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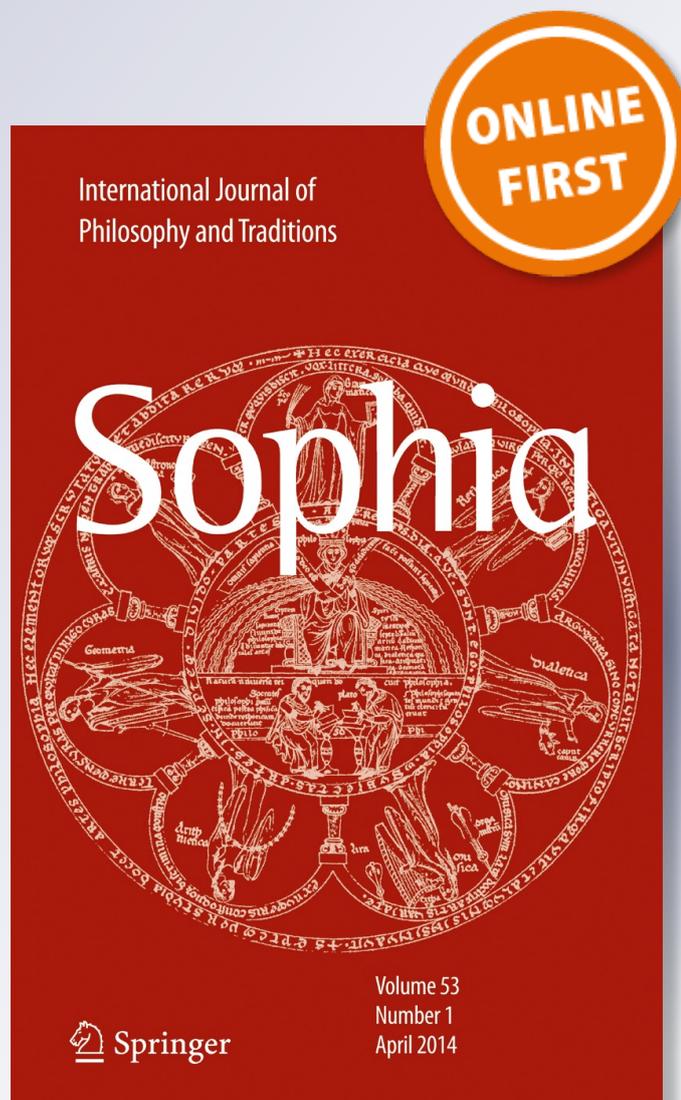
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Editorial: In the Guise of a Miracle

Pamela Sue Anderson

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'[T]he new...always appears in the guise of a miracle'.¹

The first-ever special issue of an Anglo-American philosophy journal on 'feminist philosophy of religion' appeared in 1994.² The present special issue of *Sophia: International journal for philosophy of religion, metaphysical theology and ethics* marks the beginning of the third decade of feminist writings in Anglo-American philosophy of religion. At this time, we do well to pause, in order to think about the strong resistance, which feminist philosophers have faced in this philosophical field where 'religion' still generally means traditional theism. For this religious tradition, 'God' is personal, without a body, referred to as 'He' who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient and Creator of the world. Insofar as this God has personified a gender ideal, 'He' has become the object of feminist critiques. Yet any successful feminist intervention into the philosophical debates concerning the nature and existence of the omni-perfect God will work against formidable inertia. A feminist philosopher of religion has to be realistic about the possibility of change; she is no miracle-worker. Nevertheless, she has certainly come close to something miraculous when she has laboured to give birth to something new. 'The new' comes, as Hannah Arendt wrote, 'in the guise of a miracle' breaking into our lives and, in this context, our thinking and acting.

In light of the male dominated history of western philosophy, a woman philosopher initiating change to the (supposedly) changeless God has seemed nothing short of miraculous: she has confronted 'His' Anglo-American defenders, aiming to conceive something radically new. This newness has required a break in time, which is not exactly of its time.³ Instead, the required break has had to create a way to confront the

¹Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition, with a new Introduction by Margaret Canovan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 178.

