Philosophy and Metaphor: The Significance of Christine’s ‘Blunders’.

Karen Green

Three cases where Christine de Pizan seems to have transformed her sources are discussed. The first involves a fusion of the Tiburtine and Cumean sibyls, the second Christine’s treatment of the poetic muses, and the third the image of *félicité humaine* introduced at the beginning of *Le Livre du corps de policie*. It is argued that where Christine transforms her sources she is making a distinct philosophical point. In the third of these transformations she shows a subtle appreciation of the sexism of a traditional philosophical metaphor, which she cleverly undermines and subverts.

Like most medieval authors, Christine de Pizan was a compiler who cut and pasted passages from ancient and Christian authorities (often using earlier compilations), reworking them into a loose structure of her own devising. At first glance, this practice falls short on originality. At most, the architectural arrangement is new, the material used is recycled. Yet, as others have noted, Christine also extensively transformed her materials, and often put a source to quite a different use to that of her precursors.¹ Sometimes the result can appear jarring. In her article ‘Christine et ses “bévues”: sens et portée de quelques assimilations abusives’, Julia Holderness discusses certain ‘blunders’ or ‘abusive’ assimilations made by Christine, and uses them to develop provocative theses concerning her use of fiction.² In this article, I point to a different, previously un-noticed abuse of her sources by Christine, which


is found at the beginning of *Le Livre du corps de policie*. It involves the image of *felicité humaine*. The passage in question shows Christine crafting a sophisticated transformation of the sexist overtones of a classic philosophical metaphor, and adds to our appreciation of the rhetorical richness of Christine’s texts.

Before turning to Christine’s transformation of the image of *felicité humaine*, I take a further look at the assimilations treated by Holderness, in order to sound a note of caution about jumping too quickly to conclusions concerning Christine’s abuse of her sources, based on current theories concerning the texts that were available to her. For in two cases that are mentioned by Holderness, the assumption that Christine has made an ‘abusive’ assimilation seems to rest on too narrow an appreciation of the richness and variability of her sources. In one case, Christine may be following a tradition already established in her milieu. In the other, there is reason to think that in using her sources as she does, she has made a conscious decision to indicate her support for one side of a contemporary controversy. This raises the question of whether the previously undescribed example of a distortion of her sources fits into either of these categories, and I argue that up to a point it does. For by recasting the image of *felicité humaine*, Christine shows her support for a distinct philosophical position, while at the same time she offers a revision of doctrines borrowed from the corpus available to her.

The first purported ‘blunder’ to be discussed is Christine’s fusion of the Cumean and Tiburtine sibyls. At the end of *L’Epistre Othea* Christine introduces the Cumean sibyl as the one who had announced Christianity to Caesar Augustus, saying:

Et lors le mena sur une haulte montaigne hors de la cite, et dedans le souleil, par la volenté de nostre Seigneur, apparu une Vierge tenant un infant. Sebille lui monstra et lui dist que cellui estoit vray Dieu qui estre aouré devoit, et adont Cesar l’aoura.

[And then she led him to a high mountain outside the city, and in the sun, through the desire of our Lord, appeared a Virgin holding an infant. The

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sibyl showed it to him and said to him that this was the true God, who ought to be worshiped; and therefore Caesar worshiped him.]

Holderness follows a tradition that in this passage the Cumean sibyl is ‘fused’ with the Tiburtine sibyl who, according to Jacques de Voragine in the *Golden Legend*, warned Augustus that a child greater than he was born. But there is only tenuous evidence that Christine distorted her sources in attributing this warning to the Cumean sibyl.

