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Sarah Coakley, POWERS AND SUBMISSIONS

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Chapter 8 ("Ethics and Ideology") discusses man in community rather than as an individual; it is full of wise social and political counsel. Contrary to the liberal notion, we are communal beings—a vanishing idea in today's Western society. Community is necessary for individual growth. But if the individual is ultimate, then Gauguin could not be faulted for abandoning his family and heading for Tahiti. By seeking freedom, we rarely see the need to correct our behavior or perspective or to extend our area of responsibility. Society will always be a means to my own ends. But if the self needs correcting (just talk to your spouse!), then it needs community to move beyond what it is now. A state is wise if it encourages holding back on rights-seeking and encourages community—as well as preserving a sense of the past. (The more we uncritically trash the West, the more ahistorical—and vulnerable to revisionist history—we become.) But ultimately, deception will have to rule (given naturalism) to hold a society of autonomous selves together.

The final chapter ("Ethics and God") reviews the need for God as the metaphysical foundation for ethics, grounding human dignity and the human *telos* as well as graciously providing assistance in view of our moral failures and our divided selves. We cannot separate God's power from His love (mere might does not make right). The chapter closes with some wise nuggets about "dirty hands" and the place of politics (although I would disagree with Rist's assessment of capital punishment).

This book deserves to be widely read. I wish it much success as an important antidote to the misguided notion that goodness can be detached from God.

Powers and Submissions by Sarah Coakley. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. Pp. xx, 172. \$66.95 (hardcover), \$28.95 (paperback).

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Power and Submissions reorganizes and edits a series of essays written by Sarah Coakley during the 1990s. The book makes her work accessible to readers in the United States and also proposes to reinterpret the individual essays in order to connect them into a coherent project. The book begins with a Prologue that is followed by three sections: The Contemplative Matrix, Philosophical Interlocutions, and Doctrinal Implications.

In the Prologue, Coakley acknowledges that part of her motivation for this book is to provide students with one place where many of her significant essays can be found. In addition, she proposes to establish a focus for the essays that have been written over the decade. She contends that throughout the decade, she has been asking how "the call for liberation of the powerless and oppressed, especially of women, [can] possibly coexist with a revalorization of any form of 'submission' — divine or otherwise" (xv). She suggests that the heart of the essays contained in this book is the different meanings of "power" and "submission" and the false choice between vulnerability and liberative choice. She proposes to "reinvent the

gentleness of divine power" as part of her quest. The problem with editing a set of articles written over such a period of time is that they may not clearly support the interpretation that is later developed. This is the case with these essays. While she does succeed in showing a way to read the essays within the context of her overall theme, the essays do not really cohere in the manner in which Coakley desires.

The Contemplative Matrix includes three essays. The first, "*Kenosis and Subversion*," was originally published in 1996. This essay provides the theoretical framework for positioning the rest of the essays. She contends that "Christ ... is the very 'mind' that we ourselves enact, or enter into, in prayer: the unique intersection of the vulnerable, 'non-grasping' humanity and authentic divine power, itself 'made perfect in weakness'" (38). In this essay, she sets up the argument that the exercise of contemplation provides for a place where power meets submission in the most creative and fulfilling manner. She also maintains that human sexuality must be part of the discussion of this place of contemplation. Human power has been defined as male and submission as female in most of western history. If contemplation is the place where power and submission meet, then it is also a place for connecting male and female in a spiritual context. Clearly, writing these essays has enabled Coakley to give shape to her thinking on these connections.

The second chapter, "*Tradition of Spiritual Guidance: Dom John Chapman OSB (1865-1933) on the meaning of 'Contemplation'*," reprints an article that was initially printed in 1990. The essay presents an excellent analysis of Chapman's *Spiritual Letters* and its advice for beginning to develop modes of contemplation. Coakley shows how Chapman reads and reinterprets John of the Cross. She incorporates this essay into the larger project by using it to raise the question as to how contemplation can address the gender abuses that take place in its name. How can contemplative activities rise above the humanity in which they happen? Coakley understands the third chapter, "*Creaturehood before God: Male and Female*," as addressing this question. This essay shows that Eastern Christian thought has given women a sort of equality by desexing female creatureliness. In Western Christian thought where bodyliness has been more emphasized, women have also been more subordinate. She holds that "neither of these solutions is agreeable to a systematic view of female creatureliness" (65). She believes that human creatureliness and contemplation require the recognition of an absolute dependence, in Schleiermacher's sense, of this term. The "right" dependence is what is at issue in our religious choices and identity.