²*Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Nancy Frankenberry and Marilyn Thie, 9/4 (Fall 1994). Until now, the only other journal which published a special feminist edition on philosophy of religion was the privately published, UK Society for Women in Philosophy journal, *Women's Philosophy Review* no. 29 (2002), edited by Pamela Sue Anderson and Harriet Harris; see www.swipuk.org/datapubs/old/WPR%2029.pdf.

³A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 388.

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rigour of philosophical theism. In turn, the feminist philosopher's confrontation with the rigorous philosophical defence of traditional theism has led to paving the way for not only theoretical change but also practical transformation. Here, feminist transformation in the realm of practical action has arisen in the birth of new life for philosophical debates about religion(s). To ignore new (epistemic) practices in philosophy of religion will only result in one's own personal loss: the ruin of the philosopher who lacks an adequate ontological grounding. Again, Arendt offers us the appropriate words: 'The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted.'⁴ The fact of natality has given (feminist) philosophers the necessary ontological rootedness for initiating radically new action in both thinking and living. In the present case, this has given birth to 'feminist philosophy of religion'.

In this Introduction to *Sophia's* own first special issue on 'Feminist philosophy of religion', I cannot resist taking up Steven Shakespeare's story about 'the hardcore': he testifies that Anglo-American philosophers of religion (the vast majority of whom are white male Protestant analytic philosophers) are not ashamed to attribute 'hardcore' to their talk about God!⁵ The sexist connotations of such God-talk are no surprise to a feminist philosopher of religion. Similarly, we understand the patriarchal—and racist—significance of words which Alice Walker chooses for her fictional character's reflections: '[U]s talk and talk about God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. ...[t]his hard work, let me tell you. He's been there so long, he don't want to budge.'⁶ With these poignant lines, from *The Color Purple*, about this 'hard work', Melissa Raphael captures the resistance of patriarchy to change. Yet she also contributes to unearthing the dominant imagery of the male sex, which has been difficult (for women in contemporary theology and philosophy of religion) to work with, and hard to work against!

In her essay, Raphael reminds us how feminists from more than one religion have tried to tackle idolatrous, sexual imagery; this includes traditional theism insofar as the male positioning of God remained unchallenged, and worshipped as 'God the Father' of (hu)mankind. Aiming to subvert what I suggest is the hardcore worship of a male God, Raphael explains that second-wave feminism brought together 'an inter-religious coalition of feminists who believed that idolatry is not one of the pitfalls of patriarchy but its symptom and cause.'⁷ Removing idolatry as the cause of patriarchal oppression requires struggle. Raphael recalls Emma Goldmann's struggle with 'those internal tyrants', from which we—individually and collectively—seek liberation.

Thus, it is no surprise that feminist work in philosophy of religion, as Shakespeare rightly says, 'names a field of labour'. As 'material work', it has not only 'all the potential for exclusion, exploitation and objectification' but also 'the potential for a reworking of the world through [new] concepts' which resist commodification.⁸ Yet as

⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 247.

⁵ Steven Shakespeare, 'The Imperceptible Work of God: Pamela Sue Anderson's *Re-visioning Gender*,' (below), p. 193.

⁶ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1983), p. 179.

⁷ Melissa Raphael, 'A Patrimony of Idols: Second Wave Feminist Theology and the Criticism of Religion,' (below), p. 241.

⁸ Shakespeare, 'The Imperceptible Work of God', p. 197.

Shakespeare asks, in response to his reading of Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness*,⁹

What are the institutional, material conditions which will need to be in place so that many more women write and intervene in the philosophy of religion, to change the field and its imaginary? What could be done practically to prevent 'the hardcore' becoming an impenetrable wall denying new concepts being produced by women.¹⁰

