

Post-Christian Feminisms

A Critical Approach

Edited by

LISA ISHERWOOD

University of Winchester, UK

KATHLEEN McPHILLIPS

University of Western Sydney, Australia

ASHGATE

Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>vii</i>
Introduction <i>Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips</i>	
1 Beyond Reason: Towards a Post-Christian Philosophy of Religion <i>Beverley Clack</i>	11
2 The 'Post'- Age of Belief: Wither or Whither Christianity? <i>Pamela Sue Anderson</i>	25
3 Ecofeminist Thea/logies and Ethics: A Post-Christian Movement? <i>Rosemary Radford Ruether</i>	39
4 Material Elements: The Matter of Women, The Matter of Earth, The Matter of God <i>Anne Elvey</i>	53
5 Who's Been Reading MY Bible? Post-structuralist Hermeneutics and Sacred Text <i>Janet Wootton</i>	71
6 Post-Christian Hermeneutics: The Rise and Fall of Female Subjectivity in Theological Narrative <i>J'annine Jobling</i>	89
7 The Bi/girl Writings: From Feminist Theology to Queer Theologies <i>Marcella Althaus-Reid</i>	105
8 Our Lady of Perpetual Succour: Mother of Phallic Fetishes? [Queering the Queen of Heaven] <i>Lisa Isherwood</i>	117
9 De-colonizing the Sacred: Feminist Proposals for a Post-Christian, Post-Patriarchal Sacred <i>Kathleen McPhillips</i>	129
10 Melting Hearts of Stone <i>Mary T. Condren</i>	147

11	A Third Way: Explicating the Post in Post-Christian Feminism <i>Frances Gray and Kathleen McPhillips</i>	167
12	Re-Membering Jesus: A Post-colonial Feminist Remembering <i>Satoko Yamaguchi</i>	179
13	Jesus Past the Posts: An Enquiry into Post-metaphysical Christology <i>Lisa Isherwood</i>	201
14	The Return of the Living Dead <i>Elizabeth Stuart</i>	211
	<i>Bibliography</i>	223
	<i>Index</i>	

Introduction

Edited by Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips

The aim of this book is to explore the impact and contribution of post-theories in relation to the field of Christian feminist theology. It is a particular opportunity from which to consider the multiple intersections between post-theory and Christian feminist studies in theology, as well as the contribution of particular authors to the immense and urgent questions of emancipation, ethics and community. Post-theory continues to be a heavily used, important and cutting-edge discursive field which has revolutionized the production of knowledge in both feminism and theology. Feminist theologies have benefited, utilized and created new theologies and critical analyses via post-modernism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, post-feminism and post-biblical discourses. What is central to these discourses is the destabilization and deconstruction of theology and feminism as unitary, singular accounts of knowledge which prioritize meta-theory and meta-ontology.

‘Post’ signifies destabilization of not only the creation and structure of western knowledges but also of western – even global – political, economic and symbolic systems. Post--theory problematizes history and, in particular colonialisms, exposes gender, ethnicity and race as social constructions and provides an account of religion as emerging from modernity, opens up the field of theological enquiry, and deconstructs the relationship between the natural and the social.¹ Religion and theology as discursive formations are rendered into social formations which have histories, construct ideologies, are embedded in power relations, locate truth in relation to power, and expose the many voices and experiences that construct discourse. Feminism is also problematized. As Ellen Armour demonstrates, while feminism has initially offered a politics of resistance to different oppressions, it has often been blind to assumptions about race and its inter-relations with gender. Armour provides an excellent example of the uses of deconstruction using the work of Derrida and Irigaray in relation to exploring the difficulties that feminism encounters with race.

Although post-theory is established in language and institution, analyzing the current historical period continues to be problematic. We may describe this period as one of late modernity or post-modernity or more specifically late capitalism or post-colonial. All these discourses are engaged in questions of definition and analysis but there is little doubt that we find ourselves living in a time of immense political,

1 Ellen Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/Gender Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

economic, symbolic and ecological instability, witnessing the deterioration and fragmentation of modernity and all its imperfect forms.

‘Post’ allows a place from which to theorize, reflect and strategize in relation to these processes of fragmentation and change, much of which has been rapid and violent. And as we state above, the impact of post-theory on what is commonly known as ‘systems of knowledge’ have been powerful and destabilizing. For the purposes of this book and the accounts of post-theory in relation to Christian feminisms and theology, ‘post’ does not signal either a knowledge or social practice *after modernity*. Rather ‘post’ signifies the processes of fragmentation and destabilization of the central discourses and structures of modernity: colonialism, race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion and capitalism. Feminist theologies and religious studies are in conversation with these social formations, with a critical view to understanding how modernity both constructs and situates belief and tradition, reads sacred texts and constructs meaning.

Hence the term ‘post-Christian’ signifies a destabilization of what could be considered a stable meta-discourse (Christianity) through a series of interjections including feminist, post-colonial and psychoanalytic. The term ‘post-Christian’ points towards a condition of the unravelled nature of Christianity; of the breakdown of duality as the principle organizing force of knowledge particularly through disruption to the relationship between believer and institution. Post-Christian feminisms suggest an immediate engagement with issues of definition, subjectivity and identity, ethics and meta-theology. In fact, such a discourse has been seriously derailed by feminist interjections. Questions of power, of the political disruption caused by the periphery claiming rights of speech and enfranchisement; of the body asserting autonomy; of counter claims to rationality as the dominant form of critical engagement; of indigenous and ethnic struggles for independence; the recognition of multiple gender identities; of difference among and between women – all such discourses are premised on the powerful destabilization proposed by post-theoretical interjections. The book thus begins with the condition of the unravelled nature of Christianity; of the destabilization of duality as the principle organizing force of knowledge; of the critique of biblical text as utter truth; of the emergence of multiple translations of text; of the operations of power in and around biblical interpretation; and of the particular and limited location of authorship. Post-theory asserts uncertainty as the only certainty. But this book is not about celebrating critique as the only form of authentic knowledge: it recognizes that new ways of thinking and new forms of political action are emerging. This book very much hopes to make a contribution to documenting and exploring emergent knowledges, both in terms of identifying creative emancipatory possibilities and recognizing reformulated attempts at closure and discrimination.

