of bodily existence into my reading of theological texts having to do with the physical body and its teleological significance. I will refer to developments in Christian thought pertaining to female bodies which have ultimately served a masculine agenda of supremacy and control. Consequently, images of the procreative female body, and of the Mother in Christian writing, will be criticized or deconstructed. In criticizing much of the writing from Christian tradition, I attempt to make a case for feminist theological and ethical exploration that explicitly includes how women live in their bodies. In so doing, I am making claims about the nature of anything which is said to conform to feminist theological ethics. For instance, I am saying that feminist ethics is a theological project in that divine action in the world is reflected in any praxis concerned with changing society so that woman's full personhood and potential are respected. Equally, feminist theology is ethical in its ardent attempt to understand woman's relationship with the divine as revealed in accounts of the past and as discernible in the present and the future. Thus, a realistic reconstruction of motherhood for feminist theological ethics must take full account of the mother's experience and consciousness as one, of her life as it is lived in a specific body, of her knowing and her goals.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Of the term "human experience," Rosemary Radford Ruether writes that it must include "experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic." See RUETHER, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward A Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 12.

CHAPTER FOUR
MATERNAL EMBODIMENT, *THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION*,
AND FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Introduction

My analysis in this final chapter will be carried out in four steps. First, I will present the theoretical viewpoint of Benedict Ashley, whose vision relies on rich biblical and philosophical tradition. This work is relevant to the present analysis on the basis of Ashley's insistence that the celebration of bodily existence is a unifying, and particularly a theological, endeavour.

My second task will be to offer a brief critical analysis of Ashley's contribution. Thus, within his account of embodiment, I will attempt to separate those claims or insights which are compatible with a feminist theological construction of female embodiment from those which are limiting or exclusive of female experience. The observations which I offer are inspired and supported by the theory of Mary O'Brien, primarily in *The Politics of Reproduction*.

In the third step, I present the work of feminist theological ethicists Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill to provide validation in two ways. First, the authors fully support the notion that the exclusion or distortion of women's bodily experience in Western orthodox thought has exacerbated a body/mind dualism which characterizes the traditions

of moral theology and moral philosophy. Second, they also validate the need for analysis like that of Mary O'Brien in order to draw out the ethical and theological implications of women's lives. In this sense, the ways in which a woman lives in and through her body can be seen as antithetical to the masculinist preoccupation with power-over, separateness, and self-sufficiency, of which feminist analysis in general is critical. Harrison and Cahill are very much aware of the probability that a normalizing of women's experience will be positively reflected in how people live and work together and in how we reify our relationship with the natural environment. This latter outcome is an underlying concern throughout the work of Mary O'Brien.

My fourth step will be an effort to consolidate my observations into a feminist theological perspective on women's lives, not merely as embodied lives *per se*, but rather as particularly embodied lives. I will review some of the main questions that have guided this inquiry and attempt to discuss their new implications in the light of feminist theological values. In the end, I provide an account of women's embodiment which is realistic, inspirational, and edifying, one which adds theological dimension to the discourse around biological determinism and maternal embodiment.

Embodiment and its Teleology in Christian Tradition

As Benedict Ashley shows, a discussion of the body in Christian tradition must acknowledge the input of centuries of philosophical thought. Thus, Ashley begins his theology of the body with an exploration of biblical themes, and he roots these in early Greek philosophy. The body, according to Plato, is a tomb. "The true human self is the spiritual

soul and ... the soul's earthly existence in the body is a kind of death or exile or imprisonment."¹ Ashley recognizes that it is Platonic dualism which inspired early Christian thinkers to develop a profound understanding of human spirituality. At the same, he is critical of the Platonic legacy which is responsible, he claims, for the absence of a theology of the body in the Christian Church.² It is this lack which Ashley sets out to rectify by exploring the historical development of the concept of the human person in Christianity.

According to Ashley, it is Tradition which must be the Christian's ultimate guide to the meaning of scripture. He points out that his notion of tradition is faithful to that which was adopted by the Second Vatican Council. Thus, "Tradition involves a historic development of the understanding of revelation congruent with the apostolic witness of the Scriptures."³

With this in mind, Ashley outlines the predominant scriptural themes through Christian history which "relat[e] to our human existence as living, dying, thinking, feeling, striving bodies."⁴

Among those themes is that of creation which, as Ashley explains, provides the context for the covenant between humanity and God.⁵ Adam and Eve are created in the image of God, yet by violating the order of creation, they are condemned to the

¹ ASHLEY, *Theologies*, 103.

² *Ibid.*, 104.

³ *Ibid.*, 104 (capitalization in the original).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-07.

vulnerabilities of flesh-and-blood existence. The Genesis account of creation depends upon the bifurcation of physical existence and "everlasting life." Adam and Eve are consumed by desires pertaining to the former. Ashley regards their action as the beginning of human illusion and amoral consent.⁶ Their punishment is allocated according to a "war of the sexes" which renders Eve inferior to Adam⁷ and forever subject to physical pain and sexism.⁸

Scripture goes on to establish Adam as a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church, and whose body reflects the fullness of deity. It is in Jesus' body that the Christian community is restored, Ashley points out. His body envelopes the promise of new life, incorruptibility, and cosmic transformation.⁹ Corporeal existence is that which is overcome in the theology of the New Adam. The renewal of life is an achievement of intellectual and supernatural proportions, entirely transcending the material realm and expressing a covenantal and spiritual life which is the mark of Christian human-ness.

Ashley's analysis of the principal themes throughout Christian doctrinal development exposes a perpetual tension between Platonic dualism and Aristotelian concepts of the relationship between the body and the soul. He discusses various adaptations and interpretations of the body/soul relationship throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Later still, a shift from an ontological to a phenomenological understanding of the human person heralds "the typically modern way of devaluating the

⁶ Ibid., 382.

⁷ Ibid., 383.

⁸ Ibid., 384.

⁹ Ibid., 107.

bodily aspect of our human existence."¹⁰ A survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought exposes an ongoing struggle between idealism and historicism which filtered from philosophical to theological reasoning.¹¹ As science and technology are seen to take on mythical and redemptive powers in the modern period, Ashley believes that theology needs to fully account for the historical and material context of human existence.

The question arises as to how to think about human bodily existence in a non-dualistic framework. For this task, Ashley rejects the scientific method of reductionism so important, for example, to the field of molecular biology. Reductionism, he points out, "is the habit of talking as if the system were "nothing but" the component parts"¹² In reductionism, the relations of these parts are treated as "somehow less real than the parts they relate, or even as if they were merely mental fictions."¹³ Yet the human being is more than a collection of particles and limbs. The networks of relations and interactions that dynamize human beingness are inseparable from the biological parts, Ashley claims. This unification of component parts with energy results in human self-consciousness.

In knowing ourselves, the being that we first know, according to Ashley, is "Being-in-process". We know ourselves as a unity in relation to other bodies, as *one* who is "at least as absolutely one as anything in my experience, the very paradigm of unity to which any

¹⁰ Ibid., 204.

¹¹ Ibid., 204-37.

¹² Ibid., 261.

¹³ Ibid., 261.

other kind of unity has to be compared."¹⁴ A defining mark of humanness, therefore, is our understanding that our irreducible Being is understood. This is important because Ashley relates the condition of Being-in-process with the human capacity for creativity. He claims that the Christian teleological aspect of creativity, moreover, is in the production of something of value, beauty, and truth, something which serves human purpose.¹⁵

Ashley seeks a full account of human creativity, particularly as it transcends the "blind" creativity of the evolutionary struggle.¹⁶ Thus, human self-understanding is an understanding of the freedom by which humans control their body-selves as well as their environment. It gives rise to a form of creativity which provides insight into both the immediate world and the world beyond direct experience.¹⁷ Self-understanding which marks humans *as* both human and creative necessarily involves recognition of the self-in-the-world derived comparatively from knowledge of other body-selves. Ashley agrees with Hegel's contention that self-consciousness first requires withdrawal from the self through an outward

¹⁴ Ibid., 278.

¹⁵ Ibid., 319.

¹⁶ Ibid., 312. In the paragraph from which I quote, the author actually refers to the "sub-human world [as] blindly creative through its evolutionary struggle." However, two other comments lead me to believe that Ashley would also view human biological reproduction as blindly creative. He claims, for example, that "[i]n order to think humanly, we must in some way transcend the conditions of physical processes or we would not be able to escape their control by controlling them." See *ibid.*, 310. Later, the author reduces the significant role of biological mothering by claiming that "what is unique to human parenting is not the mother-child relation which is more prolonged for humans but otherwise much the same as in other mammals, but the father-child relation which hardly exists among animals, yet is of immense importance for the human species." See *ibid.*, 435. The relevance of this reading of Ashley will be clarified later.

¹⁷ Ibid., 312.

process of thought. Hence, "it is only through going out to the Other [in the world] that we can return to discover the Self."¹⁸ The enterprise of thinking creatively and self-reflectively, therefore, is one in which the human person "goes out" to achieve a reliable sense of both her physical and interior self.

With the rejection of dualism uppermost in his mind, Ashley seeks to better understand the relationship between materiality and creativity, between self-directed biological process and those reactions and interactions by which a person thinks and understands. One becomes self-conscious and self-controlled, he claims, by transcending the production of the "primary natural unit" which is the human person. Yet what remains to be seen is precisely how creative self-consciousness can arise from unconscious matter. What is the link between the unifying acts of self-awareness and the biological entity from which they emerge? Or, as Ashley puts it, "How can *purpose* arise from simple teleology?"(italics mine).¹⁹

Ashley describes self-consciousness as an awareness relationship which mediates not only between a subject and an object, but also between the subject and the subject-self who is aware. Thus, indirect self-consciousness refers to consciousness of the outer world or of our own bodies in the world, while direct self-consciousness refers to reflection of the self as a thinking being.²⁰ Central to the notion of creative self-consciousness is the awareness that, though we are both human, "I" am not the same as "You" who exist in the world around

¹⁸ Ibid., 310.

¹⁹ Ibid., 319.

²⁰ Ibid., 321.

me. "Such self-understanding," Ashley writes, "is the ultimate interiority and transparency in our bodily universe..."²¹ Consequently, all that we know of ourselves (and this includes knowing ourselves as "creative") is derived from interaction with external bodies and things, interaction which provides all the information basic to how we understand our own identities.

The "Mother of God" in Ashley's Theology of the Body

Ashley explains that the role of Mary in Catholic teaching exemplifies his vision of a renewed theology. Thus, "the Catholic understanding of the role of Mary in the plan of salvation is, as it were, a summary of the theology of the body"²² He claims that as this understanding has developed, it has overthrown Platonic dualism in a number of ways. For example, Mary's humanness is seen as a reconciliation of original chaos into a faithful, sinless world, and as the new garden of Eden in preparation for the New Adam.²³ In a volley of metaphors, Ashley portrays her as the original Paradise, the New Eve, Mount Sinai, the Tabernacle of the desert, the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem. Thus, through the use of symbolic metaphors comparing Israelite history with Mary's life, Catholic theology attempts to bridge the Old and New Testaments, chaos and order, sin and grace, the Church and God, and so on. Ashley claims that the account of Mary reintegrates dualistic theological paradigms, and contributes to a theology of the body which is currently

²¹ Ibid., 310.

²² Ibid., 536.

²³ Ibid., 540.

meaningful.

Mary's virgin motherhood, according to Ashley, signifies the achievement of "full realization as a person *independent of any man*" (italics mine). This actualization is not accomplished "merely in being a biological mother . . . ," but rather has to do with reaching the "heights of mystical contemplation."²⁴ At this point, Ashley opens the discussion to the ordination of women. Because Christianity regards the contemplative life as superior to the active life of ministry, Mary is said to embody Wisdom and creative intelligence, a loving feminine wisdom which is different from the lower, manipulative, power-seeking rationality which is masculine.²⁵ Ashley explains that the symbolic proximity of Eve and Mary to the body, or matter, needs to be comprehended in the context of process. Thus, matter always exists in relation to form. He argues further that the sexes likewise interact with one another in dynamic and reciprocal relationality. Consequently, the superiority of both sexes rests in the feminine or masculine role each performs within the framework of the family. The point is that they are equal within the formative division of labour "which naturally exists in the family"²⁶

The "Mary experience" is necessary for the presence of God to manifest in the human world. Mary is the creative intelligence of "the mother of all the living, [and thus] the New Eve."²⁷ By the authority of her experience of motherhood, she contributes femininity to the

²⁴ Ibid., 543.

²⁵ Ibid., 544.

²⁶ Ibid., 545.

²⁷ Ibid., 546.

collectivity of women. At the same time, Mary's experience points beyond biological birth and death. As the New Eve, her union with Jesus, the New Adam, is one of perfect equality and spirituality. It is a merger that transcends all physicality and exemplifies the notion of "one flesh and one Spirit."²⁸ Ashley envisions this union as one of perfect love, liberating the partners to be individually complete and, simultaneously, seeking the completion of each other, and of others in their midst.

Critical Reflection on the Contribution of Benedict Ashley

In the foregoing, I outlined Benedict Ashley's account of dualism in Christian thought, along with his analysis of self-consciousness as a unifying human capacity. Ashley favours a notion of tradition as one of historical development which is consistent with a process view of reality. As such, the biblical view is not static but instead provides the basis for a value system for all time. This is because interpretation, rather than being reductive, flows with the process of human history. It is meant to be creative.