Both Raphael and Shakespeare are correct that feminist philosophy of religion has required the persistent determination of critical and self-reflexive feminists, in order to transform thinking, which had been idolatrous. Patriarchal idolatry undermined personal, as well as philosophical, relations between men and women. The concept of a personal, patriarchal God has dominated implicitly and explicitly a branch of philosophy which feminist (analytic) philosophers have sought to subvert and rework, at least since the 1990s. Notable is the aforementioned publication of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 'Feminist philosophy of religion', edited by Nancy Frankenberry and Marilyn Thie, 9/4 (Fall 1994). This special issue of *Hypatia* was followed by two ground-breaking monographs, both published coincidentally 4 years later, by Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: the Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief*, and by Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*.¹¹ These monographs began the digging up and the hollowing out of the field of philosophy of religion, which was necessary in order to make room for new concepts; this would include—at least for some—replacing the good old God and 'His' cluster of omni-perfect attributes. The process of transformation takes not only creative effort, but time. Two decades passed between the special issue of *Hypatia* (1994) and the special issue of *Sophia* (2014), when institutional support has rarely (if ever) been on the side of those women who worked for philosophical and personal change.

The good news is that today we welcome contributors—women and men—some of whom publish in Continental philosophy (of religion) and theology, where the same hardcore of traditional theism has not existed. Instead on the Continent, generally, we do not find the same degree of intellectually controlled rigour as that maintained by Anglo-American analytic philosophy of the Christian religion. As a contemporary (Continental) philosopher of religion Shakespeare again requests without hesitation: that we 'engage more explicitly with creating some of those new conceptual possibilities for thinking the divine.'¹² With a similar concern for creative possibilities, several of the contributors to the present special issue have taken up the feminist challenge to

⁹ (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012).

¹⁰ Shakespeare, 'The Imperceptible Work of God', p. 197-8.

¹¹ Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: the Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); and Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

¹² Shakespeare, 'The Imperceptible Work of God', p. 197. Also, note that in 2012 Patrice Haynes and Steven Shakespeare became Editors for the new Ashgate series, 'Intensities: Contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion'; and the first book in this series is *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life*, edited by Katharine Sarah Moody and Steven Shakespeare (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012).

push forward a politics of change, especially on the question of new conceptual and non-conceptual possibilities for feminist philosophy of religion. For a salient example, which brings ‘the Continent’ and ‘the British Isles’ together, in discussions of ‘knowing how to be finite’, Roxana Baiasu’s essay engages directly with A. W. Moore’s analytic account of the infinite, finitude and the ineffable, alongside of Pamela Sue Anderson’s feminist account of gender, the infinite and the ineffable.¹³ In Sherah Bloor’s review of *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, she correctly locates Anderson’s debates concerning ineffability within Kantian feminism¹⁴: this (post) Kantianism brings Moore and Baiasu together on the question of ineffable knowledge too.

Roughly, Moore who describes himself as ‘a conceptual philosopher’ motivates Baiasu to ask, how do we ‘talk about what cannot be said?’¹⁵ At the same time, Continental philosophers of religion have asked, how do we avoid speaking about what cannot be spoken?¹⁶ However, following Moore, Anderson herself—similar to Shakespeare (above)—asks, how do we allow the ineffable ‘know how’, which conditions our very use of concepts, to rework our world and so, philosophy of religion for women, as much as for men, from a global range of backgrounds?¹⁷ Here, the range of (seemingly) unresolvable conceptual issues is infinite, and feminist philosophers are readily aware of their finitude. In the end, we might follow a style more reminiscent of Jacques Derrida or Luce Irigaray in ‘miming’ the ineffable, in ‘knowing how to be finite’, when we make ‘play with infinitude’.¹⁸

Consistent with this awareness of our finitude, Marika Rose boldly asserts that Slavoj Žižek offers to feminist philosophy of religion, the possibility of thinking ‘mystical discourse according to the logic of drive.’¹⁹ This is to find, according to Rose, ‘mystical language delighting in perpetually circling around the point of its failure, as the attempt to speak about God which succeeds precisely by failing, over and over again’.²⁰ Nevertheless, Baiasu still contends that we can ‘talk about’ the ineffable, while not ‘bely[ing] its very ineffability’! Of course, she admits that a feminist (analytic) philosopher of religion struggles to maintain the aim of ‘objectivity’, while admitting ‘the locatedness of reason.’²¹ As feminist philosophers, we want neither

¹³ Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 66–87.