Feminist theology is a central object of critique in many of the chapters. While recognizing that as a discipline or discursive terrain, feminist theology has made vital contributions to re-thinking subjectivity, tradition and cultural change, it has also been caught between and within disciplines, particularly theology as a meta-discourse, and feminism as a political, if flawed, practice. The essays in this collection recognize that particular disciplines or fields of knowledge provide important jumping off points for analysis.

In this book, contributors use the term ‘post’ in two central ways. First in a temporal sense, to indicate a specific historical time period – late modernity – which has generated particular forms of politics and knowledge. Whether we are past a period called late modernity we believe is not the central question; rather, the continuing documentation and analysis of social, economic and religious change is what matters most. Edward Said indicated that one of the difficulties of talking about a post-colonial age is that it could mask the re-inscription of neo-colonial forms.² This argument is just as relevant to post-Christian and post-feminist articulations. New forms of Christianity may in fact be articulations of particular power arrangements that re-inscribe tradition and faith in oppressive ways. Feminisms can be powerful accounts that are relevant to only particular groups of women. Likewise, processes of modernity such as liberalism, democracy and capitalism are more recent in third world and emergent nations, which have existed under unjust political regimes for centuries. ‘Post’ in a temporal sense is then quite limited, power is transitional, or at least specific, unstable and changing. There may be particular sites in which ‘post’ equates with after-an-event, but these are not contingent or even linear. For example, there is no way in which one could argue for a case of post-capitalism; rather, the forms of global capitalism and in particular corporatization and commodification, emerge from previous forms of capitalism, such as state-based monopolies.

Secondly, post-theory has come to be associated with strategic reading practices that engage texts as sources to be deconstructed and from which ideologies that construct texts can be exposed and critiqued. This has been particularly powerful in feminist theologies and, we would argue, possibly more pertinent to the use of post-theory than the temporal logistic. However, such reading practices emerge within particular historical periods and are responses to current concerns and injustices and so we argue that the two readings of ‘post’ must sit together.

Returning to the question of ‘post’ as after, there has been intense discussion regarding the positioning of post-theory as either ‘after’ or ‘within’ modernity/colonialism/feminism.³ But what if ‘post’ were to signify ‘between’ or ‘engaged with’ or ‘destabilizing of’? Politically, it would be difficult to argue with any authority that Christianity in all its contemporary forms constitutes, in any sense, an after-faith, or after-tradition practice. Indeed, it is continually being re-born and re-imagined within the logistics of global economic and religious symbolic systems. One needs only to consider the revitalization and success of fundamentalist churches and their popularity – particularly with young people – to understand just how powerful this form of Christianity is becoming. It influences political leaders and systems⁴ and, as we are daily witness to, Bush organizes his responses to world events in relation to a fundamentalist Christianity which underpins a moralism of triumphalist white, western male dominance as the norm. Fundamentalist Christian churches are one of

2 Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, p. 2.

3 Anne McClintock, ‘The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Postcolonialism’, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 291–304.

4 Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

the fastest growing religious congregations in the West, and amassing property and wealth which they understand theologically as part of God's plan for the faithful. They offer their congregations entertainment, security and safety and a space in which the hard questions will be suspended. Their tithing system is not only financial but also symbolic; you exchange money and an unquestioning loyalty to a white male God for stability and security.⁵ This is a Christianity that informs contemporary western democracies and capitalism as well as global economies. More than this, it is a form of Christianity that is purposively made for global capitalism; encouraging accumulation of wealth, commodification of belief, and salvation for individual souls. It is almost as if it is gearing up for the New World and all its new formations of social practice whatever they might be. In a very real sense, we can argue that these kinds of fundamentalist Christianities which support the continuation of the USA as world leaders and deplore religious tolerance and economic justice constitute a post-Christian response to 'traditional' Christianity. This takes on a more historical sense when we look at Weber's argument⁶ that the practice of seventeenth-century Calvinism in some parts of Germany utilized the emerging ethos of capitalism, where to save money and accumulate wealth signified piety, grace and, ultimately, salvation. When this particular theology gained strength, Weber argued that it no longer required the direct support of capitalist ideology and let that fall away from its theological praxis. Considering the current nature of western fundamentalist Christianities it is hard to imagine that the immense and powerful relationship that it has with capitalist ideology, politics and wealth production could fall away. It may not.