The *Golden Legend* may have been Christine’s source for her version of this story, though her account of the revelation of the Virgin to Augustus in the *Epistre Othea* is not very close to that offered by Voragine. Christine claims that the sibyl led Augustus to a mountain outside the city, whereas the *Golden Legend* offers two versions. In one the sibyl and emperor were together in a room; according to the other, they mounted the Capitol. Yet even if Voragine was Christine’s source, as Gabrielle Parussa has correctly observed, it is not in fact made clear in the *Golden Legend* which sibyl is in question. As Holderness herself recognizes, the traditions concerning the sibyls were ambiguous and even contradictory. And Christine’s source for the story about Augustus is not obvious. In her later *Livre de la cité des dames*, Christine shows that she is familiar with the tradition according to which it was the Tiburtine sibyl who was usually attributed with having written most

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5 Holderness, p. 155.}
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7 Pizan, *Epistre Othea*, p. 454.}
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8 Holderness, ‘Christine et ses “Bévues”’, p. 156.}
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clearly about Jesus Christ. ⁹ Maureen Curnow has demonstrated that at this stage Christine was gleaning her descriptions of the sibyls from the Miroir Historial, Jean de Vigny’s French translation of Vincent de Beauvais’ Speculum Historiale, but the story of Augustus is not to be found there. And, an equally strong tradition, alive in the fifteenth century, also linked the Cumean sibyl with a prophecy of Christ’s birth.

In the Epistre Othea, Christine’s attribution of the revelation to Augustus to the Cumean sibyl suited her purposes. The Cumean sibyl appears in the third and sixth books of Virgil’s Aeneid (3.440–460 and 6.42–895). ¹⁰ Here, she is placed in the context of the expedition to Troy and shows Aeneas through the underworld. Since the Epistre Othea is largely devoted to stories from Troy, it was undoubtedly because of this association that Christine chose to attribute the prophecy to Augustus to her.

A connection between the Cumean sibyl and Caesar Augustus is also implied by the ancient sources of the sibyl’s prophecy. In a work attributed in the Middle Ages to Constantine, The Oration to the Assembly of Saints, a passage from Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue had been identified as the Cumean sibyl’s prophecy of the birth of the Saviour. ¹¹ This interpretation was repeated in Augustine’s The City of God 10.27, and was widely disseminated. Louis of Laval’s book of hours, for instance, which was completed around 1460, designates the Cumean sibyl as one who prophesied the birth of Christ. ¹² Augustine quotes Virgil’s Eclogue, ‘With you as


our guide, if any vestiges of our crimes remain, they shall be obliterated, and the
earth released from its perpetual fear’, and Augustine argues that this verse was
ddictated by the Cumean sibyl. He also mentions this sibyl at 18.23, suggesting
that it may have been she, rather than the sibyl of Erythrae who was the author
of a prophetic poem in which the phrase, ‘Jesus Christ Son of God, Saviour’ was
spelt out in the initial letters of each line. There, Augustine goes on to say of
this sibyl that ‘she speaks out against such [false] gods and their worshippers so
forcefully that she is, it seems, to be included among those who belong to the City
of God’. So Christine was following no less an authority than Augustine when
she later included the sibyls in her feminine city of God, The City of Ladies.

During the Middle Ages, it was also thought that Augustine had endorsed
the sibyls and their importance as pre-Christian prophets in the sermon Against
the Jews, Pagans and Arians then attributed to him. While Augustine does not
himself claim that it was the Cumean sibyl who announced the coming of Christ
to Augustus, since Virgil was a contemporary of Caesar Augustus and had quoted
the sibylline lines that were recognized as announcing Christ’s coming, it would
have been a small step for Christine and her contemporaries to make to reach the
conclusion that Augustus himself was the recipient of her prophecy.