¹⁴ Sherah Bloor, ‘Claiming Kant for Feminism: The Significance of Kant’s Transcendental Philosophy for Pamela Sue Anderson’s *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness*’ (below), pp. 297–302

¹⁵ A. W. Moore, ‘Arguing with Derrida’, *Ratio: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, Special issue on Arguing with Jacques Derrida, edited by Simon Glendinning, XIII/4 (December 2000): 355–381; cf. Roxana Baiasu, ‘Knowing how to talk about what cannot be said: objectivity and epistemic locatedness’ (below), pp. 215–230; and Pamela Sue Anderson, ‘Ineffable Knowledge and Gender’, in Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Rethinking Philosophy of Religion: Approaches from Continental Philosophy* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 162–183.

¹⁶ For example, Jean-Luc Marion. ‘In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of “Negative Theology”’, in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *God, The Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 20–53.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 206–222.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 70–85.

¹⁹ Marika Rose, ‘The Mystical and the Material: Slavoj Žižek and the French reception of mysticism’, (below), pp. 234 and 240.

²⁰ Rose, ‘The Mystical and the Material’, p. 240.

²¹ Baiasu, ‘Knowing How to Talk about What Cannot Be Said’, p. 222–226

to ignore our material and social locations nor to collapse into silence when it comes to objective reasoning.

In her contribution to this issue of *Sophia*, Beverley Clack urges us to express something new in 'spontaneity'. She argues powerfully that we need to keep spontaneity alive in feminist philosophy of religion. Unlike 'the control' dominating the politics of theistic philosophers, feminist philosophers are helped to flourish, according to Clack, by creating a new philosophical imaginary of 'the dancing philosopher'.²² Movements uniting body and mind take feminism directly into life, which flourishes as long as the collective-political and the individual-personal join hands. Clack's imaginary equally recalls a theme from *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestation and Transcendence Incarnate*; here, Laurie Anderson Sathe explores 'the dance of transcendence incarnate'.²³ Anderson Sathe's imagery of dancing, like Clack's imagery, aims to mobilise a philosophical practice which joins the hands and hearts of feminists, in order to create spontaneous connections across political differences. In Anderson Sathe's evocative words,

Appropriating the imagery of Matisse's *Dance* in creating the space for wise women, who move in a circle... in a flowing movement, enables constantly different shapes. Like an amoeba, these female figures dance together changing themselves and their worlds. This is a feminist picture of our ever-shifting global environment: hands unclasp and welcome new members into the philosophical circle... female inheritance encourages their movements and informs their practical wisdom.²⁴

This new philosophical imaginary of wise dancers helps to express non-conceptual possibilities, without ignoring the challenge to create concepts (e.g. wise women) for feminist philosophy of religion. In this way, both non-conceptual know how and new conceptual tools are intimated in feminist discussions of practical wisdom. Making visible the old and the new in wisdom contributes to debates not only within twentieth-century Continental and analytic philosophy but also within and beyond the contemporary feminist philosophy of religion. We see women and men in, for example, Victoria Davies's 'In the Midst', where she points a way to practical wisdom in *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life*:

[T]o avoid separating thought and life... we can see that a[n] apposite model may involve practical wisdom, generated through a reciprocal and equal participation in an event of truth and meaning-making practices. This would focus on a patient vigil which awaits truth, where all participants are working toward the mutual co-constituting of the free emergence of truth, implying rebirth.²⁵

²² Clack, 'Beginning Something New: Control, Spontaneity and the Dancing Philosopher', pp. 261-274.

²³ Laurie Anderson Sathe, 'Creating a Space for Practical Wisdom: the Dance of Transcendence Incarnate,' in Pamela Sue Anderson (ed.), *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestation and Transcendence Incarnate* (Dordrecht-New York-London: Springer, 2010), pp. 319-328. For an earlier collection of essays in this field, see Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack (eds), *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁴ Anderson Sathe, 'Creating a Space for Practical Wisdom', p. 327.

²⁵ Victoria Davies, 'In the Midst: A Discussion of *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life*', (below), p. 297.