Philosophical Interlocutions, the second part of the book, looks at Medieval, modern, and contemporary analytic philosophy seeking for a way to understand human dependence. Coakley maintains that the problem to be addressed is "how to explicate the deepest exposure to the divine presence, and how to assess the questions of power and gender...that infiltrate this profound area of human desire and longing" (72). The chapters were written in 1991, 1992, and 1997. The first of these, "*Visions of the Self in Late Medieval Christianity*," is a close reading and comparison of the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* from Western spiritual literature and the *Triads* by Gregory Palamas from the Eastern Christian literature. She com-

compares the two on the notion of the person and of the relationship of the bodily to the concept of the person. Coakley contends that "Gregory Palamas stressed the unity of body and mind which involved "a 'positive' use of the body, a pressing of the attention downwards into the body" (83). This unity provides the image for the unity of the religious community. Coakley notes that this counters an "individualistic understanding of the prayer practice" (85).

Coakley's chapter, "Gender and Knowledge in Modern Western Philosophy: The 'Man of Reason' and the 'Feminine' 'Other' in Enlightenment and Romantic Thought," was first published in 1991. In this chapter she argues that our Enlightenment heritage is not easily dispelled. The view of the autonomous self that is independent and dispassionate has been formative for our identities, even though it requires the submission of women and of some classes of men. She suggests that the Romantics try to overcome the isolation, and so the loneliness, of that self with an adulation of the feminine. While Romanticism desires to free men and women from fixed roles, the stereotypes remain and the concept of the self as male is not overcome in Romanticism. Coakley suggests that we must continue to seek for global ethical principles that cannot be easily walked away from. This requires critical and constructive work. Coakley holds that there is still much work to be done.

The final chapter of this section, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspective: Some Questions," explores analytic philosophy of religion and the role that it plays in the work to be carried out by the contemporary discussion. This chapter needs to be expanded into a book. The thesis Coakley wishes to argue is that "the undeniable clarity and apologetic strengths of the analytic tradition should not be abandoned by feminism" (104). On the other hand, she suggests that analytic philosophy will be enriched by contact with feminist questions and work.

Coakley organizes the final part of this volume to argue that feminist work must take on a spiritual dimension if it is to articulate the fullest concept of the human self. She includes her essays, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity," "The Resurrection and the 'Spiritual Senses'," and "The Eschatological Body." In the first of these essays, she focuses on the work of Gregory of Nyssa and argues that he sends the message that "gender stereotypes must be reversed, undermined, and transcended if the soul is to advance to supreme intimacy with Trinitarian God" (128). In the second chapter she makes use of Wittgenstein to explore the difficulties of seeing that which cannot be grasped. Finally, and perhaps rightfully, Coakley sees her work done over the years as addressing the most difficult question of Christianity, the Resurrection. The third chapter in this portion of the book is entitled, "The Resurrection and the 'Spiritual senses': On Wittgenstein, Epistemology, and the Risen Christ." This essay suggests that Christ cannot be grasped, as many thought. Rather, Christ must be found in each person's heart. It is there that we find each other. The final essay "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God" suggests that the interest in the body masks an eschatological longing that can only be satisfied by a theological response.

While the book contends to address the importance of the gendered

body, it ends up suggesting that this body must be moved beyond if human spirituality is to be understood. Coakley might have arrived at a more complex position if she had used her earlier work as a foundation, rather than trying to edit that work into a new book. In focusing on editing, she does not really move forward in her thinking. The volume is important for the essays it contains, but one wishes that it had taken a larger step forward in the discussion of power and submissions.