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Review of *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in the Feminist Theory*. Kathy E. Ferguson. Reviewed by Janice Wood Wetzel, Adelphi University.

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it pulls together so much material, the book abounds with wonderful references. Scott's coverage of the history of African-American women's organizations is excellent, yielding such discoveries as the fact that the first anti-slavery societies were begun by free Black women, and reminding the reader that inherent racism in American society generally kept African-American and white women's groups from making common cause. Scott also offers a rebuttal to the argument that the largely middle-class membership of women's associations had as its major goal the assertion of control over the working class and the poor. Concern for the wages of working women, she notes, was a fairly common theme. Beyond such insights, the book's greatest strength lies in its comprehensiveness. The reader is left with a sense of awe at the number and many accomplishments of women's organizations, and an amazement that their place in American history has been ignored for so long.

Leslie Leighninger
Louisiana State University

Kathy E. Ferguson. *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993. \$40.00 hardcover, \$13.00 papercover.

Ferguson's provocative book, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*, is provocative in relation to her subtitle, rather than to the title itself. Her work presents a lively discussion of three models of feminist theory, defined as praxis feminism, cosmic feminism and linguistic feminism. The models are critically compared and contrasted with a delightful mix of scholarly insight and wry humor. While "male-ordered subjectivity" in regard to women is; decried, feminist-ordered subjectivity of women is given a thorough roasting. Each concept is first set forth in purist fashion, setting up a "straw woman" situation which no one could readily support (despite the fact that, truth be known, many do).

For example, praxis feminism faults the universalisms pressed on all women who, in fact, may not fit the mold. Cosmic feminism can be faulted for its amorphous quality, ranging from

high flown metaphysical epistemology to downright flakiness. While open to the possibilities of self in relation to a higher spiritual order, together with transcendence and return, it is difficult to articulate and defend the claims of cosmic feminists. And linguistic feminism, devoted to making the familiar strange, uses strategies that are designed to defamiliarize and deconstruct in order to call into question male-ordered accounts of gender. The problem here is that the named commonalities can be overstated, while neglecting that which is experienced differently.

Ferguson rejects the possibility of championing a selected model and defending its virtues against the criticism of others. Suggesting an alternative to such a purist position, she discusses the possibility of synthesis as a solution, setting up an array of combinations of the three umbrella theories. One by one she then debunks her amalgamated constructs, leaving the reader ready for her personal version of feminist theory. Conceptualized as "mobile subjectivities," the model calls for an acceptance of all three constructs side by side, recognizing that each holds truth at a given moment in time, ever in motion, always ambiguous. The author views this stance as irony, making it possible to reside within an unstable theoretical place.

As a person who has struggled professionally with these dichotomies and unities myself, I have tremendous respect for Kathy Ferguson. She has illuminated the important questions lucidly. I don't disagree with her conclusions, but I do disagree with her definition of synthesis which she apparently views as focussing only on commonalities, while denying or ignoring difference, define synthesis as "unity in diversity" which focusses on shared experience, but acknowledges the reality and importance of differences. To my mind, mobile subjectivities is another way of speaking of this definition of unity in diversity. Could it be called "diversity in unity?" Certainly she is supporting both possibilities. (How I'd like to spend time talking with the author!)

The Man Question, the title of this book, is no doubt the decision of the publisher, while it is a provocative title, it really is not what the book is about by my reading. Rather, the title is set in juxtaposition to the "woman question" which the author feels was largely influenced by Hegel who provides the

conceptual framework for her discussion of feminist theory. An influential philosopher who portrayed human consciousness as shaped primarily by domination, subordination and death, Hegel's masculine account of self as *the* human experience provided the necessity for a feminist version of subjectivity out of which the theories in question have developed. In short, the "woman question" was raised by man, posing femininity as a problem that requires explanation. The "man question," according to Ferguson, "is a kind of frame for feminist metatheories." It does not, however, turn the woman question on its head, posing masculinity as a problem that requires explanation, as advertised. (I do hope someone will do it one day soon.)

The philosophical backdrop of this book is one that feminist scholars in the humanities, especially, will relish. It is they who would be most at home with the discourse of Ferguson's work. Although I am not a humanities scholar, I found the book to be thought provoking and most worthwhile. It provides a context for serious discourse whether one agrees with the premises or not. Every library should include *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* in its collection. While, in my opinion, it does not illuminate the man question, it certainly brings light to feminist analysis.

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