Ashley's claim that the Church lacks an accurate understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition, and its corollary, that it lacks a theological understanding of the body, accords deeply with the feminist claim that the history of the Christian Church is a *social* history. That is, the fact that the physical body attracts little respect in Christian tradition has to do with the cultural or socio-political source of dualism, which is more compelling than the dualism itself. Both ancient Greek and biblical cultures equally aspired to the goals of male-oriented ideology. In my view, Ashley rightly denounces the

²⁸ Ibid., 546.

changeless, deontological vision of scriptural content yet fails to recognize, beneath this lack of fluidity, an absence of meaning derivative of the lives women were living.

Dualism, which is a prevalent tendency to perceive opposition and antagonism in the world, is rooted in male sociality. It is generated by male ideology which situates an observer in specific world experience and predisposes him to a perspective which is always partial. When the experience from which observations and insights are drawn is one-sided, there is likely to be omission of detail and error. Women are likewise exposed and socialized to this partial perspective. Thus, an understanding that male ideology has shaped much of the Christian story leads one to further acknowledge that what is real in the story is what is at stake. Clearly, as Mary O'Brien has pointed out, ideological thought "misrepresents one level of reality in the need to give expression to another level of reality."²⁹ It is my opinion that Ashley's effort to theologize the human body lacks a recognition of the prior misrepresentation through which male ideology has portrayed it. That is to say, the problem that has beleaguered the full message of revelation where biological bodies are concerned is not merely a question of omission but also one of distortion.

The creation story, for example, recognizes Eve as "the mother of all the living."³⁰ Later in scripture, Ashley notes, she is declared "the one from whom man is taken."³¹ Yet

²⁹ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 6.

³⁰ ASHLEY, *Theologies*, 382. Ashley quotes the phrase from the Old Testament, Genesis 3:20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 384. Here Ashley quotes from the New Testament, I Cor. 11:12.

in the creation theology, Adam, who gives life to Eve, prefigures Jesus, whose body symbolizes new life and transformation. Adam is moreover given dominion over Eve in the manner of the ancient *pater familias* by which males controlled the household. From a feminist analytical point of view, the text presents the "truth of images," mirroring a singular gaze and functioning on two levels. One level is that of power and control, which distils, in Ashley's words, into woman's "submission to sexism."³² At the second level, woman is divested of her powerful capacity to nourish new life and give birth. Instead, childbirth is normalized as a negative experience by the biblical writers: Woman (for all time) is condemned to both the physical suffering of labour and the psychological battery of desiring "a *manchild* . . . who will prove a man of violence."³³ Thus, the process of reproduction is transformed into the core of female powerlessness as "woman finds herself burdened by childbirth which subjects her to slavish dependence on the man"³⁴ Here, clearly, the image of Plato's tomb devolves into Eve's womb, which now becomes the agent of her mental, if not her physical, death.

The Genesis theme of punishment through the process of childbirth has attracted little criticism from theologians, feminist or otherwise. Indeed, Ashley goes on to note that Eve's line of descendants produced Lamech who was "the first to introduce polygyny,"³⁵ a further undermining of the social power of women. Man's destiny is the sweat and toil of the public

³² Ibid., 384.

³³ Ibid., 384.

³⁴ Ibid., 418.

³⁵ Ibid., 384.

realm which offers transcendence of mere existence and excludes women. In the allocation of destinies in the creation story, therefore, we see the triumph of mind over body, of the abstract over the biological. We see, through the eyes of the male writers, a preference for non-dialectical, politically grounded dualism. It may be that, theoretically speaking, the redefinition of continuity and creativity in the story is a product of male reproductive consciousness, which must construct a notion of community on a foundation of danger associated with female biological continuity. It follows that "community" in the biblical text is an achievement of ideological reasoning which disrupts and distorts the significance of female (and specifically maternal) experience. The text exposes a powerful contest of potencies beneath the language, one which is captured in an apparent precognition of aversion and even matricide. The biblical community is a reified fantasy of male control, assuaging man's anxiety in the quest for species continuity.

Ashley's observation of tension between Platonic dualism and Aristotelian metaphysics throughout developing Christian theology fails to recognize the gender struggle within both perspectives. Thus, when he later speaks of the philosophical shift from an ontological to a phenomenological understanding of the human person as a movement toward the devaluation of the body, he is thinking in terms of a universal (male) body. I submit that Ashley is cognizant of the historical opposition between idealism and historicism, which is part and parcel of the debate that pits the method of phenomenology against that of ontology. But he is unaware of the ethics of gender polarization which has disenfranchised women on the basis of their bodiliness, which sees human creativity as male creativity, and which predates Christianity.

The shift to phenomenological awareness, Ashley explains, was intended to overcome dualism by permitting the object of consciousness to stand alone, apart from judgment and assigned meaning. Likewise, Ashley's understanding of human Being-in-process contains a rule of succession in that our awareness of the condition of Being-in-process is antecedent to our knowledge of our thought or of the world as it exists in our thought.³⁶ Existentially, humans are distinguishable from animals by this sense of Being-in-process and thus by the distinctive interrelation of the theoretical and the practical which is sustained by a value system and concern for a future. Being-in-process, then, is comprehension of one's concrete unity in relation to oneself, to other bodies, and to the world. This form of creativity interests Ashley because it posits the existence of the whole human person prior to discussion of epistemological complexity. It is cognition which is not exclusive of embodied reality.

This analysis of being and creativity is not in contradiction to feminist philosophy. We are human by our particular reflexive ability to comprehend our responsibility, freedom, and creativity. Yet I suggest that how each of these entities relates to the body may be delineated along gender lines. To illustrate, I return to Ashley's undermining of the importance of the mother-child relation and to his depiction of the "blind" process of evolution which endorses a time-honoured dualism between creativity and biology. Ironically, process Being-and-consciousness in the masculine philosophical mindset which Ashley adopts does not actually represent existence beyond the intellectual and the atomistic. This is because Being-in-process as a masculine concept entails comprehension of one's

³⁶ Ibid., 275.

place among species in the world, but it effectively "existentializes" notions like human preservation and continuity. Following Mary O'Brien, I am of the opinion that the male tradition of philosophy has standardized the concept of creativity in such a way as to deny the creative properties in the reproduction of life. Therefore, though Ashley is aware of the fact that consciousness is grounded in material existence, I suggest that material existence has different meanings depending on one's gender. Furthermore, although I concede that Ashley's notion of process is dynamic, it remains nevertheless confined by his limited understanding of the meaning of materiality.

Turning to Mary O'Brien's notion of female reproductive consciousness, I submit that women have a richly dimensional perception of the body-self which includes the inner as much as the outer world. Thus, Being-in-process, grounded in female embodiment, is also an intimacy with an interior world that is denied to men. As O'Brien has shown, this distinctive interiority may be of a potential or actual nature, but it is derivable only from identification with particular physical as well as ontological range. Thus, the way in which I, a woman, conceive of my being is not ill-defined and uncertain because it lacks a sense of rigid division from the "other." Rather, the ontological result of female reproductive consciousness is the establishment of an identity which is first and foremost in connection with others. Moreover, extending O'Brien's thought, women have access to an ability to bond in terms of an interior somatic (and conscious) coherence.

We recall Ashley's claim that the recognition that "I" am not the same as "You" constitutes self-understanding exhibiting the ultimate interiority. Ashley intends to speak for all people in assuming that "I" am constituted by the recognition of "Not-You" in the

bodily universe. Here, Ashley is in agreement with Hegel by positing the significance of the external Other in the discovery of the self. This is contentious with respect to a feminist perspective only insofar as that significance is defined as opposition. In O'Brien's work, however, we are urged to consider the process of female self-understanding which is (potentially or actually) in connection with others who are "others" in a very radical sense. O'Brien, to be sure, is among the first to dispense with psychoanalytic and metaphorical descriptions of the womb in assigning it a profoundly ethical significance. Thus, female reproductive consciousness expresses a relationship with that "other" who resides within, who is both part of and separate from the mother's body. This relationship constitutes an epistemological merger of unity and separateness which confers identity while making certain moral demands. Considering all that has been written about identity formation in relation to people and objects in the world, it follows that women, who understand the concept of the "self" in the richness of reproductive consciousness, perceive their being as one of continuity with and responsibility toward an inner as well as an outer world.

In the final analysis, Ashley attempts to correct the tendency within Western theology to subordinate physical embodiment to the "upper" intellectual echelon. I note that this aim is compatible with feminist thought in that interpretation and socialization of the body are benchmark concerns of feminism. Though Ashley ultimately neglects the theoretical and ethical possibility of maternal experience, he provides the motivation for expanding the limits that have been applied to notions of embodiment. His effort to understand the historical body "in terms of all that the human race has experienced in its physical and

cultural context..."³⁷ invites, equally, the scrutiny of feminist research and its insights with respect to female embodiment. We can assert that Ashley's theology, to some degree, frees us to ask about pregnancy and birth and the terms of maternal subjectivity. We might ask how the mother establishes identity with that internal other who is a different being within the boundaries of her own body. Can we extrapolate from the mutual-body experience that it inspires a particular self-understanding constructed as much from unity as from alienation? In other words, are women finally to be told by the experts what we have always intuitively grasped anyway, namely that pregnancy and its radical inward gaze help to establish a distinctive female ontology of connection and separateness?

A Critique of Ashley's "Mother of God" Theology

In view of all that has been said, there is an inconsistency between Ashley's ambition to be inclusive of bodily existence and his theology of Mary. That is, it would seem that Mary, seen in the context of a grounded theology, offers a way of going about a hermeneutic of embodiment. Mary's act of giving birth casts her in the collectivity of women who have long been denied power on the basis of this biological capacity. Mary, too, I suggest, is divested of the power of her body in a haste to portray her humanness in esoteric terms. Ashley envisions Mary as the mystical unity between Old and New theologies, but gives no credit to the union of divinity and humanity made possible by her physical state. Yet we observe that her pregnancy is not a transcendent event, and her maternity is not uncertain. Mary moreover consents to the prospect of giving life. She is an integrated and decisive

³⁷ Ibid., 12.

subject who fully understands the future implications of her action. She will confidently create new life very much at her own expense, not as a reflection on her greatness, but for the promise of prosperity to others. I submit that the ethic of care revealed in Mary is representative of human female reproductive consciousness.

Mary enters the Christian story as one who will give birth to God in human form, yet her maternal body is invisible and insignificant. Perhaps this is related in some way to the gendered perspective of the storytellers. According to Ashley, a great deal of poetic licence is used in the development of Christian Mariology. He explains that theological meaning unfolds, not in steps of explicit revelation, but rather through processes of reflection and intuition, ever guided by faith and the Holy Spirit.³⁸ Mary's story is a composite construction dependent on the selection of themes from floating traditions. The writers were obliged to consider the usefulness of each theme in terms of what needed to be said theologically. However, their maleness plays a role in the selection since the inability to experience birth likely influences one's view of the social world.³⁹ Thus, Mary's biology and consciousness are split apart by the operation of male ideology, and the birth story is the telling of one level of reality resistant to the theological potential of female flesh.

I observe that Ashley celebrates those attributes of Mary which fulfill both ancient and current masculine theological images of Woman. For example, Mary is mild and mystical, selfless and romantically feminine. Her persona lacks self-scrutiny; she is

³⁸ Ibid., 537-39.

³⁹ This is of course an ongoing postulate of Mary O'Brien throughout *The Politics of Reproduction*. See also Virginia HELD, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 172.

grateful for and fulfilled by the role of service to Man and male expectation. Contrary to Ashley's claim, moreover, Mary's "natural aptitude for contemplation" does not rationally devolve into woman's equality with man.⁴⁰ Portrayals of Mary that isolate and over-feminize her, and at the same time undermine bodily necessity, set her apart from the everyday realities of women's lives, past and present. They divest Mary, and all women, of a profound teleology which circumscribes maternal experience and the wonder of birth.

To continue, I will now relate my comments to Ashley's view of the Christian teleology of creativity. Ashley's reference to human creativity as the "remarkable human capacity to think in such a way as to arrive at an essential understanding of the physical world, of Being-in-process . . ." ⁴¹ resonates with the concept of female reproductive consciousness described by Mary O'Brien. The multiple awareness of self-

⁴⁰ Ibid., 544. I take exception to this notion on the bases of historical accuracy and ethical portrayal of women. Historically, the contemplative life for a woman never made her equal to man because, even in that calling, she remained a sexual animal who was a peril to herself and to all men. As Eleanor McLaughlin claims in her account of the development of medieval Mariology, "The female religious, even though she had denied her sensuality and sex in embracing the virginal life, never escaped the male assumption that she was a danger, a source of contamination, and that, in addition, her sex made her incapable of resisting the temptations of any contact with the male or the world." Vestiges of this attitude survived well into the twentieth century, with disposal of the concealing habit a rather current trend. See Eleanor Commo McLAUGHLIN, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Woman in Medieval Theology," *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford RUETHER (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 213-66, particularly pp. 244-45. Moreover, in my opinion, the portrayal of women's equality as predicated on their "natural" mastery of the intellect and contemplative skill is spurious in the mouth of a theologian within a church that denies ordination to women. It is also a value judgment that casts women as men's equals on men's terms, according to criteria set by men. Although there is no evidence that women collectively are not men's intellectual equals, to posit this as women's claim to dignity is a dubious tribute to sameness but hardly to a rich and principled equality.

⁴¹ Ibid., 312.

other-future inherent in women's self-understanding contrasts with the remote, atomistic self which is said to be exhibited by men. Mary's actualization through mystical contemplation likens her mode of consciousness to that of man in its apparent disconnection from human reality and nature. Yet Mary, I suggest, understands that her power on earth is not ego-driven nor competitive but is derived from connection to, and purpose within, the natural world. She is *like* other women because she, too, participates in a creative physical process which expresses, beyond a doubt, the unity of human and sacred realities.