The tradition that the Cumean sibyl had prophesied Jesus Christ was well
established in the courtly circles in which Christine moved. Eustache Deschamps,
with whom Christine exchanged poems, began a prophetic poem:

Augustine, The City of God against the Pagans, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge

In The Book of the City of Ladies, Christine does not take up this suggestion of Augustine
but quoting from the Miroir Historial follows the version of the sibylline tradition
according to which this is the sibyl of Erythea (Pizan, Città des Dame, II. 2.2, p. 101;

Augustine, 18.23, p. 852. In the same chapter Augustine strings together other prophecies
of the sibyls which he has culled from Lactantius, Divine Institutes noting that it is unclear
which sibyl they should be attributed to. Lactantius, who gives a list of the sibyls, agrees
that the sibylline ‘books have become confused; it is not possible to distinguish them’
(Lactantius, Divine Institutes, trans. and ed. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (Liverpool:

McGinn, p. 15: Dronke p. 228.
Je, Sebile, prophete, la Cumayne,
Qu’en .xii. vers parlay de Jhesu Crist
Par avant ce qu’il preist char humaine
En la Vierche qui nostre rachat fist,
Et fut tout voir ce que ma bouche dist.
Aussi sera la clause derreniere
Des corps lever, vueil reciter mon dit
Du cerf volant a la teste legiere.

[I, Sibyl, prophet of Cumae,
Who spoke in twelve lines of Jesus Christ
Before he took human form
In the Virgin which redeemed us
And all that my mouth spoke was true.
So will the last clause be
Of the resurrection of the body, will say my song
Of the flying stag with adolescent antlers.]

Just as it is not clear what is Christine’s exact source for the story of Augustus, so too it is not clear which source Deschamps is following in attributing a prophecy of 12 lines or verses to the Cumean sibyl. The prophetic poem to which Augustine refers in *The City of God* has in fact 27 lines, which he notes is the cube of three. This departure from Augustine indicates that Deschamps must also have been adapting a somewhat different tradition from that which has survived in the most easily accessible texts.

It is true that the tradition that it was the Tiburtine sibyl who prophesied to Augustus may also been available in the milieu in which Christine moved. During Isabeau de Bavière’s entry into Paris in 1385 a mystery play, *Octavien et la Sibylle*, was performed. It is implied by Emile Mâle that in this play the otherwise Italian tradition that the Tiburtine sibyl was the one who revealed Christ to Augustus was adopted. He also suggests that the illumination depicting the vision of the Virgin


18 Bath, p. 93.
and Christ appearing to Augustus to be found in Jean of Berry’s *Très riches heures* involves the Tiburtine sibyl. However, Mâle’s assumption with regard to the *Très riches heures* is not obviously justified. A well established story pertaining to the Cumean sibyl was that she offered nine books of prophetic writings to Tarquinius Priscus, and in the image of the sibyl in the *Très riches heures*, the sibyl is represented with a book at her feet, suggesting that here too the Cumean sibyl may be intended.

So Christine’s treatment of the sibyl does not so much involve an abusive assimilation as a judicious precisification. In the Cumean sibyl, who came like her from Italy, who was spoken of by Virgil, who was in turn described by Dante as his guide through the underworld, Christine found a powerful and authoritative precursor. In choosing her as the sibyl who spoke to Augustus, she adopted a reading of her sources evocative of her heritage and consistent with the information available to her.

In another case noted by Holderness, however, we have evidence of a choice being made among contemporary traditions that shows Christine taking a clear philosophical stance. This is what is at stake in the passage where Holderness suggests that Christine elides Boethius’ distinction between the poetic and philosophic muses. In fact, Boethius’ muses are unambiguously representatives of poetry, and are banished at the beginning of the *Consolation* by Philosophy as ‘sluts’ and ‘the very creatures who slay the rich and fruitful harvest of Reason with the barren thorns of Passion’. By contrast, Christine represents the muses as the source of both philosophic wisdom and poetic inspiration.

