

Review of Pamela Sue Anderson, ed., *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate (Feminist Philosophy Collection)*, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer 2010, xiv + 338 pp., Euro 139.95, ISBN 978-1-4020-6832-4; e-ISBN 978-1-4020-6833-1

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This substantial selection of essays forms part of the 'Feminist Philosophy Collection' published by Springer. The Collection's mission statement mentions that philosophy has become a vital arena for feminists during the last forty years so that this book series aims to publish new, representative contributions by feminist thinkers to the six most significant areas of philosophy, one of which is philosophy of religion. Some volumes in this Collection explore new territory while building upon established feminist work; others are said to break exciting new ground. The present book, edited by Pamela Anderson, well known for her earlier pioneering work in the feminist philosophy of religion, appears on first inspection to belong more to the former rather than the latter category. On closer reading, however, it falls somewhere between these two groups by building on earlier feminist work, but occasionally also breaking new ground.

The initial attraction of the book consists in the diversity of its twenty contributors, mostly women but also several men, drawn from the UK, continental Europe, Israel and North America, and in the rich variety of perspectives brought together here. A large volume of 338 pages, it is dedicated to feminist philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff whose work, together with that of Bourdieu, provides helpful signposts for several contemporary feminist philosophers of religion.

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion has a clear and well organized structure. Evenly divided into two parts of ten chapters each, the book's first part deals with 'Contestations: Concepts and Practices', whereas the second part carries the more intriguing title 'Transcendence Incarnate: Space, Self and

Other'. Unfortunately, no effort has been made to provide some integration or at least connecting links between the rich, but very diverse ideas found in each part.

The editor's general Introduction is minimal, just over three pages, and there is no overall Conclusion nor any separate introductions to the two main parts of the book. Nor is there any cumulative bibliography. Instead, separate bibliographical references are given for each essay, so that there is inevitably some repetition in the citing of sources. The presentation of each essay resembles more that of a journal article than of a book chapter: each is preceded by an abstract, keywords, and the address of each contributor, with no professional profile of the contributors provided in a separate list, as is customary in other such collections. A critical reader may well wonder in what way this book is different from a compilation of articles found in an academic journal. However, the book does include a comprehensive analytical Index.

The topics treated here are wide-ranging; they deal with textual and historical matters as well as with philosophical issues and the ideas of well-known earlier philosophical writers, from Kant to Simone Weil, Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Luce Irigaray, Grace Jantzen, and the editor, Pamela Anderson. Some essays are more historical than philosophical, such as those on Maude Royden, or on women in the ultra-orthodox Sephardic community in Israel. Other essays would fit equally well into a religious studies volume, such as, for example, Muslim reflections on the menstruation verse in the Qur'an, or the discussion of women in the Buddhist Jataka stories or of the Hindu Goddess Radha. Are these perhaps the 'new topics' alluded to in the book's title, or does 'newness' primarily relate to the imaginative new approaches evident in the discussion of some key concepts and practices?

In other words, the notion of feminist philosophy is broadly construed here, covering ontological, ethical and occasionally also spiritual questions, although the latter are more touched upon in passing than dealt with in depth. They remain mostly implicit, as they often are in Grace Jantzen's and Pamela Anderson's own writings.

Anderson's Introduction admits to this broad, inclusive understanding of the feminist philosophy of religion, but she also claims that her book has a strong affinity with the spirit of revolution that Mary Daly first famously proclaimed forty years ago as the hallmark of women's critical thinking on religion. Such a revolutionary spirit may be evident in parts of these essays, but it would be hard to maintain that a revolutionary spirit characterizes the book as a whole. I for one miss any reference to what is now called 'the revolution of evolution' – a revolution that radically transforms much past and present thinking through the application of dynamic evolutionary categories. Such new thinking, not hinted at here, will eventually also come to have a profound impact on the discussions of modernity, postmodernity, rationality, gender categories and the very concept of transcendence itself.

To give an idea of the rich variety of themes pursued in this book, I will mention just a few topics from Part I by way of example: the role of the imagination and the imaginary in the philosophy of religion is discussed with special reference to Jantzen's and Anderson's work (Marije Altorf), as is the problem of evil in Arendt and Jantzen as well as the restricted nature of traditional concepts of evil, especially in dealing with violence against women (Morny Joy). Other essays look at forgiveness and whether it can be unconditional (Anca Gheaus),

at the links between Simone Weil's social philosophy and the development of a postcolonial ethic (Inese Radzins), and at the horizons and limitations of a Muslim feminist hermeneutics (Shuruq Naguib).

Philosophically speaking, Part II on 'Transcendence Incarnate' is the more exciting section. Here the traditional notion of transcendence is both deconstructed and reconstructed as being linked to the body, human embodiment, and daily life. Late in the book a footnote mentions that this suggestive expression, 'transcendence incarnate', stems originally from a continental philosophy conference on 'Transcendence Incarnate: The Corporeality of the Spiritual and the Spirituality of the Corporeal', held in Oxford in 2007 (320, note 2). It would have been helpful to have been given more information on this event. Even more appropriate would have been some comparative historical information on – and a more extensive conceptual analysis of – the widely ramified meaning of 'transcendence' within the western philosophical and theological canon somewhere in the book.

Several essays in Part II deal with philosophical discussions of the body, beginning with Pamela Anderson's challenging chapter on 'The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence'. She describes 'the lived body', insofar as confident, as '*transcendence incarnate*' and uses the awakening of Eve as the 'lived body' moving from pre-personal to personal awareness (164). Anderson writes: 'We appear to be given abilities for transcendence; and yet the ambiguity of transcendence within a fleshy, bodily existence suggests a loss of what is, in phenomenological terms "originally" ours'. (163)

Other chapters address 'Bodies in Space: Transcendence and the Spatialisation of Gender' (Roxana Baiasu) and 'The Body as Site of Continuity and Change' (Paul S. Fiddes). Two further chapters focus specifically on Irigaray's thought: 'The Problem of Transcendence in Irigaray's Philosophy of Sexual Difference' (Patrice Haynes) and 'An Ethics of the In-Between: A Condition of Possibility of Being and Living Together' (Anne-Claire Mulder).

Maude Royden is interpreted through Kristeva's lens of the female genius (Alison Jaspers), whereas Kant's and Heidegger's influence on feminists philosophy is discussed by several authors (Daphne Hampson, Pamela Anderson, Ben Morgan), and the Goddess Radha is presented as an exemplary spiritual model for both genders (Jessica Frazer).

The book finishes with an inspiring reflection on practical wisdom, imagined as 'The Dance of Transcendence Incarnate' (Lauri Anderson Sathe). It presents women as imagining the possible, inviting them to become critical thinkers and, together with others, agents of change, creating a space for practical wisdom (which remains undefined however). This concluding essay reflects at the end, as several authors have done elsewhere, on the symbolic power of Henri Matisse's famous painting 'Dance' which shows exuberant women dancing in public space, experiencing themselves as part of the dance of life.

The overall strength of *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion* is due to several factors. It makes a significant contribution to the ongoing study of religion and gender through its focus on contemporary debates among feminist philosophers of religion. It also critically examines key ideas and themes first explored by pioneers in this field. Moreover, it further disseminates some of the novel insights presented by Grace Jantzen and Pamela Anderson in their earlier work.

Readers will find many new ideas to challenge their thinking, or old ones approached from new and unusual perspectives. There are also stimulating discussions of familiar philosophical authors, both male and female, and a new critical examination of some of their most influential work. The book provides much to choose from, whether readers are established academics, younger scholars interested in lively philosophical debates, or students eager to learn about a new field or in search of a suitable research topic.