Thus, we are hard pressed to think of a human endeavour which accords more deeply with the Christian teleological aspect of creativity. Birth brings about new life which is, of itself, a production of great wonder and value.⁴² And though men have confiscated birth in creatively symbolic ways,⁴³ to date, only women give birth. With respect to human purpose,

⁴² Here I refer to new life which is "before us." That is, I do not advocate for the production of life as a deontological and therefore prescriptive good, and I suspect more male theologians would concur, were men the birth givers. Those who argue for the deontological imperative of procreation proclaim the inviolability of a religious principle without reference to context. What is lost in this claim is the fact that the religious principles themselves were originally adopted not from thin air but on the basis of men's experiences. The feminist bid for construction of moral norms from the life experience of women, therefore, is not radically new or biased. It is an attempt to balance the ethical foundation of society by directing its references to a lived-*world* context. Accordingly, no woman should be forced to be pregnant nor have the means for preventing it (i.e., contraceptive technology) denied her. These measures infringe upon a woman's personhood and constitute a form of violence against all women. Created life, on the other hand, is another story. The new life which is "before me" is good and valuable, regardless of the circumstances of birth. (I do not intend to enter the debate concerning the viability of life in this paper.)

⁴³ I am thinking not only of Mary O'Brien's concept of the production of social institutions as man's sublimated urge to give birth. I am also cognizant of the phenomenon of couvade, mentioned earlier, in which men have literally acted out the process of labour and childbirth. This brings to mind a radio interview from April 1996 which made reference to a contemporary form of "scientific couvade": Broadcaster Joey Stringer was discussing the merits of the so-called artificial womb with Dr. Morrie Gelfand of Jewish General

I note that philosophy has been slow to recognize the everyday process of birth as an act of unity (with nature) and continuity (of the species), one which is in contrast to man's everyday displays of power over nature guaranteeing, at best, an uncertain future. Man's freedom to subdue nature by the use of dangerously accumulating technologies constitutes a subversive use of power. It is in a league with rampant reproduction to the extent that it endangers the quality of life of myriad others. One could uneasily predict that a world in which uncontrolled reproduction were the norm might eventually resort to the barbarous controls of the technological solution. They are both examples of evil in the context of O'Brien's "antiphysis."⁴⁴

The question remains open as to what theology might look like were women to be honoured for their knowledge and experience with respect to the teleology of creativity and human purpose. I should think we might expect reflection on women's lives to be more serious, more egalitarian, and, coming from male thinkers, more humble. That women have been lumped together and disparaged in much of man's theorizing is, by today's standard of research, unacceptable. That women's bodies, and notably our biological capacities in reproduction, have borne the brunt of the disparagement is unconscionable. Perhaps theology might incorporate the task of linking the dominant Christian paradigms with the life experience of more than half the population of the Christian world. With any providence,

Hospital, Montreal. Shortly into the interview, Stringer asked enthusiastically, "How long will it be before men give birth? Is that the next step?" See CBC, "As It Happens," 19 April 1996, Joey Stringer.

⁴⁴ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 68, 183, 201.

theologians will begin to comprehend the injustice of perpetually expecting the "humility of the material world [to be] most perfectly personified in Mary, the New Eve."⁴⁵ Women simply do have an affinity with the *mater*-ial world, but we have begun to demonstrate that it is far from passive and unintelligent.

The Work of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill in Support of a Feminist Theological Ethics of Maternal Embodiment

Beverly Wildung Harrison: *Making the Connections*, 1985

In her introduction to *Making the Connections*,⁴⁶ Carol S. Robb claims that Beverly Harrison's work perpetuates the feminist ethical position that "the aim of ethics and the moral point of view is the enhancement of personhood, defined as the capacity for responsible self-direction."⁴⁷ Indeed, as Harrison points out, women have been conditioned not to develop our power to name and describe the world, even the world of our own experience. Yet it is urgent that the "reshaping of traditional Christian theological ethics" become a project sensitive to "what women have learned by struggling to lay hold of the gift of life, to receive it, to live deeply into it, to pass it on"⁴⁸

Women are socialized to be passive and then told we are passive by nature. We are conditioned to fulfill the maternal role in often absurdly sentimentalized ways, then told we

⁴⁵ Ibid., 697.

⁴⁶ Beverly Wildung HARRISON, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. ROBB (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), hereafter cited as *Making*.

⁴⁷ Carol S. ROBB, introduction to *Making*, xv-xvi.

⁴⁸ HARRISON, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in *Making*, 8, hereafter cited as "Power."

are scattered and irrational. Harrison observes that women find little solace in the church, which has failed to internalize the notion of women as actors, risk-takers, and leaders.⁴⁹ Moreover, the reciprocity between the creation of individuals and the creation of culture has impressed philosophers little beyond the credit women are given for producing a supply of workers. While conventional philosophies equate the concept of living deeply with that of living in the head, the ethical potential of more holistic, embodied rationality is unexamined.⁵⁰

Harrison rejects the notion that different biologies, male and female, produce different natures and behaviours. She roots this claim in the insight that our "good questions are answered *by something we must do*"⁵¹ and not by something we are prone to do because of any "*fundamental* dimorphism."⁵² Clearly, Mary O'Brien's thesis, though accused of biological determinism, underscores this claim. The dimorphism that Harrison refers to has entrapped women in a masculine construct of femininity. In the theological tradition, woman does not overcome a closeness to nature that renders her ontologically inferior and devoid of reason. Both Harrison and O'Brien reject concepts of embodiment that place constraints on identity and self-determination. They claim that the body mediates knowing and contributes to the possibility of moral relationships. Harrison's analysis of the role of passion reminds us that emotion is necessary to the enterprise of caring, while detachment

⁴⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵² Idem, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," in *Making*, 29, hereafter cited as "Sexism."

hinders the building of community. At the same time, O'Brien reminds us that good society is grounded in history rather than in static concepts of human nature.

While Beverly Harrison is not a "difference feminist" *per se*,⁵³ her work clearly underlines the importance of theory such as O'Brien's for exposing the flux and transformability of social relations. Harrison observes that women's lives are decidedly shaped by the power to both bear and nurture new life. This power is inseparable from the consciousness that wills the creation of another, yet it is devalued by the machismo of Western cultural consciousness.⁵⁴ She believes that Christian ethics minimizes the power of human action in spite of the fact that women's action profoundly builds and deepens community. That is, though the possibility is open to men, it is women, according to Harrison, who have been the "architects of what is most authentically human." This is because women's acts of nurturance and empowerment are substantially in consonance with an understanding of love as "the power to act-each-other-into-well-being."⁵⁵ Harrison exposes a striking difference between women's modes of communication and men's view from the top. The future is endangered, she believes, by the possibility that men will retain that view by failing to abandon the notion of power as might and conquest.

Harrison's concerns echo those of O'Brien particularly with respect to the meaning of motherhood and of the social relations of reproduction. The poles of necessity which separate men from women have been misrepresented in male theory as the basis for

⁵³ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁴ Idem, "The Power," 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

contradiction between maternal care and preservation and what men do in the public realm. Thus, the political stratification of maternity and paternity which O'Brien engages throughout her work produces similar angst about the future. Speaking of man's domination of the natural world, she writes:

Man's hostile relation to nature has left us with the task of reintegrating with a world weary from that battle, a natural world which cries out to the daughters of time in a voice choked with technological sewage, cries out over a wasteland strewn with the garbage of the brotherhood's machines of war. It is from behind their barricades of radioactive productivity and in the chattering language of electronics that men now pour derision on feminist speculation and women's first efforts to make history.⁵⁶

Neither Harrison nor O'Brien subscribes to the idea that biology produces behaviour. Rather, biology is inextricably connected to thought processes which are active and transformable. In the arena of world peace and preservation, it would seem that men have a great deal to learn from women's reproductive consciousness or, in Harrison's terminology, from the power to act-each-other-into-well-being.

In a later article, Beverly Harrison continues reflection on women's relationship to procreation in the context of procreative choice.⁵⁷ Although I do not take up the issues of contraception or abortion in this thesis, the article has merit in terms of the topics I have raised. For example, Harrison points out that both Protestant and Catholic theologies have injected procreation into the theme of creation as divine gift. Procreation became almost divinized in Christian history, and this outcome served only to strengthen patriarchal power.

⁵⁶ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 194.

⁵⁷ HARRISON, "Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice," in *Making*, 115-34, hereafter cited as "Theology."

In consonance with O'Brien, Harrison explains patriarchy as a phenomenon which "derives from the need of men, through male-dominated political institutions . . . to control women's power to procreate the species."⁵⁸ This power, couched in pedestalism, is entirely a masculine creation that pits "the masculine" against "the feminine," and carves the domestic realm into body (female) and head (male). It is romanticized, destructive to the notion of personhood, and clearly not the power which is defended in feminist writing as maternal power.

Consequently, feminist theory and practice must equally embark upon "a desacralization of our biological power to reproduce"⁵⁹ The nature of women's relationship to procreation is far from simple in the technological age. For example, motherhood continues to restrict a woman's access to the rapidly changing public sphere. Even if a mother returns to the work force shortly after childbirth, she will most likely be replaced by a woman (often a mother herself) who will receive low wages for work in the domestic realm. Many women are torn between the need to secure a career, the desire to have children, and the reproductive imperative of the biological clock. And with the prospect of pregnancy comes a torrent of new issues generated by a still male-dominated medical profession which has failed to recognize birth as a "higher order" activity.⁶⁰ Finally,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 117-18.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁰ See Emily Martin's fine analysis of childbirth practices in MARTIN, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), particularly chapter 9, "The Creation of New Birth Imagery," 156-65, and especially p. 164, where Martin reasons as follows:

The kinds of integration of body and mind fostered by the

the catastrophic event of pregnancy resulting from sexual violence perhaps most vividly represents woman's complicated relationship with procreation.⁶¹

Beverly Harrison concurs with Mary O'Brien that it is not our biology but "our social relations [that] bear the image of what is most holy."⁶² The struggle to transform social reality is one which, as many feminists have noted, can begin with liberated maternity and the ensuing praxis of mothers. This would not be "the abstract maternity of Mariolatry," we are warned, "but the working face of maternity in the nurture and socialization of children."⁶³ Nurturance is carried out in physical and social forms, while socialization has its impact on both relations and bodies. Thus, motherhood has the potential to be the living core⁶⁴ of transformed historical consciousness. From this transformed consciousness we can expect to experience disillusionment with hierarchy and dualism, as well as collective respect for individual personhood.

psychophysiological approach and others, the kinds of wholly involved activity captured by the metaphors of the journey and the dance, could well be taken as higher, more essentially human, more essentially cultural forms of consciousness and activity. Here, perhaps, are whole human beings, all their parts interrelated, engaged in what may be the only form of truly unalienated labor [*sic*] now available to us.

⁶¹ HARRISON, "Theology," 122.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶³ O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 208.

⁶⁴ This is in contrast to O'Brien's observation that reproduction is traditionally regarded as "a dead core in the dynamics of human history" See *ibid.*, 26.

Lisa Sowle Cahill: *Between the Sexes*, 1985; *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 1996

The issue of motherhood in relation to gender roles and ethics has been taken up, sometimes implicitly, by Lisa Cahill in two important publications.⁶⁵ In both works Cahill makes the point that the human body is not a given. That is, there are no fixed patterns of behaviour affiliated with one or the other set of biological traits which are great enough to be entirely role determinant. Equally, according to Cahill, the sexes do not separate into two essential, culturally transcendent, hierarchical human natures.⁶⁶ Cahill consults evidence from empirical research to debunk the contention that women are exclusively suited to the domestic role, and that domestic roles are intrinsically inferior to the political life of the public realm.

In relation to the above, Cahill is critical of literal interpretations of both scripture and science. Susceptibility to bias is a factor, she claims, when end results are interpreted into inflexible and prescriptive social role duality. The Christian tradition is marked by flawed interpretation and uncritical acceptance of dated cultural norms. The Genesis creation stories, for example, advocate what are today unacceptable subordinationist perspectives. Cahill urges reader scepticism, particularly in terms of biblical evidence of gender inequality.⁶⁷ Moreover, there is no objective referent for specific human natures that

⁶⁵ Lisa Sowle CAHILL, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), hereafter cited as *Between*; *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), hereafter cited as *Sex, Gender*.

⁶⁶ CAHILL, *Between*, 87-89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

are constitutive of inequality. Instead, there are the concrete interactions within human experience from which ranges of characteristics can be induced. According to Cahill, the possibility that an author or researcher is bound to an agenda that legitimates certain prototypes and conclusions needs to be considered. For this reason, all research, including that in ethics, must be reflexive in an attempt to expose the implicit claims and presuppositions of the writer.

To the extent that only women become pregnant, give birth, and lactate, physiology determines the social role of maternity. A review of anthropological literature tells us that this inevitability has influenced social organization to a degree in both primitive and advanced societies, according to Cahill. But the literature does not clarify why a disparity in power came into being between the delineated social spheres.⁶⁸ Indicative of this disparity is the socially recognized, vast difference in meaning between the expressions "mothering a child" and "fathering a child,"⁶⁹ also noted by Mary O'Brien. The issues raised here by Cahill are, in fact, central to the focus in O'Brien's body of work. From a feminist perspective, these issues demand a standpoint analysis in which a relationship with the real environment and actual experience is recognizable.

Broadly speaking, Cahill makes two essential claims regarding biology and gender roles. The first is that human sexual difference must be understood in the context of human freedom and potential. Thus, inconsistent with the imperative of human dignity is the notion that biology is sufficient to impose reductionist social role opportunities. Secondly, Cahill

⁶⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 96.

points out that there is no evidence in either scripture or empirical research to suggest the inferiority of the private realm. It follows that, in the light of so much theory to the contrary, it is the task of normative ethics to support interpretations of gender that reject notions of hierarchy.