In her *Chemin de longue étude*, Christine depicts the nine muses bathing naked in the fountain of wisdom at which the philosophers Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Seneca, Tully, and Ptolemy, as well as the poets Virgil, Homer, Ovid, and Horace have drunk. Holderness suggests that she is rewriting and adapting the representation of the muses to be found in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,

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one of her major sources. Yet we should note that Christine was working with a variety of sources, not all of which treated the poetic muses with suspicion. With regard to sources, *Le Chemin de longue étude* is as much indebted to Dante as to Boethius, and it is from his *Commedia* that Christine took her title. Following Virgil, Dante unabashedly evoked the muses as an untainted source of poetic inspiration. The Cumean sibyl, who in this poem is acting as Christine’s guide, explains to her that the path that they are following, which leads past the fountain of the muses, is called ‘Lonc Estude’, to which Christine responds:

Mais le nom du plaisant pourpris  
Oncques mais ne me fu apris,  
Fors en tant que bien me recorde  
Que Dant de Florence el recorde  
En son livre qu’il composa  
Ou il moult biau stile posa;

[But the name of the pleasing passage  
Was no sooner learnt by me  
Than straight away I remembered  
That Dante of Florence recorded it  
In his book which he wrote  
Displaying the most beautiful style.]

So Christine’s evocation of the muses echoes Dante and acknowledges her debt to him as a ‘theological poet’ in whom she found fused a moral and philosophical subject matter with a poetic style congenial to her.

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26 Richards, ‘Christine de Pizan and Dante’, p. 104; Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l’advision Christine*, ed. Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac (Paris: Champion, 2001), p. 110: ‘Puis me pris aux livres des pouetes, et comme de plus en plus alast croissant le bien de ma cognaisance, adonc fus je aise quant j’oz trouvé le stille a moy naturel’ [Then I took up the books of poets, and as my understanding was growing and improving I was happy to have found the style natural to me], improving I was happy to have found the style natural to me.]
The banishment of the poetic muses in Boethius harks back to Plato’s critique of poetry as a dangerous stimulant to the emotions, and mere representation of the illusory world that fails to approach timeless truth. Christine did not know Plato in the original, but Tigonville’s Dits Moraulx, an important source for her Épistre Othea, touches on this debate. Anachronistically, Pythagoras and others are there represented as criticizing Aristotle for having taught poetry and rhetoric, for, it is said, they claimed that poetry simply teaches children to repeat fables and lies and rhetoric to polish flatteries. Aristotle is there represented as replying that even the sciences of rhetoric and poetry are based on reason and that knowledge should be put forward in the most appropriate manner. From this discussion, Christine extracts a passage with which she concludes the first gloss of the Épistre Othea which appeals to the authority of Aristotle for the conclusion that wisdom should be ‘monstree par la meilleure raison et la plus convenable maniere’ [demonstrated by the best reasons and in the most appropriate manner]. Christine’s construction of the muses as both philosophic and poetic should therefore be read as evidence of her deliberately ignoring a conception of poetry to which she did not subscribe. It was not that she thought that poetry could not be used to teach lies. Her criticisms of the defenders of the Romance of the Rose show her highly critical of de Meun’s use of poetry. But she never took this to be the fault of poetry itself, and in writing to Pierre Col she proposed Dante as a far preferable model to de Meun. She was critical only of those who failed to use poetry as a means to display wisdom in the most appropriate manner. Implicitly then, Christine’s treatment of the muses in the Chemin de longue étude shows her taking sides in a philosophical dispute and making a conscious decision to repeat only those elements of a source text which cohere with her convictions.

29 Pizan, Épistre Othea, p. 200; Christine de Pizan’s Letter of Othea to Hector, p. 37.
30 Richards, p. 103.
31 For a detailed discussion of Christine’s attitude to poetry and for the documents concerning the debate over the Romance of the Rose see Rosalind Brown-Grant, Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1977).
The yet more fascinating and significant ‘abusive’ or selective repetition of her sources, which is the last subject of this paper, occurs in *Le Livre du corps de poliec* I.2, where Christine introduces ‘l’imaige de felicité vertueuse’ [the image of virtuous happiness]. This image has been extensively commented on by Kate Forhan, who relates it to the illuminations in Oresme’s translation of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, but its full significance has not hitherto been appreciated.  

