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Choris Andros: St. Paul on Worlds Without Men

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ABSTRACT
The genre of fiction portraying worlds without men is over a century old – and growing. It reaches back to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1910 *Herland*, through scores of utopias from second wave feminist writers like Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas to contemporary examples from Lauren Beukes and Sandra Newman. This article asks: if it were in fact possible to create a world without men, for what reasons should we pursue or forgo such a world? Those who have endured patriarchy's cruelty have good reasons to want to institute such a world. However, I present a biblical warrant for rejecting that utopian vision derived from 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul writes that there is "no woman without man" (χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς, *choris andros*), and "no man without woman." At the crux of a text that emphasizes the interdependence of God's creatures, Paul reminds us that interdependence obtains across lines of sexual difference.

KEYWORDS
hysterics; Feminist speculative fiction; ectogenesis; 1 Corinthians 11; sexual reproduction; human interdependence; reproductive technologies

> We are, for the most part, visibly male or female, our social roles defined by our sexual equipment. But we are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it.
>
> —*James Baldwin*[1]

What a wonderful world

The opening scene of the 2021 Hulu dark comedy, "Creamerie," begins with a slow-motion montage in which a number of men are palling around in a locker room, until one sneezes a mouth full of blood, under the heading "Day 1." Within days, all the men in the locker room have succumbed to the illness, whatever it is. The bloody locker room walls get scrubbed clean, first by women wearing hazmat suits, and then by women who have doffed their protective gear, apparently having learned that the

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It deserves mention that this project was first conceived, and was later developed, during episodes in which this author's (male) partner graciously created space for her to take time away from her duties as a parent of young children and work on professional and scholarly projects. It would not be possible in the absence of such supportive relationships.

[1]Baldwin, "Here Be Dragons," 689–90.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article

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mysterious disease only infects men.[2] By "Day 30," the camera pans to an open, flaming grave of bodies. The heading then speeds ahead to "Day 2920," and the mass grave has turned into a grassy mound, framed beneath a pale, peaceful rainbow. The soundtrack to the entire one-minute montage is a tender, female-voiced rendition of "What a Wonderful World." Whether such a world is quite so wonderful is a central theme of the show. The three protagonists Alex, Pip, and Jaime have differing views about the despotic, Goop-like political regime. But there are doubtless virtues to the society they have brought about.

The impulse to imagine a world without men is not new. Among the first of such treatments is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's pathbreaking 1915 *Herland*, which presents and examines a society populated only by women to present her early feminist political and ethical theory.[3] In *Herland*'s opening pages, the narrator Van expresses his bewilderment at the orderliness of the nation: "why, this is a civilized country! … There must be men."[4] Eventually, Van writes,

> [a]s I learned more and more to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I was of what we, with all our manhood, had done. You see, they had had no wars. They had had no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together-not by competition, but by united action.[5]

The women of *Herland*, in Gilman's telling, are far more physically, mentally, and spiritually accomplished than any of the men her readers might know.

Since Gilman's utopic *Herland*, many feminist science fiction writers have undertaken similar projects, particularly during the height of second wave feminism. Joanna Russ' 1975 *The Female Man* contemplates the virtue of women's (and especially lesbian) separatism and the violence that might be necessary to bring it about.[6] Suzy McKee Charnas' *Holdfast Chronicles* tetralogy contrasts the oppressive, male dominated society of Holdfast with the Riding Women of the Grasslands, who enjoy a non-hierarchical cooperative kinship. The 1976 novella *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, written by Alice Sheldon (under the pseudonym James Tiptree), tells the story of three male astronauts who accidentally time travel to a future in which Earth is peopled only by women.[7] The astronauts are unable to fathom the egalitarian, flourishing society that women bring about, and under the influence of truth-telling drugs they reveal their own domineering posture toward the women of the new civilization.

Recently, the women's-only worlds of the nineteen-seventies have seen a resurgence in literature and film. Elizabeth Bear's 2006 *Carnival* tells of New Amazonia, where men

[2]I should note at the outset that I use the term "women" here advisedly. As I will discuss below, justice demands that we not to use "women" and "females" or "men" and "males" interchangeably, to avoid exacerbating the harm that is suffered by non-binary and trans people of all genders. I have only used this language in the introduction to forestall the linguistic complications that will be addressed in the second section of the essay.

[3]In fact, the first such project is Mary Bradley Lane's 1880 *Mizora*, which describes a subterrestrial utopia peopled entirely by women. See Lane, *Mizora*. Other noteworthy early texts of this genre include Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein's "Sultana's Dream."

[4]Gilman, "Herland," 13.

[5]Gilman, 61.

[6]Russ, *The Female Man*.

[7]Tiptree, *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* To reiterate footnote 2 above, I use the words "women" and "men" in these two paragraphs advisedly, following the authors of the narratives who use the word "women" to name those who are capable of gestation and "men" to name those capable of natural insemination.

exist, but are subjugated and kept merely for their cooperation in reproduction.[8] The 2016 mockumentary *No Men Beyond This Point* documents the development of so-called "virgin births" following a geological anomaly and the ascendance of women as men slowly die out. William Moulton Marston's *Wonder Woman* comic book series, first published in 1941, was adapted for the cinema in *Wonder Woman* (2017) and the subsequent *Wonder Woman* 1984 (2019). Both foreground the Amazon heroine Diana, from the women-only society of the island of Themiscyra, which is pristine and serene – at least until it is discovered and disturbed by incursive men. The women's-only world of Lauren Beukes' 2020 *Afterland* is not quite so pristine. Following what this novel calls the "Manfall," a contagious form of prostate cancer that kills nearly all the world's men, the female protagonist Cole seeks to protect her twelve-year-old son Miles from would-be kidnappers.[9] Then, in 2021, two television series both illustrated women's-only worlds, born of similar viruses – though both, like Beukes' *Afterland*, were conceived before the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. These include "Creamerie," mentioned above, and the television adaptation of the comic book series *Y: The Last Man*, first printed between 2002 and 2008.[10] Then, just months ago in June of 2022, Sandra Newman's novel *The Men*, in which all persons with a Y chromosome mysteriously disappear, was selected as a Best Book of the Year by the New York Times.[11]

It seems that there is no shortage of interest in the idea of a world without men.