Now, Kate Kirkpatrick offers—initially at least—a more sobering picture of the possibilities for the personal and social reality of women's lives. Kirkpatrick wonders why young women are not warned of the disturbing reality of change, especially of the physical and psychological-emotional changes to women's bodies brought about by pregnancy and by old age. Kirkpatrick reminds us that a woman in her own life—perhaps earlier than a man—experiences destabilising changes as bodily and cultural phenomena which are often far from liberating!

Take the example of the experience of change in the life of a female dancer. First, referring to *The Second Sex*, Kirkpatrick recalls Simone de Beauvoir's account of the dancer, Isadora Duncan, 'who mourns the loss of her "marble body" in pregnancy, describing "the Spanish Inquisition as "mild sport" in comparison to the pain of labour'.²⁶ Next, Kirkpatrick points out that from Beauvoir's dialectical view—that is, 'from within' and 'from without'—the dancer's pain in pregnancy will not last. And her body will 'grow lithe again!' In the end, Kirkpatrick herself stresses that every new life is, in Beauvoir's terms, 'a strange miracle.'²⁷ Once again, a woman in philosophy of religion discovers that 'the new' appears in the guise of a miracle! Yet did we not (always) know that the miraculous is strange? It seems that this needs to be said to young women, as much as it is repeated by and to older women!

As Kirkpatrick demonstrates so well, the strangeness of the miraculous accompanies life's transformative power. Such power will challenge a woman's thinking about (her) life with the pain, as much as the joy, of change. From Kirkpatrick's reading of Beauvoir, we are reminded that the sobering nature of 'the psychological transformation that occurs with the birth of a child is, like the realization that one is old, irreversible'.²⁸

So, how can feminist philosophers of religion make progress when they seem more often than not, to move in circles, which do not always move them forward in any consistently positive direction? Progress in change is not always the outcome of our philosophizing or living. Even when feminist philosophers have created new conceptual, and at times, non-conceptual tools for changing the discipline of philosophy, we discover that the joy of the new is undone by pain and loss. Nowhere is this sad irony more clear than in the case of the timely writings of feminist philosopher Gillian Howie whose memory we celebrate in this special issue.

The dedication of *Sophia's* special issue on 'Feminist philosophy of religion' to Howie might have initially seemed odd to our philosophical and theological readers alike. Howie was neither a theologian nor a philosopher of religion. Nevertheless, Gillian Howie was a feminist philosopher who remains deeply significant to feminist philosophers of religion, and so, this dedication is highly appropriate! 'Gill', as her friends knew her, provoked the thinking of feminist philosophers personally, and often profoundly. J'annine Jobling, 'Obituary: Gillian O. Howie (1965–2013), 'The Personal is the Philosophical', poignantly expresses Gill's touch. The woman and the philosopher—Gill—touched our lives and our thinking about life more than we can adequately

²⁶ Kate Kirkpatrick, 'Past Her Prime? Simone de Beauvoir on Motherhood and Old Age', (below), p. 282.

²⁷ Kirkpatrick, 'Past Her Prime?', p. 280 and 282

²⁸ Kirkpatrick, 'Past Her Prime?', p. 282; also see pp. 275, 276 and 280.

express here.²⁹ Yet we can say that, from Gill, we did learn to be ever more determined and driven, especially in connecting feminist philosophy (of religion) to living, which included Gill's project, 'living with dying'.³⁰

Crucially, as we reflect critically upon a woman's lived experiences of change as a bodily and cultural phenomenon, the God 'without a body' who dominates the thought and life of the theistic philosopher will appear personally and philosophically lacking, if not irrelevant. The sex and gender attributed to the theist's God in actual religious discourse and practice are part of the problem for feminist philosophy of religion. The other part of the problem is 'His' irrelevance. Philosophical debates about this God—about 'Him'—simply fail to address some of the most profound concerns in (a woman's) life: both the fact of natality and the matter of how we live our lives. We see this in Gill's own life and her life's work: she 'lived' her feminism and her philosophy, forcing the feminist philosopher (of religion) to reflect individually and collectively upon the real sense in which a philosopher's life is about thinking; at the same time, the feminist philosopher finds herself reflecting upon the sense in which her thinking is about living with loss. Gill herself gives testimony to the reality of a life, which is interwoven with other lives, socially and materially, but also a life, which engages in thinking with the philosophical writings of others who are living with/and dying.³¹