Christine says:

> Or est-il bon que aux roys et aux haults princes singulierement assez affiert honneur et par consequent vertu.  
> Sy nous couvient distinguer les parties que nous entendons pour vertu.  
> Et vecy Saint Augustin ou livre de la *Cité de Dieu* ou .xx.° chapitre qui en telle maniere le declare. Il dit que les philosophes dient que vertu est la fin de bien et mal humain, c’est a dire que la felicité humain est en estre vertueux. Or est-il ainsi que en felicité ait grand delectacion, aultrement ne seroit felicité. Et de ceste joie et felicité faisoient les anciens philosophez figurer et paindre l’imaige en telle maniere: elle estoit en guise d’une tresbelle et delictative royné qui en une chaiere royal seoit. Environ elle estoient les vertus et ou visage la regardoient pour atendre ses commandemens et a elle servir et obeir. Elle commandoit a Prudence qu’elle enquierist dilligemment comment elle peust longuement regner et estre saigne et en estat seur.  

[Now it is good that kings and high princes should particularly value honor and in consequence virtue.  
So it is appropriate that we distinguish the parts of what we understand to be virtue. And see on this Saint Augustine at the book of the *City of God* at the 20th chapter who describes it in this manner. He says that the philosophers say that virtue is the goal of human good and evil, which is to say that human happiness is in being virtuous. Now it is thus that there is great delight in happiness, otherwise it would not be happiness. And of this joy and happiness the ancient philosophers drew and painted the image in the following manner: she was represented as a beautiful and delicate queen sitting on a royal throne. Around her were the virtues]

32 Kate Forhan, “Reading Backward: Aristotelianism in the Political Thought of Christine De Pizan,” in *Au champ des escriptures*, ed. Hicks, pp. 359–82.
who watched her face waiting her commands in order to serve and obey her. She commanded Prudence to diligently enquire how she might long reign in a safe and sure manner.[33]

The passage continues with a description of Justice, Strength and Temperance that completes the picture of the four parts of virtue mentioned at the beginning of the quotation. Superficially, this looks like the repetition of a common Ciceronian tradition that morality flows from the four cardinal virtues. A closer look reveals an intriguing departure from both Cicero and St Augustine.

When we look at the passage from St Augustine to which Christine must be referring, we have to confess that she at first appears to be suffering from considerable philosophical confusion. Undoubtedly in the reference to the text quoted, a letter ‘v’ has been elided, and she intends Book V, chapter 20 of the *City of God* which is titled, ‘That it is as shameful for the virtues to serve human glory as it would be for them to serve bodily pleasure’. The image that Christine uses is clearly found here, but it serves quite a different purpose to that to which she puts it. Augustine begins with the observation that ‘there are certain philosophers who regard virtue as the highest human good’ and he says, these attempt to shame the others, the Epicureans, who see virtue as a means to bodily pleasure by painting the following picture: it is a picture which shows this highest good, pleasure, to be a voluptuous queen. He then goes further than these traditional critics of Epicurus and suggests that it would be equally inappropriate for the virtues to serve glory and so for glory to be identified with the highest good. While glory may not be voluptuous, it is still vain. The source of the passage quoted by Augustine is, it

33 Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre du corps de policie*, I.2, p. 2, *The Book of the Body Politic*, pp. 4–5, I have not followed Forhan’s translation but offered a rather more literal word for word translation which I believe is more faithful to the philosophical doctrines involved. For instance, Forhan translates, ‘Il dit que les philosophes dient que vertu est la fin de bien et mal humain, c’est a dire que la felicité humaine est en estre vertueux,’ as ‘[he] says that the philosophers say that virtue is the objective of all human good and evil. That is human happiness comes from being virtuous.’ This translation makes Augustine’s position, according to which happiness consists in virtue, sound too close to the Epicurean doctrine that virtue leads to happiness, which consists in pleasure.