Procreation in single-sex societies

How such worlds come to be varies widely among the undertakings listed here. In some, like Gilman's *Herland* and Marston's *Wonder Woman*, women create a secluded social order on Earth, not known or explored by men. Russ', Charnas', and Bear's novels have those new social orders initiated on new planets, and not accidentally, but as projects of resistance against patriarchal planets elsewhere. In other narratives, like Tiptree's novella, Beukes' *Afterland*, Y: *The Last Man*, and "Creamerie," some biological anomaly destroys all the world's men. *No Men Beyond This Point* doesn't kill off the world's men, but makes them increasingly rare, after a passing meteor causes women to spontaneously birth children. All born thereafter are female at birth, as they are not products of sexual reproduction and thus must carry XX chromosomes.

Even as the narratives themselves vary widely in their origin stories – and their assessment of the praiseworthiness of such societies – they all share one feature. Each tells some story about how the inhabitants of the women's-only world reproduce. When one of the men visiting Gilman's *Herland* learns that there have been no men in Herland for two thousand years, he protests: "But—the people—the children!"[12] The women explain that they do not need to mate to produce offspring; they procreate through an asexual reproductive process called parthenogenesis. Many of the narratives listed above employ some similar explanation. In *No Men Beyond This Point*, the meteor that

[8]Bear, *Carnival*.
[9]Beukes, *Afterland*.
[10]"Creamerie"; Vaughan and Guerra; "Y: The Last Man."
[11]Newman, *The Men*. It should be noted that Newman's novel faced significant criticism from the trans community, given its slippage between the categories "people with y-chromosomes" and "men," which I work to avoid replicating here.
[12]Gilman, "Herland," 47.

approaches earth inexplicably makes parthenogenesis possible. In *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, a woman astronaut explains that they began to clone the women that survived after a plague wiped out all of the men.[13] Other narratives that do not entertain the possibility of human asexual reproduction tend to tilt more pessimistic. In these, insemination is achieved either artificially, drawing on extant sperm banks – as in the case "Creamerie" and *Afterland* – or by pairings with the few remaining, subjugated men – as in Charnas' *Holdfast Chronicles*.

It is striking that the means for reproduction make such a difference in the tone and posture of the narratives regarding women's-only worlds. Where reproduction is possible without need for assistance or cooperation, as in *Herland* and *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, the worlds are represented as idyllic and conflict-free.[14] On the other hand, where sperm are scarce and reproduction difficult to accomplish, the women's-only worlds fall short of utopic. In other words: where males are, for whatever reason, no longer needed for reproduction, a peaceful women's-only world appears much more conceivable. Such worlds remain dystopic when women continue to depend on men, in any respect, at least in the narratives that I've identified above. The way to rid the world of evil, these texts suggest, is to eliminate women's dependence on men.

While self-determination is certainly a worthy desideratum – it is with good reason that second-wave feminism was often known as the movement for women's *liberation* – I fear that this emphasis overshadows the good of human, and indeed *intersexual*, interdependence. In what follows, I will interrogate in further depth the idealization of independent reproduction, and the association of intersexual interdependence with strife. As I will discuss, the reproductive technologies that have henceforth belonged to the genre of science fiction are increasingly possible. With the emergence of artificial insemination, a world without males may no longer be a matter of speculation. In fact, recent scientific developments have even advanced the possibility of human parthenogenesis. The utopian worlds that some feminists have portrayed as idyllic – following the development of parthenogenesis or other reproductive technologies – could, before long, become actualizable.

We may find ourselves faced with the following question: if it in fact were possible to create a world without men, for what reasons might we want to pursue or forgo such a world? After all, the motivations for instituting a world without men may be readily apparent to those who have suffered patriarchy's most oppressive effects. However, I will cast doubt on the desirability of such a world, balancing the good of human self-determination with the good of human interdependence. Before proceeding, however, I must offer a brief note on language.

A note about language

Some readers may already find themselves with sharply raised eyebrows, given the degree to which the preceding pages have, following the authors of many of the named narratives, used "women" and "men" as biological signifiers. They would be right to do so. Those of us who are not as troubled by these slippages, on the other hand, may

[13]Tiptree, *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, 54–55.
[14]Gilman, "Herland," 80–82; Tiptree, *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, 58–59.

benefit from fine-tuning our attentiveness to the lurking dangers of biological determinism and binarism that haunts much of this literature.[15] So much hangs on the relationship between language and gender- and sex-based injustice; whole libraries could be written on the subject.[16] As such, it will be impossible for me to offer a full accounting in this essay of my approach to the terms I use within it. Those readers who are interested in a more comprehensive account will find one in a project that I hope to publish before long. However, it is worth naming at the outset that I will be using neologisms in what follows, to be both as clear and as thoughtful as possible.

In a context in which terms like "women" and "men," "female" and "male," and indeed "sex" and "gender" serve as ammunition perhaps even more often than as descriptors, I hesitate to reduplicate the harmful and unjust use of such words. It is imperative that we acknowledge, for example, that not all those identified as male at birth are men, nor are all those identified as female at birth women. Just as importantly, even categories like "males" and "females" are not so simply delineated.[17] Nor are those the only categories to which persons can belong.[18]

Yet our language is given to us, as are our bodies, and while both are malleable, both are also limited and imperfect. While we must undertake to amend the misguided and harmful ways that language can be employed, because of our human condition, we can only do so within the limitations of that language. Given that fact, very sparingly I advisedly use the term "women" to name persons who are presumed to be capable of gestating offspring. I do so in large part because that is what many of the authors with which I engage here – feminist science fiction writers, activist essayists like Shulamith Firestone, and the authors of the New Testament – have in mind when they use the term.

To be clear, I do not believe that all those persons capable of gestating offspring *must* be identified as women, or that all women *must* have such reproductive capacities. Aside from unjustly discounting trans women – and unjustly including trans men against their own self-identifications – such an approach would also exclude the infertile and the post-menopausal. As such, I also introduce new language to name those persons who are presumed to be capable of gestating offspring, to avoid the pitfalls portended by language that uses "men" and "women" to signify individuals' reproductive capacities.

As will become clear in what follows, we need language to identify those persons who are presumptively capable of gestation, on account of their possession of vulvas and, presumptively, functioning female reproductive systems.[19] I propose that we name such a class

[15]Given how much of the "women's only world" literature came from feminism's second wave, this should be relatively unsurprising.

[16]Consider, for example, Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*; Miller and Swift, *Words and Women*; Cameron, *On Language and Sexual Politics*; Christie, *Gender and Language*.

[17]See Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes"; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*. Nor is it the case that sex identification is only done by means of genital identification; for a criticism of Fausto-Sterling on this point, see Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed*.

