

**Review of Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-Visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion. Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (Intensities: Contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion Series), Farnham/Surrey/Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2012, XIV + 249 pp., ISBN 978-0-7546-0785-4**

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This important study full of insight, wisdom and critical comment is fired by a passion for truth and justice and a deep concern for advancing the case for reason, love and beauty in the contemporary global world. It represents both a summation and extension of Anderson's earlier work since it develops, questions and revises what she has previously written in several books and numerous articles (without listing all her publications, the book's bibliography includes 28 book essays and articles by Anderson).

The succinct Preface makes it clear that this is a book written with a strong commitment to transform traditional philosophy of religion as practised in the western, especially Anglo-Saxon, academy. This task is pursued not simply by revising the discipline, but by radically re-visioning it from a sophisticated, complex gender perspective that takes into account the intersectionality of gender with a range of social and material categories including race, religion, ethnicity, class, age and sexual orientation. Anderson's self-reflexivity as a woman-philosopher who teaches Anglo-American philosophy of religion, while also writing on Continental philosophy of religion, in an academic field largely dominated by men, leads her into a lively dialogue with other women-philosophers and women-poets of past and present. They enable her to look at philosophy of religion and its central constructs from a new critical direction in order to see the whole field anew. This is an ambitious aim which is remarkably well pursued in this book.

Philosophers of religion will have to judge whether Anderson's trenchant criticisms are justified and her constructive efforts helpful in changing their

discipline. I chose this new publication for an attentive, close reading since, knowing Anderson's earlier work, I was full of expectations, eagerly anticipating new perspectives opening up before my mind. I have not been disappointed as I have learnt a great deal and been encouraged to reflect critically and constructively on some of her ideas in my own work. But I have also several reservations. Critical readers will be left with further questions in their mind, not so much about the substance and central arguments than about the incompleteness, lack of precision and clarity in their articulation, so that some of the challenging promises announced by the author seem far from having been fully delivered. In addition there is some poor editing and an unnecessarily repetitive wordiness and didactic approach in several sections of this work. The substantial Bibliography (18 pages) will be most valuable for researchers and graduate students as will be the detailed Index, although not all writers referred to in the text are listed.

The book has been long in the making. Writing with great transparency and honesty, Anderson not only meticulously acknowledges all her sources but also indicates clearly that the discussions pursued here have been shaped over many years. The essence of her material is taken from previously published articles and essays in other people's books. Thoroughly revised and rearranged, the content of all chapters, except for that of Chapter 8, has been published in earlier versions between the years of 2002 and 2012, but their chronological order is not followed here. Although a widely established practice, the manner of re-using earlier publications varies enormously among authors and can lead to widely differing results. Any critical reader of such rearranged work must immediately wonder whether the new combination created out of earlier writings produces a coherent, self-contained whole reborn in the form of a well argued, closely integrated new book. This question still remains in my mind after a prolonged intensive reading of this rather dense, over-annotated and in many places repetitive text. However, Anderson has provided a great service in creating this book since few people will know every article in this volume from earlier publications. The cumulative effect of all the arguments pursued here together carries much more weight, endowing the whole book with more power of reasoning that can persuade readers far more than any one article can in isolation.

The ten chapter titles include the key ideas that figure throughout most of Anderson's analysis. They range from re-visioning gender and patriarchy to philosophy of religion, theism and feminism, Continental philosophy of religion, love, reason, feminist philosophy of religion and gender justice to diversity and gender. A critic may point out that this is mainly an ideas book, so very abstract that one can rightly say that it follows closely the highly perfected intellectual-abstract model of the much criticised male philosophical masters, in spite of its quite different, contrary intentions. The discussions lack empirical examples and the concrete vividness of life as actually lived by most people on earth.