Cahill and O'Brien share the concern that the male theoretical position has limited women on the basis of biology, especially reproductive function. Based on the premise that human relationality is dynamic, they agree that the links between physiology and gender do not support role determinism. O'Brien's signature claim, that reproductive process changes in history, is indeed an endorsement of this dynamism. Clearly, according to the authors, any attribution of specific natures to male and female is a contradiction to the notion of active historical process. Cahill makes reference to historicity and temporality in terms of a "'range' of characteristics natural to humanity,"⁷⁰ and "the experience of human being in time."⁷¹ For O'Brien, the dynamic of reproduction is captured in the language of dialectical process. Birth labour, as both active and mediative, is, even more significantly, inseparable from (transformable) consciousness. It is because of the fundamental instability of process that the prospect of human nature(s) has far-reaching significance: the human world is at a technological crossroad where decisions regarding the nature of change (to reproductive process, for example) depend on how individuals actualize the good or evil potential of human nature.

Finally, the problem of hierarchy embedded in social dualism leads both authors

⁷⁰ Ibid., 88-89, 100.

⁷¹ Ibid., 98.

toward analysis of male ideology. Cahill's insight concerning the role of interpretation and researcher bias is that the agenda of a cultural mindset may figure more prominently in the creation of norms than does a vital Christian assessment. The critical test, according to her, is the degree to which the biblical accounts summon forth experience which is still meaningful today. This is consonant with O'Brien's analysis of the Greek polis and its perversion of femaleness, which persisted well into the nineteenth century. In particular, O'Brien's reading of Hegel and his understanding of the household as the "arena of death"⁷² highlights the problem with the Hegelian claim that consciousness produces the world. In reality, male consciousness, rooted in man's reproductive experience, has produced the mainstream historical accounts of the world, and these accounts are replete with dualism and male supremacy. Cahill and O'Brien are optimistic, however, that the movement has begun in which feminist ethics can disable male supremacy by relying on, among other things, responsible revelations about female embodiment.

In her second work, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, Cahill makes the point that ethics always has to do with the human body. This is due to the centrality of human action to the focus of moral theory.⁷³ But bodies cannot be understood apart from their social aspect. The indissolubility between the body and consciousness is expressed in Cahill's claim that "movements back and forth between the body and its social world seem to be intrinsic to the meaning of body itself."⁷⁴ This means that motherhood as it is organized in

⁷² O'BRIEN, *Politics*, 25.

⁷³ CAHILL, *Sex, Gender*, 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

social interpretation and motherhood as biological experience are inseparable. What is problematic is the realization that the one who defines and ultimately gives form to the experience may be only remotely or prejudicially acquainted with it. Cahill suggests the need for a critical stance in order to redress imbalances between the physical and the social. At the same time, the task of examining the relationship between cultural inscription and bodies "does not obviate the need to investigate the commonalities of human experience furnished by the irreducibility of our bodily existence."⁷⁵

Human physiological reproduction is a case in point. While women's embodiment reduces neither to social role specificity nor to subordinate difference, Cahill supports the notion that the unique bodily relations created by sexuality, pregnancy, and lactation are evidence of two important points. The first is that women's experience of embodiment can never be assimilated into an account of men's sexual and paternal relationality. Yet the body referred to in classical philosophy is a male body, which is fashioned after the author and presented to an implicitly male audience. Compared to this normative male body is the "other," the "invisible or defective" and always silent female body. The second point is Cahill's claim that the distinctive sexual and maternal experiences of women are infused with gender meaning, and contribute to a woman's sense of self and way of being in the world.⁷⁶ Keeping this in mind, feminist researchers must not defer to the "safe" axes of race and class while ignoring the grounding provided by the "ubiquitous elements of the gender axis . . .

⁷⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 84-85.

77

In the two claims above, Cahill, like O'Brien, does not suggest that theoretical significance rests with the female body in its pure material facticity. Rather, the vast literature which is responsible for absorbing or denigrating the female body is a prime example of historical mediation. The task of retrieving female embodied experience is also one of social mediation aimed at raising consciousness understood as inseparable from material existence. Thus, the second point, that sexual and maternal experience contribute to a woman's way of being in the world, refers to a history of actual conscious mediation subsumed under male supremacist consciousness. While racial and cultural axes are by no means unimportant, this suggests that the universality of gender with respect to reproduction⁷⁸ constitutes a preliminary line of analysis for feminist research. What women's experiences of postponed menstruation, gestation, birth, and breastfeeding have meant to women has so far been irrelevant to men's accounts of selfhood and subjectivity.

Cahill therefore endorses O'Brien's quest for knowledge concerning the significance of motherhood as a distinctive experience. At the same time, both authors caution against seeking to locate either female superiority or perfect homogeneity in the experience. Women have been known to be violent toward their children. They have been alienated by the inability to reproduce and by motherhood itself. The point is that, while gender is never

⁷⁷ Susan BORDO, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. NICHOLSON (New York: Routledge, 1990), 146. Cahill quotes from this article by Bordo in the present discussion.

⁷⁸ By "universality of gender with respect to reproduction," I refer to the fundamental understanding of biological maternal and paternal roles.

representable in pure form, and while methodological tools can always be adjusted to produce counterexamples, the feminist refusal to recognize any generalization in terms of maternal experience invites a perpetual self-understanding of indeterminate otherness in the face of patriarchal claims. By arguing through the general category of physiological motherhood (which most Canadian women experience) on the other hand, these authors aim at dislocating and overthrowing the grand patriarchal narratives of pregnancy and motherhood. As Cahill remarks, "gender is at least as structuring of identity and consciousness as is race, and should not become the quick casualty of an overly zealous politics of equality-as-sameness."⁷⁹

In a later chapter, Cahill provides evidence from papal documentation that a woman-defined explanation of motherhood is urgently needed within the Catholic church. For example, in *Familiaris Consortio* (Apostolic Exhortation *On the Family*, 1981)⁸⁰ John Paul II repeats the necessity for procreation as completion of the conjugal sex act. Motherhood and the domestic role are deemed more valuable to women than public roles, which are said to detract from femininity and amount to imitation of masculine privilege. Women and men do not enjoy equality to the extent that family life and public obligations are equal opportunity privileges. According to Cahill, moreover, a clear subordination of women to men is reflected in a more recent Catholic publication condemning the diaphragm in sexual

⁷⁹ CAHILL, *Sex, Gender*, 87.

⁸⁰ This discussion refers to Cahill's brief analysis of *Humanae vitae* (1968) and *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) in *Sex, Gender*, 201-07.

intercourse, and equating masculine identity with how and where semen is ejaculated.⁸¹ Cahill's earlier recognition of men's unresolved competition with female procreative abilities⁸² now seems relevant to the papal opinion that women's dignity resides in private life. This idealization of maternity is demeaning to women because it takes the experience entirely out of the context (positive or negative) in which it is understood by the mother. In addition, it confines women to the private sphere where the notion of maternal power presents no threat to the power men wield in political and non-secular circles.

Neither O'Brien nor Cahill believes that motherhood is essential to a woman's identity and well-being. However, it is an experience common to most women, regardless of the race, culture, or economic status involved. And while these factors, worthy of study, alter how maternity is experienced, they are subsequent to the gender struggle that appears to be consistent through time since man exhibited his first awareness of his paternity. Motherhood, potential or actual, irrefutably contributes to a woman's sense of herself in the world. It follows that maternal experience influences choices and action as it is assimilated into the identity. Christian feminist literature has lagged behind feminist philosophy in posing the questions and insights that shed light on the relationship between maternal identity and action that contributes to a common good. In 1989, Mary O'Brien declared motherhood to be the "ethical issue of the coming decades" for the destruction of dualism

⁸¹ Ibid., 205.

⁸² Ibid., 119.

and the care and conservation it typifies.⁸³ As O'Brien has shown, the tension between women's experience of motherhood and their exclusion from interpreting it originates in the primal gender struggle of human coexistence. Similarly, Lisa Cahill regards gender as itself a moral project concerned with the "humanization of biological tendencies, capacities, and differences, including the social ties that they, by their very nature, are inclined to create."⁸⁴ Both authors express the need for ongoing feminist critique of gender that refuses the classical picture of motherhood as the foundation of patriarchal stability.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that Benedict Ashley's work is relevant to the themes raised in this paper because, located as he is in masculine tradition, he too recognizes the need for a theology that encompasses bodily experience. Ashley's interest in the relationship between the body and theology is inspired by issues arising from the burgeoning field of medical ethics. He develops his arguments through a broad chronological sweep of cultural representations of the body from the time of Plato to present day. Ashley is concerned with how these images have been assimilated into mainstream theology, and how they have functioned to dualize the body and the intellect. Thus, the link posited between the role of the body in classical philosophies and the evolution of dualist and reductionist thought is an original perspective in the literature of theology-as-usual.

⁸³ Mary O'BRIEN, "State Power and Reproductive Freedom," in *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory*, comp. Mary O'BRIEN (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 30.

⁸⁴ CAHILL, *Sex, Gender*, 89.

For our purposes, the value of Ashley's analysis rests in two overarching claims. The first is that beingness and biology are inseparable entities. The ramifications of this claim are numerous: cognition includes embodiment; thought is inseparable from the thinker; reason is not exclusive of care and feeling; identity is embodied; and so forth. Human nature, according to Ashley, is manifest as a body-self in a context of other-bodies that are open to subjectivism, historicism, and creativity. Yet the body-self that Ashley envisions is generic, and this results in contradiction. Throughout the work, "the sin of free people" creeps out of materiality. In the end, bodiliness equates with humility, and the "community of spirit" abbreviates teleology to mean transcendence. This reading of the body, in my view, lacks the dialectical potential of gender analysis. Ultimately (and this is contrary to Ashley's intention) it results in a narrowing of the significance of creative, lived-body experience.

Ashley's second principal claim is that the biblical view is not meant to be static or reductionist. Rather, a dialectical relationship exists between history and scripture, through which they reflect and complete one another. In feminist theological ethics, this is an equally fundamental premise. Yet it differs from the notion intended by Ashley in that it is inclusive of the praxis of gender.

The difference is manifest, for example, in Ashley's discussion of form and matter. Despite his insistence on the "profound mutuality" of the two, matter seems to pull downward as Ashley denies that Mary's greatness can be connected with "mere" biological motherhood. Her *raison d'être*, as explained by Ashley, moreover, condenses into an account of the superiority of masculine and feminine roles in the division of labour within

the family. This analysis is meant to honour women, yet Mary's story negotiates nothing new in terms of the emancipation of women. Her achievement as the Mother of God is exemplified by the act of contemplation. The bond between mother and child in Ashley's understanding is consigned to the status of an inadvertently disembodied "perfect love."

Ashley's work responds to a profound lack in theological analysis. Transcendence of the body as a theological value has frequently been interpreted as the basis for attributing low value to material life. In the examples of war and ecological destruction, Ashley clearly demonstrates a need to examine human nature in its lethal crusades against created nature. At the same time, I have shown that Ashley's effort to privilege the relationship between scriptural and historical development falls short of dialectical reality. The problem is rooted in his notion of the body as ordered by theological concepts which adjust to neither historical nor gendered reality.

My turn to the work of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill in effect bridges Benedict Ashley's effort to theologize human embodiment with Mary O'Brien's feminist analysis of the root cause of male dominance and dualism. Briefly stated, Harrison and Cahill contextualize O'Brien's theory both within and beyond the maternal boundary. That is, each examines the potential for feminist ethics (or metaethics, as Harrison calls it) to galvanize women's power to effect change in the world. This power emanates from a raised consciousness concerning women's experiences of self, body, and gendered world. At the same time, the authors caution against any dramatization of experience which would play into the fantasy of the patriarchal Woman.

Harrison's profound concern for personhood leads an examination of women's power

to give birth and to nurture. Her comparison of the masculine penchant for conquest with the power of women as a grounded agent of empowerment corresponds with Mary O'Brien's perception of female reproductive consciousness as unified and creative. Harrison is also clear that the dialectic of body and world constitutive of human experience is not reducible to the notion that biology alone produces natures and behaviours. Because bodies do not exist in a social vacuum, the contexts in which bodies live contribute to their movement, meaning, and transformability. This is critical to Harrison's comprehension of the issues related to the human future and the valid meanings of maternal power.

I have endeavoured to show how Beverly Harrison's insights are consonant with Mary O'Brien's general thesis that reproductive relations are crucial to female self-understanding and that, in the lived world, these relations are exercised in adaptive and dialectical processes. It is evident to both writers that the central paradox of female existence lies within the context of reproduction. They observe that, while women demonstrate a tremendous power in maternal experience, women throughout the world continue to lack social relevance, often *because* of that experience.

Harrison and O'Brien moreover agree that a sense of urgency cloaks the issue of maternal power: as feminist consciousness takes root in the natural and social worlds, women will gain status and public power, they claim. Yet as women accumulate such power, is there reason to believe they will be less susceptible than men to utilitarian options in exercising it? We cannot say for certain. It is established, however, that biological maternity, in both its potential and actual states, has indeed exerted influence over women's self-understanding and motivation. In addition, new technologies aimed at releasing women

from aspects of the physiological process present new horizons in terms of resolving identity and moral choice issues. Harrison and O'Brien are confident that we do not escape the mediating role of the body in the acquisition of knowledge and social justice. Thus, women's continuity with birth and nurturance is a constitutive factor in the formulation of a feminist perspective on personhood and power.

