Most of us are nostalgic about our childhood and youth and think wistfully of the wonderful days that they were. The innocent pastimes one indulged in remind us of a blissful time. But on a deeper thought, was it because ignorance is bliss? Susan Neiman tries to lift the veil of fascination covering childhood and youth and tries to show its true picture, a period of forced ignorance. She does not waste time in setting the book’s tone: ‘Can philosophy help us to find a model of maturity that is not a matter of resignation?’ (2). She defines her purpose: ‘This book will argue that being grown-up is an ideal: one that is rarely achieved in its entirety, but all the more worth striving for’ (22). Philosophy is not a veneer to cover up the feeling of defeat that comes with realising the truth.

It has long become a fad with philosophers to couch their statements in inaccessible jargon and circuitous analyses. Neiman comes as a welcome relief in the confusing sea of thinkers. Her language is natural and familiar and her style simple and smooth. She has a keen insight into the history of thought and compels the reader to go back to the pages of philosophy that one forgot to read closely, mainly because of the influence of how they have been understood till then. She makes us see Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant in a completely new light.

This is a book that breaks the fallacy of childhood being admirable and adulthood being a painful experience. One realises that ‘infancy of reason is dogmatic’ (ibid.). Adulthood is a courageous experience of knowledge. Neiman affirms that we gloat over childhood because of our being ‘lazy and scared’ (5). She repeatedly tells us that childhood and youth are glorified because some powers want that to be so. Neiman is well-versed in psychology as the text and its subtext shows us throughout the book. She not only refers to psychological theories and experiments but also her understanding of philosophy evolves from her understanding of individual and social psychology.

Neiman’s concern over distractions that we have allowed technology to gift us is evident in the entire book. She tells us that consumerism is one of the principal reasons of our leaning towards adolescence: ‘When consuming goods rather than satisfying work becomes the focus of our culture, we have created (or acquiesced in) a society of permanent adolescents’ (19). She takes us through Rousseau’s *Emile*, emphasising the need for rereading this philosopher and his thoughts on education. Neiman’s keen insight into apparently eternal issues in education fascinates the reader with its freshness. Displaying her lively engagement with popular culture, she shows us that the movie versions of *Peter Pan* reflect how in ‘less than a century, grown-ups declined from the merely dreary to the positively pathetic’ (21).

However, the idea that childhood and youth are great periods of our lives is a new one, says Neiman: ‘The glorification of childhood and youth, and the view of everything else after that as a let-down, is really quite new, and by no means universal’ (32). She says that the ‘nostalgia for childhood is confined to ... cultures that can be called WEIRD—as in Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich Democracies’ (32). People living in other cultures like the present reviewer could vouch that this is not always the case. At least in India, childhood and youth have been
glorified for centuries and old age dreaded. Neiman is striking in her analysis and the logical extension of Plato’s and Kant’s thought. The plethora of choices for consumer goods given by the governments is a sweet distraction from more important issues.

Neiman’s eloquence is poetic: ‘Direct control leads to rebellion; indirect control leads to dependency’ (39). ‘Reason drives your search to make sense of the world by pushing you to ask why things are as they are. For theoretical reason, the outcome of that search becomes science, for practical reason, the outcome is a more just world’ (115). She tells us that we need grown-ups to build an equitable society and reminds us that it was Rousseau who first treated growing up as a philosophical problem. Her statements are spiritual and sometimes have uncanny resemblances to the tenets of Advaita Vedanta. She almost repeats the Bhagavadgita when she says: ‘Two passions, for glory and for luxury, are the source of all our ills; we are wicked because of the one and miserable because of the other’ (53). But, her sentences are bereft of any religious colour or dogma. This book is a testimony to how philosophy and spirituality need not be frightening or out of reach. Neiman emphasises the need for an ideal and encourages that we strive for achieving it. And for this, we need to give an appropriate education to our children. ‘Children are not born acting on principle, and most adults never get there. If we want them to have a chance of doing so, we have to adopt an education appropriate to their development’ (58).

Neiman does a critical analysis of Rousseau’s Emile and establishes that it is ‘the clearest and most detailed practical manual of Enlightenment ever written’ (56). This volume also traces various stages of the growing up of a human being. The first experience is surprising and wonderful and thereafter the surprise wears off. This is what growing up is, says Neiman. She is not content with easy explanations and believes that ‘the claim that virtue is all there is to happiness is an eloquent variation on the fox’s sour grapes’ (114). Neiman argues that we stifle the interest of children to grow up by philosophising and learning, because it is easier to shut up questions.