Now, to return to the question of non-conceptual possibilities in actual living, these might be found implicit in Clack's figuring of a dancing philosopher. Possibilities for living are imagined in various forms in this special issue of *Sophia*. Yet the large question persists: how do we allow the ineffable know how, which conditions our very use of concepts, to rework our world? Ideally, this reworking of the world, of human affairs, would include 're-visioning' the field of philosophy of religion for women, as much as for men, from a global range of religious backgrounds?³² Again, the task seems infinite, while as feminist philosophers, we are all too aware of (our) life's finitude. Nevertheless, in learning how to be finite, we seek—as already suggested—to make play with infinitude.

Consistent with learning about life's finitude, we find Baiasu defending reason's material and social locatedness as it appears in *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion*. In this way, Baiasu brings the feminist closer to the conceptual philosopher's assumptions concerning objectivity and ineffability. Here, I am unable to enter adequately into the issues, which Baiasu raises not only about Moore and Anderson but also about Patrice Haynes's engagement with Anderson's feminist philosophy of

²⁹ J'annine Jobling, Obituary Gillian O. Howie, 1965-2013: 'The Personal is the Philosophical', *Radical Philosophy* 180 (July/August 2013).

³⁰ <http://newthinkingaboutlivingwithdying.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/death-you-cant-live-with-it-you-cant-live-without-it/> (June 28, 2012)

³¹ At one of Howie's workshops on 'Living with Dying', I recalled the poignant words from a posthumous publication of fragments from Paul Ricoeur's reflections, which he himself had written down in thinking about death at the end of his own life: 'The dying person [is] still living [insofar as] calling on the deepest resources of life' (Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, translated by David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 4).

³² Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), pp. 206–222.

religion.³³ However, I would like to stress that the contributions by Haynes and by Daniel Whistler each introduce highly significant philosophical matters, encouraging a turn to Howie's critical work on feminist-informed analytic philosophy and Marxist-informed feminist philosophy.³⁴ Haynes and Whistler make new critical distinctions concerning 'objectivity' and 'abstraction', respectively, in feminist philosophy. Whistler's engagement with 'real' abstraction, alongside Haynes's engagement with Marxist objectivity, takes us beyond both Moore's conceptual philosophy and Baiasu's 'talk about' ineffability.

To attempt further explanation, Haynes's original position on objectivity is subtle and strong in creatively engaging with issues at the interface between feminist concepts in *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion* and materialist relations in *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method*.³⁵ Haynes engages Howie's own positioning in feminist philosophy at the point in time when the latter constructively returns feminism to its roots in Marxist dialectical reason. In this way, Haynes offers a rich and challenging dialogue on substantive conceptual matters with Anderson's yearning, for social and material change and her own proposal for the 'courage' which is needed for refining 'a thoughtful love of life'.

Independent of, yet in complement to, Haynes's contribution Whistler argues incisively that all criticism of religion in feminist philosophy goes back to Marx's dialectical materialism. Whistler advocates that feminist philosophers of religion turn to Howie, especially to her last writings. In the latter, he discovers the timely philosophical and feminist significance of Howie's emancipatory critique, which teases out the contradictions in feminism's implicit relation to Enlightenment reason. Whistler like Haynes makes it clear that we should think more carefully about feminist philosopher's relations both to the Enlightenment and to the materialism implicit in feminism's Marxist origins.

