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(Yelena V. Mayakovsky)

THE  
**ACCIDENTAL THEORIST**

The Double Helix of Everyday Life

Excerpt: Chapters 9, 10

BOOK 1

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THE HESTIA TRILOGY



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## Hestianeutics: Deconstructing Hermean Language

[W]hen texts are at issue...the technique is to read against the grain, beneath the surface, through the gaps in order to determine what every classificatory term—slaves, guardians, women, mothers—excludes in the very process of drawing together commonalities. The unstated premise here is that no classification, no stipulation, is innocent; every one is selective and hence exclusionary. The task, then, is to learn to see—to *perceive*—the exclusions, to understand the politics of inclusion that produces them.

—Lorraine Code

Goodin (1977) observes that the affective substratum of language is less accessible to empirical study than most social scientists would care to admit. However, the substratum of language, of the common core of human ideas, lingers beneath the surface in our idioms and key forms of expression. In this book, “hearth and home” represents such a usage. Goodin points to the “inertia” of linguistic routines which reflect the “institutional inertia” of public institutions which tend to persist long after the objective conditions to which they first responded have given way to new conditions requiring new responses. I would argue that they are not “new conditions” but manifestations of “old conditions” that, sooner or later, erupt, explode, or even implode to challenge the established norms of the socially-constructed hermean domain. They are the site at which unintended outcomes disturb the equilibrium of the social order. They are the invisible sources of civil disorder first felt as dissatisfaction in the hestian domain. The personal gets translated into the political or even the apolitical from time to time. New language develops to mask old power relations.

As discussed in Chapter 8, those who occupy different locations in the social world (like people who occupy different locations in the physical world) literally see reality differently. Through perspectival analysis of two distinctive sets of orienting assumptions based on social location, one can “read between the lines” and “against the grain,” as proposed in the epi-

graph. We can do this along two consistent orienting axes: the *oikos*-centered hestian perspective and the *polis*-centered hermean perspective.

The Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm facilitates comparison of a broad range of human activities within two general frames of intelligibility that depend on standpoint. Adherence to one or another set of orienting assumptions leads to explanations within different frames of intelligibility (Thompson 1988; 1992). Even as language structures reality, what is left out of language becomes invisible. But language repeated too often may go unattended. That explains why novel language is so appealing even when it does not express novel ideas. Sometimes meanings are collapsed into categories that betray the subtleties of experience based on obvious differences in favor of obvious characteristics based on obvious sameness—a standard of “sameness” reinforced by patriarchal epistemes.

### Dual Standpoints and Dual Contexts

Must Adrienne Rich’s “dream of a common language” lead to a totalizing feminist discourse to replace a totalizing masculinist discourse? I think we need a discourse in which both women and men can speak to each other in their common humanity. Speaking and writing depend on the conventional systems of signification we embed in language. Languages are understood in context. For example, the menu of a French restaurant is not the menu on my computer program. Nor is the icon in a church the icon on my computer screen! I recall that when I spoke to one of my graduate classes of an “icon,” I was speaking of a “sports icon” (i.e., a “role model”), and my students reacted with blank looks. They knew the word only with reference to their computer screens. And, as I was adjusting the computer on which this book was written, “wallpaper” refers not to a type of wall covering but to a design that appears on the screen to save it. So context at the practical level is one thing. Context at the theoretical level is another. The hestian/hermean standpoints develop from hestian/hermean contexts and lead to two “languages” that are context-dependent and may be understood differently depending on the frame of intelligibility employed.

Resorting to the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm allows us—prior to addressing issues of gender—to identify two organizing points of reference, two poles of truth—with each domain providing a standpoint, starting point, position, and perspective. The lens of analysis thus provided is not gender-based. The new paradigm goes beyond gender. It can help us

hold in mind seemingly incompatible claims in a both/and frame of reference rather than in the more familiar either/or formulations. It also distances us from the notions that sex and gender limit our capacities to identify that which is uniquely human, not uniquely female/feminine or male/masculine.

A feminist perspective that values the experiences of women can be based on a standpoint in either the *oikos*-system or the *polis*-system. As Kenneth Gergen has pointed out, we are limited in our conclusions by the orienting assumptions that guide our inquiry and that make our discourses intelligible. Thus the meanings we attach to certain concepts will be shaped by and in turn shape our common language and become part of what we like to call "common sense." What we count as "common sense" in the hestian domain may seem quite senseless from the reference frame of the hermean domain and vice versa. The paradoxes and contradictions we try to resolve between incommensurable paradigms can then be explained by becoming sensitive to, and recognizing the power of, the ideologies inherent in the hestian/hermean perspectives. The process of hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci describes it, allows a dominant group to establish the cultural common sense (cited in Hennessy, 1993a, 22). Most often, this ruling elite is not only male-defined but also serves the distinctly hermean objectives of dominance, power, and control.

Over the centuries, we have seen various cycles of hestian/hermean ideological practices become influential. For example, I would say that the hestian concerns of Jesus of Nazareth eventually gave way to the hermean goals of organized religion. A direct and personal ethic of care gave way to an indirect and impersonal ethic of control. Taking a great historical leap, I would also say that the Victorian ideology that sought to elevate the domestic realm to parity with the civic realm has been largely criticized by modern feminists as a "cult of domesticity." They judge it negatively because it seemed to restrict women to the devalued domestic domain and to discourage them from seeking a role in the more valued public domain. As will be discussed in Chapter 11, I believe it was the Victorian domestic reformers' intent to make the private hestian domain equal to the public hermean domain because they knew that the well-being of each domain depends on the well-being of the other. This domestic ideology was a complement to the civic ideology of a developing republic.

Lacking a common language, it is difficult to articulate the values and beliefs that inform a particular position without contesting and challeng-

ing those perspectives developed from within the reference frame of the Other. Each domain grounds its symbolic order within its own frame of intelligibility. Thus we speak of the language of love and the language of power. When we genderize the organizing principles of everyday life, we forget that much of what has been called "women's work" is, in actuality, hestian work that could be done by men or women in a world that is not only gender-equitable but that values the contributions of the hestian domain to our humanness. These are not gender issues. They are values, language, and communication issues.

### Deconstructing Hermean Language

As a little girl, the first lesson I learned about language was that I could not find myself in it. Once we passed "Dick and Jane," it was hard to find girls except in books written especially for them. As I grew older and read more complex texts in philosophy and political theory, this became even more apparent. By making the exclusion of the female and the feminine from language an issue, feminist critics raised the consciousness of writers, editors, and publishers. I myself was a book editor when the ubiquitous "he" was often changed to "she" and sometimes to s/he or to pronouns that were presumed to be neutral. Nouns were suspect, and "fireman" became "firefighter" and "policeman" became "police officer." It didn't always work, of course, but it broke the androcentric assumption that any individual in authority was always male. But other problems remained that were more subtle and more invidious. As feminist writers grew bolder, other assumptions implicit in language surfaced. Postmodern feminists, influenced by Derridean theories of language and text, have written extensively on women's exclusion from language and the consequences of such exclusion on self-knowledge. As laid out by Elaine Marx:

The principal methodology of post-structuralism is deconstruction: to split the binary pair (masculine/feminine; active/passive, sun/moon) and show one term inhabiting the other; to show inconsistencies in major arguments through attention to detail; *to locate the inevitable blind spot hiding within crucial metaphors*; to contextualize both within the individual texts and by placing the individual texts in relation to other texts of the same period but of different genres, or in relation to intertexts that both precede and follow. (1985, 174, emphasis mine)

FIGURE 9.1

## DECONSTRUCTING HERMEAN LANGUAGE

### Two Frames of Intelligibility

#### Hestian Concepts

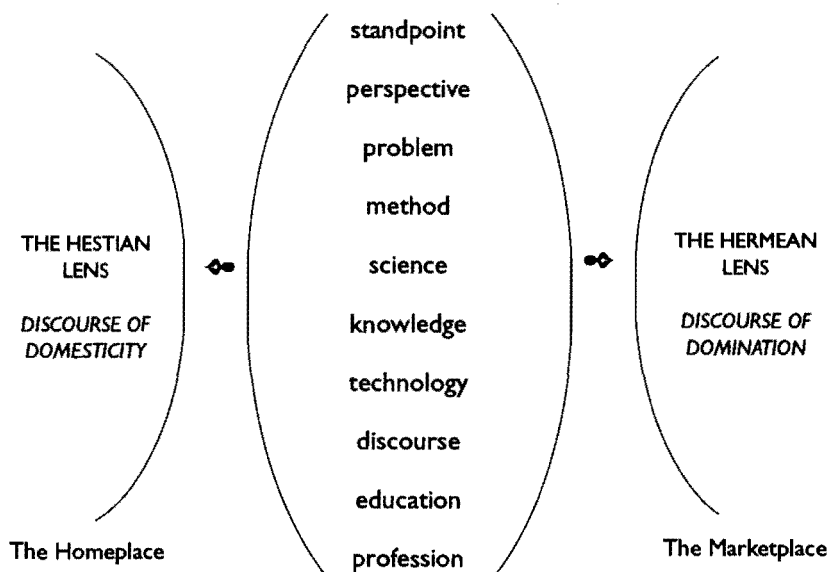
*Caring/Connecting*

*Sustenance/Nurturance*

#### Hermean Concepts

*Controlling/Dominating*

*Governance/Dominance*



The post-structuralist view that language itself is contradictory can be subjected to a hestian/hermean analysis so that the contradictions—in the English language at least—can be disclosed as representing two linguistic “turns” with contesting subliminal messages in the discourse of domesticity and the discourse of domination. Each word will “mean” something different, depending on one’s standpoint and frame of intelligibility, i.e., whether seen through a hestian or a hermean lens.