Global politics is an arena of intense change and struggle. The rise of religious fundamentalism as response to global instabilities, and the developing politics of fear about change, the encouragement of hate and rage against the 'other' whose difference continues to define normality, are growing. For example, in Australia over the last ten years, the Government has moved to close its borders to those who seek refuge from inhumane political regimes. Indeed, it has moved to excise its own territories – small islands in the Pacific – in order to dump refugees there in a place that is not-Australia. It has also bribed small Pacific island nations with increased aid and money to take people for processing; anything rather than allowing refugees to land in Australia. This is a monumental forgetting of the fact that only 200 years ago, the ancestors of Anglo Australians landed in Botany Bay and began a new colony for the British Empire.⁷ A new language – asylum seekers – emerges to signify those who refuse to 'queue' for proper migration processes. This language is often used by Australian migrants themselves who did queue twenty and thirty years ago, and now want that imposed on a group for which this is impossible. The refugees are treated appallingly, and the process of applications is slow. The Government trades

5 Lisa Isherwood, 'Incarnation in Times of Terror: Christian Theology and the Challenge of September 11th', *Feminist Theology*, vol. 14 no. 1 (2005): 69–82.

6 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Harper Collins, 1991 [1930]).

7 John O'Carroll, 'Federation or Perdition: Australian Dreams of Nationhood', in *Eremos* Essay Supplement No 26 (2001).

in the politics of fear and terrorism; it sets up programmes that encourage citizens to ‘dob-in’ anyone whose behaviour appears questionable. The current borders between countries, particularly at airports, are places of stress and fear. As well as being victims of this kind of violence, women themselves are often key players in the demonization of ‘other’ peoples, and indeed of fundamentalist movements.⁸

Articulations of Post-Christian Feminisms

Genealogies of Christian feminisms provide accounts of the ways in which women engage with the politics of injustice and liberation, and it is largely from this agenda that post-Christian feminisms emerge. Beginning with Mary Daly’s work, we argue that the call to women to leave the Church, find their own voices and articulate their own spiritual and theological analyses has been central to theological praxis. Thousands, maybe millions, of women did leave the Church and began exploring other histories and accounts of women’s religious experience. Mary Daly provided not only a sharp critique of gender and power in the Church, but also a language from which new forms of subjectivity could be imagined. The excavation of hidden histories of women, religion and culture were celebrated: from early Goddess societies pre-dating Hebrew society through the millennia to modern forms of Christianity. A new discourse – theology – emerged to explore the feminine as divine in all its cultural forms and to re-locate key terms such as the sacred, embodiment, ecology and nature within a new discursive framework. Much of this work (see in particular the work of Carol Christ, Naomi Goldenberg, Starhawk and Melissa Raphael) accepted that for women to find religious legitimacy required a move away from tradition and church primarily because it was understood that Christian culture was patriarchal to the core and incapable of providing a full humanity for women.

From these positions women engaged with a deconstruction of the idea of God itself as well as the edifices that the traditional God gave birth to (see for example the work of Sallie McFague, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Ivone Gebara). In the early days much of the discourse was fractured and there could be very little mutual agreement between those who worked within Christianity to find the female divine and those who left Christianity looking for her in other older traditions. While there remains huge diversity there also seems to be emerging a number of areas in which similar understandings are coming to light. This we see as a strength of the ‘post’ position we are taking, that is to say that those who still work through a tradition can retain integrity while opening up greater areas of commonality for ongoing discussion.

A recent articulation of post-Christian feminist theology as after Christianity comes from Daphne Hampson’s work where she argues that Christianity is morally and politically unjustifiable if we take seriously women’s liberation. In *After Christianity* Hampson argues that there must be an ethical apriori position in Christianity that locates women as fully human. She based this not so much on an interpretation

⁸ Laura Donaldson and Pui-lan Kwok (eds), *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

of scripture or tradition but as a philosophical standpoint which countered that the Church's acceptance and historical commitment to the divinity of Jesus Christ meant that women could never be accorded real equality but would be always in some form of second place. Likewise she argued that feminism as a discourse of gender equality could not politically align itself with a tradition that continued to maintain the divinity of humanity through a man. It could not stand up to the arguments and positions put forward by theism and humanism and thus she rejected Christianity as a faith position that could further or even include the liberation of women. Hence, after Christianity refers to a temporal position as much as a discursive position.

Hampson has also argued that the claim for autonomy that feminism makes, that is that women should be free and true to themselves within their own skins, does not sit easy with traditional Christianity which exerts ultimate power from outside. It is here that 'post' of the kind that we are suggesting can be disrupting since this approach has to unsettle many of the fixed points of Christian theology such as Christology and redemption. Only by understanding these traditions in another way, thinking about them differently, will we be able to think through our own skins differently and situate our own subjectivity more radically on the planet.

But it is the case that, in discursive terms, much of the reading practices utilized by feminist theologians are in fact deconstructive. They aim to expose and deconstruct male-centred theological discourse, and to re-formulate the central stories of biblical texts which provide an inclusive account of women as religious and political agents. The central discourses of theology have all been the object of feminist analyses and in this respect constitute a post-Christian reading position. The question remains how much re-reading can be done in order that we remain in a 'post' position, which is critically creative from within and at what point we move to an 'after' position; a position that we may not wish to occupy.

The Collection

The thoughts gathered in these articles challenge many of the accepted wisdoms of the academy and for this we are delighted. The authors place before us the gift of thinking differently and in so doing offer many avenues ahead.

Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack shake the ground in the philosophy of religion by challenging the very core of how this discipline understands itself. Anderson asks in what ways 'post' may be separate from 'modern' and what are the implications of this separation. She finds the answer to be in transformation and conversion rather than in an abandonment of that we are critiquing. For her, Daphne Hampson's assertion that one had to move on from Christianity as it was no longer ethical enough, which at one time seemed correct, needs to be reassessed. The need to reassess lies in the fact that women continue to be Christian and ethical and so what does this lived experience present us with? Anderson claims that we are faced with a series of new beginnings that demand engagement and continue to challenge.