[18]A Biblical interpretation of the realities that Fausto-Sterling identifies can be found in Hartke, *Transforming*. As Hartke discusses, the identification of "male" and "female" in Genesis 1:26 are a merism – a trope in Hebrew that identifies the outer bounds of a spectrum, not two exhaustive categories. Just as we read that God made day and night, and can infer that God also made dawn and dusk, and just as we read that God made the land and the waters, we can also assume that God made marshes. "In the same way we call God the Alpha and the Omega, implying all things from first to last and in between," Hartke writes, "the author of Genesis 1 is merely using the same dualistic poetic device to corral the infinite diversity of creation into categories we can easily understand." Hartke, 51.

[19]I say "presumptively," because one's possession of a vulva at birth does not guarantee one's possession of a uterus or capacity to gestate, as in those patients with Müllerian agenesis.

as "hysterics," per the Greek word for uterus (ὑστέρα, or *hystera* in transliterated English). The use of "hysterics" is intended to serve as a linguistic reclamation of the term, analogically to the use of the word "queer" in contemporary critical theory and activism.[20] But the term also does important work. It is important, for example, to be able to name the unique burdens borne by those victims of sexual assault who are *also* presumptively capable of gestating children, and as such need access to reproductive medical care.[21] This kind of difference is surely significant enough to merit the invention of new language shorn of the heteropatriarchal baggage and gendered harms associated with the terms "men" and "women." Where the neologism "hysterics" proves a stumbling block to the reader in the foregoing pages, I invite the reader to note how the word "woman" would not be suitable in its place, and, relatedly, how desperately new language is needed.

Nevertheless, as mentioned, I do occasionally slip into language that is tinged with binarism and other heteropatriarchal ills, given that I and my readers find ourselves in a dreadfully heteropatriarchal world. As such, there are intermittent moments in the essay in which I use the word "females" to name those who are capable of gestating children, and "males" to name those who are capable of natural insemination. I also will not modify language from source material that uses the words "women" and "men" to evoke persons with male or female reproductive capacities. For these shortcomings, I beg my reader's forgiveness – particularly from those readers who have been most harmed by others' use of this language.

These are our inheritances: our beautiful, inadequate language, and our beautiful, inadequate bodies. A question emerges here, though: why are our bodies in fact so inadequate? Wouldn't it be better if we could do more things independently, including reproduce? It is to that puzzle that we now turn.

Costly males

Before considering whether the pursuit of a world without males is advisable, we might well ask: why would there be ever males in the first place? Why should half of our species be unable to do the work of gestating offspring? In fact, this puzzle has long mystified biologists. Sexual reproduction is a relatively new development among creatures on our planet, as it emerged only about a billion years ago; organisms have reproduced asexually for as many as 4.28 billion years. For much of Earth's history, that is, organisms produced either by splitting or self-replicating. The process of asexual reproduction is generally uncomplicated. From one organism can come many, many more, without need for any additional contact or collaboration with any other member of the species. The parthenogenesis described in Gilman's *Herland*, for example, is a form of asexual reproduction. Gilman describes the parthogenesis of *Herland* as one directed by a prospective mother's deep desire: "[w]hen a woman chose to be a mother, she allowed the child-longing to grow within her till it worked its natural miracle."[22]

[20]The reader will recall that "hysteria" was the diagnosis given, until recently, to women who did not comport themselves according to social norms, or who suffered mental illnesses. I am not the first to try to reclaim the term. See especially Gilman et al., *Hysteria beyond Freud*.

[21]It's worth noting that whether or not any particular individual belongs to the category of "hysterics" may be, if rarely, unclear. I do not think that is good enough reason to dismiss with the category. After all, whether a given individual is in fact "queer" is debated. See Wortham, "When Everyone Can Be 'Queer,' Is Anyone?"

[22]Gilman, "Herland," 72.

It seems at first glance that the ability to reproduce without needing cooperation from another member of one's species would be advantageous, given creatures' inherent drive to propagate one's species. If creatures are born with an innate desire to multiply, why should it not be possible to do so without needing the cooperation of another? And why should only half of the species be able to gestate offspring? As one biologist, Matthew Gage, puts it, sexual reproduction

> isn't easy to explain because sex carries big burdens, the most obvious of which is that only half of your offspring—daughters—will actually produce offspring. Why should any species waste all that effort on sons? We [need] to understand how Darwinian selection can allow this widespread and seemingly wasteful reproductive system to persist, when a system where all individuals produce offspring without sex—as in all-female asexual populations—would be a far more effective route to reproduce greater numbers of offspring.[23]

Simply put, the emergence of sexual reproduction appears to controvert a species' interest in proliferation. Sexual reproduction renders half of a species' population unable to reproduce, and further requires that those members able to reproduce interface with their non-reproductive counterparts to do so. Males are, as the biologists put it, costly. Furthermore, in sexual reproduction, each organism is only able to contribute half of their genetic material to the new generation. Biologists call this the "twofold cost of males."[24]

But the cost, it turns out, is worth it, according to a regnant hypothesis that explains the emergence of sexual reproduction. Asexual reproduction, it turns out, has a major shortcoming. Because reproducing asexually – by splitting or self-replicating – produces genetic replicas or near replicas, species that reproduce asexually exhibit a marked lack of genetic diversity. (Think, for example, of the difficulties faced by purebreds.) When a species with too little genetic diversity is confronted with a parasite, for example, or a shift in its environment, its numbers can be decimated or even eradicated. Sexual reproduction involves repeated genetic recombination, which enhances the genetic diversity of a species so that not all members of the species experience identical susceptibilities. The biologist George Williams used the metaphor of lottery tickets to illustrate the point. Asexual reproduction, Williams explained, can be likened to purchasing hundreds of lottery tickets – but all with the same number. Sexual reproduction may not grant a species quite as many lottery tickets, but because they are not identical, even with fewer total tickets a species has a better chance of "winning."[25]

Furthermore, the possibility of combining genetic material between mating partners makes it possible to favor advantageous permutations and to disfavor disadvantageous ones in the process of natural selection. Those offspring that inherit useful genetic combinations will stand a better chance of living longer and reproducing more frequently, which benefits the species, too. Engaging in the genetic recombination that sexual reproduction makes possible enables a species to adapt strategically to its environment, to resist parasites, and to maximally benefit from genetic innovations. Many biologists thus theorize that these advantages help to explain the evolution and maintenance of

[23]Feltman, "Scientists Examine Why Men Even Exist."
[24]Maynard Smith, *The Evolution of Sex*.
[25]Williams, *Sex and Evolution*.

sexual reproduction among the lion's share of Earth's multicellular organisms, despite the costs it imposes on such species.[26]