35 Augustine, V. 20, p. 226.
turns out, Cicero’s *De finibus* 2.21.69, where he in turn attributes the image to Cleanthes. 36 Augustine says, ‘They depict pleasure as some voluptuous queen seated upon a royal throne. The virtues serve her as handmaidens, watching for her nod so that they may do whatever she commands.’ He continues that the picture would be no better if Glory were on the throne, for ‘though Glory is indeed not a voluptuous woman, she is still puffed up and has great vanity’. 37

In *Le Livre du corps de policie* Christine has completely transformed the significance of this image. She has turned it on its head as it were, and made it an image of what ought to be, the virtues serving happiness, rather than what ought not to be, the virtues serving pleasure or glory. But how could Christine have distorted her source so markedly? Does her transformation arise from an ambiguity in the contemporary corpus, as I argued was the case for her elision of the Cumean and Tibertian sibyls? Or, is she adopting a particular philosophical stance, as I argued she must be read as doing when she ignored the distrust of the poetic muses to be found in Boethius?

The thought that Christine’s confusion was common among her contemporaries is unsustainable. If one looks at Raoul de Presle’s translation of *The City of God*, which Christine might be thought to have consulted, Augustine’s meaning is perfectly clear. 38 If Christine’s source were this translation, one would have to conclude that she had deliberately subverted the misogynist overtones of the image,

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36 ‘You will be put to the blush, I say, by the picture that Cleanthes used to draw so cleverly in his lectures. He would tell his audience to imagine a painting representing Pleasure, decked as a queen, and gorgeously apparelled, seated on a throne; at her side should stand the Virtues as her handmaidens, who should make it their sole object and duty to minister to Pleasure, merely whispering in her ear the warning (provided this could be conveyed by the painter’s art) to beware of unwittingly doing aught to offend public opinion, or anything from which pain might result’ (Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*, trans. H. Rackham, *Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heineman and Harvard University Press, 1914), 2.21.69, p. 159.

37 Augustine, V. 20, p. 227.

38 Charity Cannon Willard, ‘Raoul de Presle’s Translation of Saint Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei’*, in *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. J. Beer (Kalamazoo: 1989), pp. 329–46 (p. 342). I consulted only one fifteenth-century manuscript of this translation – Pierpoint Ms 215 – but this is a manuscript clearly contemporary with Christine and there is no reason to think that other manuscripts available at this period would be significantly more corrupt.
replacing them with a metaphor intended to subtly enhance the prestige of women. However, following my own advice, it is important not too jump too quickly to conclusions. Angus Kennedy has argued that, whatever the original source of the passage, Christine’s immediate source was the Hesdin/Gonesse glossed translation of Valerius Maximus’ *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium*. Could Christine’s perversion of the image come from this source?

A perusal of the Hesdin/Gonesse Valerius Maximus makes it clear that this is by no means plausible. If anything, the Hesdin/Gonesse use of the passage makes even clearer the standard function of the metaphor as a Stoic refutation of the doctrines of Epicurus, as represented by them. For in Hesdin/Gonesse the repetition of the image is inserted into a discussion of the claims of the Epicureans that pleasure, or corporeal delight, is the highest good. So for Hesdin/Gonesse the voluptuous queen serves the same function as in Cicero. It is a picture painted by those who believe that virtue is the highest good, to embarrass the Epicureans, by representing pleasure as a voluptuous woman, inappropriately served by the virtues. Christine shows, by her introduction to the passage, in which she mentions glory, that she was independently familiar with Augustine’s use of the trope, but her adaptation of it turns sharply away from his intentions, as well as perverting Cicero’s original.