Clack challenges the assumption that philosophy is simply the art of reason. She illustrates how philosophers on all sides of various arguments all seem to agree that

reason lies at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. For her this is only part of the story and she begins her philosophical enterprise from elsewhere. Her point of departure is between Freud and Nietzsche, where the human being can be understood as dwelling between the animal instincts [Freud] and the ability to demonstrate God-like reason [Nietzsche]. For Clack there is a limit to philosophy which, claiming to be about the love of wisdom, fails to engage our unconscious drives and desires and believes all can be encapsulated in the sterile and cold light of reason. Her project is more passionate and engaged with the depth of who we are as humans and she considers that any philosophy of religion has to deal with the immense range and depth of the religious impulse. For Clack this engagement sheds more light on what it is to be human and so is an urgent task for philosophers as well as theologians.

In the articles on ecofeminism two authors take different but interesting approaches. Rosemary Radford Ruether takes us through a careful analysis of the work of Starhawk, Carol Christ and Ivone Gebara in order to place before us their challenges to the traditional views of the world. What emerges is a picture of matter as alive and relational and demanding respect and interconnection from humans. We are shown how the networking of relationships that is central to a feminist view of the human person also includes all aspects of the cosmos. Ruether demonstrates how these women from different traditions actually deconstruct God and in so doing reject the splitting of the divine from the earth; a position that brings them close to each other. In advocating the matrix of life-giving energy these writers are contemplating a very similar picture of the sacred. We tend to forget that such a position would have been almost impossible years ago and in itself signals the strength of the 'post' position. What is also demonstrated through this article is that the 'post' does not mean we have to move beyond in order to come to this place of emerging similarities.

In her article, Anne Elvey investigates the relocation of transcendence, arguing for an eco-feminist materialist transcendence. Along with Irigaray she reminds us that women and nature have both been excluded from transcendence and situated in materiality, and she argues for a reassessment of materiality. It should no longer be viewed as purely immanence but rather as self transcendent and a place that can mediate the transcendence of the other and of the divine. In this way she argues for a rethinking of transcendence not as a 'beyondness' outside matter but rather as otherness within matter. Radical immanence is an orientation to the other in interrelationality and is the site of the formation of subjectivity. Elvey's approach calls for more materialism and not less, but one that recognizes the possibilities for moving towards the 'other'.

The articles on hermeneutics are challenging and creative. Janet Wootton reminds us that all readings are akin to the way in which we engage with fairytales. Taking the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears as her starting point she engages in a poststructuralist reading of sacred texts. We, like Goldilocks, have been prepared for a life of submission to male readings and instead have to threaten the cosy family of male reading by being 'resisting readers'. Wootton clearly demonstrates how women are emasculated by reading male texts where we are powerless and divided, self against self. While celebrating feminist readings, Wootton also cautions that feminist readings cannot open the door wide enough for the world to pass through.

This is the point at which she is arguing for a ‘post’ feminist reading in the sense of moving differently within the discourse, not passing beyond it. She reminds us that the bible is a politically drenched text and that our readings have to be acts of reading in community and context. In her article she demonstrates many creative and challenging ways of reading.

J’an Jobling starts her examination of the ‘post’ world with a reminder that it is not a moving beyond but rather a denouncing or an exposure of the iniquitous and from here, a reclaiming and expanding. She engages in two readings – that of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension motif and the creation story – in order to demonstrate the creative potential of ‘post’ readings. Looking again at feminist concerns about the nature of sacrifice and suffering associated with the crucifixion, she asks if there is another way to see. It may indeed be possible to see the death of Christ as the death of the male symbolic order while from the tomb rises the resurrected self of the female person who, as the abject one, has been placed there in order to transform it from a place of death to one of fecundity. Jobling also questions whether much feminist theology has been too essentialist in its concerns with the maleness of Jesus; she sees male and female as more permeable and understands the body as a terrain of becoming and thus as a fluid site of what may be. In Jobling’s argument the male Christ may be more of a problem for men. She argues that female becoming may need a masculine symbolic as a divine mirror; the male is denied this mirror of divine becoming when we image a purely male God. For Jobling the creation story has defied constant readings, and this is their strength as they retain their disruptive potential.

In the articles on queer theology we are asked to look again at how we actually think and therefore how we engage with our traditions. Marcella Althaus-Reid reminds us that nobody defines us better than our enemies. In considering feminist and gay, lesbian and transgender theology, she suggests that, as challenging as they are, they do not depart from the old paradigm as they are still operating within the frame of an unfolding truth. They have not, in her opinion, dared to journey without a map, while queer theology dwells in the instability of becoming and has no certainty of arriving. Queer theology, she suggests, is concerned with the meaning of in-betweenness and this is why she engages with the notion of the bi-girl in her articles. The girl, not the woman, is passing through and so does not allow concepts and experiences to settle. Althaus-Reid claims that we can speak of God best when we do not repeat or fix God and for this purpose she encourages us to engage with changing identities, to allow the texts and traditions to queer us rather than to fix us.

Lisa Isherwood looks for the queer potential in the queen of heaven and in so doing attempts to remove the phallus from our collective psyche. Using the notion of the phallic mother, which is the crux of sexual and political systems and the fetish which removes us from reality, she attempts to uncover the challenges of autonomy for women and dependency for men. In returning sexual desire to the virgin placed in a real body and with real genitals, Isherwood demonstrates the creative and challenging potential of queer theology. From within an existing theological concept, that of virgin mother, lady of perpetual succour, she destabilizes the tradition and points to new possibilities and different political realities.