So Howie offers to contemporary philosophers like Haynes and Whistler a crucial, dialectical conception of critical reason. Haynes shows us how to follow Howie back to the heart of the material and social dimensions of women's actual lives, in order to change them. As feminist philosophers, there can be no doubt that we need to rethink—with Howie and, now, with Haynes—the Marxist conception of dialectical critical reason, in order to get at the concrete problems and conflicts, which determine our personal and philosophical lives. A question is rightly raised concerning ineffable knowledge: does the Marxist feminist philosopher decisively put an end to 'talk about the ineffable', insofar as a form of 'mystification' of our social and material relations? Applying Howie's emancipatory critique to conceptual philosophy would seem to require dialectical reason to unearth the social and material conditions of its ineffability. Perhaps, this is where Whistler's concern with Howie's real abstraction forces us to transform the (religious) philosopher's account of ineffable knowledge, and so, to place her or his knowledge within a materialist social history, and this would be to transform ineffability into concrete, dialectical relations.

³³ Patrice Haynes, 'Encouraging a Thoughtful Love of Life: Pamela Sue Anderson and Gillian Howie on Practising Philosophy', (below), pp. 199–214.

³⁴ Daniel Whistler, 'Howie's *Between Feminism and Materialism* and the Critical History of Religion', (below), pp. 184–5 and 190.

³⁵ Gillian Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Whistler's brilliant ability to break new ground for feminist philosophy of religion rests in his incisive elucidation of the significant and powerful turn to real abstraction in Howie's last writings. This would challenge any naive hope to make play with infinitude; the latter runs the danger of a mystification of religious claims to the effable and the ineffable. We run the danger of cutting 'religious practice' off from 'religious content', which, as Howie contends, is precisely what Jean-Paul Sartre does in *Being and Nothingness*.³⁶ Instead, real hope, if it is to be concrete and to have content, needs to be extremely cautious of any mystifying changes to religious practice, especially of any proposal for ignoring the epistemic practices in Anglo-American philosophy of religion. The much needed change to 'something new' (i.e. the miraculous) has to be grounded in a careful working out of what Shakespeare describes as 'the institutional, material conditions, which will need to be in place so that women write and intervene in the philosophy of religion'.³⁷ Any adequate answer to Shakespeare's question cannot simply be superficial for expediency.

In giving a necessary role to real abstraction in a critical (feminist) philosophy of religion, Whistler makes us stop—and think! For my part at least, I am forced to reflect upon the earlier feminist (Marxist) projects. For instance, the socially situated reality of feminist standpoint theory played a crucial role in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, and this meant socially situated knowledge was required, in order for us to join hands with those thinkers excluded from our epistemic practices. Of course, Howie goes much further in seeking the radically transformative practices for the material and social conditions of our lives as women philosophers. Yet I suggest that today women and men in philosophy of religion can do more than this too: to begin with, we can actively follow Howie's late writing, thinking and living with dying, in order to take our inspiration from her philosophical life and labour. While Whistler points us to Howie's ultimate retrieval of feminism and materialism in Marxist critical theory, his contribution hollows out the material and social conditions for Gillian Howie's own living with dying. In Whistler's words, this implies 'using dialectical materialism to illuminate the practical, economic and socially-specific bases of concept-use so as to distinguish a theoretically-productive form of reason or universality from those forms that are patriarchally pernicious'.³⁸ Howie's contribution to a position 'between' feminism and materialism emerges in Whistler's restorative interpretation of her thinking, and this restoration of her real living and thinking speaks volumes to the critical theorist. That is, Howie as read by Whistler offers feminists and philosophers of religion a new task: 'a critique of critiques of religion'. And this would create a new path: 'the emergence of a critical philosophy of religion' which, as Whistler explains, is 'premised on the identification of religions as "real abstractions"'.³⁹

We might also like to think about Howie and her political distinctiveness, in order that we radicalise Clack's 'beginning of something new'. Howie's materialist politics both return us to and take us beyond the Enlightenment roots of (Anderson's) Kantian feminism and philosophy of religion. In this way, Howie offers a way to place feminist philosophy of religion back into the politics of material and social history. The feminist

³⁶ Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, pp. 149–152.

³⁷ Shakespeare, 'The Imperceptible Work of God', pp. 197–198.

³⁸ Whistler, 'Howie's *Between Feminism and Materialism*', p. 185.

