

Muslims, according to the author, have many challenges lying ahead of them. One of the major challenges is the connection existing between racism and sexism and the responsibility of progressive Islam to wage a struggle against both. Esack strikes a sad note when he records that while progressive Islam was engaged in an intellectual and practical struggle against Apartheid, it was confined to a few intellectuals and academicians and to only one mosque in the entire country. He says, "We thus find that not only is the country in the wilderness, but so is progressive Islam" (250).

To conclude, the author succeeds in presenting a creative vision of both Islam and Muslim identity that can be best affirmed by fighting injustice and transforming an unjust situation to a just one. Such a struggle, moreover, may be fulfilled by rereading the text in a new and creative way, and by presenting Islamic systematic theology that is in solidarity with the oppressed of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. This book establishes Esack as one of the few liberation theologians in contemporary Islam.

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Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World. By Wendy Farley. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. 220 pages. \$16.95.

In this well written and provocative book Wendy Farley (associate professor of religion and ethics at Emory University) takes up the project of developing a feminist philosophical ethics that can respond to the challenges presented by postmodernity. She aims to articulate and argue for a concept of truth that does not succumb to the false dichotomy between sheer relativism and dogmatic absolutism characteristic of the postmodern era. While some might take issue with certain aspects of her presentation of postmodern thought, her account of postmodernity is carefully drawn to avoid caricature. She rightly identifies the dichotomy between relativism and absolutism as a cultural condition and is careful to distinguish between the cultural condition and particular figures often wrongly associated with it (Jacques Derrida, for example). She aligns her own work with other postmodern challenges to the loss of particularity and diversity in face of a drive toward unity and sameness. Similarly, Farley traces the various forms of oppression back to their origins in aspects of the modern project. Her approach to moving beyond modernity's problematic legacy, however, is distinctive. As an antidote to this cultural condition, Farley lays out a notion of truth that embraces difference and plurality. This notion of truth arises out of and grounds ethical existence. Nurturing ethical life requires distinguishing between reality, which is inherently plural, and illusion: false, distorting versions of the way things are. Neither absolutism nor sheer relativism can sustain such a notion of truth in Farley's view.

The first half of the book defines illusion, diagnoses its origins, and describes its effects. The second half offers an evocative portrait of what Farley calls *eros* for

the other, drawn from reflection on ethical existence. Drawing primarily on Plato and Levinas, as well as feminist ethicists, Farley develops the concept of *eidōs* in order to enable thinking unity and particularity together. She tests the concept on a troubling issue in feminist thought, the problem of essentialism. The book closes with a discussion of a series of issues that pertain to retaining and sustaining truth as an ethical thinking and practice.

Farley defines illusion as “a disposition for unreality” (17) that has its roots in “an absolutization of the One” (18), that is, a person’s or culture’s central value. Absolutization of the One renders difference intolerable. Difference represents a threat that must be absorbed, ignored, or rejected. Stubborn refusals to face the reality of difference and plurality, or illusions, arise out of this situation, according to Farley. The fiction of subhumanity constitutes a prime mode through which illusion works. This logic grounds such diverse phenomena as totalitarianism, colonialism, racism, sexism, and so on. The notion of subhumanity illustrates the dynamics of illusion particularly well. Against all evidence to the contrary, assigning others to subhuman status refuses to acknowledge the humanity they share in common with “us” and denies humanity’s inherent plurality. It is this dual violation that lies at the heart of illusion’s condemnation as anti-ethical. Farley is not suggesting that illusions are mere ephemeral specters easily banished from the scene by a good, hard dose of reality. Illusions are well able to produce the kinds of worlds they describe, complete with subjects and objects of domination. However, “the question is whether the definitions of reality by power are true and how the struggle for *truth* can be embodied in history. The silence of women is a fact of our history, but the claim that women are subhuman is a lie. The disjunction between these two orders of reality is the locus of illusion and evil. It is this disjunction that renders questions of being, metaphysics, and truth ethical ones” (36). Farley productively reads Levinas’s critique of totality alongside Arendt’s critique of totalitarianism as offering complementary accounts of absolutization. Figures such as Edward Said, Elaine Scarry, and a number of feminist thinkers add concrete substance to her discussion.

In the next chapters Farley defines and describes an *eros* toward the other that resists absolutization. To develop her portrait of *eros*, she draws on poets (Audre Lorde, Sappho, Anne Carson), feminist ethicists, and philosophers. Levinas’s insistence on the primordially of ethics occupies a central role as does a recovery of Plato’s understanding of *eros* and of *eidōs*. *Eros* for the other arises in response to the lure of the other’s exteriority, Farley argues. This *eros* occurs first as attraction to the others’ beauty in its difference. This initial attraction yields awareness of the other’s fragility, which opens into compassion for its suffering. *Eros* for the other funds and founds the ethical life, Farley argues. Ethics in its fundamental sense, then, is not the application of abstract principles but an aesthetic and erotic response to concrete existents in their particularity. At the same time, awareness of concrete existents is not awareness of sheer particularity, Farley argues. The encounter with the other occurs on ground constituted by layers of generality and particularity that all demand recognition. Recovering Plato’s concept of *eidōs* enables Farley to articulate the interaction between generality and

particularity that constitute any encounter with an other. Properly understood and deployed, *eidōs* renders unity in and through difference.