The emergence of sexual reproduction was quickly followed by a concurrent biological development: the division of species into two sexual forms, known to the biologists as "sexual dimorphism."[27] The first differences to evolve in the reproductive process were among gametes – cells like eggs and sperm. To make genetic recombination more straightforward and most likely to survive, reproductive cells divide into types that are very small (sperm) and very large (eggs).[28] Sexual differentiation at the level of the organism follows shortly thereafter. Differences between one half of the species, which invests considerably more energy and time into the reproductive process, and the other become more marked in the process of sexual selection. The latter tend to develop different forms of ornamentation, coloration, behavior, and mating calls. Then, about half a billion years ago, came the evolution of creatures who reproduced not by laying eggs – a biological characteristic called "oviparity" – but by carrying offspring within their bodies and thereafter birthing live young – what biologists call "viviparity." According to biologists, viviparity evolved among earthly creatures at least 150 times independently, giving us reason to believe that there is something physically advantageous to the internal, rather than external, gestation of offspring.[29] With viviparity came heightened differences between the sexes, as those who were to reproduce viviparously – those we might, in the human species, call "hysterics" – evolved in ways that supported their procreative capacities. This includes secondary sex characteristics including functional mammary glands capable of providing nutrition for live newborns, wider hips, and higher body fat percentages.

Of course, human sexual dimorphism is at the center of ongoing arguments about sex and gender identity. Ninety-five percent of the creatures on earth are gonochoric – meaning they have two sexes, and each member of the species belongs to one of the two sexes.[30] Humans, too, are gonochoric. Yet such a general statement must not be taken to discount the fact that there are many members of the human species who demonstrate exceptional characteristics with regard to sex. We might rightly say, for example, the following sentence: "Humans have ten toes." Yet, strictly speaking, this sentence is wrong; there are many members of our species that do not, in fact, have ten toes, perhaps by accident of birth or some other circumstance.[31] Similarly, while humans are gonochoric, there remain a significant proportion of humans that cannot be neatly assigned to one of either of the sexes.[32]

While an overwhelming majority of animals are gonochoric, as it is an evolutionarily stable biological scheme, for the purposes of the present essay, it really matters not how

[26]West, Lively, and Read, "A Pluralist Approach to Sex and Recombination."
[27]See Fairbairn, Blanckenhorn, and Székely, *Sex, Size, and Gender Roles*.
[28]Johnson et al., "A Dynamical Model for the Origin of Anisogamy."
[29]Whittington et al., "Understanding the Evolution of Viviparity Using Intraspecific Variation in Reproductive Mode and Transitional Forms of Pregnancy."
[30]See Bell, *The Masterpiece of Nature*, 41–42; Jarne and Auld, "Animals Mix It up Too." Sometimes the botanists' term "dioecious" is substituted for "gonochoric."
[31]For work in analytic philosophy on this type of sentence structure, see Leslie, "Generics and the Structure of the Mind"; Leslie, "The Original Sin of Cognition."
[32]Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes"; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*.

many sexes are present in a species.[33] Rather, I want to draw our attention to the fact that most animals, as sexual reproducers, manifest in their very bodies an enduring truth: we are better together. Indeed, not only are we better together, but we are better when we are united to those who are different than us. It was only with the evolution of sexual reproduction that multicellular organisms emerged. Not just the human species but indeed all animals would likely never have come into being apart from the sexual reproduction that joins creatures across lines of difference. We are better for needing one another – and needing those others that are unlike us. The value of dependence is underscored by the recurring evolution of viviparity, or the internal gestation of offspring. That is to say: not only are we better together, and better together across lines of difference, but we are also better when we are, for at least a period, borne by others.

Idealizing independent reproduction

Even if the cost of sexual reproduction is "worth it" to species, it may be unclear to the reader that the costs of sexual oppression justify the maintenance of sexual difference. We had better keep in mind the naturalistic fallacy; the way things are does not tell us anything about the way things ought to be. That we evolved to be omnivores, for example, does not preclude vegetarianism being desirable or even morally obligatory. Similarly, the fact of humans' sexual reproduction and sexual dimorphism should not be taken to justify the maintenance of the social recognition of sexual difference, especially if doing so bolsters oppression.

So argued the visionary radical feminist Shulamith Firestone. Around the same time of the publication of Russ' *The Female Man*, Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines*, and Tiptree's *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* Firestone printed her groundbreaking manifesto *The Dialectic of Sex*. The 1970 *Dialectic* – now considered "a classic of feminist thought" – posits that the root of patriarchal oppression lies in the division of reproductive labor between the sexes.[34] As one interpreter summarizes, "Firestone holds that it is the biological sexual dichotomy itself, particularly the biological division of labor in reproduction, which is the root cause not only of male domination, but of economic class exploitation, racism, imperialism and ecological irresponsibility."[35] The feminist revolution, which her manifesto seeks to induce, is attainable – but only with the elimination of the sexual difference upon which patriarchy is built. In Firestone's own words, "the end goal of feminist revolution must be … not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the sex *distinction* itself."[36] Women's liberation requires, as Firestone writes, "freeing women from the tyranny of their sexual-reproductive roles—both the fundamental biological condition itself, and the sexual class system built upon, and reinforcing, this biological condition."[37] Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that the feminist utopias penned in subsequent years by Russ, Charnas, and Tiptree eliminate the sex distinction simply by eliminating males altogether. In these texts, there

[33]John Maynard Smith's concept of evolutionary stability identifies those behaviors or characteristics which are most likely to emerge via natural selection. See Maynard Smith, *Evolution and the Theory of Games*.
[34]Warren, *The Nature of Woman*, 155.
[35]Warren, 155.
[36]Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 19. Italics in the original.
[37]Firestone, 37. It should be noted that Firestone also recommended the elimination of pregnancy, as she found it "barbaric."

no longer is any sexual class system, because the dominant sexual class has been eliminated *tout court*.[38]

Note, however, the critical role that technology plays in the accomplishment of Firestone's utopia, as well in the feminist science fiction authors' utopias that followed. Firestone was not at all pessimistic about the possibility of surmounting the dialectic of sex. Rather, as Firestone writes, new reproductive technologies make possible the liberation from the "tyranny of biology" she desired:

> the biological family unit has always oppressed women and children, but now, for the first time in history, technology has created real preconditions for overthrowing these oppressive "natural" conditions, along with their cultural reinforcements. … it has become necessary to free humanity from the tyranny of its biology.[39]