To a certain extent, the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm may appear to “re-constitute” the binary pair, but it does so for a different reason, namely to allow two terms to define each other and to show how two meanings inhabit the same linguistic structure. In this way, inconsistencies can be revealed and understood in both their sameness and their difference. We have tried to show the “blind spot” hidden in the metaphor of “hearth and home” by re-visiting ancient texts and meanings and recognizing the binary pair as representing dual social locations that contextualize our usages by their absence as well as by their presence.

Without digressing into a technical discussion of deconstruction, I would like to apply the deconstructive process to some commonly understood words in order to contextualize them by reading them through the lenses of the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm. I believe this exercise can lead to a new understanding of some common English nouns:

- knowledge
- technology
- science
- education
- work
- profession

We can read each word in two ways: first, we recognize the word and attach to it our commonly shared “dictionary” definitions. I would suggest that these are the meanings given to words within the dominant hermean paradigm. If we preface each word with “hestian,” however, a submerged alternative meaning emerges. (See Figure 9.1) Let us examine the short list from the hestian side of the paradigm.

*Hestian knowledge* is knowledge created and used in the hestian domain. It is knowledge created—in the broadest possible way and from the widest possible sources—to inform problems related to the sustenance and nurturance of individuals and groups over the lifespan. Thus it relates to a wide variety of knowledges—from recipes to nutrition and psychology textbooks—related to human development and well-being. Knowledge related to every stage in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has a place in the hestian knowledge system (Thompson 1984a). But it must also be applied rationally, that is, it must be applied in ways that promote the goals of the hestian systems of action.

Broadly defined, *technology* is the way knowledge is organized for a useful purpose. Technology is neutral until it is put to use. Even bombs and nuclear energy are inert until activated (through praxis) for some purpose. *Hestian technology* is organized to assist with systems of action developed to achieve the sustenance/nurturance goals of the hestian domain related, for example,



to food, clothing, shelter, child and elder care, and such associated activities as communication, enculturation, and socialization. This includes such "soft" technologies as cooking, gardening, sewing, and managing household resources. Technology that serves the goals of dominance and governance can be called hermean. This includes such "hard" technologies as nuclear power and modern factory and agricultural production.

Science, as a unique form of knowledge arrived at through careful analysis of empirical evidence, can also be deconstructed. *Hestian science* pursues the discovery of relationships and connections in the natural and human world. *Hermean science* explores relations of dominance and control in the natural and human world. Scientific "facts" can be marshalled to support either hestian or hermean goals.

*Hestian education* organizes information and knowledge from an *oikos*-centric perspective (including hermean science and technology). Hestian education seeks to inform actions and decisions made in the hestian domain and to relate them to education in the hermean domain. It would extend to such female-intensive fields of practice as nursing, social work, home economics, guidance counseling, and early childhood education where the goal is to empower individuals and to bring out their capacities for self-development, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. It also focuses on household/family processes that sustain and nurture individuals and families.

*Hestian work* is effort and energy directed to providing the goods and services involved in sustenance and nurturance such as housing, child care, household care and property maintenance, personal finance, consumer education, nutrition, guidance counseling, and parenting. *Hermean work* takes the decisions for such matters out of the hands of the individual and family group in the homeplace and transfers it to a depersonalized agency or institution in the hermean, profit-making marketplace.

By and large, the designation "profession" usually implies a specialist or expert in a hermean field of endeavor. Feminists have raised the question about women and the professions. Shouldn't women be able to argue for the professionalization of hestian work in an age of expanding knowledge and technology (Thompson, 1984a, b)?

These are but a few examples of how looking through hestian/hermean lenses can help to disclose meaning and improve understanding of everyday language. They offer an alternative perspective from which to view language and discourse. Submerged, muted, or forgotten meanings can be identified. Again, the goal here is to recognize that physical and social location

shape how we see. Many languages are “gendered.” It is a mistake to think the English language is gender-neutral simply because most nouns are neutral. The gender bias in the English language is easy to detect. Implicit in the definition of English words are those denotations and connotations historically legitimated by patriarchal reality-definers. Recognizing that our linguistic usages are also *polis*-centric, however, requires us to see, hear, speak, read, and listen differently.

### Deconstructing Two Discursive Practices

Discursive practices are those spoken and unspoken rules that define how and what can be said and read, who writes and who reads, who speaks and who listens, whose constructions of reality are accepted and define the horizon of intelligibility, what is deemed of sufficient importance to be included in a text or conversation, and what—because of the listener’s own frame of intelligibility—is neither heard, understood, nor deemed to be significant.

Michel Foucault has pointed to the power relations that operate in the control of discourse. Power resides in the gatekeepers of discourse, those who introduce ideas from one domain of knowledge to another and who deny access to the dominant discourse to some marginalized groups on the basis that they have “nothing to say” or they are “not worth listening to.” In every generation, the most influential thinkers have held a unique power—power over the human mind through the influence of their discursive practices. Standard references to the public sphere are presented and re-presented in the ruling texts that constitute the hermean discourse of domination. By contrast, the hestian discourse of domesticity consistently supports texts that support “the rule of relationships.” They move the familial to parity with the political, a move that accounts for the popularity of books in the self-help genre.

### The Discourses of Domesticity and Domination

By “discourse” I mean a common language and common meanings shared by those occupying a “discourse territory” or a social space in which communication occurs. The Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm challenges the monovocal discourse of domination, inherent in patriarchy, which is assumed to be authoritative and is certainly totalizing. All household life and political life is discursive. Patterned communication is essential for

ongoing, intersubjective and interpersonal activities in both the hestian and the hermean systems. What is deemed "practicable" and what is deemed "reasonable" or "rational" depends on which system's goals are being advanced. Whereas the discourse of the hestian domain involves domestic units with particular and universal needs, the discourse of the hermean domain involves civic units (local, regional, state, provincial, national, and global) with institutional needs.

The discourse of domesticity is personal and private, centered on the sustenance and nurturance needs basic to human survival. The discourse of domination is typically an open-ended, public conversation in which all citizens could theoretically contribute on the basis of shared understanding. This option has historically been denied to women. Patriarchal authority is embedded in hegemonic discourse. It is a language unified in its goal to control rather than to connect people and to ignore rather than to respect their differences.

The passage of time brings formal language with new layers of meaning into the vernacular such that what were once the coinages of a disciplinary or professional specialty become words in the common parlance of the populace. Such words as "ego," "trauma," "clone," and "stem cell," for example, have been removed from their privileged intellectual uses to become part of the everyday language of significant numbers of people who are unfamiliar with the original "authors" who promoted their use. When such words break loose from their original moorings they take on—as I expect "hestian" and "hermean" may eventually do—slightly distorted or imprecise meanings in vernacular language.

If social change is a goal of the feminist project, can it be conducted in the language of patriarchy or from within the discourse of domination? Can males ever be persuaded that language legitimized by women to voice their interests can be comfortably adopted by men to voice theirs? Or is this new language better able to express the relationship between one set of interests (the hestian) over and against another set of interests (the hermean)? The hestian discourse of domesticity is parsed in everyday vernacular usage that even the uneducated can, in most cases, comprehend. The Other is parsed in the formal language communicated by philosophers, scientists, scholars, and intellectuals among themselves, often with different esoteric meanings attached to each.

On the one hand, we have a seemingly unrefined "babble" or "buzzing" of colloquial hestian language. On the other hand, we have the privileged

language of professionals and experts which creates a unified discourse of the few at the expense of the contesting discourses of the many. The discourse of domination excludes rather than includes the "voices" of ordinary people—the *hoi poloi*. Sometimes hermean speakers adopt hestian speakers' language for their own purposes, as when they appropriate the term "family values" as an aid to manipulating popular opinion. This would be an example of the "cunning language" employed by Hermes.