To a modern philosopher, Christine’s complete revision of the passage’s original intention, and apparent lack of care with the distinction between Stoic and Epicurean theories of the highest good, is somewhat shocking. And if one assumes that the Epicureans believed that corporeal pleasure is the highest good, Christine’s perversion of the traditional image would have been shocking to her contemporaries also. At the same time, since there had been considerable debate in the twelfth century over the nature of the highest good, she would have been seen, among those who knew their St Augustine, Cicero, and Abelard, as entering

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40 I am extremely grateful to Angus Kennedy for having provided me with a copy of the relevant folios 188d–189a from the Hesdin/Gonesse manuscript BNF fr. 282 which he consulted for his edition of *Le Livre du corps de policie*.
into an ongoing debate about the nature of the highest good.\textsuperscript{41} We must therefore conclude that Christine’s abusive transformation, which can hardly have gone unnoticed by her educated readers, was completely deliberate and was intended to make a substantive point. The transformation is in line with the conclusion that Christine largely subscribed to the Stoic tradition which identified the highest good with virtue, but wanted to underscore the compatibility of virtue and femininity, denied by important Stoics such as Cicero.

In the transformation of the image of \textit{felicité humaine}, one sees Christine engaged in an enormously sophisticated rhetorical strategy. Either unconsciously, or more probably consciously, her defence of women involved not just explicit argument, but also the construction of a new set of metaphors to counter and undermine the standard tropes used by philosophers. It appears from many passages that Christine largely agreed with the Stoics that virtue is the highest good. Characteristic is the following from the \textit{Livre de Paix} in which she approvingly quotes Seneca: \‘disoit Senecque: cellui est riche qui est bon, comme nul tresor ne s’aparage a bonté ne autre chose n’est droirement avoir.’ [Seneca said: He is rich who is good, as no treasure equals goodness nor is anything else true wealth].\textsuperscript{42} Her entire poem \textit{La Mutacion de Fortune} is a meditation on the theme that the goods of virtue are more solid than the variable gifts of fortune.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, she minimizes the difference between the Stoics and Epicureans by adopting, in her advice to Louis of Guyenne, the optimistic view that virtue is compatible with pleasure:

\textsuperscript{41} The debate, which is explicit in Augustine, was taken up by Peter Abelard in his \textit{Collationes}, trans. and ed. John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlandi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Marenbon points out in his introduction to this work that in it Abelard rehabilitates Epicurus and minimizes the difference between his views and those of the Stoics. Marenbon wonders whether this is derived from a reading of Seneca whose Letter 66 suggests that the pursuit of virtue brings pleasure (pp. lxix–lxxi). In her later \textit{Livre de Paix}, Christine also cites this letter but misattributes it (Christine de Pizan, \textit{The “Livre de la Paix” of Christine de Pisan}, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co, 1958), I. 5, p. 66). One might therefore wonder whether, as well as undercutting Cicero’s rhetoric, Christine is not also, like Abelard, deliberately promoting a fusion of Epicurean and Stoic views in this passage.

\textsuperscript{42} Pizan, \textit{The “Livre de la Paix” of Christine de Pisan}, III. 25, p. 153. See also I. 4, p. 63.

Mais pour ce que doubter pourroies que à suivre cest ordre convenisist du tout delaissier joye et leesse de laquelle chose naturelment se puet à paine deporter juenece, je te respons encorees au propros dessus que Tulles dit que de toutes les joyes et plaisances mondaines ne s’apareille nulle à celle qui vient et sourt à cause de vertu, car c’est comme la fontaine qui est interissable. Et ce conferme Saint Bernart disant que pour soy sauver et bien faire n’est ja besoing oster de soy delit et plaisance.44

[But since you might imagine that to follow this direction amounts to giving up all joy and cheerfulness – which things youth can hardly do without, of course – I answer the matter like this: Tully says all the joys and pleasures of the world cannot match what issues from virtue, for it is a fountain that can never dry up. St Bernard confirms this, saying that to be saved and to do good it is not necessary to put aside all relish of pleasure.]