The women's-only utopias of the nineteen-seventies, like Firestone's hypothesized utopia, depended upon innovative reproductive technologies to achieve their sexual-classless society. Russ' Whileaway – a faraway planet that, following the demise of men *en masse* from a plague centuries prior – had accomplished reproduction by "the merging of ova."[40] As mentioned above, the women's-only utopia of *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* depends on a system of cloning, and clones that share genetic backgrounds refer to one another as "sisters." They eagerly learn from their duplicates about their strengths and weaknesses – "like Judys should watch out for skin cancer."[41] Another second wave feminist utopian novel, *Woman at the Edge of Time*, published in 1976 by Marge Piercy, similarly posits a utopian genderless future – though not by eliminating males altogether.[42] In Percy's utopian Mattapoisett, offspring are gestated outside of the human body in test tubes – what biologists call ectogenesis – and children are nursed by both males and females. Any lingering division between the sexes is overcome using hormones, reproductive technologies, and gender-neutral language in which the only pronouns assigned to people are "per" (as in "person"). Only in this respect does Mattapoisett fall short of Firestone's political prescription but, given that the remaining distinction between the sexes is virtually undetectable, Piercy's vision might still be said to merit Firestone's commendation.

The technologies that Firestone's manifesto and the feminist utopias conjure are increasingly plausible. Firestone's vision, and the utopian visions of Russ, Tiptree, and Piercy, only barely predated the first successful birth from in vitro fertilization in 1978. In the half century since the birth of Louise Joy Brown, "the world's first test-tube baby," millions of children have been conceived with the technology, though they continue to require human gestation. Today, as many as two percent of all children born in America annually are conceived with the help of assistive reproductive technologies (ART).[43] Human cloning is likely possible, though scientists have still cloned no

[38]These same years witnessed the publication of Valerie Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto*, which called for the elimination of men by violent means. The titular acronym referred to the Society for Cutting Up Men. "The elimination of any male is," Solanas wrote, "a righteous and good act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy." Whether or not the text is a satire continues to be debated, but Solanas' attempted murder of Andy Warhol in 1968 gives readers reason to believe that her manifesto was not wholly ironic. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*.

[39]Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 183.

[40]Russ, *The Female Man*, 12.

[41]Tiptree, *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, 109.

[42]Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

[43]According to one report egg donation and in-vitro fertilization accounted for just under 77,000 births in the United States in 2016, which was just under two percent of the United States total. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Society for Reproductive Medicine, and Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology, "2016 Assisted

more than a handful of human embryos thus far.[44] Other reproductive technologies are on the near horizon. Ectogenesis – the gestation of offspring outside of the body – may be accomplished within decades. Researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia have pioneered an artificial womb, called a "BioBag," which has been used to gestate lambs, a species that gestates very similarly to humans.[45] Male pregnancy, following a uterine transplant, is also foreseeable.[46] The first successful pregnancy following a female-to-female uterine transplant took place in Sweden in 2014; since then, several more have followed, including one in the United States.[47] According to one doctor interviewed by the New York Times, it is conceivable that a male could be the recipient of such a transplant and carry a child to term.[48] Finally, the hormone-induced male breastfeeding of Piercy's Mattapoisett is similarly likely to be realizable in the coming years; in 2018, a trans woman was able to serve as the sole source of nutrition for the baby that her partner had brought to term.[49] Meanwhile, scores of fathers already engage in breastfeeding using Supplemental Nursing Systems (SNSs).

With the forthcoming appearance of such technologies, Firestone's prescription for liberating hysterics from the "tyranny of biology" appears increasingly possible. These technologies may fall short of the parthenogenesis of *Herland*, where mere longing for a child spontaneously produces one, and where reproduction does not transpire apart from such longing. Yet they resemble in many ways Gilman's portrayal of a world in which mere desire yields children.

We have at least two reasons, however, to be wary of such utopic prescriptions. Both can be found in Mary O'Brien's daring and prescient *The Politics of Reproduction*. The first pertains to Firestone's misplaced optimism about reproductive technology. O'Brien, who with Firestone builds on Marxist theory, is attentive to the ways that technologies – reproductive and otherwise – can exacerbate, rather than assuage, the exploitation and alienation of individuals.[50] Consider, for example, the development of birth control in the early twentieth century. While that singular technological advancement vastly improved hysterics' quality of life, it also made possible a program of eugenics that found its culmination in the Third Reich. For a more contemporary example, we might consider IVF, which has enabled infertile and same-sex couples to conceive where they would otherwise be unable to do so. On the other hand, however, this has fueled the exploitation of surrogates, and particularly in the global south.[51] Increasingly,

Reproductive Technology Fertility Clinic Success Rates Report." It is difficult to know how many births arise from donor insemination per year, as there is no federal requirement that such statistics be recorded. However, one estimate suggests the number to be at about 30,000 births per year; see Greif and Merz, "Manufacturing Children," 87.

[44]Tavernise, "His Fertility Advance Draws Ire."

[45]Romanis, "Artificial Womb Technology and the Frontiers of Human Reproduction."

[46]However, such births would, for the foreseeable future, be exceedingly rare and exorbitantly costly. A female-to-female uterine transplant costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. See Grady, "Woman Becomes First In America to Give Birth After Uterus Transplant."

[47]Baumgaertner, "From a Deceased Woman's Transplanted Uterus, a Live Birth"; Grady, "Woman Becomes First In America to Give Birth After Uterus Transplant."

[48]Grady, "Will Uterine Transplants Make Male Pregnancy Possible?" To be clear: I am not discussing pregnancy among trans men, which deserves increased attention. Rather, by "male pregnancy," I mean the gestation of offspring by those assigned male at birth.

[49]Reisman and Goldstein, "Case Report: Induced Lactation in a Transgender Woman"; Cederstrom, "Are We Ready for the Breastfeeding Father?"

[50]O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 79.

[51]Blyth and Farrand, "Reproductive Tourism: A Price Worth Paying for Reproductive Autonomy?" Also see Kittay, "The Global Heart Transplant and Caring across National Boundaries."

hysterics with resources have pursued surrogates for their children either out of convenience or a desire to avoid experiencing the challenges of pregnancy firsthand – so-called "social surrogacy."[52] In a more ethically complicated situation, a growing movement for "fertility equality" has begun to appeal to health insurance companies to compensate surrogates for same-sex couples who face what the movement calls "social infertility."[53] While the distress faced by a queer person otherwise unable to conceive biologically is indeed heartrending, it does not follow that such distress produces one's right to the backbreaking work that is gestational surrogacy.