In his own way, Wittgenstein sensed this tension when he said, "every familiar word, book, for example, actually carries an atmosphere with it in our minds, a 'corona' of lightly indicated uses ..." (1953, VI, 181). Hestian language may be comprised of "lightly indicated uses," while hermean language is made up of more heavily indicated (and therefore dominant) usages. In any case, the two languages embedded in these dual discourses play off each other at both unconscious and conscious levels, inviting us to deconstruct them.

#### The Discourse of Domestic Economy and the Discourse of Political Economy

A discourse developed to deal with the invisible aspects of household life would constitute a discourse of *domestic economy*. A discourse developed to deal with the visible aspects of public life would constitute a discourse of *political economy*. I use the example of household or home economics and domestic economy as examples of hestian discourse, and I use economics and political economy as examples of hermean discourse.

In American usage, the domestic economy and political economy were concepts prior to the linguistic change represented by replacing "economy" with "science," i.e., domestic science and political science. The change reflects the emphasis on prediction and control essential to the scientific method, a method today undergoing significant feminist reappraisal (Bordo 1986; Hubbard 1988). Others have also challenged whether the discourse labeled "scientific" is, in fact, constitutive of "Truth." In the United States, an early effort on the part of Victorian moral philosophers such as Catharine Beecher (1800-1878) to place texts on domestic economy on the same plane as texts on political economy met with astonishingly popular acceptance. In her time, the term *domestic science* was used to contrast with and complement the term *political science*. Thus there was an implicit recognition that each discourse represented the unique perspective of a particular domain.

The "hestian logic" of Beecher's perspective and arguments will be discussed in Chapter 11.

Lorraine Code summarizes Ruth Ginzberg's contention that "gyno-centric *science*," which centers on women's traditional knowledge and skills, does exist—invisibly, because it has been labeled "art," as for example, "the *art* of midwifery, the *art* of cooking, or the *art* of homemaking." Had these "arts" been developed in traditionally male practices, they might have earned the labels "obstetrical *science*" and "family *social science*" (1991a, 233-4, citing Ruth Ginzberg, "Uncovering Gynocentric Science," 1987, 91-2). We might add that "domestic science" might also have been better received. If we accept science as socially constructed and its language as patriarchally coded by definition, then science is as vulnerable to a charge of representing a monofocal patriarchal perspective as is any other human activity.

Code points out that recognizing knowledge construction as dependent on its "location" is the same as claiming that knowledge is determined by it. These factors constitute the stuff out of which knowers, as both creators of meaning and as actors, must construct their meanings, purposes, and actions. They not only limit the constructive process, they give it shape as well. They do not obliterate it (1991a, 269). Thus systems of knowledge are built on assumptions related to our location in the social world as well as on our gendered experiences in that location. They are communicated in hestian/hermean discourses. Gender expectations are not the only product of socialization and enculturation. Perspectives are also grounded in social and cultural conditioning. Perspective is the unrecognized component in the way we think, see, act, and discourse.

The hestian standpoint and voice challenge hegemonic, hermean discourse and the patriarchal order (Thompson 1982a). The Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm allows us to re-frame discourse so that an excluded category is reintroduced to our perspective. That standpoint provides a perspective from which one speaks in a hestian voice (Thompson 1992a, b, c, d). If we turn to the possibilities inherent in an *oikos*-centric perspective to fit, we can explain why contemporary political concepts are inadequate to deal with proliferating economic and social problems that originate in dysfunctional domestic units. We are often entertained by books addressing gender and communication, i.e., "women are from Venus—men are from Mars." At issue are the processes of gender socialization and gender enculturation that reinforce certain standpoints and viewpoints for males and "Other" standpoints and viewpoints for females and disadvantaged or

oppressed males on identical phenomena, processes, or events. The social construction of "otherness" is linked to the uncritical acceptance of a single androcentric perspective and the acceptance of that monofocal perspective as the basis for a monological discourse. That monological discourse supports the relations of ruling in the hermean domain. But there is—in the language of systems theory—a parallogical discourse that supports the systems of action that support the rule of relationships in the hestian domain.

While we speak of women who think like men, we have no idioms that identify men who think like women. (Nevertheless, a man who displays emotion is often said to *act* like a woman.) Women and men think and feel on a continuum of cognitive and emotive levels. A purely cognitive approach is labeled "rational," and this concept is implicit in Western intellectual life. By contrast, an emotive approach is labeled "intuitive" and is ranked of lesser value than the rational. It may even be characterized as "irrational" or "a-rational," thus privileging the androcentric definition of "rationality." Can we agree that the extent to which nonemotive, rational thinking is encouraged in males and emotive, intuitive thinking is encouraged in females is a matter of enculturation and socialization rather than of inborn, essential differences in the intellectual capacities of *all* females and *all* males?

There is no "way of thinking" unique to either sex. Does the suggestion that rational thinking is exclusively masculine and emotive thinking is exclusively feminine stand up to commonsense observation? No one I know operates exclusively in one mode or the other; context makes a difference. We all know men who are emotional and women who are rational. I characterize these dual modes as promoting a hestian discourse (affective) and a hermean discourse (instrumental). These descriptors derive from the overarching goals of each domain. Individuals develop capacities in both modes, but meaning is influenced by context; therefore, what is rational in a hestian context may be considered irrational in a hermean context. The mode appropriate for one domain may be inappropriate for the other. That the modes of discourse shift with individuals and circumstances is not at issue here. We need to recognize that each domain—the private hestian (domestic) domain and the public hermean (civic) domain—supports a characteristic mode of discourse related to standpoint.

What is true historically of our textual traditions is that those modes that have been debated publicly enter into a legitimated and formal discursive tradition transmitted through ruling texts of various kinds that guide public discourse. Rejected or marginalized ideas generally attain only lim-

ited circulation and become accessible only if and when they become texts. They often enter discursive traditions transmitted through informal, oral, or narrative means. If they are written, they may be classified as "ephemera." In effect, they are unvoiced. In any case, they are excluded from the discursive norms of the public sphere. What is manifest, however, is that there is no institutionalized social mechanism—except perhaps the Family—by which coherent and continuous discourse associated with the hestian domain is consciously transmitted from one generation to the next.

### Challenging Hegemonic Discourse

For some time, that which (like Hestia) "went without saying" was left unspoken and, after a time, became invisible. One of contemporary feminism's inherent disadvantages is its dependence on hermean authorities and experts when attempting to articulate a hestian perspective that has, for millennia, been the special—but by no means the exclusive—province of women. Patriarchal control of discourse (and ultimately the weight of masculist textual representation) perpetuates the disadvantaged status of women and especially of women who believe in and value the activities that contribute to the sustenance and nurturance of successive generations of human beings.

Observing that hegemonic discourse always has slips or cracks in its coherence, Rosemary Hennessy recognizes these slips and/or cracks as spaces in or from which alternative or counterhegemonic discourses arise. She believes that critique—especially the critique of Marxist materialist feminism—"issues from these cracks, historicizes them, and claims them as a basis for an alternative narrative" (27). There is an inherent difficulty in the notion of historicizing discourse in that history itself is a bivalent concept; there is a history of the Household/Family and a history of the Government/State. There is a history of men and male-defined interests and a history of women who "fit in" with male-defined interests. But there is no history of women's changing relationship to issues that could be claimed as hestian interests. There is yet to be a history written that allows these dual aspects of history to play off against each other's often contesting narratives. To my mind, the discourse of domesticity is a counter narrative, and it is the unvoiced challenges that come from domestic spaces ("homeplaces") that become the sources of ambiguity and contradiction in public spaces ("marketplaces").

Within the discursive practices of the hestian domain lie challenges to the dominant epistememes of patriarchy that mainstream feminists believe they are uniquely qualified to contest. For example, applying a hermean lens of analysis to counterhegemonic texts (usually expressed in vernacular rather than theoretical language), many feminist critics have ignored "women's fields" that speak in a hestian voice. We can use the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm to decode women's texts and understand their significance for each of the dual domains in a particular historical period. Doing so may solve some issues that seem paradoxical by identifying the parallogics generated within them.

The message conveyed to me by the discourse of domination is that, if I wish to achieve recognition from either masculist or feminist critics, I must "dis-place" myself (as *zoon oikonomikon*) from the "first order" private sphere of the Household/Family and "place" myself (as *zoon politikon*) in the "second order" public sphere of the Government/State and its agencies. No matter how unwelcome I may be made to feel there, I must emulate their discourses. At the same time, to be true to my "self," as a feminist, I must resist being drawn into the discourse of domination that would direct me to dominate or subordinate others (employees, coworkers, other women, or children, for example) because it is a discourse that excludes me from the category "knowing subject." I must resist concepts of self-knowledge that deny the significance of gender as an aspect of my "true" self. I must also resist discourses (feminist and masculist) that de-value the hestian domain and the discourse that supports its systems of action.