The fifth chapter brings Farley's project of developing a way to think plurality in contrast to illusion to full fruition. She brings the concept of *eidōs* developed in the previous chapter to bear on feminism's notorious inability to think women in all their diversity. *Eidōs*, she argues, is far better equipped to think women's unity and difference than either essentialism or anti-essentialism. These usual alternatives remain trapped in the dichotomy between absoluteness and relativism, static sameness and sheer difference, which Farley wants to move beyond. Farley's use of *eidōs* here constitutes a significant contribution to this discussion in feminist circles. Few if any feminists have matched the diverse range of women's writings that Farley engages. In addition to works by African American women, for example, Farley includes women from a variety of international locations. Farley also attends to the impact of historical context on women's subjectivity. Any particular woman, she argues, is a composite of layers of generality and particularity ranging from the most universal (human being) to the most particular (mother of this child, partner of this person, etc.). It is only in and through this mix of particularity and universality that "woman" comes to have any content at all. To miss any of these layers is to miss women altogether.

Farley's project is clearly defined, well argued, and beautifully articulated, often verging on the poetic. The power and clarity of her writing keep the reader consistently engaged, and she renders complex ideas clearly without diluting their power. In addition to her proposal regarding *eidōs*, her appropriations of Arendt, Levinas, and Plato for feminist purposes are of particular interest. Farley is an attentive and levelheaded reader who engages these figures' work in substantial and subtle ways. She acknowledges the validity of certain feminist critiques of Platonism's place in founding and sustaining certain hierarchical dualisms (matter and form, for example), but (like John Sallis) argues that Plato's texts themselves exhibit more complex articulations of such relationships. Her reading of Levinas goes beyond retrieval to produce a reformulation of certain Levinasian themes. Like other readers of Levinas, Farley finds troubling Levinas's portrayal of response to the claim of the other as self-abnegation. As a feminist, Farley finds this particularly troubling given western culture's traditional demand that women sacrifice themselves for others. She goes beyond pointing to the possible presence of masculine bias to distinguish self-abnegation from *eros* for the other. Both self-abnegation and self-centeredness are projects of self-interest, Farley argues; neither constitutes *eros* toward the other.

All these elements in Farley's project render it an important contribution to feminist philosophical ethics as modernity draws to a close. Reading it within this context raises some questions for Farley's proposal, however. How well can Farley's approach to truth through the distinction between illusion and reality deal with more subtle (and perhaps more intransigent) forms that oppression takes? Her proposal grounds resistance to oppressive construals of groups or individuals and speaks to the dehumanization inherent in, for example, the cult of domesticity on whose effects Farley focuses. However, it fails to account for what Mary

McClintock Fulkerson has described as the pleasures (and constraints) that come with taking up this subject position (see *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* [Fortress Press, 1994]). In addition, Farley rightly resists labeling women as subhuman as a lie. Insisting that women are human beings provides necessary purchase on ethical claims. However, several feminist thinkers have questioned whether the category of human being as traditionally articulated is really compatible with difference—sexual and otherwise. Nonetheless, Farley's constructive proposal remains one to be taken seriously for its passion, power, and substance.

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The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right. By Didi Herman. University of Chicago Press, 1997. 242 pages. \$24.95.

What is the relationship between a certain theological position and a right-wing political agenda? Didi Herman addresses this question in *The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and The Christian Right*. She explores the connections between "orthodox vision" and the anti-homosexual activism of the Christian Right through readings of conservative Christian publications, interviews with contemporary political leaders, and analysis of contemporary political struggles. Herman teaches law at Keele University in Britain and has written extensively on legal and political issues affecting lesbians and gay men in the U.S. and Canada. She comes to her topic because conservative Christian politics is so frequently opposed to what she sees as vibrant and growing lesbian and gay political movements, but she recognizes that any analysis of what she terms the "Christian Right" is inadequate if it does not take into account the theological worldviews that inform its political activism. As Herman reports, "On a personal level my initial interest in writing this book was to move beyond stereotypical depictions of 'religious bigotry' motivated by 'homophobia.' Such approaches seemed too partial in attempting to come to terms with the clash between lesbians and gay men and religious orthodoxy. . . . As I argue throughout the book, lesbian and gay activists must understand, and in some sense come to terms with, the conservative Christian vision animating so many of their opponents" (6-7).

Herman defines the "Christian Right" as primarily "conservative evangelical Protestantism" (10), recognizing that "Protestant Right" would be a more accurate term for the movements that she analyzes. While from a religious studies perspective her failure to analyze fully either Catholic conservatism or the frequent anti-Catholicism of the Protestant Right is problematic, she chooses the term Christian Right, because "it is Christian faith and history as a whole that animates the antigay activity analyzed in this book" (10). Again, from a religious studies perspective the nuances and complexities of Christian history are lost in this statement, and yet by placing Christianity at the center of the book, Herman is attempting, as few political analysts do, to connect conservative Christian po-



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