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Ruth H. Bloch. *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. x + 225 pp. (e-book), ISBN 978-0-585-46778-8; $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-23405-5; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-23406-2.

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Ruth Bloch's *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture* is a valuable and provocative collection of essays on Anglo-American gender ideology in the colonial and revolutionary era. While most of the articles in the volume have been previously published, Bloch includes one previously unpublished essay along with a new introduction and concluding essay. Although the essays were published over a long period, spanning from 1978 to 2001, and discuss a variety of topics, they are unified by Bloch's concern with exploring the complex interconnections between gender relations and ideas about morality. Organizing the essays both thematically and chronologically, Bloch presents the larger theoretical and interpretive framework for the book in the first two essays. As Bloch discusses in these essays, her overriding purpose is to provide what she calls a "culturalist" critique of feminist theory. Influenced by Clifford Geertz and other symbolic anthropologists, Bloch defines culture broadly as "the system of meaning that expresses collective needs and ideals that go beyond the utilitarian pursuit of power" (p. 26). According to Bloch, the problem with most recent feminist theory is that by focusing almost exclusively on gender as an expression and a function of relations of power, it has failed to recognize the cultural dimension to definitions of gender. As Bloch points out, influenced by Marx, early feminist theorists viewed women's oppression as a function of class oppression. While more concerned with culture than Marxist theorists, poststructuralist feminist theorists (in their assumption that culture was ultimately an instrument of power), Bloch argues, share the "materialism and interest-driven view of humanity" of their Marxist opponents (p. 26). In opposition to these theorists, Bloch argues for a "culturalist" approach that would recognize how the desire for meaning is as important to definitions of gender as the desire for power. Or, as Bloch puts it, "gender symbolism tends to be at least as much about interconnectedness as about power" (p. 40). And so, for Bloch, scholars wishing to understand the construction of gender would have to look beyond structures of power such as race or class and analyze how gender was part of "wider systems of meaning" by taking into account its relationship to aesthetic, religious, and scientific influences (p. 40).

In the next group of essays, Bloch puts this injunction into practice by examining the relationship between gender and larger systems of value in the colonial era. In these essays, Bloch argues that the eighteenth century was an important turning point in the development of Anglo-American assumptions about gender, for she locates the roots of the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres in this period. As she rightly notes, while there has been a great deal of debate over the in-

fluence and implications of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity, historians have paid much less attention to explaining how and why this ideology emerged.[1] Most important, she argues, the sentimentalized view of women as more virtuous and morally pure than men–an assumption that was at the heart of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity–emerged in the eighteenth century. According to Bloch, both the rise of the ideal of the "moral mother" in the eighteenth century and changes in the laws of courtship during this period revealed the transformation in women's moral status from the seventeenth-century assumption that women were morally inferior to men to an idealized view of women's moral purity. While recognizing the role of industrialization in this transformation, consistent with her "culturalist" approach, Bloch emphasizes the contribution of intellectual and cultural forces such as Enlightenment ideas and evangelical religion to the emerging view of women as morally superior to men.

Through this analysis, Bloch challenges scholars such as Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton who have emphasized the impact of the American Revolution on women's roles. While arguing that the Revolution was not as central as these scholars have claimed, Bloch at the same time acknowledges that the Revolution did accelerate and intensify developments that had already begun to occur earlier in the eighteenth century, and the final set of essays examines the relationship between revolutionary ideology and these changing definitions of gender. These essays demonstrate the value of Bloch's culturalist approach, for by linking gender to broader moral concerns, she shows how the study of gender and women's history is integral to understanding "conventional questions of political history" such as the character of revolutionary ideology (p. 138). In particular, Bloch makes an important contribution to the historiographical debate over the influence of classical republicanism and liberalism on revolutionary ideology. Despite the apparent conflict between the individualistic emphasis of liberal ideology and the communal orientation of classical republicanism, Bloch argues that these two sets of values were not mutually exclusive, as some scholars have claimed.[1] Bloch shows how Americans reconciled this conflict by looking beyond formal political writing to analyze the realm of popular culture–namely, at religious writing and novels. Gender played an important role in this reconciliation, she argues, for both church and family embodied "interdependent social relationships" that promoted communal values within a voluntaristic and private framework (p. 134). Bloch reveals most clearly how gender can add to our understanding of the complex relationship between republican and liberal ideology in one of the best-known and most influential essays in the volume, "Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America." Extending the argument that she makes in her essay on "the rise of the moral mother," Bloch demonstrates how the very concept of virtue became feminized during the eighteenth century. By examining the role of evangelical religion, literary sentimentalism, and Scottish moral philosophy in this transformation, Bloch reveals that there was much more to revolutionary ideology than just classical republicanism or liberalism. And by looking at the transformation in the meaning of virtue, Bloch shows how Americans in this period reconciled the growing acceptance of a political order based on the "utilitarian pursuit of self interest" with their persisting attachment to the republican ideal of a virtuous society (p. 151). As Bloch demonstrates, by making women responsible for virtue, white male Americans could freely embrace the pursuit of individual self-interest without feeling as though they had abandoned the classical republican ideal of the public good altogether. In her efforts to resolve and transcend the debate over the relative influence of classical republican ideology and liberalism, Bloch is part of–and has indeed played an important role in–a larger trend in revolutionary historiography. Like her, scholars have come to recognize the complex relationship between these ideologies and the role of other cultural traditions such as evangelical religion and Scottish moral thought on the revolutionary generation.[2]