These examples show us that reproductive technological advancements are by no means guaranteed to advance the cause of hysterics' emancipation from patriarchal structures. Rather than empower hysterics, the availability of social surrogacy can in fact exacerbate expectations of hysterics both to become mothers and to maintain a particular physical and professional presence. What's more, it further privileges those hysterics who have the resources to secure surrogates and diminishes those who cannot. Forthcoming reproductive technologies may similarly prove to be both blessings and curses. The possibility of ectogenesis has been heralded as a solution to debates over abortion, for example – insofar as those hysterics who prefer to terminate their pregnancy could, foreseeably, simply transfer the fetus they carry to an artificial womb.[54] The same technology that Firestone would herald as a triumph could therefore relegate hysterics to involuntary *motherhood*, even if it frees them from involuntary *gestation*.

There is a second, more decisive reason that we ought to be unconvinced by the faith in reproductive technological progress. It deepens the alienation of humans from ourselves. As O'Brien puts it, in a passage worth quoting at length:

> The family is a historical development with its roots in a natural necessity. The necessity itself is invariant, and women's place in the social relations of reproduction is therefore circumscribed by her childbearing function. While this view has been a staple of masculine thought, it has also been shared by important feminist writers, including de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone. Feminist versions retain the premise of the argument but alter the conclusion. Traditional wisdom says: Women are naturally trapped in the childbearing function. ∴ Women therefore cannot participate in social life on equal terms with men. In place of this, a new syllogism is coined: Women are naturally trapped in the childbearing function. ∴ Therefore the liberation of women depends on their being freed from this trap.[55]

O'Brien, however, calls into question the idea that hysterics' participation in reproductive labor necessarily constitutes *entrapment*. The material necessities to which humans are bound need not be treated as tyrannies; as O'Brien notes, Marx does not treat the human need to eat as a limitation but an essential premise of his theory. We ought not to pray with Augustine, "from my necessities, deliver me Thou" – *if* by "necessities" we mean the simple material conditions of human experience.[56]

All the same, this does not mean, for O'Brien, that we ought to embrace any and every "natural" characteristic of human reproduction. She vigorously advocates for

[52]Lewin, "Coming to U.S. for Baby, and Womb to Carry It."
[53]Kaufman, "The Right to a Baby?"
[54]Debate on this subject has recently exploded. At the core of the debate is whether those who might wish to terminate their pregnancy could be forced to have the fetus transferred to an artificial womb, or if they have a right to not become a biological parent. See, for example, Overall, "Rethinking Abortion, Ectogenesis, and Fetal Death."
[55]O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 20.
[56]See Psalm 25:17 and Augustine's City of God XIX.6.

contraceptive technologies – not only because of the bodily control they grant to hysterics but also because of the reproductive consciousness that they make possible among hysterics.[57] We will want to affirm similar things about access to artificial reproductive technologies, which give infertile persons and same-sex couples the ability to become biological parents. O'Brien helps us to see, however, that more must be said about the politics of reproduction than is said by Firestone and the utopian writers that followed her. To emancipate hysterics from having to depend on non-hysterics' reproductive contribution may not be to emancipate hysterics *as such*.

Put otherwise, we must not assume that, to liberate hysterics from the oppression of non-hysterics, we should enable them to become non-hysterics – that is, persons (ostensibly) unfettered by the demands of gestational necessity and related social demands. Susan Okin was right to criticize Hobbes' recommendation that we conceive of persons "as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other."[58] It seems to me, however, that in idealizing independent reproduction, Firestone and other utopian thinkers reduplicate the same romantic, unconstrained individualism that Okin criticizes in Hobbes. "In the last analysis," O'Brien writes, "Firestone wants women to become men, with a vague implication that the absence of sexual differentiation will result in the abolition of power as such and thus harmonize human relationships."[59] The point is not merely something like: "women are sinners, too, and so getting rid of men will not eliminate women's oppression" – although that is certainly true. (And, it should be mentioned, many of the more recent, less optimistic portrayals of women's-only worlds meditate on this truth.) The point is something even more substantial: that *to be human is to depend on others*, even or perhaps especially in the process of human reproduction.

Human interdependence, and particularly intersexual interdependence, ought not be lamented but embraced as a condition of human experience. Of course, it must be said that the fact of human interdependence cannot be used to justify the domination of one class of persons over any another. We must remain vigilant about the ways individuals manipulate interdependence to selfish ends. But the central fact remains: to romanticize the mastery and control certain reproductive technologies might afford is to fundamentally deny who we are as interdependent creatures.[60]

Women and men in 1 Corinthians 11

To cast this point in a new light, in this section I turn to Paul's discussion of intersexual interdependence found in 1 Corinthians 11:11. In the midst of a perplexing passage – which one commentator writes is "notoriously obscure"[61] – Paul writes that "woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman." As we shall see, Paul presages Beauvoir's Hegelian analysis of gender by highlighting the fact that men and women are not viable apart from one another.

[57]O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 21–22. Of course, O'Brien does not herself use any language like the neologism "hysterics" that I introduce here, but I have reason to believe she would be friendly to its introduction.
[58]Hobbes, *De Cive*, 117; Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 21.
[59]O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 82.
[60]Here I purposefully invoke Jennings, *After Whiteness*.
[61]Hays, *First Corinthians*, 183.

Strikingly, the chapter within which 1 Corinthians 11:11 appears is often cited as a rationale for the subjugation of women within and beyond the church. The passage discusses reasons that women ought to be expected or even required to wear a veil during worship. In a characteristically Pauline manner, Paul puns on the topic, using the word "head" eleven times in as many verses. Paul's use of the word "head" conjures to a contemporary reader not puns but subordination. "I want you to understand," Paul writes, "that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3). (Indeed, Tiptree's *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* includes a scene in which the sanctimonious captain cites Corinthians "one eleven three" as a basis for his apparent intention to claim authority over the women who rescue his ship. "'The head of the woman is the man,' Dave says crisply."[62]) But the chapter is more ambiguous about the relationship between hysterics and non-hysterics than it appears at first – especially to those readers trained by contemporary sexual politics to interpret these words to mean that husbands should rule over their wives.