### The Hermean Discourse Territory

It is not merely the silencing of women and their exclusion from the public world of the symposia and the agora but the suppression of the divergent standpoint I call "hestian" that needs to be redressed. In essence, the dialogues that purport to be dialectical serve, in fact, to limit our thinking to the two sides of an issue that are essentially two sides of the same patriarchal coin. Both sides of the argument emanate from the hermean standpoint. Such arguments restrict our capacity to view reality holistically, i.e., to view reality "bifocally," seeing it from both sides of the *oikos/polis*, domestic/civic, private/public split.

We must also recognize that perspectives differ depending on whether one is inside or outside Plato's cave. Perspective depends on where one stands,



and it depends on which standpoint is privileged and why. Applying the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm allows us a new way of seeing and a new language with which to discuss the muted discourse emanating from the perspective of the *oikos*-system. Not only have women been excluded from public discourse, but an alternative hestian perspective on what might make a “good human being” or constitute the “good life” has never provided an equal venue for philosophical debate. Ever since the classical period, women and men have been limited in our discursive practices to the public sphere hermean discourse territory marked out by patriarchy.

### The Limits of the Hermeneutic Circle

Hermeneutics, the practice of textual interpretation, derives from Hermes, protector of public spaces and communication (see Chapter 5). Gadamer (1976) conceives hermeneutics as a quest for agreement among rational beings who are divided by a multiplicity of languages and even by cultures separated by time and space. He does not address gender issues in language. However, he does say:

We must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding and in this way realize the possibility that ‘other’ aims emerge in their own right from tradition—which is nothing other than realizing the possibility that we can understand something in its ‘otherness.’ (156)

In thus embracing “otherness” as an aspect of understanding, Gadamer’s intention is to make the Other an equal partner in dialogue by allowing ourselves to be challenged by the Other’s position (Vitkin 1995, 7). To the extent that gender represents a prejudice that governs understanding, understanding is also influenced by standpoint. Standpoint and viewpoint are related. Reference to the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm represents an approach to the problem of “otherness” in the Western textual tradition. It invites a “hestianeutic” approach to the meaning of discourse from the standpoint of the *oikos*-centric domain as well as a female “Other.”

### The Hestianeutic Circle

Hermeneutics developed as a way to examine texts and discourse from a public-world, typically androcentric, perspective. Despite Gadamer’s recognition of “otherness,” hermeneutic interpretations of standard texts serve to reinforce hermean intentions rather than introduce alternative readings

from the domain of "otherness" which, in the present case, is the hestian domain and its systems of action. The "circle of understanding," as Gadamer calls it, is a closed system of patriarchally legitimated signs that has as its implicit goal the establishment and maintenance, through language, of hierarchies of domination/subordination in the conduct of human affairs.

Feminist thinkers must ask if a hermean, *polis*-centric standpoint for interpretation is appropriate for texts and discourses produced to address unmarked needs in a nonpublic context. I believe that an analysis of the hestian domain's discourse of domesticity requires a "hestianeutics" so that reading between the lines and reading against the grain, as Code suggests, becomes systematic (in the broadest sense). A hestianeutic is necessary to get at the meaning of texts that support the "rule of relationships" associated with hestian systems of action in domestic units in the *oikos*-system that complement the "relationships of ruling" associated with hermean systems of action in civic units in the *polis*-system.

Language and discourse have been under the control of powerful, most often male, reality-definers. Privileging the male-supported hermean perspective distorts our understanding of the human. Male control of language and of ideas creates obstacles to an understanding of the totality of human experience from a perspective that is neither masculinist nor feminist in its privileged exclusivity.

The collective goal of hermean systems of action is the maintenance of the patriarchy through systems of dominance and governance that go by various names. The hermeneutic tradition does not challenge the epistemic authority of the male voice or the epistemic privileging of the *polis*-centric, hermean standpoint. Texts are repeated (iterated) from one age to the next by one master narrator to the next. In effect, they are reinterpreted from one masculinist tradition to another, often through newly-coined language or novel usages of old language. Linguistically speaking, patriarchy is a moving target. No sooner do women enter into the language system (Wittgenstein calls them "games") of their time than communities of male scholars and hermean gatekeepers control the development of neologisms in other parts of the language system.

### Hestianeutic/Hermeneutic Interpretation

While there is no uniform feminist linguistic challenge to the ideas that lie beneath the surface of patriarchal language, writers (both male and female)

use language to challenge the master narratives of “the fathers.” This repetitive cycle of attack and defense and constant iteration and reinterpretation of masculinist concepts—sometimes (it must be admitted) by women—comprises the patriarchal canon, i.e., the standard system of interrelated written texts in various forms (books, laws, rules, regulations, critiques, etc.) that support the relations of ruling.

By contrast, a hestianeutic interpretation discloses a discourse of domesticity with the goal of sustenance and nurturance in the hestian system. It is not—indeed, from the “get go” it could not be—civic or political in the basic meaning of those terms. This makes the feminist mantra “the personal is political” theoretically indefensible by virtue of the different domains in which these terms have their “is-ness” or “being.” The personal is private/particular. It involves actions in the invisible hestian sphere. The institution devoted to this endeavor is the Family in its various and diverse forms and the socially constructed systems of action designed to meet the needs of family ecosystems. The political is public. It involves actions in the visible hermean sphere. The institution devoted to this endeavor is the State and its various and diverse forms of government. On a systems view, actors are agentic in carrying the “personal” and the “political” across the boundaries of the hestian/hermean systems. To the extent that politics deals with issues of power or authority, similar (but not identical) issues of power and authority surface in family ecosystems.

### Taking the “Hestian Turn”

To take the “hestian turn” in our conceptual world requires us to take a “linguistic turn” as well. If we adopt an *oikos*-centric perspective on the human condition, we can explain why political concepts alone are inadequate to deal with proliferating economic and social problems. Attempts to deal with hunger, homelessness, and family fragility from a *polis*-centric, hermean, public world perspective are doomed to fail because they are issues that arise in the hestian space of our common world.

Carol Pateman (1988) observes that the continual forgetting of domestic life creates a negation at the very heart of social contract theory. By virtue of its disavowal, domestic life became and remains a problematic boundary of civil society. She says:

because liberalism conceptualizes civil society in abstraction from ascriptive domestic life, the latter remains forgotten in theoretical dis-

cession. The separation between private and public is thus reestablished as a division within civil society itself, within the world of men. (122)

This is clearly a *perspectival* as well as gender issue. The bifocal perspective suggested by the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm is not meant to establish a feminist/masculist equality but to restore balance to the conceptual world (open to both women and men) by accepting the private/public, *oikos/polis*, domestic/civic as interactive, interconnected, interdependent systems of human action as the grounding for distinctive discursive practices. Although women enter a world of preconstructed and patriarchally legitimated language, they begin to accept or reject its meaning for themselves as soon as they start to think. Perhaps Mrs. Aristotle would have said that men are morally inferior to women in the hestian domain.

The "hestian turn" forces us to think of how and why people see things so differently that conflicts escalate and communication shuts down. The Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm is an effort to re-vision and reclaim this intuitively held but socially excluded perspective and to bring the hestian knowledge system and the subsystems of human action it generates into discourse. Its approach, or method, is to subject selected texts—classic and contemporary—to perspectival analysis related both to the gender of the knower and to the knower's orienting assumptions with respect to the hestian/hermean domains.

The hestian/hermean paradigm's dual lenses enable us to distinguish the particularistic and private from the public "held in common" world. It can be used to see the double helix of everyday life holistically. The recovery of the hestian in everyday life is of paramount importance as humanity enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is important to feminism, too. We need to consider how a dual systems perspective combined with recognition of the social construction of two interdependent systems of human action can improve our understanding of the world in which we live and of the gender relations that have so far limited the development of many women's and men's fullest human potential.

## Revisiting Fustel's "Ancient City"

History does not study material facts and institutions alone; its true object of study is the human mind: it should aspire to know what this mind believed, thought, and felt in the different ages of life of the human race.