Lisa Cahill contributes to the discussion above by fleshing out some of the theoretical claims made by Mary O'Brien. For example, Cahill rejects the notion of biological determinism by relying on an analysis of freedom and historicity. The body by itself does not impose behaviour on the individual. The *experience* of the body, on the other hand, influences understanding of the self and of the action one is likely to take. Along these lines, Cahill offers the hypothesis that a woman's sense of self is nourished by the deep connection between fetus (or infant) and mother, which is potentiated by female reproductive capability. The fact that men lack the bodily relations of pregnancy and lactation and must socially work out their relationship to their offspring inevitably contributes to the male sense of self. Indeed, the experience of a "lack" in itself validates the view that the experience of fatherhood is infused with gender value. Like O'Brien, Cahill claims that male and female consciousness are inseparable from bodiliness, while a vast component of bodily experience is reproductive. Man's lack is reflected in competitive masculine identity and may well account for the prevailing dualistic understanding of the world.

Cahill observes a fundamental continuity between the meaning of embodied existence and the doing of ethics. Social organization has essentially been an interpretation of human activity according to a dominant gendered capacity to see and reason. Cahill

points out that gender itself is a continuous moral project and that attempts to purify its significance result in polarization. Strict gender-role interpretations of moral existence limit human access to actualization and meaning.

While female existence cannot be plugged into social role specificity, the experiences associated with sexuality and motherhood, according to Cahill, are uniquely important. Cahill's work exposes the need for a realistic integration of the material world in the social relations of women and men. Women need to identify and lay claim to some commonalities in their experience of embodiment. For Cahill, motherhood furnishes a "safe" axis for gender analysis without which the female sense of identity can be analyzed into diffuseness and vulnerability. A discourse on motherhood consisting of woman-defined narratives is a source of truth and authority over patriarchal interpretation.

At the same time, Cahill shares Mary O'Brien's suspicion of overzealous approaches that reproduce the myth of motherhood in new ways. In spite of everything that can be said of reproductive consciousness and continuity, both authors know that women can be socially alienated from themselves, from motherhood, and from one another. Not all women choose to be mothers, and not all mothers are fulfilled by the status. The point is that it is stabilizing and empowering for women to embrace the universal aspects of experience and to dispel the fragmentation of women accomplished in men's theories. But Cahill and O'Brien denounce romanticized accounts of the maternal that only burden women with a false, destructive sisterhood.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this thesis I set out to explore the meaning of embodied existence in the discourse of difference feminism and in the articulation of feminist theological ethics. Specifically, my analysis has centred on the embodiment of maternity, both as it has been depicted in the tradition of philosophical and theological thought and as contemporary feminist philosophers debate its significance. As I mentioned earlier, my interest in the "difference" of maternity was inspired by personal, academic, and professional influences. I have posed questions that emerge from each of these viewpoints, allowing them to mingle in a demonstration of my opinion that the spheres of our lives are inseparable.

On a personal note, there has been a particular question surreptitiously steering the project, theme by theme: why has Mary O'Brien's writing resonated so fiercely with the experiences I bring to the reading of it? The answer, still incomplete for me, speaks to that fire of recognition (encountered only rarely) that relates to a writer's willingness to authentically inhabit her words. Detractors have found notes of stridency in this voice, yet what I see in Mary O'Brien's work is a profound feminist vigilance over technological expansion. From the professional side of my life, my daily familiarity with the evidence of man's will to wound and annihilate formed a logical trajectory for O'Brien's ethics. There is a great deal still to be researched, I believe, with respect to the theory of reproductive consciousness and violence against women. Finally, the frustrations of a journey in

masculine academia erupted constructively in my decision to bring Mary O'Brien's theory to Christian theological ethics and in the decision of faithful others in the field to journey with me. This thesis is a beginning. It is intended to turn the attention of philosophers and theologians to the messages about female bodies delivered in the "ethics-as-usual" body of thought. It is an inaugural exercise in the application of Mary O'Brien's work to the problem of dualism - in its manifold displays - in Western culture.

The salient question guiding this thesis springs from a line of inquiry that has been energetically explored throughout the history of philosophy: what is the significance of the female body to the enterprise of intellectual discourse? To spiritual transcendence? To the capacity to reason? To the way in which ethics is perceived and "done"? In general, the tradition has tolerated the inclusion of female embodiment only insofar as it gave flesh to expressions of human depravity. Much contemporary research is devoted to condemnation and revision of this state of affairs. On the other hand, when I took up the challenge of a thesis, little attention had been given to the significance of the maternal body. I have extended the original questions, therefore, by exploring the meaning of maternal embodiment within the theoretical and structural creations of Western men.

Following the path clarified by Mary O'Brien's writing, my aim has been to deepen the significance of her theory of reproductive consciousness by exposing its potential to theological ethics. Thus, while *The Politics of Reproduction* appeals directly to the meaning of human action with respect to how people treat one another and the fragile world around us, a feminist theological understanding articulates the gravity of injustice in a world nurtured by perpetual love. Male supremacy and the conditioning of entire cultures to its

dictates cannot be God's will. Rather, from a feminist theological perspective, the difference of male and female contributes to the holiness of each in one another's eyes. This thesis has therefore teased out a clarion observation that Mary O'Brien's privileging of the process of birth is equally a celebration of the gift of creation given, in grace, to women.

In the first chapter, I outlined the contemporary debate among feminist writers concerning the place of difference in the feminist movement. The authors chosen to delineate a "place" offer unique and often incompatible views, and yet they unanimously agree that experience mediated by a female body generates a sense of the world which is very different from man's perceptions and sensations. Each author examines what I call the axiological reifications of dualism, particularly the way in which dualistic encoding has relegated woman to the periphery of meaning making.

For example, my analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, described the author's brilliant effort to redefine freedom for the female sex. Aimed at liberating woman from man's suffocating rules of existence, de Beauvoir invites her to strive beyond the victim status thrust upon her, to overcome the repressive conflicts of femininity and motherhood. However, I showed that de Beauvoir's concepts of femininity and motherhood are borrowed from the pages of existential philosophy and are inherently flawed by it. De Beauvoir distances herself from the women who would be her readers. Speaking from the heights of intellectualism, I pointed out, she contributes to the privatization of the ordinary woman, offering, as she does, complex abstraction as the route to social change.

In my consideration of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, I explored the foundational claim that the body is a social construction. This work is similar to O'Brien's in that Rich

links the female role in procreation to a world-historic suppression of women. Thus, the body's ability to give birth, the process that birth requires, and the intimacy of women in their knowledge and attentiveness to one another in birth have incited palpable jealousy among the (already-empowered) men of the world. Rich describes a host of influences, principally from philosophy, spirituality, politics, and medicine, through which birth-giving perceived as power was brought under male control. At the same time, Rich's approach differs from O'Brien's in its candid inclusion of motherhood as an alienated experience. Here I explored the notion of the female body as culturally inscribed and, at the same time, (said to be) pathologically affective. Ultimately, Rich's feminism, unlike that of O'Brien, takes a separatist tack in order to establish non-patriarchal materialist foundations.

As I continued with Nancy Chodorow's book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, I analysed the tendency of psychoanalysis to label women as problematically relational. Relying on object-relations theory, Chodorow develops the hypothesis that the creation of meaning in the human world is a psychological event. One's core identity is the product of systematic responses to early nurturance, according to Chodorow. Thus, touch, proximity, and separation are infant experiences that process into distinctly gendered attitudes toward the social environment. As Chodorow's theory explains in detail, the mother-infant dyad is a *social setting*, internalized by the infant as it grows in awareness. Significantly, father-absence is also internalized and plays a salient role in the structure of the child's identity. In my opinion, however, the concern to understand psychological mechanisms dwarfs a concern for real embodied relationship. My review of Chodorow elicited the concern that, in spite of the label "materialist psychology" attached to her work, Chodorow slights the

body in favour of the mind.

Finally, I presented the French feminist viewpoint of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray attacks the logic of language development by showing how language is inundated with symbols that are derived from the male imaginary. More specifically, much of the symbolism we are conditioned to accept in Western philosophy is a replication of phallic biology. Women, according to her theory, have not effectively resisted their absorption in masculine systems of meaning. Thus, Irigaray sets out to "perform" a reversal which violates the "logic of the Same" by superimposing female biology and subjectivity. The result, as I described it, is a demonstration of the not-known, of the inseparability of the female body and mind in an articulation of both sexual and maternal pleasure. My account drew out the continuity between Irigaray's notion of female difference as a symbolic inversion of psychoanalytic philosophy and Mary O'Brien's contention that birth-giving constitutes a critical gender difference which men have subverted in order to keep women from comprehending their exclusive, elemental power.

In chapter two, I gave a detailed account of Mary O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness. I proceeded by describing her vital inspiration - drawn from her experience as a Scottish midwife - to explore the ethical significance of birth. O'Brien, I pointed out, departed from the prevalent methodologies of feminist theorizing in the seventies and eighties. In place of the postmodern "view from everywhere", *The Politics of Reproduction* returned to Marxist and somewhat universalizing basics. Yet I presented O'Brien's reclamation of the female body in terms of a *dialectical* encounter with traditional themes and methodologies. This is the core achievement of O'Brien's method - the privileging of

a fundamentally universal experience with the proviso that all human experience is subject to dialectical transformation.

Similar to Luce Irigaray's approach, Mary O'Brien's writing demonstrates the absurdity involved when men have created theory as the voice of the human race. For example, Hegel's notion of procreative process as negation and regeneration of consciousness projects man's struggle against annihilation, O'Brien points out, but says nothing of woman's contribution of body and mind to the birth of a human being. When Marx inverts Hegel's idealism in order to validate material life and labour, his efforts fall short of explaining the original labour and value of birth. O'Brien's revision of these works is a carefully laid out exercise in dialectical dialogue. The role of consciousness is not discarded but rather is preserved and valued as a true recreation of knowledge-through-embodiment of the human and natural worlds. Similarly, the pole of necessity given a proletariat and economic orientation by Marx inspires O'Brien to consider the primal necessity of the human world to reproduce itself in physical and ontological contexts.

My discussion of O'Brien's contribution to difference feminism highlighted the way in which explicit reference to the female body unobtrusively "takes over" the master theories. O'Brien makes the troubling discovery that women's lives have been directly and indirectly left out of social (hence, ethical) discourse. Yet by envisioning the "life" of female embodiment incorporated into the theoretical mainstream, O'Brien makes a feminist claim to creativity that radically alters traditional meditations on the nature of history. Fundamentally, women have been the history-makers virtually in the shadow of men's grand narratives on creation and continuity. This revelation shakes the tentative foundation of

ethics-as-usual.

In chapter three, I positioned Mary O'Brien in dialogue with the authors from the first chapter, with their varying positions on difference feminism. The purpose of this exercise was to bring forward some of the major treatments of difference among feminists revealing the penchant for creativity which characterizes the feminist impulse. Also significant is the appeal each author makes to predecessor theories and methods. My analysis explored both the gains and the pitfalls of adhering closely to a masculine framework in the generation of feminist insight.

My comparison of the work of Simone de Beauvoir with that of Mary O'Brien was grounded in the interest each showed in the condition of maternity. De Beauvoir's observations are given shape by Sartrean existentialism, which holds that transcendence is the crowning achievement of authentic existence. However, my discussion shows that de Beauvoir becomes entangled in the existentialist machinery when she attempts to fit credible feminist values into a masculine value system. Thus, de Beauvoir accepts the notion of female inferiority as an a priori reality, against which she must develop an ethic of authenticity for women. The result is both derivative and non-dialectical.

While de Beauvoir is rightly critical of the postwar hardship of female life, my treatment of her work revealed how the positing of existentialism as emancipation - without dialectical scrutiny - is hopelessly close to the "bad faith" which she herself denounces. De Beauvoir is unable to challenge dualism and thus equally ill-equipped to address woman's sexual and maternal "deficiencies" except by proposing transcendence. As I compared this writing with O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness, I noted that de Beauvoir's

deference to existential norms blocks freedom and autonomy for women by precluding the possibility of a female knowing subject. Through O'Brien's work we see that the dead weight attributed to female embodiment by existentialist theory may well be a projection of man's biological and ontological alienation from birth process.

As I discussed the work of Adrienne Rich in the light of Mary O'Brien's thought, I observed both strong similarity and distinct differences. Rich, as I explained earlier, rejects the political commitments of predecessor theories and thus any patronymic function they might serve. In addition, because patriarchy is sustained by a narcissistic Mother-fantasy, Rich aims to avoid its perpetuation by writing from a critically eclectic stance. No singular male theory has the authority to guide a feminist meditation, this would seem to say. Moreover, if male theory is to be revised, it has relevance for her only as the by-product of theory having the primary goal of improving women's lives.

Rich and O'Brien share a sense of what lingers in the dark center of patriarchy. The institution of motherhood, as Rich calls it, is a reification of the cultural repression of maternal identity. The authors agree that man's self-consciousness in the light of female reproductive potential is the origin of the infantilized Mother who emerges like a salve from the mindset of Western philosophy. This Mother depoliticizes and controls real motherhood by deflecting those impulses for change that flow from dialectical existence. The Mother's body is an enslaving concept, timeless and lifeless, that revolves around male desire and mechanically renews male privilege.

Adrienne Rich and Mary O'Brien condemn male-defined femininity and value women's ability to form close relationships. However, it is O'Brien's analysis that provides

a firm theoretical base on which to conceive the structure for a feminist rationale. Man's co-optation of maternal power is evident in the male-dominant literature of philosophy and Christian theology. O'Brien explains the theft as man's alienation made explicit in the language of value and historical progress. While consciousness and history are said to relate dialectically according to her predecessors, O'Brien trumps the concept by claiming that female reproductive consciousness epitomizes value and progress in the context of a feminist and world-affirming axiology.