³⁹ Whistler, 'Howie's *Between Feminism and Materialism*', p. 185.

task is not to lose touch with the concrete, or the political, but to realise that, 'like Gill,' we can change our minds and attempt to change our worlds. Whistler paves one path for doing this: he follows Howie 'to show how...abstraction can become a theoretically productive category', and this is also to employ 'abstraction' tentatively, and with a great deal of suspicion. To quote Howie as Whistler does:

Despite the dangers of abstraction, it is only through a process of cognitive abstraction that the particular can be revealed within its relations. This is not to ape an epistemological view-from-nowhere but to begin from a particular place and then to uncover social relations of construction, organization and distribution.⁴⁰

Similarly, Haynes takes support from Howie's feminism and materialism *to feel*—that is, *to really experience*—the profound sensitivity, which is made possible by a contemporary woman doing (feminist) philosophy of religion and theology. For example, Haynes sees the earlier Marxist potential in Anderson's project for feminists whose yearning for spiritual change accompanies and motivates their desire for social transformation; but Haynes also explores the incredible strength in Howie's return to Marxist critical theory. Briefly, while Howie inspires Whistler, she empowers Haynes as a woman and a feminist philosopher of religion.

To sum up, Shakespeare encourages feminist philosophers to rework their philosophical and theological concepts. Baiasu and Rose tackle the ineffable and the mystical, respectively; but Rose seems equally aware of the dialectical relation between the material and the mystical, as two poles of a feminist's critical role in re-doing philosophy of religion. Clack and Kirkpatrick remain concerned with women's lived experiences, albeit in changing pain into joy by becoming aware that both suffering loss and enjoying life are feminist issues. Moreover, these issues raise metaphysical questions about the particular nature of a woman's sexually specific suffering in pregnancy and in childbirth, but this will also include sexually specific violence, which is inflicted on the female body, and is ratified by patriarchal myths (of theism). Similarly, feminist issues raise social questions about the particular nature of a woman's caring for those persons at the beginning and the end of life: 'caring' women take on concrete roles which sadly are still conditions of patriarchal oppression. Whether in the lived experiences of pregnancy or in the alienating experiences of old aged, women become aware, to a greater or lesser degree, of the materially and socially specific ways in which change is destabilising for them. Most salient here in extending Howie's radical critiques to feminist philosophy of religion is the experience of, as stressed already, her project on living with dying. Again Jobling's 'The personal is philosophical' rightly places its stresses on real life.⁴¹ For Howie, personal reality is philosophical. And let me propose that, perhaps, Howie's living just like her thinking teaches each of us something new, even miraculous.

Thus, each in their own way, feminist philosophers of religion seek to change our living collectively in dialectical relation to one another's thinking. Crucially, taking up this thinking about life seeks to remove that 'old white man' from our own heads, demystifying 'His' speaking as an internal tyrant. Both recognition of real abstractions

⁴⁰ Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method*, p. 83.

⁴¹ Jobling, 'The Personal is philosophical', *Radical Philosophy* 180 (July/August 2013).

and radical critiques of theistic abstractions motivate the heart of *the* feminist drive for transformation. Once again, we recall that ‘drive’ which Rose describes as the feminist philosopher’s delight in ‘circling around a point of [the] failure’ of mystical language to speak ‘God’, and such delight is not far from dance, in urging us to flourish the dancer’s flowing movement, which no longer tries to control this life.

In reading the essays, which make up this special issue of *Sophia* on ‘Feminist philosophy of religion’, it will become clear how deeply the feminist philosophers who contribute their work here have been moved by both living and thinking. We (I) have taken Gillian Howie as an example of a feminist philosopher whose commitments have inspired other feminist and non-feminist philosophers alike, showing us to care more actively and concretely about changing actual lives in the very act of philosophising up to death as the (best) way to keep living with dying. In turn, feminist philosophers of religion become ever-more inspired and moved to change (their) lives through philosophy! Thus, our dedication to Gillian Howie’s life and work as a philosopher and a feminist (materialist) gives us one particular woman’s political passion, but she has become more to us here, as a vital model for our feminist philosophical critique of philosophical critiques of religion.