As her discussion of these cultural traditions reveals, Bloch is also deeply concerned with placing American developments in a transatlantic context. Here, too, Bloch is part of a larger historiographical trend, as, like her, scholars of American history–particularly of the colonial era–have become increasingly interested in analyzing the nation's history from a transnational perspective. Not only were both America and Europe influenced by many of the same intellectual and social transformations, according to Bloch; these changes also had similar implications for definitions of gender on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, she argues, with the rise of evangelical religion and industrialization, both England and America saw the emergence of a greater sense of differentiation between men and women, and of the belief in female moral authority during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While her analysis thus departs from an exceptionalist view of American history, Bloch, at the same time, argues that America was distinctive in certain respects, particularly with regard to religion, for the spe-

cial influence of dissenting Protestantism on the American colonists made them "particularly receptive to sentimentalist understandings of women" (p. 9). By showing how colonial and Revolutionary Americans at once differed from and resembled their European contemporaries, Bloch offers a complex perspective on the long-standing debate over American exceptionalism. Just as she transcends the debate over liberalism and classical republicanism, Bloch also goes beyond the "golden-age" debate about whether or not women in the colonial era were better off than their nineteenth-century successors. Hence, Bloch is careful to avoid portraying the history of women in linear terms as a narrative of either progress or decline.[3] Instead, throughout the essays, Bloch offers a sophisticated and complex analysis of the double-edged implications of the developments she examines. For example, as she acknowledges, while the rise of the ideal of the moral mother enhanced women's moral and social authority in many ways, this ideal also served to limit and confine women to their role as mothers. While she emphasizes the importance of ideas, Bloch's analysis is never reductive. In her emphasis on intellectual and cultural forces, Bloch does not discount the importance of more concrete political and economic developments such as the American Revolution or the advent of industrialization. Rather, she seeks to provide a corrective to scholars in women's history who have privileged material forces at the expense of ideas and to illuminate the complex intersection between the material and the cultural. As she argues, political and economic conditions alone do not determine women's status, for the impact of such material forces depends on the "patterns of thought" that shape and mediate perceptions of those forces (pp. 13-14). Thus, in her final essay, she examines how the consumer revolution intersected with ideas about romantic love in the development of an alternative understanding of the relationship between private and public–and in turn, between male and female–to the ideology of separate spheres. Modeling social relationships on both marriage and the voluntary interactions of the marketplace, this alternative formulation, in contrast to the ideology of separate spheres, blurred the boundaries between private and public and based social harmony on the interdependence and mutuality embodied by both commercial exchanges and love-based marriage. Perhaps the most provocative part of her analysis–and the most open to debate–is the dichotomy Bloch sets up between power and material interest, on the one hand, and culture, or what she calls "intangible definitions of meaning," on the other (p. 21). After noting scholarly criticisms of this dichotomy, and acknowledging that "no such separation exists in real life, or in history," Bloch nevertheless argues that such a distinction can serve as a useful analytical and conceptual tool for historians (p. 22). One question that could be raised about her analysis, however, is whether she needs to broaden her definition of power itself to include non-material forms of power, for in the opposition she sets up between power and culture, she seems concerned primarily with concrete, material forms of power such as economic or political power. Hence, when she speaks of power, she uses terms like "coercive power and material gain" (p. 3), or "utilitarian interests" (p. 40). If we define power more broadly to mean the desire for control (whether that control be material, intellectual, or psychological), then it becomes even more difficult–and more problematic–to separate the desire for meaning from the desire for power, for, it could be argued that the search for meaning can provide people with an intangible sense of power by enabling them to predict and control the world of their concerns.

Yet simply in provoking such debates and questions, Bloch reveals the significance of her work as a contribution to new ways of approaching women's history. In turn, by demonstrating the importance of ideas to our understanding of women's history, Bloch's work also makes a significant contribution to intellectual history more generally.

Notes

[1]. On the historiography of the ideology of separate spheres, see Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," in her *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 159-199.

[2]. Important works in this debate include Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969); Robert Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (January 1972): 49-80; Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); and Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of*

a Party Ideology (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978).

[3]. On this trend, see Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11-38. On the influence of other cultural traditions, such as religion and Scottish moral thought, see, for example, James Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics of Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987): 9-33; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage, 1978); and Daniel Walker Howe, "European Sources of Political Ideas in Jeffersonian America," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982): 28-44.

[4]. On the "golden age" debate, see Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 593-619.