My comparison of Nancy Chodorow's work with O'Brien's philosophy of birth further delineated the problem that can arise when women's experiences are examined through the lens of patriarchal methodology. Chodorow proposes to understand why women choose to mother in post-industrial society, a question which is rhetorically answered throughout *The Politics of Reproduction*. The combination of sociological and psychoanalytic theory to which Chodorow appeals, however rich in analysis of sexual cathexis, remained woefully silent on the nature of embodied relations from the mother's point of view. Chodorow's mother, I showed, digests the social scenery without protest, bowing not only to Freudian fantasies of what women want, but also to an unforgiving account of infant psychological development.

My analysis revealed an affirmation of the psychic realm which inadvertently locks female mothering to father absence. I showed that there is little opportunity for the actors to transform, given the circularity of the cause-and-effect relationship between the binary social environment and Freud's explanation of psychological internalization. On the other hand, it is precisely this inevitability of circumstance which O'Brien's dialectical analysis defeats.

The dialectical relationship between personal and political spheres potentiates transformation. O'Brien's theory, I demonstrated, challenges the psychoanalytic privileging of immediacy and "blank-slate" bonding. Hence, bodily experience and memory figure prominently in the refinement of female identity.

Finally, I compared the ideas of Luce Irigaray on female difference and symbol formation with Mary O'Brien's account of reproductive consciousness. O'Brien and Irigaray denounce the ever-present male subject in philosophical discourse, particularly as "he" controls the delineation of what is definable and thematizable. Because the body grounds perception and meaning-construction for the authors, they maintain that male subjectivity essentially revises the outer world according to the movement and boundaries of the male body. Significantly, the experience of maternity is part of this outer world.

My comparative analysis revealed how O'Brien and Irigaray refuse constructions of maternity that merely give back man's fear or desire. In the works they discuss, motherhood traps a woman in existential and psychological contingency which is mitigated (not reversed) by compliance with patriarchy. Patriarchal politics, they point out, rise up between paternal embodiment and the autonomously sexual or maternal woman. On the other hand, a woman can realize her capacity for self-expression from within the very boundaries of the logic that entraps her. Women disrupt the masculine economy of meaning in the experience of alterity from the inside. For O'Brien, the master theory becomes a vehicle for the celebration of female unity, while Irigaray employs mimicry in an effort to abandon and transcend the masculine imaginary.

In chapter four, I brought a feminist theological interpretation to bear upon the

insights of the previous chapters. I did this by first discussing the work of Benedict Ashley, who claims that an adequate theology of the body is sadly absent from the literature of Christian ethics. My analysis showed that Ashley is perceptive in his delineation of the problem, but that the lack of gender sensitivity in his theory limits his "body-self" to maleness. I concluded that, ultimately, Ashley's account of bodiliness is oriented by theological principles that narrow the potential for creativity and defeat the ethical project.

Next, I addressed the feminist theories of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lisa Sowle Cahill and their relationship to Mary O'Brien's thought. Harrison, like O'Brien, analyzes the power to give birth as something which men have envied and needed to control. In reclaiming this power from the patriarchal agenda, Harrison holds that it must be authentic and desacralized. Thus, the social relations (or dialectics) of maternity militate against notions of the Mother that are static and overdetermined. Similarly, Lisa Cahill criticizes the inflexibility of the "two natures" ideology. "Male" and "female" are not reducible to specific behaviours, she claims, and often such conclusions result from alienation or bias on the part of the theorizer. Cahill, like Harrison, urges us to consider sexual-maternal difference in the context of personhood and dialectical freedom.

The dialogue of this last chapter supports the opinion that maternal experience constitutes a profoundly originary difference which both traditional and feminist philosophies have only tentatively explored. Thus, Mary O'Brien's analysis of birth and motherhood uncovers powerful ontological and epistemological resources that foster specific ethical claims and are grounded in transformable material relations. Transformation here is the product of historicity, which O'Brien and her feminist interlocutors posit explicitly in

terms of contexts. That is, they reject the authenticity of abstract contexts such as progress or the "realm of reason" in favour of concrete circumstances like poverty and medicalized childbirth. Moreover, O'Brien's theory discovers a vital link between motherhood and theological ethics which is grasped by Beverly Harrison, Lisa Cahill, and others. The physical experiences of pregnancy and birth have an inseparable conscious component which is significant partly in that it responds to some of the central questions posed in moral theological tradition. The structure of difference is dialectical, however, and this remaining disclosure transports O'Brien's readers into the heart of creativity. In *The Politics of Reproduction*, Mary O'Brien implicitly theologizes birth and maternity by showing that transcendence is imminent in the way in which flesh and spirit merge with fluency on earth.

Finally, the most daring and promising aspect of O'Brien's work is the attribution of value with respect to material life process and, in particular, to the role of women in childbirth. As I discussed earlier, feminists have been wary of talk about relationality and nurturance as these have been or might be applied to women. In the light of postmodern and current preferences for plurality and dispersal, they worry that emphasis on female physiology as a profound commonality will only sentimentalize women and sharpen the myth of female "otherness." O'Brien, on the other hand, is critical of the abandonment of the physiological axis of analysis. Her dynamic understanding of reproductive realities neither limits, totalizes, nor renders static the signature process which is birth. This is a vital perception for feminist theoretical strategy.

This thesis dealing with Mary O'Brien's theory, therefore, suggests a heuristic for transforming established parameters in philosophical and ethical thought. The philosophical

tradition, for example, has supported gendered interpretations of "subject" and "object," or "active" and "passive," and such interpretations were filtered into ethical reasoning. In theology, masculine rationale elevated "virtue" and "goodness" skyward without adequately relating these ideas to the social milieu of diverse living beings. The "lower" world of functionality (woman's world) bore no resemblance to man's esoteric paths to excellence and redemption. Moreover, through the ages, prevalent notions of virtue and excellence provided almost no validation of female personhood in terms of woman's actual knowing and doing.

Reality skewed by powerful, articulate, and sometimes cloistered men is something women have been socialized to endure. Operating at the level of an instinct, a restlessness, or perhaps a precondition of uncertainty (as O'Brien sees it), man has struggled to translate his particular existence into a variety of structures and meaning systems. Evidence of the masculine penchant for detachment, opposition, and domination is ubiquitous in the world. Yet the tendency of male philosophers to distort or omit reality has always been a revelation about men, while the power to change such circumstances belongs to those who will seek the opportunity in the very creations of the empowered class - in this case, to women. The thesis has endeavoured to highlight this reality as a transformative dynamic made possible by dialectical awareness.

With respect to contraceptive and reproductive technologies, for example, the race between competing conglomerates for technological solutions has outdistanced the development of sound and practical ethical guidelines for monitoring such innovations. The sphere of technology is rigidly gendered to begin with, characterized as it is by

depersonalization, control, and fierce means-and-ends instrumentality. Women have a unique investment in the outcome of the race because we are its objects, its targeted consumers and financial sustenance. Yet we frequently fail to acknowledge our formidable status in the issue in the sense that women continue to own their reproductive labour power. This point, derivative of Marxist logic, has been raised several times in the thesis. The upshot of our ownership is that ethical mediation is in the hands of women who dare to comprehend both the ravenous politics of the cyber-universe *and* the fact that we are in a position to tame and humanize its cyber-goals.

Similarly, my thesis is relevant to the profusion of technologies that threaten global ecology. The pleasure that men take, for instance, in the processes of abstraction and risk-taking is rewarded by the dark side of industrial and military means of destruction when that pleasure is put to the service of mass technology. My analysis provides a thoughtful explanation of the masculine tendency to see the real as unreal and to subdue the natural environment. Perhaps man's comfort with the discourses and practices of the technological universe betrays a deeper desire to soften his primordial expulsion from human, life-giving, material process. Now the question becomes, what kind of contribution to theological ethics is made possible by this explanation?

The "ethics of integration" can be applied to numerous issues affecting how women and men share the planet and realize justice in daily life. Uniquely, however, this thesis, through explicit valorization of female physiological process, transforms the parameters of feminist ethical and theological reflection. I point out that, by unveiling and demystifying reproductive process, feminists can find ways to establish female embodied experience as

a locus of validation and agency. Thus, to the extent that only women are the birth-givers, woman's "affinity with nature" is critically relevant and thematizable. The inclusion of topics such as menstruation and childbirth constitutes the "nothing-new" for women, and yet, within the tower of ethics or theology, it is a fresh declaration of the power of sexual difference.

In the thesis I pointed out that many ethicists, including feminist ethicists, are fond of framing the issue of human biology as a discussion of the biosocial or of sociobiology in which the social aspects are elevated and over-analyzed. It is often with near-audible relief that feminist writers pedestal consciousness, and with almost palpable rancour that they censor one another for biologism, reductionism, or essentialism. It is my view that feminists have recoiled from talk of the biological possibly in an attempt to claim man's artificial "freedom from" as a badge of equality. This modern day phenomenon is constitutive of female restlessness, a mimetic rejection of woman's "physiological fate." In other words, similar to Beauvoir's perspective, feminists sometimes seem to be saying that acting like a man will make woman equal to man. Fearing the slippery slope of essentialism, then, feminism heightened its possibility by abandoning the analysis of female bodies and beingness, and by tacitly endorsing what men have said in the past.

Another point is that women need to be cautious about relinquishing their reproductive capacities to the hungers of the technological revolution. Instead, by describing and seriously assigning privilege to the maternal powers, women can begin to value their mothers, daughters, and themselves *on terms that are their own*. Menstruation, gestation, birth, and lactation are processes grounded in relationality, nurturance, and empowerment.

Unlike the cold masculine paradigms of control and autonomy emanating from the productive realm and threatening life on earth with radical nonbeing, the maternal symbols of integration promise to build unities into social relations and to be creative of a future that is certain to be there.

My final thoughts have to do with childbirth and motherhood as a rich starting point for feminist theological ethics in the light of biblical imagery. I will draw on two contrasting, yet linked images, and discuss these as trajectories of the analysis in this thesis. The first is contained in the Old Testament proclamation that childbirth pain and sorrow constitute woman's ongoing punishment in the world. Thus, childbirth is seen as the embodiment of chaos, violence, and retribution. The second image is that provided by the New Testament nativity scene in which Mary gives birth in the shadows, rendering her womb an ineffable place of origin, and her labour implicitly existential. This picture contrasts with the first one in its refusal to deal with labour process except as politely suppressed and mysterious activity. The images are similar in that each effectively silences women's experience and, in so doing, reveals the passive violence that many feminists have attributed to such silence.

Throughout the thesis, I have emphasized the positive ontological and ethical aspects of giving birth. The contribution of a mother's body and mind to the potential of another human being is simply not animalistic "lower order" activity. Rather, I have shown that the "life" of female embodiment is the first order of history-making which gives rise to values that promote empowerment and unity. Moreover, I show that when masculine investments are depoliticized, childbirth can be appreciated as the locus of commitment to material life

and to a responsible future.

The biblical images of punishment and taboo are mediated images. Woman as carnal, unclean, or in violent labour responds to patriarchal envy directed at her body, which is seen as physically powerful and unique. Similarly, the dismissal of real labour and birth in the nativity story is revealing of the storyteller's experience and the poverty of patriarchal narrative. A great deal of feminist research is needed in order to examine the biblical treatment of birth and to dispel dangerous messages about women in the scripture. This thesis provides a methodological perspective and a sturdy heuristic for moving in such directions. Clearly, the contribution to feminist theological ethics will be a further dismantling of deductive ethics, and a renewed vision of female ontology that underlines the theme of integration and gives fresh substance to incarnation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Mary O'Brien:

- 1976 "The Politics of Impotence." In *Contemporary Issues in Political Philosophy*. Edited by Wm. R. SHEA and John King FARLOW. New York: Sci. Hist. Pub.
- 1977 "Hegel: Man, Physiology and Fate." Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, G.R.O.W. Paper no. 12.
- 1978a "The Dialectics of Reproduction." *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 1.
- 1978b "At School on the Streets." *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 1.
- 1979a "Marxism, Motherhood, and Metatheory." Paper presented at Canadian Association of Learned Societies, Saskatoon.
- 1979b "The Politics of Reproduction: A Feminist Perspective." *RFR/DRF*, vol. 5 (spring).
- 1979c "Political Theory: A Feminist Perspective." *RFR/DRF*, vol. 8 (March).
- 1979d "Reproducing Marxist Man. In *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*. Edited by Lorenne M. G. CLARK and Lynda LANGE. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 1979e "The Politics of Hysteria." *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 1.
- 1981a "The Constitution in Context." *Broadside: A Feminist Review*, vol. 2 (February).
- 1981b *The Politics of Reproduction*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 1981c "Feminist Theory and Dialectical Logic." *Signs*, vol. 7.
- 1982a "Feminism and Revolution." In *Feminism in Canada*. Edited by Angela

MILES and Geraldine FINN. Montreal: Black Rose Books, chapter 14, part 1. Reprinted as *Feminism: From Pressure to Politics*. Edited by MILES and FINN. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989.