—Numa Fustel de Coulanges

In this chapter I revisit one of the most influential texts in the study of public law and government. I will try to show how the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm reveals a long-lost hestian subtext. In 1858, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), a graduate student at the École Normale Supérieure of Paris, presented two theses to obtain his doctorate. One was on Polybius (*Polybe, ou la Grèce conquise*), written in French, and the other on Vesta (*Quid Vestae cultus in institutis veterum privatis publicisque valuerit*) written in Latin. This research launched the career of a leading French scholar who, in combining the perspectives of the emerging fields of anthropology and sociology with classical sources, anticipated the development of the interdisciplinary *Annales* school of historiography. A major work, *La Cité Antique*, translated as "The Ancient City," traces the development of the "city," i.e., the Greek city-state or *polis*, from the time of Pericles to the "eternal city" of Rome at the time of Cicero. I will suggest that a hestianeutic re-reading of the text will demonstrate how a seemingly objective scholar perpetuates, even imposes, a hermean interpretation on events and texts.<sup>1</sup>

### Re-Visioning Hestian Her-story

As a graduate student in the 1950s, I accepted Fustel's work and its patriarchal, masculinist premises at face value. I found the book a detailed presentation of familiar myth and history that supported the elitist views of my graduate professors at Columbia's School of Public Law and Government (a hermean institution). The book has become a canonical text in political theory and the development of legal institutions. Recently, re-reading the English translation with a view influenced by a Hestian feminist conscious-

ness, I was intrigued by Fustel's language. Since Hestian Feminism draws on metaphors associated with the "hearth goddess," Fustel's repeated references to "the sacred hearth," "the domestic fire," "the sacred fire," and "the holy fire," piqued my curiosity.

The subject of Fustel's second graduate thesis was Vesta, the Roman version of the Greek goddess Hestia. I returned to his work for clues to this near-invisible divinity and her possible influence on Roman thought and institutional development. Quite honestly, I turned the pages to test the value of a hestianeutic reading.<sup>2</sup> Why, I wondered, did Fustel or his translator consistently use such evasive, elusive terms? Why these repeated heteronymous appellations with no reference to the goddess they invoke? In my earlier reading of Fustel, I failed to sense the presence of a powerful goddess. His work seems now to be a typical example of how female readers are kept ignorant of empowering feminist ideas and images from the past. This chapter is not an exercise in revisionist history but an attempt to reclaim the invisible presence of Hestia in Fustel's work.

#### Dis-closing the Hestian Palimpsest in Fustel's Text

It is possible to reveal the hestian palimpsest that underlies Fustel's language when we substitute the word/name *hestia*/Hestia for words like "sacred fire," "hearthfire," and "sacred hearth" throughout his text. In so doing, we can recover lost principles and lost ideas that are potentially empowering for women.<sup>3</sup> When deconstructed and reconstructed in this way, a text takes on a different tone. It also takes on new meaning. Admittedly, to do this project justice would require a word for word, document by document, reinterpretation of the original text, the English translation, and the sources cited by the author. That is not the purpose of this chapter which is but a first step in applying hestianeutics to a body of scholarship (texts, translations, and sources) whose hermean biases may influence women's and men's thinking at critical points in their education.

Fustel asks us to "place ourselves, in thought...in the midst of these ancient generations whose traces have not been entirely effaced, and who delegated their beliefs and their laws to subsequent ages" (105). How different history looks when women place themselves not only in the events but in the thoughts of the past. I leave it to feminist classicists and historians to refine this approach if it has (as I believe it does) the power to unseat the monofocal hermean view of Woman and the feminine in the classical canon.

*The Ancient City* is a work with tightly interwoven themes—kinship, kingship, religion, property rights, agnation, inheritance, myth, private and public law, justice—themes of mastery and control that support the androcentric values and viewpoints of patriarchy in the hermean system. Humphreys comments on Fustel's ambiguity about ancient texts and toward his historical materials and their inherent values (xii). Fustel says our "way of thinking" differs from ancient times. In speaking of certain Roman religious beliefs, he observes that they may appear crude, but they were those of the most intellectual people of ancient times, and their influence is with us still. We can detect internal contradictions as a dialectical struggle between Fustel's hestian subject and his hermean viewpoint.

Fustel bemoans the lack of written records of the "most remote ages," assuming that history can be found only in consciously prepared documents and records. The vestiges of Hestia are not so inscribed. What was the learning of women? What knowledge did they possess? How and what did Hestian/Vestal priestesses learn, and how did they transmit their knowledge to other women? Introducing a hestian lens of analysis affords a radically changed perspective that reveals what might otherwise remain unseen and unheard. This approach is less concerned with a "woman's view" or a "feminist standpoint" than with a perspective grounded in the context wherein women were most intimately involved—the *oikos*—and the activities associated with the transmission of hestian values, i.e., the enduring values of "hearth and home."

If, as Fustel observes, epochs are more easily marked by the succession of ideas and institutions than by years, we must look for the succession of ideas and institutions that were the primary locus/focus of women's lives in every epoch. We must then assess their meaning in relation to those commonly brought to light in historical texts. We must also ask whether hermean texts are reliable sources to be read uncritically. To re-view the essence of hestian history and the institution of the *oikos* discloses two interdependent skeins of human and institutional development occurring simultaneously: the "double helix" I call hestian/ hermean, with one hestian and one hermean strand. Patriarchal texts stress the hermean. Women and men were (and continue to be) enmeshed in both. The rise of patriarchal institutions, however, has served to erase or adumbrate the ideas, activities, and values of the hestian domain. Following the hestian thread of these events requires both a raised feminist consciousness and skill in hestianeutics.

Ariadne's thread led the minotaur out of labyrinthine darkness. That darkness was psychic as well as physical. If we are willing to shift our perspective somewhat so as to include both the private/public, the domestic/civic, and the hestian/hermean, we become *inclusive* as opposed to *exclusive*. We can then argue for the importance of introducing both hestian/hermean interpretations of events and texts to complete the human record.

### The Sacred Fire and the Domestic Religion

Fustel bases his study of Greek and Roman history on an examination of funeral rituals. A proper burial was a precondition to the lasting peace of the dead (10). The belief was that the departed had the same primal necessities—food, wine, a place of rest—as the living, and these had to be provided in order to stave off perpetual hunger, thirst, and aimless wandering in the afterlife. The sacrifice of animals and the libations offered at the tomb were “funeral feasts” for the dead. The sacrifice was a symbol of sustenance in which the memory of the dead was kept alive in the actions of the living, the descendants who recognized their common ancestry.<sup>4</sup> Fustel stresses the relation of the domestic religion to the evolution of public authority.

This same religion, after having enlarged and extended the family, formed a still larger association, the city, and reigned in that as it had reigned in the family. From it came all the institutions, as well as all the private law, of the ancients. It was from this that the city received all its principles, its rules, its usages, and its magistracies. But, in the course of time, *this ancient religion became modified or effaced*, and private law and political institutions were modified with it. (5, emphasis mine.)

If Fustel's assumption that the foundation of “this ancient religion” was male rather than female, and if he interpreted facts to make his thesis more persuasive, our understanding of this period is seriously distorted and incomplete because it misrepresents the hestian essence of the ancient religion. If it was arbitrarily replaced with a hermean essence, it creates a flaw in our understanding of the past that plagues us to this day. When Fustel refers to old forms of belief as “groundless and ridiculous” (13), he discounts the spiritual “grounding” of domestic ritual observances. The spirits of the past family line (called “Lares and Penates” by the Romans) were “sacred beings” who, if neglected, became malignant spirits. We must ask not just what the content of a ritual was but what animated or en-souled it.<sup>5</sup>



Fustel concludes the first book of his treatise on the *polis* with a discussion of the "sacred fire" (*hestia*) and "the domestic religion." These he presents as the foundation on which the city was built. In doing so, he subordinates the hestian (private, personally oriented system of activity and belief) to the hermean (publicly oriented system of activity and belief). He begins with a discussion of the family, whose religion, he argues, is a source of the principles underlying the foundation of the city and its male-dominant public ethos. This masculinist hermean standpoint is different from examining the underlying orientation to Hestia/Vesta as a guiding force in directing the energy used in everyday life, both in the household/family and in the city-state. By privileging what males value, Fustel—like other men before and after him—neglected the energizing and empowering force of sacred rituals in the care of women both in the *oikos* and the *polis*.