A minimization of the gap between Stoic and Epicurean doctrines can also be read into Christine’s image of *felicité humaine*. This does not detract from the fact that the vice that many philosophers attributed to women excluded them from full participation in the highest good when it is identified with virtue. Rewriting the image of *felicité humaine*, Christine opposed this exclusion.

Women philosophers during the past three decades have noted the prevalence within philosophical texts of various metaphors which undermine philosophy’s self-representation as a discourse grounded purely in reason and literal truth.45

While the metaphors used by philosophers are not necessarily sexist, in many cases they are. Following Plato, the image that philosophy often paints of itself is that of an incorporeal disengaged love of higher things, escaping from a lower bestial or corporeal femininity. The passage that Cicero attributes to Cleanthes embodies this classic masculine prejudice. If the Epicurean makes the sovereign

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*Parergon* 22.1 (2005)
good a voluptuous queen, no more need be said; the Epicureans are expected to retreat in blushing shame. But Christine turns the image around. Possibly inspired by the miniature depicting *felicité humaine* in the Oresme translation of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Christine chose to make her a queen, quite appropriately served by the virtues, who become her handmaidens waiting at her beck and call. The image asserts that there is nothing inappropriate about a woman on the throne. It has been recast to fit the Aristotelian doctrine that the virtues serve human happiness (*eudaimonia*), and in the process the misogyny of the original passage has been exposed and undermined.

One cannot help wondering whether Christine does not choose this passage also to promote a literal queen. Human happiness as a queen upon the throne may well have been for Christine an image to be promoted, if she believed, as she may have done, that only a firm and effective regency under Isabeau de Bavière could save France from political chaos. Ironically, it has become difficult for commentators to see that Christine may have had this intention, for history has cast Isabeau so very much in the mould of a ‘voluptuous queen’, and ancestress of Marie Antoinette, that even female commentators have unquestioningly accepted the truth of this distorted image. A combination of male chauvinism and democracy has resulted in a very bad press for queens. Particularly in the lead up to the French Revolution, male democrats combined an expression of their loathing for women in power with an image of the debauched nature of monarchy, which resulted in the feminization of the king and the unnatural rule of men by women. This

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46 Forhan, ‘Reading Backward’, p. 368.

*Parergon* 22.1 (2005)
tendency peaked during the French Revolution, when Marie-Antoinette became the object of a vitriolic and sexualized attack. The public prosecutor at her trial evoked the spectre of former rapacious queens:


Here we hear echoed the prejudices captured in the image that Cicero had Cleanthes paint. This image is anathema for his audience, because what it represents, a queen on the throne, is a perversion of all that is right and noble. In it, the inferior rules the superior. Christine reverses the metaphor. A queen on the throne is as right and noble as the virtues serving a virtuous human happiness as the highest good. As reason tells her in the *Cité des Dames*, in refutation of Cicero, it is the perfection of the virtues that makes a person superior, not their sex.\footnote{Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, I.9.3, p. 24.}

By reading Christine’s writings against the message promoted in her sources we have come to see that her strategies of compilation and rewriting are far more subtle than is apparent on the surface. When Christine makes a genuine ‘abusive assimilation’, chances are that she has a clear philosophical agenda. When we look below the surface we find Christine responding to the sexist metaphors of the philosophical corpus not by rejecting reason or philosophy but by persistently recasting philosophical metaphors in more congenial forms. She is not the only
medieval or early modern woman philosopher to have done so, but her practice shows a particularly acute awareness both of the metaphorical resonances of the philosophical corpus and of the rhetorical strategies available to undermine them.\textsuperscript{52}

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\textsuperscript{52} For a fuller discussion of the sexism of philosophy’s metaphors, and further examples of women’s attempts to transform them see Jacqueline Broad, Karen Green, and Helen Prosser, ‘Emasculating Metaphor: Whither the Maleness of Reason?’, in Feminist Alliances, ed. Lynda Burns (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 103–23.