The articles on the sacred are exciting and offer other ways of thinking. Kathleen McPhillips surveys the field of feminist interjections into social theory on the sacred. Beginning with Durkheim's account of the sacred as completely opposite to the profane – and which dominates theoretical approaches to the sacred – she looks at the ways in which feminist theorists including Nancy Jay and Victoria Lee Erickson deconstruct this discourse. The work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray critique discourses of violence and sacrifice while showing how they underpin modern western consciousness and place the maternal at the core of the abject. Psychoanalytic accounts also problematize 'religion' as a discourse, and propose a different approach to questions of awe and ultimacy. Finally, McPhillips looks at feminist re-constructions of the sacred and the problems that they produce in moving the discourse onto new ground.

Mary Condren looks critically at the central location of discourses of sacrifice, atonement and redemption in accounts of Christian faith and practice. Condren argues that the legitimation of sacrifice is directly tied to the exclusion and devaluation of women and suggests that the placement of mercy as the core of Christian practice is desperately needed if we are to respond to global crises.

Frances Gray and Kathleen McPhillips consider the meaning of the term 'post' in both post-Christian and post-colonial accounts of the sacred in contemporary Australian cultural and theological analysis. They provide two readings – by Elaine Wainwright and Anne Pattel-Gray – which demonstrate a reading strategy that identifies instances of neo-colonial inscription while also suggesting alternative, feminist readings of significant texts to the feminist theological community.

The two articles on Jesus demonstrate the breadth of this discourse. Satoko Yamaguchi begins from a triple 'post' position, that of post-Christian, post-colonial and post-feminist. Her context is Japan, where Christianity has been both oppressive and liberative. She claims that biblical scholarship is trapped in a racialized discourse from which it is hard to free itself and that this discourse relies on an idealized western reading of world history. By re-evaluating the Jesus tradition through the eyes of the Sophia Movement, Yamaguchi wishes to reformulate a Christian identity that will not downgrade the differences in spiritual traditions but will rather sustain global collaborations. This process can begin via the post-colonial feminist recognition that conflicts and limitation were part of the tradition from the beginning. In this way the pursuit of an idealized western hegemonic discourse on world history is abandoned and replaced by a much more realistic eye on where we have been and so where we may go. Yamaguchi is careful to ensure that her own advocacy of the Sophia Movement does not also fall into a romantic and idealized version of what may actually have been.

Lisa Isherwood asks us to consider the possibility of a post-metaphysical Christology as an authentic way to engage fully with the as yet unexplored nature of incarnation. This is a 'post' that many Christians would believe to be unthinkable let alone necessary and would be a 'post' that many feminists would feel unwise, arguing that there is something in the nature of metaphysics that is fundamental to the psychic space needed by humans. Isherwood argues that dualistic metaphysics have not allowed the creative and transforming potential of an incarnational religion

to explore itself since they have captured people within their own skin, a position from which they will not easily flourish.

Finally, Elizabeth Stuart provides us with a challenging look at death through 'post' eyes. She takes as her starting point the disintegration of the meta-narratives and the singularity of the modernist illusion that there ever were universal interpretations equally shared by all. She questions the wisdom of feminist theologies and others not dealing with the matter of life after death in any robust way. What she calls the 'compost' life after death theology does not truly address the question of what happens after and, more importantly, what Christianity offers those whose life here has been brief, painful and unfulfilled. In short, she feels that much of the most recent theology about death has a distinctly western and privileged flavour about it. In addition, she argues that this complacent view lacks Christian imagination and this in turn has implications for how we live. She argues that in refusing to accept that baptism is an embracing of death and resurrection then we are locked into the social reality in which we live, such as gender and heterosexism, rather than queering it through living otherwise. Stuart argues that Christianity has death at the heart of its sacramental system and that the Christian life not lived as though in the presence of the death/resurrection reality is a life not fully lived.

The heart of this book is to continue the work of feminist liberatory praxes in relation to theology and religion, and in particular to recognize and explore the use and status of post-theory in feminist theologies. We believe that these essays make an on-going contribution to the discourse of Christian feminist theologies and their liberation agendas.

Chapter 1

Beyond Reason: Towards a Post-Christian Philosophy of Religion

Beverley Clack

Introduction

Philosophers have always emphasized that responsible opinions must be based on *argument* rather than on private preference or group conviction. Even those who hold the position that there are beliefs for which we need no argument must provide an argument for their position. Furthermore, their opponents must also formulate arguments for why they disagree. Ideally, then, one will rest one's point of view on sound thinking and will be open to persuasion based on further careful reasoning. (M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach and D. Basinger, 1991: 7)

Religion is essentially emotion. (Feuerbach [1841] 1957: 25)

In offering their description of the methodology employed by philosophers of religion, the authors of one of the introductory texts to the subject present a picture of the philosopher of religion as one who seeks *reasons* for the beliefs that people hold. Beliefs – if they are to be taken seriously – must be based upon ‘sound thinking’ rather than ‘on private preference or group conviction’. My suggestion, to the contrary, is that considering religion with a view to establishing whether it is reasonable or not fails to engage with the multifaceted role that religiosity plays in the life of human beings. As such – and in common with other feminist philosophers of religion¹ – I shall challenge the narrow focus of a philosophy of religion that eschews an engagement with emotion and desire. At the same time, I shall show that a philosophical sleight of hand occurs when philosophers claim that they approach religion and religious categories in a purely rational way. Such claims ignore the extent to which ‘reasonableness’ is invariably connected with an understanding of religion moulded in Christian terms. As someone who is interested in considering religion as *a natural human phenomenon*,² I shall argue that moving philosophy of religion away from its connection with what might be called ‘Christian philosophy’ opens up new approaches to the philosophical study of religion. While accepting

1 See Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) for similar if distinct challenges to the construction of philosophy of religion as a discipline.