- 1982b "Feminist Theory and Feminist Practice." In *Feminism in Canada*, chapter 14, part 2.
- 1983a "Reproductive Labour and the Creation of Value." *Atlantis*, vol. 8 (spring).
- 1983b "Naming Our Experience: Mary O'Brien on the Politics of Reproduction." *Healthsharing* (summer).
- 1984 "The Commatization of Women: Patriarchal Fetishism in the Sociology of Education." *Interchange*, vol. 15.
- 1986 "Patriarchal Hegemony and Legal Education." Co-authored with Sheila MCINTYRE. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 2.
- 1987a "Fiction and Fact." *RFR/DRF*, vol. 16 (spring).
- 1987b "Loving Wisdom." *RFR/DRF*, vol. 16 (September).
- 1989a "Periods." In *Taking our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality*. Edited by Frieda FORMAN and Caoran SOWTON. New York: Pergamon Press.
- 1989b *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Boulder & London: Westview Press.
- 1990a "Political Ideology and Patriarchal Education." In *Feminism and Education: A Canadian Perspective*. Edited by Frieda FORMAN et al. Toronto: Centre for Women's Studies in Education, O.I.S.E.
- 1990b "Never-Married Older Women: Beyond the Stereotypes." In *Women and Well-Being/Les Femmes et le Mieux-Être*. Edited by Vanaja DHURVARAJAN. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Interviews and Audio-Visual Material:

- 1983 "Women in 1984." Interview by Gideon FORMAN and Terry MALEY, *Acta Victoriana* (fall).
- 1984 "Gender Relations." Audio-visual with M. MACKIE, H. BUCHBINDER, and E. VAZ. Toronto: TVOntario.

- 1985 "Mary O'Brien: Life's Process leads to a Theory of Life." Interview by Penelope GLASSER, *Status of Women News* (June).
- 1985 "Defining Feminism." Interview by Melanie RANDALL, *RFR/DRF*, vol. 14 (November).

Reviews of Mary O'Brien's Work:

- CODE, Lorraine. Review of *Politics*. *Atlantis* 9 (spring 1984): 118-20.
- _____. Review of *Politics*. *Choice* 19 (June 1982): 1415.
- DEITCH, Cynthia. Review of *Politics*. *Contemporary Sociology* 12 (March 1983): 229-30.
- FAROUGH, Dawn. Review of *Politics*. *Herizons* 1 (November 1983): 40.
- FINN, Geraldine. Review of *Politics*. *RFR/DRF* 11 (December/January 1982-3): 441-43.
- HARDING, Sandra. Review of *Politics*. *Signs* 8 (winter 1982): 361-63.
- HUNTLEY, Joy. Review of *Politics*. *The American Political Science Review* 77 (December 1983): 1117-18.
- MINNICH, Eliz. K. Review of *Reproducing the World*. *Signs* 16 (autumn 1990): 177-80.
- OKIN, Susan Moller. Review of *Politics*. *RFR/DRF* 11 (December/January 1982-3): 443-44.
- RÉAUME, Denise. Review of *Politics*. *Queen's Quarterly* 91 (February 1984): 474-77.
- ROTHSCHILD, Joan. Review of *Politics* in *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 9 (January 1983): 139-42.
- TORNES, Kristin. Review of *Politics*. *Acta Sociologica* 26 (March 1983): 175-81.
- VICKERS, Jill. Review of *Reproducing the World*. *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 102-04.

Discussions of the Ideas of Mary O'Brien:

- ACHILLES, Rona, and Mark LIPPINCOTT. "The Dialectics of Reproduction: The Third

Revolution?" *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 72-75.

AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY. 108th Annual Spring Meeting. "The Politics of Reproduction: Case Studies Reflecting on the Work of Mary O'Brien." Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina: 26 April, 1986.

BRIERE, Paule. "Du Savoir des femmes à la science des hommes." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 62-66.

BRODRIBB, Somer. "Delivering Babies: Contracts and Contradictions." In *The Future of Human Reproduction*, 139-58. Edited by Christine OVERALL. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1989.

_____. "Introduction." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 2-6.

_____. *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Post-Modernism*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1992.

BURFOOT, Annette. "The Tenacity of the Alchemic Imagination." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 57-61.

EMERSON, Julie. "Control of Biotechnology and How We Lost It At the Movies." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 44-46.

EVANS, Judith. "Feminist Theory and Political Analysis." In *Feminism and Political Theory*, 103-19. Edited by Judith EVANS et al. London: Sage Publications, 1986.

FINN, Geraldine. "Natural Woman, Cultural Man: The Anthropology of Male Hysteria and Father Right." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 24-28.

FORMAN, Frieda Johles, with Caoron SOWTON, eds. *Taking Our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1989.

GRUMET, Madeleine R. "Knots: Feminist Theorizing in the Middle." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 13-18.

HAWKESWORTH, M.E. "Explaining Oppression: Matriarchy, Patriarchy, and the Defeat of the Female Sex." *Beyond Oppression: Feminist Theory and Political Strategy*. New York: Continuum, 1990, chapter 3, 73-109.

HELD, Virginia. "Preconceptions of Birth and Death." *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, chapter 6, 130-37. Foreword by Catharine R. STIMPSON.

- KAHN, Robbie Pfeufer. "Mother's Milk: The 'Moment of Nurture' Revisited." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 29-36.
- KAMINSKI, Phyllis H. "'Reproducing the World': Mary O'Brien's Theory of Reproductive Consciousness and Implications for Feminist Incarnational Theology." *Horizons* 19 (April 1992): 240-62.
- LAZARO, Reyes. "Feminism and Motherhood: O'Brien vs. Beauvoir." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 87-102.
- MARONEY, Heather Jon. "Embracing Motherhood: New Feminist Theory." *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 9 (winter/spring 1985): 40-64.
- MILLS, Patricia Jagentowicz. "Hegel and 'The Woman Question': Recognition and intersubjectivity." In *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche*, 74-98. Edited by Lorenne M.G. CLARK and Lynda LANGE. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.
- NADYNE, Fay. "The Mythology of Origins: Ancient Sumerian/Babylonian Perspectives." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 19-23.
- SAUNDERS, Martha J. "Mothers Are Our Sisters: Agency, Responsibility and Community." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 47-50.
- THIELE, Bev. "Dissolving Dualisms: O'Brien, Embodiment and Social Construction." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 7-12.
- TONG, Rosemarie. "Radical Feminism on Reproduction and Mothering." *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1989, chapter 3, 78-80.
- WEINTRAUB, Laura. "The Imperial Conquest of Birth: Notes on 'Death in Life' in Ancient Roman Comedy." *RFR/DRF* 18 (September 1989): 37-43.
- YAEGER, Patricia S. "Reproductive Pleasure and Danger." In *Power, Gender, Values*. Edited by Judith GENOVA. Edmonton: Academic Printing & Publishing, 1987, 63-67.
- YOUNG, Iris Marion. "Humanism, Gynocentrism, and Feminist Politics." *Throwing Like a Girl And Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, chapter 5, 82-3, 87

Difference Discourse / Feminist Method

- ADAMS, Alice E. *Reproducing the Womb: Images of Childbirth in Science, Feminist Theory, and Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- ALLEN, Jeffner. "Motherhood: The Annihilation of Women." In *Mothering*, 315-30.
- ARENS, Katherine. "Between Hypatia and Beauvoir: Philosophy as Discourse." *Hypatia* 10 (fall 1995): 46-75.
- ARNUP, Katherine. "Adrienne Rich: Poet, Mother, Lesbian Feminist, Visionary." *Atlantis* 8 (fall 1982): 97-110.
- BARRETT, Michele. "Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A British Sociologist's View." *Signs* (winter 1992): 455-66.
- _____. "Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis." In *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Edited by Michele BARRETT and Anne PHILLIPS. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992, 201-19.
- _____, and Anne PHILLIPS. "Introduction." In *Destabilizing Theory*, 1-9.
- BART, Pauline. "Review of Chodorow's 'The Reproduction of Mothering.'" In *Mothering*, 147-52.
- BELENKY, Mary Field, et al., eds. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.
- BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, Renate. *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- BORDO, Susan. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Edited and with an Introduction by Linda J. NICHOLSON. New York: Routledge, 1990, 133-56.
- BURT, Sandra, Lorraine CODE, and Lindsay DORNEY, eds. *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.
- BUTLER, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- _____. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

- CAMPBELL, Richmond. "The Virtues of Feminist Empiricism." *Hypatia* 9 (winter 1994): 90-115.
- CARD, Claudia. "Against Marriage and Motherhood." *Hypatia* 11 (summer 1996): 1-23.
- CHODOROW, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- _____, Dorothy DINNERSTEIN, and Roger GOTTLIEB. "Mothering and the Reproduction of Power: An Exchange." *SocialistReview* 14 (September-October 1984): 121-30.
- CIXOUS, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." In *New French Feminisms*. Edited by Elaine MARKS and Isabelle DE COURTIVRON. Brighton: Harvester, 1975, 245-67.
- CODE, Lorraine. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- _____, Sheila MULLETT, and Christine OVERALL, eds. *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- COOPER, Jane Roberta, ed. *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.
- DALLERY, Arleen B. "Sexual Embodiment: Beauvoir and French Feminism (écriture féminine)." In *Hypatia Reborn: Essays in Feminist Philosophy*. Edited by Azizah Y. al-HIBRI and Margaret A. SIMONS. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, 270-79.
- DALY, Brenda O., and Maureen T. REDDY, eds. *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.
- DE BEAUVOIR, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Edited and translated by H. M. PARSHLEY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.
- DESCARRIES-BELANGER, Francine, and Shirley ROY. *The Women's Movement and its Currents of Thought: A Typological Essay*. Translated by Jennifer Beeman. Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, 1991.
- Di STEFANO, Christine. *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

- _____. "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 63-82.
- _____. "Masculinity as Ideology in Political Theory: Hobbesian Man Considered." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 90-109.
- DINNERSTEIN, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: HarperCollins, 1976.
- DOANE, Janice, and Devon HODGES. *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- DUMONT, Micheline. *The Women's Movement: Then and Now. Feminist Perspectives* series no. 5b. Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, 1986.
- EHRENREICH, Barbara and ENGLISH, Deirdre. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Doubleday, 1978.
- EISENSTEIN, Hester, and Alice JARDINE, eds. *The Future of Difference*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980.
- ELSHTAIN, Jean Bethke. *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*, 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- FARRELL-SMITH, Janet. "Possessive Power." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 103-20.
- FERGUSON, Ann. *Blood At The Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance*. London: Pandora Press, 1989.
- _____. "Lesbian Identity: Beauvoir and History." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 280-89.
- _____. "Motherhood and Sexuality: Some Feminist Questions." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 3-22.
- _____. "On Conceiving Motherhood and Sexuality: A Feminist Materialist Approach." In *Mothering*, 153-82.
- FIRESTONE, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: William Morrow, 1970.
- FLAX, Jane. "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of*

Science. Edited by Sandra HARDING and Merrill B. HINTIKKA. Boston: D. Reidel, 1983, 245-81.

_____. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 39-62.

FOREMAN, Ann. *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Pluto Press, 1977.

FOX, Meg. "Unreliable Allies: Subjective and Objective Time in Childbirth." In *Taking Our Time*, 123-34.

FRASER, Nancy. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

_____, and Sandra Lee BARTKY, eds. *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

_____, and Linda J. NICHOLSON. "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 19-38.

GALLOP, Jane. "The Father's Seduction." In *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Edited by Shirley Nelson GARNER, Claire KAHANE and Madelon SPRENGNETHER. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985, 33-50.

GARNER, Shirley Nelson, Claire KAHANE, and Madelon SPRENGNETHER, eds. *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*.

GATENS, Moira. *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

_____. "Power, Bodies and Difference." In *Destabilizing Theory*, 120-37.

GELPI, Barbara Charlesworth, and Albert GELPI, eds. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993.

GILLIGAN, Carol. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

GIMINEZ, Martha E. "Feminism, Pronatalism, and Motherhood." In *Mothering*, 287-314.

GLENN, Evelyn Nakano, Grace CHANG, Linda Rennie FORCEY, eds. *Mothering:*

Ideology, Experience, and Agency. New York: Routledge, 1994.

GOTTLIEB, Roger S. "Mothering and the Reproduction of Power: Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Social Theory." *Socialist Review* 14 (September-October 1984): 92-119.

GOULD, Carol C., ed. *Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanhead, 1983.

GRAHAM, Elaine. *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

GROSZ, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Coporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

HARDING, Sandra, ed. *Feminism and Methodology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.

_____. "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 83-106.

_____. "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory." In *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process*, Edited by Micheline R. MALSON et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 15-34.

_____. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

_____. "Why Has the Sex/Gender System Become Visible Only Now?" In *Discovering Reality*, 311-24.

HARTSOCK, Nancy C.M. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In *Feminism and Methodology*, 157-80.

HASLANGER, Sally. "On Being Objective and Being Objectified." In *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*. Edited by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, 85-125.

HELD, Virginia. "The Obligations of Mothers and Fathers." In *Mothering*, 7-20.

HIBRI, Azizah al-. "Reproduction, Mothering, and the Origins of Patriarchy." In *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Edited by Joyce TREBLICOT. Savage, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983, 81-93.

- HUBBARD, Ruth. *The Politics of Women's Biology*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- INCE, Kate. "Questions to Luce Irigaray." *Hypatia* 11 (spring 1996): 122-40.
- IRIGARAY, Luce. *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974.
- _____. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- JAGGAR, Alison M. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983.
- _____. "Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered." In *Beyond Domination*, 21-42.
- _____, and William L. MCBRIDE, William L. "'Reproduction' as Male Ideology." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 249-69.
- KAHN, Coppelia. "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Recent Gender Theories and Their Implications." In *The (M)other Tongue*, 72-88.
- KEALEY, Linda, ed. *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1979.
- KITTAY, Eva Feder. "Rereading Freud on 'Femininity' or Why Not Womb Envy?" In *Hypatia Reborn*, 192-203.
- _____. "Womb Envy: An Explanatory Concept." In *Mothering*, 94-128.
- KOZEL, Susan. "The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty." *Hypatia* 11 (summer 1996): 114-29.
- KRISTEVA, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Edited by Leon S. ROUDIEZ. Translated by Thomas GORA, Alice JARDINE, and Leon ROUDIEZ. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- _____. *Histoires d'amour*. Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1983.
- KUYKENDALL, Eleanor H. "Toward an Ethic of Nurturance: Luce Irigaray on Mothering and Power." In *Mothering*, 263-74.
- LANDER, Louise. *Images of Bleeding: Menstruation as Ideology*. New York: Orlando Press, 1988.