In fact, there is much reason to read Paul as using the metaphor of a "head" as something like the *source* of the second member of each pair in 1 Cor. 11:3, rather than to imagine the "head" as the *ruler* of each pair. As Fee explains, "idea that the head is the source of supply and support for all the body's systems a natural metaphor in the Greek world."[63] This connotation of "head" as "source," rather than "ruler," is borne out in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Where Hebrew, like English, often uses the word "head" to describe a sovereign, every time the Hebrew word for "head" (רֹאשׁ) appears with such a connotation, it is translated in Greek as "ruler" (ἄρχων) rather than "head" (κεφαλή).[64] The translators of the Old Testament into Greek seemed to think that the translating the Hebrew רֹאשׁ as κεφαλή when the intended meaning was "ruler" would have been misunderstood by the Septuagint's Greek readers. The substitution of "head" for "ruler" that succeeds in Hebrew and English simply does not in Greek. Given the context in which he was writing, Paul is clearly thinking about the head as a *sustaining* part of the body, not as a *governing* part of the body. In fact, the only time that anything about "authority" arises in the passage is in verse ten, where Paul writes that women ought to have authority (ἐξουσία) over their own heads – something quite contradictory to the idea that they ought to be subordinate to others.[65]

Rereading "head" as "source," rather than "ruler," has several merits. Among them is how such a reading renders the "nevertheless" that begins verse eleven much more legible. "Nevertheless," Paul writes, "in the Lord woman is not independent of man (χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς, *choris andros*, where *choris* means 'without') or man independent of woman (χωρὶς γυναικὸς, *choris gynaikos*)." In verse twelve, Paul continues: "[f]or just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God." The emphasis here, which continues Paul's meditation in verses eight and nine

[62]Tiptree, *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*, 137.
[63]Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," 151.
[64]Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman."
[65]This is often claimed to be the most impenetrable verse of a generally impenetrable passage. Foremost among the many things to be said about the verse is that it has often been deliberately misinterpreted to bring it into conformity with the misguided interpretation of verse three. Many translations misleadingly introduce the phrase "a symbol of" before the word "authority," such that the verse would read: "For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head." For detailed, recent work on this verse, see Peppiatt, *Unveiling Paul's Women*, 43–44.

on the Genesis account about the creation of women, is on the source of our material being. There is a symmetry between the Genesis narrative – where a woman is created from a man – and birth – given that every man comes to be through a woman's pregnancy and childbirth. As Fee interprets Paul's thesis in the passage: "neither man nor woman can exist without the other, and gender [*sic*] distinctions are part of the 'all things [that] are from God.'"[66]

Paul's point is not a mere chronological observation about of how women and men come to be over time. He wants to say something stronger: that *God ordained sexual difference and intersexual interdependence*. The allusion to Genesis underscores the fact that God creates humans in such a way that they are different from – and dependent upon – one another. Humans' interdependence always obtains across lines of difference. It is not just upon others like me that I depend; rather, I depend deeply upon others markedly unlike me.

It is no coincidence that the passage whence Paul's declaration of interdependence comes is bookended by two different meditations on what Paul calls the "body of Christ," in which individuals are incorporated into a social whole. As Paul famously writes in 1 Corinthians 12, for example, bodies can never be made up of a collection of identical body parts. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?" Paul asks. "If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?" (1 Cor. 12:17) Each part must be distinctive, serving different purposes given the gifts they are given. But Paul is just as eager to highlight the individuality and difference of the parts of the body as he is to highlight their interdependence. Each part needs every other, such that none can dismiss all the others. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you,'" writes Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21. The interdependence of each bodily organ that Paul meditates on in 1 Cor.12 appears in 1 Cor. 11 as the interdependence between lines of sexual difference. At the center of an epistle that underscores the interdependence of God's creatures, Paul reminds us that interdependence also obtains across lines of sexual difference.

At this point it may be worth revisiting the abovementioned emergence of sexual reproduction, as an innovation on the asexual reproductive process that proceeded it. At first glance, the apparent costs of sexual reproduction make sexual reproduction seem inefficient or improvident. Instead, it is the development of an interdependent reproductive process that benefits, rather than weakens, species of organisms. A parallel to this biological fact can be traced in the story that Paul seems to tell about the Genesis story and God's creation of human beings. We are better together – and in fact, we are *made to be* better together.[67]

Paul's argument is perhaps even stronger than merely affirming that we are better together, however. What Paul means to show in this passage is that without being connected to others different from us, we are not even ourselves. There simply is no woman

[66]Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," 158.

[67]As an aside, it may be worth mentioning here that thinking about the emergence of sexual reproduction in tandem with a Pauline view of human interdependence bears out theistic evolutionism: the view that evolution is not purposeless but God-ordained. Where many have accepted the so-called "conflict thesis" that contraposes science and religion, theistic evolutionists affirm evolutionary theory while opposing the idea that evolution is an arbitrary or random process. Though his own beliefs changed in his later life, Darwin himself affirmed the notion that God ordered the process of evolution during the period in which he wrote *The Origin of Species*, as discussed in Ospovat, "God and Natural Selection."

apart from man, and no man apart from woman. The existence of each depends on the existence of the other. Anticipating Beauvoir's Hegelian gender analysis, Paul insists that hysterics and non-hysterics cannot be who they are without their counterparts. Indeed, I am certain that 1 Corinthians was ringing in James Baldwin's mind when he wrote the words that served as an epigraph to this essay, repeated here:

> … we are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it.[68]

Note here an important point that both Paul and Baldwin underline. It is not by our participation in binary, heterosexual, reproductive intercourse that we evince our dependence on others. It is by virtue of our very *existence* as corporeal products of some other fleshly intercourse (sexual or otherwise) that we evince our dependence on others. The point of the present essay is not to underscore the role any of us might play in the reproduction of future generations – though I reflect on what the division of labor in such reproduction means for justice in other forthcoming work. Rather, I want to follow Paul and Baldwin in highlighting the way that each of us owes our very selves to the intersexual association of others.

Baldwin, though, goes even farther, evoking Paul's language in 1 Corinthians and Romans that we are parts of one another. We are not only brought into being by intersexual fellowship – although that is a truth demanding our recognition – but our continued formation and agency depend, too, on others. "It is virtually impossible to trust one's human value without the collaboration or corroboration of … the eye of one's enemy or one's friend or one's lover," writes Baldwin, and so we all remain vulnerable to another's misrecognition or humiliation of ourselves.[69] Andrea Long Chu echoes this thread of Baldwin's when she writes that "[g]ender exists, if it is to exist at all, only in the structural generosity of strangers."[70] There is a non-sovereignty here that may, to some like Firestone, seem tyrannical. Yet the fact remains that, as Baldwin puts it, "none of us can do anything about it." We cannot help but depend upon one another.