2 And, it should be noted, as none the worse for that!

that it is not possible to approach the study of religion in a wholly objective way, for there is no ‘view from nowhere’, there might be ways of engaging with this phenomenon that reveals something of what it is *to be human*, rather than simply what it means to practise a particular faith. As such, my post-Christian philosophy of religion will also be post-Freudian, applying not just reason to the study of religion, but also allowing for the role that desire and the unconscious play in shaping human responses to the world and to each other.

Christianity and the Philosophy of Religion

In the summer of 2003, the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion met in Oxford. For the first time, its proceedings were conducted jointly with the American based Society of Christian Philosophers. This explicit connection between philosophy of religion, as it is practised in the English-speaking world, and the Christian religion suggests that the subject’s apparent commitment to an ‘objective’ engagement with the phenomenon of religion, expressed in the description of the subject given by Peterson *et al*, is not all that it seems. Indeed, to consider the subject’s evolution is to get some sense of the way in which supposedly secular western societies remain dependent upon Christian attitudes and values.

Consider, for example, the way in which philosophy of religion – at least in its English-speaking context – has been primarily concerned with the application of reason to religious belief. It is, in this sense, an inheritor of the European Enlightenment of the ‘long’ seventeenth century. However, the concern to present a form of apologetic that convinces unbelievers of the veracity of a religious position can be traced to the ‘natural theology’ of pre-Reformation Catholic scholasticism. Indeed the ideas of Anselm and Aquinas remain central in shaping courses in the philosophy of religion, and their ideas, while often distilled from their specific theological context, are fundamentally grounded in the exposition and explication of the Catholic faith. Anselm’s ontological argument for the existence of God is a staple component of undergraduate courses.³ According to Anselm, accepting the definition of God as ‘that than which no greater can be conceived’ means that one cannot then say that this God does not exist. This is often presented as a purely logical argument for God’s existence. Yet placing it as he does within the context of a prayerful meditation to the God in whom he already believes raises the question of what, precisely, Anselm is doing when he reflects upon the nature of God. Clearly he has a prior commitment to this divine being, and is not seeking to convince himself of that God’s reality by formulating a logical argument.

Reflection on Anselm’s writing suggests a complex engagement with religion that involves not just abstract philosophical argument. Anselm’s writing is personal as well as academic, shaping his whole outlook on life. Reasoning about his faith is one aspect of his engagement with God, but only one aspect. His head and his heart are intimately connected in the discussion of the divine. This may seem strange to professional philosophers of religion who even when explicitly discussing the

3 See Anselm’s *Proslogion*, chapters 2–4.

emotions do so only in the context of exploring what would constitute ‘rightly ordered emotions’ (Swinburne 1998: 79), thus prioritizing mind over desire. But taking seriously the manner of Anselm’s writing suggests a more integrated account of human personhood than one that locates all value in the working of the rational mind: and by implication a more complex connection between Christian commitment and philosophical reasoning.

So why has reason become the only lens through which philosophers analyse the meaning and significance of religion and religious belief? Historical, intellectual, and social movements have shaped the philosophy of religion as, indeed, they have shaped other disciplines. The shift from Catholic to Protestant sensibilities in Britain is highly significant for understanding the kind of Christian belief that underpins the discipline. With the Reformation, the role of reason became more significant for understanding and framing human life. ‘Faith seeking understanding’ was not simply the business of an elite group, but a fundamental component of the Protestant view of what faith involved. Keith Thomas, famously, illustrated the connections between magic and religion in folk Catholicism, showing how this connection is resisted by early Protestantism, and replaced by an emphasis on right belief rather than right practice (Thomas 1973: 767–800). More recently, Tina Beattie has built upon and developed this connection, arguing that philosophy of religion operates with a set of assumptions about what religion and Christianity involves, and that these assumptions reflect all too clearly the scientific paradigm that underpins Protestantism. To re-engage with Catholicism – in her case, interpreted through the lens of French literary criticism – will lead to a more imaginative view of what actually constitutes religion (Beattie 2004).

The Enlightenment – at least ostensibly – seems to move beyond these shifts in Christian practice, offering a rather more neutral basis for the discussion of religion. Yet in practice, many of its practitioners approach religion in ways that mirror Protestant concerns. And this means that what is excluded from the discussion of religion is often what is excluded from Protestant accounts of what constitutes ‘genuine’ religion. So relics, saints, holy days and pilgrimage are often ignored when describing what ‘good’ religion, what ‘reasonable’ religion, will look like. Kant’s writings provide a good example of the implicit (Protestant?) assumptions that underpin such understandings of ‘good’ religion. When considering the difference between the black and white races he notes the features of African religion that differentiate it from white religion: ‘The religion of fetishes so widespread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature. A bird feather, a cow’s horn, a conch shell, or any other common object, as soon as it becomes consecrated by a few words, is an object of veneration and of invocation in swearing oaths’ (Kant [1763] 1991: 111).