Fustel states that it was the *master's* sacred obligation to keep the fire day and night. This probably means the "master" saw to it that the "mistress" did these things, since fire-care requires constant watchfulness, hence a "stay-at-home," "stay-by-the-fire" attendant. Central to this activity is the injunction against allowing the fire to die out because, with the fire's death, came the death of the family line and the death of the *oikos*. Extinguishing the fire in the public hearth meant the death of the *polis* or city. One can only imagine the dread one would feel at the possible extinction of a hearthfire in either private or public space. The importance in Greek and Roman life of maintaining the "sacred flame" of the household and the city cannot be minimized. It represented the "first rule" of their everyday lives and their social and political organization. Fustel cites the Orphic hymn:

Render us always prosperous, always happy, O fire; thou who art eternal, beautiful, ever young; thou who nourishest, thou who art rich, receive favorably these our offerings, and in return give us happiness and sweet health. (18, n. 7)

Surely this is a "Hymn to Hestia." Yet Fustel masculinizes the fire as a "beneficent god" (18), changing Hestia's gender without explanation or apology! He identifies the hearth as a place of refuge. Following the destruction of Priam's palace, Hecuba draws the old man near the hearth, the altar that will "protect us all" (*ibid.*). Alcestis, as she is about to die, approaches the fire. She invokes the divinity as "mistress of this house" and addresses her prayers for her children's future to her (n. 9, 19. See Euripides, *Alcestis*, 11,

well, but  
for the  
heart  
of flame  
the sac-  
red light  
within  
that she  
also finds.

62-168). On his return from Troy, Agamemnon's first act is to propitiate the *hestia* in his own house (see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, l. 1015). According to Cato, a man never left his house or returned to it without first addressing a prayer to the *hestia*. A guilty man could not approach his hearth until he had purified himself (21).

Fustel conflates altar, worship, and ritual in his discussion of the sacred fire, which has been translated as the "Providence" of the family. On a hestianeutic reading, it might as well have been called the "Conscience" of the family, since it guided ethical behavior from within. The extinction of the fire meant that "a god ceased to exist," and sacrifices were offered to "him." The essence of the "sacrifice" was "to sustain and reanimate the sacred fire, to nourish and develop the body of the god." This gender shift (from goddess to god), against all evidence, denies the possibility that such a pervasive power in everyday life could be the embodiment of an abstract "feminine" principle rather than an abstract "masculine" principle. In offering wine, oil, incense, and fat (which were, as the "Homeric Hymns" attest, the first offerings to Hestia), Fustel writes:

The *god* received these offerings, and devoured them; radiant with satisfaction, *he* rose above the altar and lighted up the worshipper with *his* brightness. Then was the moment to invoke *him*; and the hymn of prayer went out from the heart of man. (19, emphasis mine)

If we were to adopt a hestian perspective to "correct" Fustel's statement, we would say instead:

The goddess received these offerings, and consumed them; radiant with satisfaction, she rose above the hearth, and enlightened the worshipper with her own brilliance. Then was the moment to invoke her; and the prayer went out from the heart of the *oikos*, the household/family.

This re-phrasing, I think, goes beyond gender and comes close to the meaning of hestian ritual in the mind of the ancient Greek votary.

Because Hestia dwelt in the fire of the hearth (she was an in-dwelling presence), family meals were taken in a spiritual context. The mistress of the house or her female servants had cooked the bread and prepared the food, hence a prayer to Hestia marked the beginning and end of every meal, including the "first meal" shared by wife and husband before the *hestia* which would become the new wife's moral and practical responsibility. Against

Homer's "Hymn to Hestia," Fustel masculinizes the goddess and compares "him" to the Hindu male fire-god Agni (20-21). He finds that the "religion of the sacred fire" dates from a time before there were Greeks, Italians, and Hindus, only the Aryan tribes which carried their worship with them when they dispersed.

In reviewing the Indo-European origins of Western traditions, Fustel ignores the gender difference between the Hindu form of worship and the Greek. He concedes, however, that in Greece the fire of the hearth took precedence over all other gods (22), but he seems not to have carried this through in his thinking about the domestic hearth (*hestia*) and its presiding goddess (Hestia). The hearthfire was older than the gods (*ibid.*). What an empowering image for women as hearthkeepers!

Hestia's "first place" in the ancient religion is misrepresented when Fustel writes:

the old worship of the hearthfire submitted to the common law which human intelligence, in that period, imposed upon every religion. The altar of the sacred fire was personified. They called it hestia, Vesta; the name was the same in Latin and in Greek, and was the same that in the common and primitive language designated an altar. (22)

Fustel gives a brief etymological explanation, saying "By a process frequent enough, a common noun had become a proper name. By degrees a legend was formed. They pictured this divinity to themselves as wearing a female form, because the word used for altar was of the feminine gender" (22). By inverting our thinking, we find the reason the word "altar" is feminine is that the older word for "hearth" encoded a principle viewed as feminine. Fustel states also that the ancients even went so far as to represent this goddess in statues, but he provides no support for this statement which runs counter to other writers who speak of Hestia as "beyond representation" (Goux, 1983). Nonetheless, he continues, "they could never efface the primitive belief, according to which this divinity was simply the fire upon the altar; and Ovid himself was compelled to admit that Vesta was nothing more than a 'living flame,' (23, *cit. Ovid's Fasti*, VI, 291). Fustel goes to absurd lengths to ignore the gender and identity of this "First Goddess," writing "the first invocation was always addressed to the fire" and "the first sacrifice at Olympia was to the hearthfire, the second to Zeus" (22, *cit. om.*).

In these statements we move beyond the question of the gender of the goddess/god to see the misinterpretation of the past that androcentric bias

introduces to our understanding of ancient Greek life and thought. There is no clearer case of hermean bias in historical scholarship than the downplaying of Hestia's presence in Fustel's account.

Fustel concedes that the hearthfire was not the fire of "material nature," not the "purely physical element that warms and burns, that transforms bodies, melts metals, and becomes the powerful instrument of human industry" (23). Its nature (essence) is different. It is a pure fire, a chaste fire, one that can be maintained only through performing certain rituals, using only certain kinds of wood. Prayers were not addressed to Hestia for material gain but for "purity of heart, temperance, and wisdom." The hearthfire was a "moral being" that shines, warms, and cooks the sacred food; but at the same time thinks and has a conscience. It knows our duties, and sees they are fulfilled" (23). This is the grounding of a hestian ethos, an ethos that emanates from within and dictates the nature of our obligations and the spirit in which they should be met. Like human beings, the hearthfire has a dual nature:

[P]hysically, it blazes up, it moves, it lives, it procures abundance, it prepares the repast, it nourishes the body; morally, it has sentiments and affections, it gives man [sic] purity, it enjoins the beautiful and the good, it nourishes the soul. One might say it supports human life in the double series of its manifestations. (Ibid.)

Every family had a duty to perpetuate itself. Fustel describes the ceremony in which a son was presented to the domestic gods. A female carried the child in her arms and ran several times around the hearth (see Plato, *Theaetetus*). There were two levels in this ceremony. The primary level involved the female and the female divinity of the fire. The secondary level involved dedication to the household gods. Fustel says the wife "preserved neither religious nor legal connections" with her natal family, and her son "had nothing in common with this family" (49). I suggest that the unifying symbol of relationship was the hearthfire which had first been lit with fire brought from the maternal line and which later promoted the well-being of the paternal family line.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, the site of the ceremony could just as well have been elsewhere.

Fustel describes how a slave became part of the Athenian *oikos*:

They made him approach the fire, placed him in the presence of the domestic divinity, and poured lustral water upon his head. He then

shared with the family some cakes and fruit. This ceremony bore a certain analogy to those of marriage and adoption. It doubtless signified that the newcomer, a stranger the day before, should henceforth be a member of the family, and share in its religion. And thus the slave joined in the prayers, and took part in the festivals. The fire protected him; the religion of the Lares belonged to him as well as his master. This is why the slave was buried in the burial-place of the family. (106-7, cit. om.)

Plato defines kinship as the community of the same domestic worship (*Laws* V, cited in Fustel, 48). One could not be related through females, Fustel explains, because "a female transmitted neither being nor worship" (48). We must remember that without the "living flame" transmitted from a mother's *hestia* to her daughter and brought to her husband's hearth, there is no fire to sanctify the family worship, and the family line dies out. Fustel's androcentric perspective, which brings only males into focus, requires a reading of the hestian palimpsest of such ancient texts.

Through an *oikos*-centric reading of texts, we can enter into the worshipful spirit prompted by Hestia. The offering is wafted upward, and we can understand that people would believe their words—their prayers and incantations—would be sent heavenward by the immortal goddess to the other gods on Olympus. Thus the recognized connection between the early hearth and the altar. Yet another "sex change" describing the divinity of the hearthfire! As the *phratries* grew, they became tribes, and a tribe took its name from a deified eponymous hero who was deemed the family's most illustrious forebear.

### Vesta and the City of Rome

In Rome, the sacred site was the temple of Vesta. The Romans believed the destiny of their city was connected to the eternal fire kept burning in the temple. The elected members of the *curia* ate together, and on certain days the senate held a sacred feast in the Capitol. The festivals were also carried to the streets where the people observed and ate together—a public show of "fellow feeling."