Jean-Francois Lyotard asks: ‘Why Philosophize?’ (See Jean-Francois Lyotard, Why Philosophize (Cambridge: Polity, 2014)). He says we do that because ‘there is desire, because there is absence in presence, dreadness in life; and also because there is our power that is not yet power; and also because there is alienation, the loss of what we thought we had acquired and the gap between the deed and the doing, between the said and the saying; and finally because we cannot evade this: testifying to the presence of the lack with our speech’ (Why Philosophize, 123). Neiman convinces us that growing up and philosophising are the same thing and that we need to do it for the same reasons as Lyotard’s. Only she does it in a much more eloquent and friendly manner. She gives her short reason for growing up: ‘Because it’s harder than you think’ (192).

Neiman concludes her book by saying: ‘Courage is needed to oppose all the forces that will continue work against maturity’ because it is a ‘process of permanent revolution’ (234). Many misconceptions are cleared in this book, which is a revised edition of the original publication in 2014 and has all the qualities of a self-help book and much more. For instance, our attention is drawn to the fact that Enlightenment was not Eurocentric. On the contrary, it questioned blind adherence to European ideals. This is a book on parenting as much as it is a book about rereading Enlightenment. Philosophy has for once become readable and more importantly, enjoyable. Recommended for anyone interested in human life.

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**Chinnamastā: The Awful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess**

Elisabeth Anne Beard

Wikipedia has replaced *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Yet if one reads the entries of each of the ten Mahavidyas in *Wikipedia*, then one longs for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Each Wikipedia entry has the same information and are haphazard. For example, the entries on Mothers Dhumavati and Matangi are mirror-articles. And the entry on Mother Chinnamasta is a disaster. (See ‘Mahavidya’ and the links to the ten Mahavidyas [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahavidya] accessed 06 September 2016).

Online searches regarding Mother Chinnamasta return arcane facts, mantras, and esoteric non-historical nonsense.

Elisabeth Anne Beard’s monograph is a readable source on Mother Chinnamasta. Unlike the material online that confuses the Buddhist Vajrayogini with the Hindu Mahavidya, Beard knows her subject. ‘Comparison of Buddhist and Hindu Tantra’ (75–8) is a concise discussion of the distinction between Buddhist and Hindu tantras available within the academic study of Hinduism and Buddhism. Studying Beard one understands that worshipping Mother Chinnamasta is to destroy ‘the internal enemy—ignorance which creates the illusion of separateness between a being and Brahman’ (105).

Motilal Banarsidass has done a great service by publishing this monograph as a paperback. But the book needs updating. Beard mentions that there is a temple of Mother Chinnamasta in Bishnupur. How is it possible that in spite of the Internet neither Beard, nor her Indian publisher has cared to either put in more about that temple or change the black and white pictures to colour? The plight of Hinduism as a missiologically oriented religion is apparent from this book. It is as if both the writer and the publisher want this book to be read by seekers after cultic and esoteric knowledge. But Mother Chinnamasta is not the patrimony of either Hindus or misleadingly fearsome tantras. She is the Mother of all. Appendix I of this book detailing the Mother’s thousand names proves her universal Motherhood.

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**Hatred and Forgiveness**

*Julia Kristeva*
*Trans. Jeanine Herman*


The author Julia Kristeva says: ‘The disabled person opens a narcissistic identity wound in the person who is not disabled.’ She addresses ‘the very borders of the human species’ and finds it exploding (29) since disabilities cause anxiety in those who feel themselves mistakenly integrated. In short, disability evokes hatred in the non-disabled. Kristeva’s knowledge of the Bible and Catholic Religious Orders in relation to the polis (35–8) is central to understanding this book as itself a work of caritas, a theological virtue. This book in particular might have prompted Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) to write on the Franciscans in his *The Highest Poverty* (See Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University, 2013)). Kristeva unabashedly praises the Franciscan way of life in this book (35). It surprises this reviewer that while Kristeva feels the need to study monasticism and Christianity and other religions to enact psychoanalysis, which is caritas in praxis, psychoanalysts and philosophers of the mind and cognition are stuck at Jacques Lacan’s (1901–81) clinical positions vis-à-vis clinical psychoses. To appear learned and confuse beginners, Lacan’s being a medical doctor is often forgotten. In universities around the world his *Seminars* (See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 20 vols (New York: Norton, 2007)) have nearly made psychoanalysis theoretical, therefore redundant, and something so obscure that few understand what the *real*, the *imaginary*, and the *symbolic* are in Lacan! Kristeva’s book under review could replace Lacan in universities where Lacan is meaninglessly taught and generations of students search the Internet to understand terms which only clinical practice can make explicit.