While contemporary philosophers of religion would avoid grounding such claims in the racist assumptions that inform Kant’s words, the implicit idea that there is a ‘true’ form of religion continues to haunt the discipline. The attempt to establish the existence of God supports this conclusion. For analytic philosophy of religion, belief in God constitutes the basic category of religious belief: and ‘God’ is subsequently defined in terms common to all the monotheistic faiths. ‘God’ is viewed as a being whose existence can be proved by rational argument, a God who is omnipotent,

omniscient, immutable, impassible, eternal and perfectly good. In determining whether religion is meaningful or not, the philosopher of religion seems committed to an enterprise which considers whether there are good grounds for belief in such a God. Is it possible, for example, to provide arguments that support – or reject – the existence of such a God? And in practice there seems little difference between the way in which the subject matter of religion is understood: so Swinburne and Mackie’s famous dispute over the existence of God is dependent upon a common understanding of what belief in God involves, the difference lying in their conclusions about whether belief in that God is based upon solid ground.⁴

This implicit framework fails to engage with the variety of religious expression and thus misses what religion in all its manifest forms might tell us about the strange animal ‘man’. Even philosophers of religion who have attempted to develop rather different methodologies to those considered thus far continue to operate with a framework that makes a distinction between what might be called ‘true’ religion and ‘superstition’.

D.Z. Phillips, the foremost exponent of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, adopts precisely this true/false dichotomy. Phillips’ work has challenged the idea that religion can be ‘explained’ or ‘justified’ in the way that analytic philosophers of religion suggest (see, for example, Phillips 1976). For Phillips, the focus is on ‘the insider’, an approach which has the advantage of moving us away from the idea of the philosopher of religion as a transcendent observer, removed from the rituals, beliefs and practices that ‘he’ is observing and upon which ‘he’ is commenting. Instead, the philosopher is asked to focus on what *the believer* thinks they are doing. In actuality this approach is not as believer-centred as it claims to be: there is a tendency to force the believer’s claims into a model that coheres with ideas of what constitutes ‘reasonable’ belief. So Phillips contrasts what he sees as ‘superstitious’ forms of prayer which seek to ‘change God’s mind’ with prayers that are not seeking an answer from God, but are, rather, striving to accept ‘the will of God’:

I heard a diver tell of an experience which occurred while he was searching a wreck. He lost his torch and could not find the exit of the hold. He prayed: ‘O God get me out of this. I’ll do anything you want if only you’ll let me find my way out.’ Compare that prayer with: ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.’ (Psalm 23).

Phillips’ attempt to engage with the *actual* nature of religious practice, grounded in a given faith community, is open to criticism precisely because of this tendency to differentiate between genuine religion and superstition. What matters less is describing what the believer does (strange in itself, given his claims to follow Wittgenstein), and more making a decision about what precisely the believer thinks they are doing and whether this is reasonable or not. This leads, as Terrence Tilley

4 Compare the arguments presented by Richard Swinburne in *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and those presented by John Mackie in *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For example, Mackie states at the outset that ‘I shall follow Swinburne in taking these descriptions [of God] fairly literally, though in some I shall allow reasonable qualifications and flexibilities in interpretation’ (p. 1).

has pointed out in his excellent discussion of Phillips' work, to a limited account of what religion involves. As Tilley puts it: 'By practically denigrating the religious practices he labels "superstitious" his philosophy of religion reflects *only a part of religion*' (Tilley 2000: 346, my emphasis). In this, Phillips, like other philosophers of religion, constructs an account of religion that ignores the non-rational, emotive and, frankly, sometimes weird aspects of religious belief and practice. As Tilley puts it: "religious belief" and "superstition" are rarely, if ever, unmixed' (Tilley 2000: 350).

It would, of course, be a mistake to suggest that there are no philosophers of religion who are seeking to consider religion in different ways. Recent work in the discipline has seen a concerted attempt to move beyond the account of reason given by Enlightenment thinkers. Mention has already been made of the attempt by feminists to challenge the over-emphasis on reason. In so doing, the dualistic structure that supports the traditional approach to the discipline has been challenged, and desire has been seen as a vital part of the experience of being human. For some feminists – most notably Grace Jantzen, Amy Hollywood and Ellen Armour⁵ – this means taking seriously the emphasis placed on difference in continental philosophy, a theme developed in Philip Goodchild's recent collection of essays.⁶ Goodchild et al attempt to take seriously the difference that marks human experience in terms of race, gender, and class, suggesting that diverse and varied accounts of religion will emerge from such an engagement. In similar vein, philosophers of religion who stand in the analytic tradition, such as Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, have highlighted the philosophical questions that arise within specific religious traditions, thus avoiding the idea that there could be a generalized philosophical account of what religion involves.⁷ An engagement with what religion involves *in terms of concrete practice* is clearly important, but having said that there is something about the engagement with a more generalized account of religion that I would like to maintain and explore in the remainder of this article. Engaging with the religious impulse *in general* may tell us much about what it is to be a human animal.

Religion and the 'Sick Animal': Shaping a Post-Christian Philosophy of Religion

So far, we have considered the way in which philosophy of religion developed over time into the kind of discipline that now forms an important part of many degrees

5 See Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, Ch. 3; Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Ellen Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology and the Problem of Difference* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

6 Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

7 See Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) where Part I of their collection explicitly links philosophical issues to specific religious traditions; also Susan Frank Parsons (ed.), *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), which locates feminist critical engagement with religion in the context of the specific faith practices of women.

in theology and religious studies. Now I want to turn our attention to the concept of human being that supports philosophies of religion that, at least ostensibly, seem to have very different agendas. For the philosophies of religion we have mentioned thus far, prioritizing the ability to *reason* unites even the most vociferous of opponents. Richard Swinburne and D.Z. Phillips are often to be found on opposing sides of various debates in the philosophy of religion,⁸ yet both adopt surprisingly similar accounts of what it is to be human. Swinburne's attempt to find justifications for religious belief is predicated upon the idea that reason is what differentiates us from the animals; Phillips' method of focusing on those aspects of religious belief that make sense, excluding those aspects that go against reason and which are in this sense 'superstitious', suggests a similar assumption. In these accounts of what it is to be human one gets a sense of the extent to which the Enlightenment conception of human being is dependent upon Christian thought forms. Common to both Catholic and Protestant theology is the idea that human beings are made in the *imago Dei*, located, according to Augustine,⁹ in the mind.¹⁰ It is reason and thought that distinguishes us from the animals. Such a view of human being inevitably leads to the attempt to establish the reasonableness of religious belief, a stance that at best will marginalize other aspects of human life, and at worst will avoid engaging with the way in which these aspects and responses challenge this paradigm of what it is to be human.