Among traditional philosophers Kant and Spinoza are given much attention whereas among the modern ones especially Ricoeur, but also Derrida and Deleuze, are referred to. Of contemporary women writers and philosophers Iris Murdoch finds extensive discussion and is shown to have influenced Anderson considerably. Michèle Le Doeuff also figures prominently as does Grace Jantzen's work. Irigaray's feminism of sexual difference is critically examined and found wanting whereas the two French 'Simones' – de Beauvoir and Weil – are

more approvingly cited. Adrienne Rich's poetry provides some thought-provoking quotations and bell hooks' writings are acknowledged to have inspired sections of Chapters 1, 6, 8, 9 and 10 (2012: 102). The detailed discussion of hooks' thought may invite readers to turn to this black American feminist writer and social activist in order to fathom the rich seams of her work.

I want to highlight a few central ideas of Anderson's book. Faith, reason and truth are shown not to be the enemies of women in philosophy but, on the contrary, they prove to be absolutely necessary for re-visioning gender in philosophy of religion. Traditional theism, as discussed in philosophy, is closely examined, but the critical objections regarding the traditional understanding of God would have been construed differently if the alternative critical and constructive work of Charles Hartshorne had been included in this discussion. However, Anderson's new way of being bold and confident in acting rationally and passionately must be applauded. She writes:

Feminist philosophers of religion come at old texts with fresh eyes and from a critical direction which is whole-making; that is, they constantly aim to connect author, text and readers in a radical vision of what binds humans together philosophically and spiritually. This critical direction makes possible open engagement with, for instance, a Spinozist *conatus*...[this technical term, like some others in the book, is never explained, U. King]...The ongoing feminist challenge for re-visioning gender in philosophy of religion is to free the mind to affirm bodily life within an ever-greater perfection that never reaches its goal, but constantly increases power in love and wisdom (2012: 154).

Chapter 6 on 'Restoring Faith in Reason' is of particular importance since the understanding of reason and the place of a rightly understood rationality are essential in human life. Here Anderson's discussion even draws on the encyclical letter *Faith and Reason* by the late Pope John Paul II. She defends an engaged grasp of the concept of reason so that it is a concept by which we can live. The modern loss of faith in reason has led to nihilism and to a 'diremption', a tearing apart of faith and reason. We are therefore confronted by a global culture that has lost its meaning and a life that is missing its humanity. Anderson argues passionately for restoring our faith in reason; she speaks of rational passion which she sees linked to a deep yearning, perceived as a human craving for infinitude, but also a deep-felt longing for a shared humanity. For her, 'Yearning for a common humanity goes to the heart of truth, but also to the depths of our embodiment, individually and collectively' (2012: 136). This yearning also extends to the establishment of gender justice 'where wounds are healed and we share a common humanity in a circle of love' (2012: 137).

This theme is meant to be more fully elaborated in Chapter 8 on 'Gender Justice and Unselfish Attention' but in spite of its title it contains relatively few reflections on justice. Its primary concerns are beauty and love, the gendering of the beautiful and sublime, pointing to the need for a new aesthetic. The last chapter (2012: 10) addresses the great contemporary issue of diversity, primarily in relation to gender, but also to race and religion, showing that some well-known philosophical writers on religious diversity and interreligious dialogue remain quite gender-blind. Thus it calls into question the presumed 'gender-neutrality' of philosophy of religion. Great emphasis is laid on the epistemic locatedness of all knowing as socially and materially conditioned. This is strongly and repeatedly affirmed but never illustrated through any concrete

examples. Donna Haraway's view that 'humanity's face' has been the face of man will strike a strong chord with feminist readers as will be the celebration of the power of life and the appeal for a joyful love of life. Anderson encourages feminist philosophy of religion to be life-affirming while recognizing that ultimately we need to re-vision the gender of every woman and man. Re-visioning gender in the philosophy of religion is both an individual and collective process.

She concludes that her book 'has endeavoured to make this process move forward by elucidating the philosopher's reason, love and epistemic locatedness and by gradually changing the field' (2012: 222). Only the future can tell whether this radical transformation will have happened.