Kristeva, on the other hand, is the real heir to
the legacy of the misread Freud who ‘makes psychoanalysis a treatment of the passions by way of the passions: be impassions in order to disimpassion’ (93). Kristeva clearly understands the power and effect of psychoanalysis as distinct from medical intervention in the form of SSRIs and SNRIs: ‘We belong to a divided civilization ... globalisation hopes passions will be reduced under ... Prozac’s biological well-being’ (92–3). Lacan treated psychotics with anti-psychotics; Kristeva in her clinical practice treats patients through the hermeneutic of her own understanding of religion and classical psychoanalysis.

The ‘exciting word, hatred’ is generally seen as a ‘symptom or pathology’ (183) from which Kristeva will go on to vehemently differ since in her earlier clinical work she found that ‘hatred and desire [are] indissociable from speaking humanity’ (184). Hatred as seen by Kristeva in this book is part of the construction of what she had earlier written on: abjection (see Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University, 1980)). According to Kristeva, the abject is neither ‘ob-jeu ... or a transitional object’ nor is it ‘a correlate of the ego ... The abject has only one quality of the object—that of opposing the I’ (184). This opposition is primal hatred.

Kristeva reads Freud here as he had never been read before, even by her. ‘Digression on the Timeless’ (132–6) brings into focus the most neglected quality of the unconscious in psychoanalytic literature: ‘The unconscious ignores time’ (132). See note 8 on page 311 for an explication of this. This irrevocability of hatred and the transformation of hatred at most to hysteria—‘A humanity capable of laughing, out of love, and making light of love’ (227)—can only be understood through the timeless character of the unconscious from where arise fairy tales, myths, and even Renaissance tragedies like Macbeth. The first scene of Macbeth lends credence to the importance of hatred being entwined with timelessness and how forgiveness qua paranoia is a psychoanalytic trope which has little value unless we abandon Freud and accept Kristeva’s readings on religions. The third part of this book is important for psychoanalysts like this reviewer. It makes explicit the techne of practising psychoanalysis. It is recommended that mental healthcare professionals, humanities scholars, and those interested in various talk-therapies read this book as a summary of all previous books on the subject. What Horacio Etchegoyen in his monumental The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique (See R Horacio Etchegoyen, The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique (London: Karnac, 1991)) could not accomplish, Kristeva has done so in this book. She has revived the endangered but effective therapy begun by Freud and misread by so many others.

Kristeva’s choice of religious photos in this book (180–1) is refreshing as also her chapter ‘Healing, A Psychical Rebirth’ (153—8). Keeping with her rightful concern with the body she begins this chapter with those afflicted with cancer and then she goes on to detail the inner signs and internal logic of those who care for the terminally ill since ‘physical life is atrophying, the soul is dying. Modern man ... is somatising’ (157). Those who have not studied psychoanalysis from Freud up to Kristeva fail to understand that psychoanalysis is not a religion by itself or a substitute to religion. What Freud could not do, Kristeva has done. She has at last made psychoanalysis part of the arsenal for those whose jobs are to help others to self-actualise.

This reviewer suggests that this book be read in formative spirituality courses globally and within theology departments of all major religions. And non-theology syllabi framers should set portions of this book and if possible, the entire book, as set syllabi in domains as diverse as women’s studies (129–52) to studies in narratology (251–6). Kristeva strangely sounds more and more like Carl Jung. The eighteenth chapter, ‘The Triple Uprooting’ (213–21) is a psychoanalytic and extraordinary reading of Exodus and of the Old Testament prophets. This is the chapter which transforms Kristeva from a dry Freudian couch-therapist to a theologian who has earned her invitation to the College of Roman Catholic Cardinals to whom she had given Lenten talks for the latter’s spiritual retreat! This book is caritas and a rebuttal to hatred.

*Subhasis Chattopadhyay*