The public hearth of the city had a supreme priest who was responsible for officiating at public religious sacrifices. According to Fustel, king, prytane, and archon were names given to this chief of religious practice who kept up the fire, offered sacrifices, said the prayers, and presided over the religious feasts (166). The source of his dignity and power was through association

with the public hearth. Although Fustel repeats the claim that the lighting and care of the public hearth was a hereditary honor passed from father to son, he never refers to the in-dwelling spirit of Hestia/ Vesta that was honored by such service, nor does he discuss the role of the Vestals in the sacrifices at Rome. The source of secular power was sacred power.

S. C. Humphrey's statement that "the common hearth for the city personified in Rome by the goddess Vesta" (xiii) omits to mention that the sacred fire in Vesta's temple symbolized the legitimacy of the city's sacred origin. Its secular founder was Aeneas, but its moral legitimacy rested with Romulus, one of the twin sons of the Vestal priestess Rhea Silvia and the god Mars. Rome's legitimacy could as well be traced to the founder's mother and the sacred flame that honored Hestia/Vesta. The hearth, as "first altar," also laid the foundation of the Church of Rome.

In Fustel's words, the continuation in Rome of the sacred fire under the protection of Vesta:

represented...order, but not rigorous, abstract, mathematical order, the imperious and unchangeable law....She was moral order...a sort of universal soul, which regulated the different movements of worlds, as the human soul keeps order in the human system. (24)

Fustel can maintain Vesta's "female essence" but not Hestia's. Why? Is it too much to think that humankind's most ancient beliefs were the abstraction of a hestian principle of moral ordering, ordinary, commonplace, and not the least bit dramatic? Humphrey's statement "the common hearth for the city personified in Rome by the goddess Vesta" (xiii) misses the point that the presence of Vesta's temple with its eternal flame legitimated the city's sacred character.

### The Roman Family: Lares and Penates

In Rome, the Lares and Penates were the tutelary spirits of the household. The Greeks called them *ephestioi* or *estiokioi*, words whose etymology recalls the hearth and the *oikos* (see 24, n. 21). Hector entrusts the hearthfire (the Trojan Penates) to Aeneas' care, which Aeneas calls "Penates, Lares, and Vesta" (*ibid.*, n. 24. See Virgil, IX. 259; V. 744). When speaking of the hearthfire, descendants called their ancestor by name: Aeneas spoke of Lar of Assaracus "as if he saw in this fire the soul of his ancestor" (25). Orestes says to his sister, "Leave this place and advance toward the ancient hearth of

Pelops, to hear my words (n. 25, citing Euripides, *Orestes*, 1140-42).

Fustel notes that the ancient religion "became enfeebled by degrees" but did not disappear. Even the religion of the Greek Olympians "could not extirpate it; only Christianity could do this" (25). Fustel uses Christianity as the standard by which to measure religious belief retroactively, as not being monotheistic, not venerating saints, having no idea of creation. Consequently, "the mystery of generation was for them what the mystery of creation is for us" (28). Surely one of the key "mysteries" in the control of women was the identity of the fathers of their children. For the Greeks, as with others who venerate their ancestors, their progenitor was the creator of the "family line." For this line to hold, they had to preserve and protect the "purity" of their wives, but the knowledge of generation, procreation, and hearthkeeping was essentially the province of women.

Family worship was observed in private and kept from public view. The gaze of a stranger defiled the religious acts and sacred objects of the family. The family's ceremonies and celebrations were unique to it, and they became "a patrimony, a sacred property" (30). In the ancient Greek family, the living could not do without the dead, nor the dead without the living. A powerful bond existed among past and future generations of the same family, which made of it a body forever inseparable. The ancestor remained in the midst of his relatives; invisible but always present. He continued to be a part of the family, its "first father." "Immortal, happy, divine," he was still interested in all of his progeny whom he had left upon the earth.

He knew their needs and sustained their feebleness; and he who still lived, who labored, who, according to the ancient expression, had not yet discharged the debt of existence, he had near him his guides and his supports—his forefathers. In the midst of difficulties, he invoked their ancient wisdom; in grief, he asked consolation of them; in danger, he asked their support, and after a fault, their pardon. (28)

On Fustel's account, the right to practice the domestic religion was passed only from male to male, the father passing to his son his creed, his worship, the right to continue the sacred fire, to offer the funeral meal, to pronounce the formulas of prayer (30). But he overlooks the fact that the source of the continuous sacred fire was the *hestia* of the maternal line. The ancient Greek language has a very significant word to designate a family. It is a word which signifies, literally, that which is near a hearth. A family was a group of persons whom religion permitted to invoke the same sacred fire

and to offer the funeral repast to the same ancestors (34).

### Greek and Roman Marriage and Wedding Customs

Fustel, citing Stephen of Byzantium, states that "From the hour of marriage, the wife has no longer anything in common with the domestic religion of her fathers; she sacrifices at the hearth of her husband" (35, n. 1). Fustel suggests that the woman abandons the religion of her fathers, but he misses the symbolism of the fire brought from her mother's *hestia*, and this produces rather convoluted reasoning on his part because the family religion requires that those who sacrifice to it be born near it. The wife was born close to the hearthfire she brings to her husband's home and which she continues to nurture. She brings her children into communion with it. The injunction against invoking two sacred fires and two sets of family ancestors is puzzling, since clearly it is the hearthfire itself that brings the spirit of the goddess to the *oikos*.

For a man to continue his "sacred patrimony," he needs a wife to nurture the *hestia*. According to Fustel, marriage was the ceremony that allowed a woman to become a priestess of the sacred fire to which she was not attached by birth. It might as well have sealed the man's right to appropriate the fire from the wife's maternal line, which had kept it alive down through the generations. The principal and essential part of the marriage ceremony took place before the domestic hearth and consisted of three acts: The first took place before the hearth of the bride (Fustel says of her father), the second the passage from the father's to the husband's hearth, and the third before the husband's hearth. The central and focal element of this transition was the hearthfire lit by a torch that was originally lit at the *hestia* of the bride's mother. And the hearthfire was in the control of the female line and "the torch was passed" through her to continue a male line.

In his descriptions of these rites of marriage, Fustel emphasizes the paternal role and says only that en route to her new "hearth and home" the bride was preceded by a torch he calls "the nuptial torch" (37). It is probable that the torch (or some similar vessel) contained the sacred fire from the bride's *hestia*, a *hestia* presided over by her mother. Fustel describes a ritual in which the husband simulates a seizure by force, and the bride's attendants pretend to protect her. Fustel speculates that the custom signalled the wife's submission to the gods of her husband's *oikos*. Perhaps it was not the woman who was the point of capture, but the fire. If so, in bringing the fire



from her mother's hearth the bride has brought "a new spark of life" to her husband's family line.

After a mock struggle, the husband carries the bride (wearing white, a veil, and a crown) over the threshold (protected by Hermes), being careful that her feet do not touch the sill, presumably not to defile her purity in lighting the hearthfire in her husband's home, a fire that was not to be extinguished in the lifetime of the husband. The husband and wife share a libation and a cake before the *hestia*, a light meal that, according to custom, begins and ends with a prayer to Hestia, and this shared nourishment in the presence of the fire puts the husband and wife in spiritual communion with the goddess of the hearthfire and the domestic gods of the household.

### The Hearth and Private Property

The origin of private property was tied to the fixed location of the family hearth and the family tomb. Families were bound by a shared hearth and rituals honoring common ancestors, both of which occupied sacred soil. The hearth is the symbol of a settled life, fixed in place and immovable. The hearth is fixed upon the soil, and the family is attached to the hearth. The family tomb is located nearby. The protection of this sacred soil leads to the idea of "property" and property ownership, and ultimately to "private" property in a secular sense. One was the "resting place" for the living, the other the "resting place" for the departed.

Fustel refers to the *oikos* [*'eoxos*, 55] as a "sacred enclosure," called *herctum* in Latin, as the space in which the family had its house, flocks, and cultivated fields, the life support system of the family. Hook and Paolucci (1971) restate the concept in describing the household/family unit as an ecosystem. But Fustel says that in the midst rose "the protecting fire-god" (55). The fire god was a hearthfire goddess—Hestia. How can we explain this consistently disconcerting gender change in Fustel's work?

Fustel explains the construction plan of ancient shelter as arranged to isolate and preserve the hearth, confirming the Greek view that "religion," i.e., reverence for Hestia, guided humans to build houses. His explanations, suffused with the hermean vocabulary of mastery and proprietorship (typical of the discourse of domination), distort the basic themes of connection and continuity of the spirit of family—which is more than the "perpetual presence of gods." Gods and humans exist together. The substitution of form for substance obscures the empowering presence of Hestia in the family's

domestic space, i.e., its spiritual rather than its material space.