Yet we can go still further. We might add, in the same Pauline-Beauvoirian-Baldwinian logic, straightness depends upon need queerness (*and vice versa*) and cisgender depends upon transgender (*and vice versa*).[71] And this not only because these terms serve to demarcate one another's boundaries, but because of the way that the very

[68]Baldwin, "Here Be Dragons," 689–90. Baldwin echoes Paul's phrase "born of a woman," and I am confident that the one time preacher did not do so inadvertently. Baldwin's Pauline language also evokes a work of speculative fiction that I did not include in this piece. The title of Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* comes from a line within the novel: "Light is the left hand of darkness and darkness the right hand of light. Two are one, life and death, lying together like lovers." As a note, I did not discuss Le Guin's tour de force because it portrays a world of androgynous characters, not women, as in the other second wave feminist texts surveyed here. *Left Hand of Darkness*, however, is an outstanding example of the kind of literature that eschews the kind of sovereignty that Firestone commends and instead foregrounds the necessity of human intimacy across lines of difference.

[69]Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," 680.

[70]Chu, *Females*, 38.

[71]This is not just a matter of definition, whereby cisgender persons as a class are demarcated by the bounds of transness. Rather, there are ways that members of the human species that belong to these different groups can depend on one another. The body is made better because of the individuality of its parts, and so there are features about gay persons that straight persons can benefit from, and features about trans persons that cis persons can benefit from.

constitution of our bodies is ordered toward difference. We are, as discussed above, begotten by sexual reproduction, a process that is valuable to species like ours precisely because of the difference it invites and incites. Only by virtue of the explorations and improvisations that are precipitated when humans come together, new features and attributes and strengths emerge. We ought to invite and incite the difference that our bodies' fusion with one another might bring about, because it strengthens and enriches us. That difference may include discovering unfamiliar ways of being, seeing, touching, *loving*.[72] Infused in all of this, furthermore, is our need, just as Beauvoir maintained in *The Second Sex*, for a deeper recognition of our interdependence – though not to the detriment of our recognition of our distinctiveness.[73] The point of insisting on intersexual interdependence is to insist on persons' status as equals, not as identicals.

This reminder from Paul (and his Hegelian heirs) may not be particularly welcome to his earliest readers, nor to many of his more recent readers. We humans are not always eager to acknowledge our interdependence. The utopian longing for independent, self-sufficient living and reproduction can induce us to overlook the degree to which we need others, including especially those who are not like us. We may, as Baldwin notes, find it "exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair." That same tendency arises in Firestone's analysis, and in many of the feminist utopian authors' narratives. We are reluctant to acknowledge our reliance on others, and our vulnerability to their mistreatment. But failing to recognize our interdependence is only self-deception, which is less likely to bring about utopia than to aggravate our affliction.

Before moving to the next section, one final note is in order. There is a danger, in foregrounding human interdependence, of prioritizing a social whole *to the exclusion of* individual persons. In the case of Gilman's *Herland*, for example, the utopian women, aware of their mutual interdependence and devoted to the common enterprise, develop a eugenic system to ensure that only the most qualified become mothers. Women who fall short of certain social standards, Gilman explains, forego reproducing, bearing their own sacrifice for the greater good of the community. Of course, Gilman was among the innumerable progressives that supported eugenics in the early twentieth century. We must remain suspicious of social logics that highlight human interdependence to subordinate individuals.

Conclusion: the good of interdependence

In her droll and dark 2019 essay, *What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal*, E. Jean Carroll invites reflections on the book's titular question. Carroll is more than happy to dispense with men, given the experiences of sexual abuse and maltreatment she documents in the book – including from the 45th president. She offers her Swiftian proposal:

> I have been assured by female scientists that the male body is roughly composed of 0.00004 percent iodine, 0.00004 percent iron, 0.05 percent magnesium, 0.15 percent chlorine, 0.15 percent sodium, 0.25 percent sulfur, 0.35 percent potassium, 1 percent phosphorus, 1.5 percent calcium, 3.2 percent nitrogen, 10 percent hydrogen, 18 percent carbon, and 65

[72]I am grateful to Max Thornton for his paper, "Fingery eyes, fingery 'I's: A trans theology of touching genders" and its push to foreground touch in gender and trans theology.
[73]de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

> percent oxygen, and these elements would, on the open market, fetch about $1 per bloke. The number of males in America is generally reckoned at 164,628,232. Ladies, I propose that we dispose of our chaps at the $1.03 price and put their elements to better use … Plus, with the $170 or $180 million we receive, we will be able to purchase, in return, eleven or twelve genuine Birkin bags.[74]

In light of the agonizing stories Carroll has to tell – and the stories that all too many women have to tell – it is difficult to avoid empathizing with her impulse to eliminate the world of the sexual difference that makes such agony possible. Similarly, this author cannot help but identify with the utopian visions described above and share their longing for worlds free of patriarchal oppression. It is difficult to find fault with such a comprehensible response to the harms wrought by architects and agents of gender discrimination and violence.

Yet, utopias tend to stand only a hair's breadth from their dystopian counterparts, and the women's-only worlds, and the reproductive technologies that enable them, portend their own evils. Most dangerous about the utopian narratives discussed above is the implied premise that what is most desperately needed for women's liberation is the elimination of human interdependence across lines of sexual difference. Such a proposal contradicts both the fact and the goodness of human interdependence.[75]

I must admit that the foregoing discussion of Firestone, feminist utopian science fiction, and St. Paul may at first glance read as an apologia for the inclusion of men – in a collection of essays that purposefully excludes men. While I am happy to defend the maintenance of gender diversity inclusive of men, my central aim here is rather to champion intersexual independence in order to sustain the ongoing effort to foreground women and non-men in social institutions. This is precisely what I take the purpose of this special issue to be: not to serve as a paragon of ideal scholarly activity, but to provide a long-overdue corrective to work that tends to privilege men's voices and perspectives.

The discipline of political theology and adjacent disciplines remain heavily dominated by men. The same is true within the Christian church, where disagreements about the ordination of women and queer and trans persons continue to divide Christ's body. We should know better. We must do better. To the degree that the theological disciplines – including especially political theology – have failed to integrate the voices of those who are not cisgender men, they are deficient and require revision. Our recognition that, in Paul's language, there are no men without women must bring about a political theology that looks vastly different than the one that obtains presently. Foregrounding the voices and efforts of those who are not men is a great way to begin this work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

[74]Carroll, *What Do We Need Men For?*, 1–2.

[75][REF] These two – the fact and the goodness of human interdependence – are not wholly distinct. The foregoing discussions of human sexual reproduction are intended to demonstrate to the reader that the reason that our species reproduces sexually, and viviparously, is because it is good for us. I am grateful to a reviewer for prompting me to name this.

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