- LARRABEE, Mary Jeanne, ed. *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- LERNER, Gerda. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- _____. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- LLOYD, Genevieve. "Maleness, Metaphor, and the 'Crisis' of Reason." In *A Mind of One's Own*, 69-83.
- LORBER, Judith, et al. "On *The Reproduction of Mothering*: A Methodological Debate." *Signs* 6 (spring 1981): 482-514.
- LOVIBOND, Sabina. "Maternalist Ethics: A Feminist Assessment." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93 (fall 1994): 779-802.
- MALSON, Micheline R., et al., eds. *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- MARTIN, Emily. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. With a new Introduction. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- MICHAELS, Meredith W. "Other Mothers: Toward an Ethic of Postmaternal Practice." *Hypatia* 11 (spring 1996): 49-70.
- MILAN WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE COLLECTIVE, The. *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- MOHANTY, Chandra Talpade. "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience." In *Destabilizing Theory*, 74-92.
- MOI, Toril. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 1994.
- MORGAN, Lynn M. "Fetal Relationality in Feminist Philosophy: An Anthropological Critique." *Hypatia* 11 (summer 1996): 47-70.
- NYE, Andrea. *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- OKIN, Susan Moller. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.
- _____. "Sexual Orientation, Gender, and Families: Dichotomizing Differences."

- Hypatia* 11 (winter 1996): 30-48.
- PECK, Ellen, and Judith SENDEROWITZ, eds. *Pronatalism: The Myth of Mom and Apple Pie*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1974.
- PHILLIPS, Anne. "Universal Pretensions in Political Thought." In *Destabilizing Theory*, 10-30.
- PHOENIX, Ann, Anne WOOLLETT, and Eva LLOYD, eds. *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*. London: Sage Publications, 1991.
- PILARDI, Jo-Ann. "On the War Path and Beyond: Hegel, Freud and Feminist Theory." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 5-17.
- PROBYN, Elspeth. "Bodies and Anti-Bodies: Feminism in the Postmodern." *Cultural Studies* 1 (3): 349-60.
- _____. "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 176-89.
- RABUZZI, Kathryn Allen. *Mother with Child: Transformations through Childbirth*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- RAYMOND, Janice. "Female Friendship: Contra Chodorow and Dinnerstein." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 37-48.
- RICH, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976.
- ROSSITER, Amy. *From Private to Public: A Feminist Exploration of Early Mothering*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988.
- ROTHMAN, Barbara Katz. *Recreating Motherhood: Ideology and Technology in a Patriarchal Society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.
- _____. "Women As Fathers: Motherhood and Child Care Under a Modified Patriarchy." *Gender & Society* 3 (March 1989): 89-104.
- RUDDICK, Sara. "Maternal Thinking." In *Mothering*, 213-30.
- RYAN, Barbara. *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- SCHEMAN, Naomi. *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege*.

New York: Routledge, 1993.

_____. "Individualism and the Objects of Psychology." In *Discovering Reality*, 225-44.

SCHOTT, Robin May. "Resurrecting Embodiment: Toward a Feminist Materialism." In *A Mind of One's Own*, 171-84.

SINGER, Linda. "Interpretation and Retrieval." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 323-36.

SIMONS, Margaret A. "Motherhood, Feminism and Identity." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 156-74.

_____. "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir." In *Revaluing French Feminism*, 25-41.

SMITH, Janet Farrell. "Possessive Power." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 103-20.

SNITOW, Ann. "Motherhood: Reclaiming the Demon Texts." *Ms.* 1 (May/June 1991): 34-37.

SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

_____. "The Politics of Translation." In *Destabilizing Theory*, 177-200.

STANLEY, Liz, and Sue WISE. *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

STANTON, Domna C. "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva." In *The Poetics of Gender*, 157-82. Edited by Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

THORNE, Barrie, and Marilyn YALOM, eds. *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992.

THURER, Shari L. *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents The Good Mother*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994.

TRONTO, Joan C. "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care." *Signs* 12 (summer 1987): 644-63.

TUANA, Nancy. "Re-fusing Nature/Nurture." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 70-89.

VALESKA, Lucia. "If All Else Fails, I'm Still a Mother." In *Mothering*, 70-78.

- VAN MENS-VERHULST, Janneke, Karlein SCHREURS, and Liesbeth WOERTMAN, eds. *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- VETTERLING-BRAGGIN, Mary, Frederick A. ELLISTON, and Jane ENGLISH, eds. *Feminism and Philosophy*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1977.
- WHITBECK, Caroline. "The Maternal Instinct (1972)," "Afterword (1982)." In *Mothering*, 185-98.
- _____. "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology." In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Edited by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, 51-76.
- WITT, Charlotte. "Feminist Metaphysics." In *A Mind of One's Own*, 273-88.
- XU, Ping. "Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism." *Hypatia* 10 (fall 1995): 76-89.
- YEATMAN, Anna. "A Feminist Theory of Social Differentiation." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 281-99.
- YOUNG, Iris Marion. "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics." In *Hypatia Reborn*, 231-48.
- _____. "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 300-23.
- _____. *Throwing Like A Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- YOUNG-BRUEHL, Elisabeth. "The Education of Women as Philosophers." In *Feminist Theory in Practice*, 35-49.
- ZERILLI, Linda M. G. "A Process without a Subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on Maternity." *Signs* 18 (autumn 1992): 111-35.

Feminist Ethics

- ANDOLSEN, Barbara Hilbert. "Agape in Feminist Ethics." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 9 (spring 1981): 69-83.
- BAIER, Annette C. *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard University

Press, 1994.

- _____. "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" *Nous* 19 (March 1985): 53-63.
- CAHILL, Lisa Sowle. *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
- _____. "Feminist Ethics." *Theological Studies* 51 (March 1990): 49-64.
- _____. *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- CODE, Lorraine, et al. *Is Feminist Ethics Possible?* Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, May 1991.
- COHEN, Cheryl H. "The Feminist Sexuality Debate: Ethics and Politics." *Hypatia* 1 (fall 1986): 71-86.
- COLE, Eve Browning, and Susan COULTRAP-McQUIN, eds. *Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- DIPROSE, Rosalyn. *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- ARLEY, Margaret A. "Feminist Ethics in the Christian Ethics Curriculum." *Horizons* 11 (fall 1984): 361-72.
- FRAZER, Elizabeth, Jennifer HORNSBY, and Sabina LOVIBOND, eds. *Ethics: A Feminist Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- HANEY, Eleanor Humes. "What is Feminist Ethics? A Proposal for Continuing Discussion." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 8 (spring 1980): 115-24.
- HARRISON, Beverly Wildung. *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*. Edited by Carol S. ROBB. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- _____. *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.
- HELD, Virginia. *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. Foreword by Catharine R. STIMPSON. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- _____. "Reply to Moody-Adams." *Hypatia* 11 (winter 1996): 168-74.

- _____. *Rights and Goods: Justifying Social Action*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.
- IRIGARAY, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Translated by Carolyn BURKE and Gillian C. GILL. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- KITTAY, Eva Feder, and Diana T. MEYERS, eds. *Women and Moral Theory*. Savage, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987.
- KROEGER-MAPPES, Joy. "The Ethic of Care vis-a-vis the Ethic of Rights: A Problem for Contemporary Moral Theory." *Hypatia* 9 (summer 1994): 108-31.
- LUGONES Maria C. and SPELMAN, Elizabeth V. "Have We Got A Theory For You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice.'" In *Hypatia Reborn*, 18-33.
- MAGUIRE, Daniel C. "The Feminist Turn in Ethics." *Horizons* 10 (fall 1983): 341-47.
- MOODY-ADAMS, Michele M. "Feminist Inquiry and the Transformation of the 'Public' Sphere in Virginia Held's *Feminist Morality*." *Hypatia* 11 (winter 1996): 155-67.
- OVERALL, Christine. *Ethics and Human Reproduction: A Feminist Analysis*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987.
- PORTER, Elisabeth J. *Women and Moral Identity*. North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1991.
- ROBB, Carol S. "A Framework for Feminist Ethics." In *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics*. Edited by Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf and Mary D. Pallauer. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985, 211-33.
- SMITH, Ruth L. "Feminism and the Moral Subject." In *Women's Consciousness*, 235-50.
- TRONTO, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- WELCH, Sharon D. *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- WILLETT, Cynthia. *Maternal Ethics and other Slave Moralities*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Feminist Theological Interpretation

- ANTONELLI, Judith. "Feminist Spirituality: The Politics of the Psyche." In *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*. Edited by Charlene SPRETNAK. New York: Doubleday, 1982, 399-403.
- ARMOUR, Ellen T. "Questioning 'Woman' in Feminist/Womanist Theology: Irigaray, Ruether, and Daly." In *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*. Edited by C.W. Maggie KIM et al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 143-69.
- ATKINSON, Clarissa W., Constance H. BUCHANAN, and Margaret R. MILES, eds. *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- _____, eds. *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- BAUM, Gregory. "Bulletin: The Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*." *Concillium* 206 (December 1989): 144-49.
- CARR, Anne E. *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- CARR, Anne, and Elisabeth Schussler FIORENZA, eds. "Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology." English language editor, Philip Hillyer. *Concillium* 206 (December 1989).
- CARSON, Anne. *Feminist Spirituality and the Feminine Divine: An Annotated Bibliography*. Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1986.
- CHRIST, Carol P. "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections." In *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. Edited by Carol P. CHRIST and Judith PLASKOW. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, 273-87.
- COPPER, Baba. "The Voice of Women's Spirituality in Futurism." In *The Politics*, 497-509.
- DALY, Lois K., ed. *Feminist Theological Ethics*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- DALY, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.
- DEUTSCHER, Penelope. "'The Only Diabolical Thing about Women . . .': Luce Irigaray on

- Divinity." *Hypatia* 9 (fall 1994): 88-111.
- ENGELSMAN, Joan Chamberlain. *The Feminine Dimension of the Divine*. London: Westminster Press, 1979; reprint ed.: Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1987.
- FARLEY, Margaret A. "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture." In *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Letty M. RUSSEL. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985, 41-51.
- GRAHN, Judy. "From Sacred Blood to the Curse and Beyond." In *The Politics*, 265-79.
- GRAY, Elizabeth Dodson. *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*. Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1988.
- GROSZ, Elizabeth. "Irigaray and the Divine." In *Transfigurations*, 199-214.
- GUDORF, Christine E. "The Power to Create: Sacraments and Men's Need to Birth." Horizons 14 (Fall 1987): 296-309.
- HINSDALE, Mary Ann, and Phyllis H. KAMINSKI, eds. *Women and Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995.
- HOLLYWOOD, Amy M. "Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical." *Hypatia* 9 (fall 1994): 158-85.
- JONTE-PACE, Diane. "Object Relations Theory, Mothering, and Religion: Toward a Feminist Psychology of Religion." *Horizons* 14 (fall 1987): 310-27.
- KAMINSKI, Phyllis H. "'Reproducing the World': Mary O'Brien's Theory of Reproductive Consciousness and Implications for Feminist Incarnational Theology." *Horizons* 19 (April 1992): 240-62.
- LaCUGNA, Catherine Mowry, ed. *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- LEGGE, Marilyn J. *The Grace of Difference: A Canadian Feminist Theological Ethic*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.
- MCFAGUE, Sallie. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- OCHS, Carol. *Behind the Sex of God*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.
- PASSMORE, Nancy F.W. "A Consciousness Manifesto." In *The Politics*, 163-71.

- RIDDLE, Dorothy I. "Politics, Spirituality, and Models of Change." In *The Politics*, 373-81.
- ROUSSEAU, Mary F. "Pope John Paul II's 'Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women': the call to *communio*." *Communio* 16 (summer 1989): 212-32.
- RUETHER, Rosemary Radford. "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation." In *Feminist Interpretation*, 111-24.
- _____. *Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.
- _____. *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.
- _____. *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974.
- _____. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.
- _____. *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- RUSSELL, Letty M. "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation." In *Feminist Interpretation*, 137-46.
- SAIVING, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." In *Womanspirit Rising*, 25-42.
- SAKENFELD, Katharine Doob. "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials." In *Feminist Interpretation*, 55-64.
- SPRETNAK, Charlene. *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- _____. "The Politics of Women's Spirituality." In *The Politics*, 393-98.
- SUCHOCKI, Marjorie Hewitt. "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy." *Hypatia* 9 (fall 1994): 57-68.
- WASHBOURN, Penelope. "Becoming Woman: Menstruation as Spiritual Experience." In *Womanspirit Rising*, 246-58.

WEBER, Christin Lore. *WomanChrist: A New Vision of Feminist Spirituality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

YOUNG, Pamela Dickey. *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Related Works

ASHLEY, Benedict M., O.P. *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian*. Braintree, Mass.: The Pope John Center, 1985.

ELIADE, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. Translated by William R. TRASK. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1959.

JOHN PAUL II. *Mulieris Dignitatem*. ("Dignity and Vocation of Women"). Vatican translation. Sherbrooke, QC: Éditions Paulines, 1988.

NELSON, James B. *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.