If the "domestic religion," as Fustel observes, was passed from father to son in the worship of an ancestral line, then the sacred fire was passed from mother to daughter in a symbolic transfer of the female essence necessary for family life to continue. In examining ancient texts, the question of androcentric valuation must be taken into account, namely that greater value is attached to the soil, to the tomb of the ancestors and their associated rituals in the control of men, than is attached to the living flame of the hearthfire in the control of women. Although property might pass through the male line, it was only held in trust for the family. A man's "rights" to these ceased with his death. The new obligation was on the living members of the *oikos*. A family's soul and spirit had to be rekindled with the presence of a wife/mother at the household hearth in each generation. It was she who carried the spiritual essence of the family, for which the material grounding was secondary. Women and men had different roles to play in a shared sacred trust.

#### The Hearth as Life Force

In the ancient Greek family, the power of the household gods was greater than that of the father (78). Above the father is the domestic religion, "that god whom the Greeks called the hearth-master.... the Romans called "*Lar familiaris*" (78). This "divinity of the interior"—the human soul—is the ultimate authority and what "fixed rank" in the family and placed the father first in the presence of the sacred fire. Of greater significance, it seems to me, is that the sacred fire was, in fact, a female essence—Hestia. The wife, while not the "proprietor" of the hearth, is nevertheless responsible for keeping the fire alive. She nurtured the fire. She was its "caretaker." Roman law restricted woman's role and formalized the hierarchical authorial relation between husband and wife. The father's duty as the convener of domestic rituals is the manifest symbol of the family's spiritual life, but the "indivisible" essence is the immanent hestian presence.

Fustel traces the etymology of the word *pater* in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, a word retained in religious invocations given to Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Bacchus, Vulcan, and Pluto. Similarly, the appellation "mater" was given to three virgin goddesses—Minerva, Diana, and Vesta (Athena, Artemis, and Hestia in Greek) (81). The Greeks, Romans, and Hindus used a similar word, *genitor* (82) to designate the progenitor, or first founder, of a family line.

In Roman law, wives, sons, and slaves were equally under the father's power. Only the head of a household—the father—could appear before the tribunals of the city in Rome. Public justice existed for him alone, and he was responsible for any crime committed by a family member.

Justice for wife and son was not in the city, because it was in the house. The chief of the family was their judge, placed upon a judgment seat by virtue of his marital and parental authority, in the name of the family and under the eyes of the domestic divinity (85, notes and cit. om.).

Women were not subject to the State but to the head of their families—i.e., their fathers or their husbands, and that right was absolute—extending to life and death, by virtue of their right as judges—not solely as fathers or husbands. Fustel speaks of "domestic morality" and the wife's role in maintaining family rituals accompanying the domestic worship. He attributes this to the "veneration" accorded to mothers in Greek and Roman society. In Greek and Roman life, the wife/mother had the same titular respect as the husband/father.

When the principles sacred to Hestia were violated, family worship was defiled, the sacred fire became impure, and each offering before it became an impiety. The consequences of impiety were experienced in this world and the next, because no remembrance could be offered in the proper spirit before the tomb of the offender.

As Fustel acknowledges, the wife had rights as well as duties. His statement that the master lit the fire is inconsistent with the premise that the fire was not allowed to die out and that it was the wife's duty to see that it did not (90). Lacking a wife, the domestic rituals were incomplete and insufficient. Says Fustel, "She, too has her priesthood" (ibid.). It was a great tragedy for a Greek to have a hearth deprived of a wife (ibid., citing Xenophon, *Government of the Lacedaemonians*).

### Piety as a Patriarchal Family Value

The ancients used the word "piety" to describe domestic virtues or "family values." This included filial piety, the son's obedience to the father and the love he bore his mother. This was *pietas erga parentes*. The father's attachment for the child, the mother's tenderness, were also marks of piety, *pietas erga liberos*. Everything in family life was sacred. The sense of relationship and the moral obligations involved in the family, family affection, and a sacred commitment were all expressed in the word piety (Fustel, 91). Once

we enter into the thoughts and feelings of these ancient peoples we find in them the highest expression of what we today identify as “family values.”

The first goddess, Hestia, was in the house, living in the hearthfire. The sanctity of the house and the hearth were inviolable. For those for whom a house is merely shelter, empty of a spirit of sharing and caring, the spirit of Hestia is lost. It was Hestia who guarded the family’s fortunes, who heard its members’ prayers, who granted their wishes. The hearth and the household gods belonged to one’s family and not to one’s neighbor. One’s house and one’s family line were the same—expressed in the concept of *oikos*. Family members honored the same household divinities, called forth by their common hearth. This was a powerful bond. Family unity extended to the past and to the future, and it called on family members to love and respect one another. The gods lived in the interior of the *oikos*. A man loved the spirit of place represented by his home, a place fixed and durable, which had been passed down to him by his forebears and which he passed on to his children as a sanctuary. It was a home, a supporting natural, social, and spiritual environment, the location of the family hearth—his *oikos* (Fustel, 92). The family was indivisible. Time did not dismember it. Hearth, tomb, patrimony, family were all encompassed in the *oikos*. A man then loved his *oikos* with the same intensity and fervor as he later loved his church and his country.

Empty formalities could not carry the spirit of Hestia into the public sphere. The essence of falsehood is that it seeks the appearance of truth in order to be taken as truth. But the false is hollow. It does not ring true. And, with women excluded from it, the spirit of the *oikos* could never transfer to the *polis* where increasingly empty formalities (hermean rhetoric) passed for a genuine spirit of community and the trust that was established through hestian rituals in domestic units.

### Putting Hestia in Her “Place”

A clearer picture of ancient Greek and Roman history could benefit from a “hestian turn” in interpreting past events. Rome was founded on a repressed principle of hestian “mother right” extended to the idea of a “Mother Church” and a “virgin birth.” Fustel’s view was skewed when he stated his conviction that one could not be related through the female line because “a female transmitted neither being nor worship” (48), a claim to which I take exception based on the evidence offered in Chapter 4. While acknowledg-

ing Fustel's mastery of the texts, we might also claim it to be an eisegesis, that is, an interpretation of Greek and Latin texts that reflects the translator's bias, which in this case would be masculinist and patriarchal. It must be acknowledged, however, that in French grammar the masculine takes precedence over the feminine when words are translated. The same logic underlies French grammar in general. So women and the feminine are not only subordinated to men and the masculine under patriarchy, languages also have their implicit gender biases.

Once we shift perspective from an "either/or" to a "both/and" viewpoint, as in the model of the double helix, we can see two strands proceeding through the Greco-Roman era, and we can see once again what lies in the neglected hestian palimpsest of this era. Perception shaped through androcentric tradition, as mine was on my first reading of Fustel in graduate school, must be re-thought. Without the collective consciousness made possible through feminist interrogation of canonical works, such a re-thinking is impossible, and we will continue to accept warped views of the human past. What may once have seemed minor or insignificant can, as evidence accumulates, warrant truly objective re-vision by referring to the lenses of analysis offered by the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm. Instead of de-valuing the masculine in favor of the feminine, transvaluation can offer a more balanced view of past events that respects not only women's/men's different social locations but also the different perspectives generated by their *oikos*-centric and *polis*-centric perspectives. Gender, race, and class will still be applicable analytic categories, but their operation in the dual domains may be better understood and their explanatory power strengthened. When we place ourselves in the "thoughts" of past time, we must acknowledge that women, like men, had thoughts. While they may not have expressed them in public or in texts, those thoughts are captured in the symbolism of Hestia's fire and Vesta's temple.

### Notes

1. A computer-generated content analysis of this text would be a valuable resource for a hestian re-visiting of this historical period.
2. I owe the neologism "hestianeutic" to my friend and colleague Linda Peterat of the University of British Columbia.

3. Admittedly, to do this project justice would require a word-for-word, document-by-document reinterpretation of the original texts, the English translations, and the sources cited by the authors.
4. Fustel observes that "Since the dead had need of food and drink, it appeared to be a duty of the living to satisfy the need. The care of supplying the dead with sustenance was not left to the caprice or to the variable sentiments of men; it was obligatory" (13). This obligation, as demonstrated by the actions of Antigone, devolved on the women of the "House" (*oikos*).
5. The Lares were the household gods who were guarantors of the larder. They assured that the household cupboard would never be found bare! There would always be resources available for the necessary feasts and ritual observances. They are symbols of a "conserving" attitude on the part of the family.
6. Today I would compare this with the transmission of mitochondrial DNA from mothers to daughters.
7. The Greek citizens who ate at the public table did so in a spirit of sacred observance, and they were called *parasites*. The word which began as an honorific title has come to mean those who take advantage of generosity and largesse and who abuse a trust or kindness.