My post-Christian philosophy of religion begins with a rather different view of what it is to be human: a view derived from the ideas of two of the 'masters of suspicion', Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.¹¹ For Nietzsche and Freud human beings cannot be described simply in terms of the ability to reason, yet neither can they be described simply as animals. Indeed, the peculiarities of the human condition arise precisely because we are caught between our animal instincts *and* the apparently god-like capacity to reason. This leads Nietzsche to describe man as 'the sick animal' (Nietzsche [1887] 1956: 257); the one creature whose way of living is at odds with its animal nature. Freud sees human beings in a remarkably similar way.¹² Our peculiarity lies in the fact that we are torn between our animal instincts and the

8 See for example their respective papers on evil in Stuart Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 81–139.

9 Whose ideas, it should be noted, support the central doctrines of both forms of Christianity.

10 *On the Trinity* Book XII.

11 It is interesting to note that Nietzsche and Freud, despite their notorious views on woman (see Beverley Clack (ed.), *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 192–205), have proved useful for developing the ideas of some feminists: Mary Daly's work, while rightly critical of Nietzsche's misogyny, employs elements of his critique of Christianity (see Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (London: Women's Press, 1984), pp. 100–101), while Juliet Mitchell (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Pelican, 1974)) bases her account of the psychology of women within Freud's discussion of female sexuality.

12 And we might note that Freud himself says that he deliberately did not read Nietzsche before he started formulating his own ideas on the nature of human being as he feared that there would be too much overlap with his own ideas.

requirements of human civilization. This means that we are fundamentally unhappy creatures precisely because we find it impossible to reconcile these two opposing aspects of our existence.¹³

What might adopting such a paradigm mean for shaping the scope of a philosophy of religion? Sceptical voices in the history of the philosophy of religion concerned with developing ‘natural histories of religion’ sometimes use language that suggests a similar idea of human being: or at least the *religious* human being. David Hume, for example, refers to religion as ‘sick men’s dreams’ (Hume [1757] 1993: 184). Feuerbach reiterates this image in his highly influential *Essence of Christianity* by describing religion as ‘the dream of the human mind’ (Feuerbach [1841] 1957: xxxix). For Hume and Feuerbach, this image of the dream is utilized to describe their belief that religion is concerned with illusions – and for Hume unhealthy illusions at that. My intention is to use this image in the more comprehensive way in which Nietzsche and Freud use it. For Nietzsche and Freud we are *all* sick animals, all caught in the double bind of our humanity. As such, ‘illusions’ are what will shape pretty much *all* human activity as we seek to make sense of our place in this world. And as Ana-Maria Rizzuto has noted, ‘men cannot be men without illusions’ (Rizzuto 1979: 209; cited in Palmer 1997: 75): a claim that suggests that we would be mistaken in thinking that human beings can be understood without considering the range of their dreams and fantasies. It is in this way that I intend to employ this model: in other words, less as a factual, ‘scientific’ description of what it is to be human, and more as a creative image that will enable an engagement with the full range of experiences open to human beings. Accepting that we are animals, but animals who are not fully comfortable with their animality, provides an important way of engaging with religion. Religion, according to Feuerbach, is the thing that distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom, for ‘the brutes have no religion’ (Feuerbach 1957: 1). If such a view is accepted, our engagement with religion should be more profound than simply trying to work out if religious beliefs are coherent or not: exploring human religiosity offers a vital way into the dreams, ideals and fantasies that shape our sense of ourselves. Thus my post-Christian philosophy of religion also accepts Feuerbach’s famous contention that ‘religion is human life reflected, mirrored in itself’ (Feuerbach 1957: 63).

My challenge, then, to the role that reason has played in determining the shape of philosophy of religion is not about proclaiming that there can be no reasoned engagement with reality, but rather with attempting to widen the vision of what religion involves. The fact that we are, to put it bluntly, *strange* animals gets lost if too much credence is placed upon discovering the extent to which our beliefs conform to rational criteria. We are not simply rational beings: we act out of other concerns and feelings too. Tilley expresses this well when he reflects that the problem with Phillips’ philosophy of religion is that it suggests that: ‘a religious practice motivated by fear and involving causality is not *really* religious’ (Tilley 2000: 348). It may well be that practices of which ‘we’ (who broadly accept the scientific paradigm of

13 See Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) where this theme is developed in detail.

the world) do not approve can tell us much about the particular and peculiar way in which the human being expresses and develops itself.

To accept such a view necessitates engaging with an area that interests both Freud and Nietzsche: namely, the unconscious drives and desires that shape human life. For Freud, ‘the dream work’ is important because our dreams are in part the enciphered forms of our repressed desires.¹⁴ Through analysis of those dreams it is possible to arrive at a sense of the things that concern and perhaps torment us. Note that under this model we are not straightforwardly conscious beings: we are, if you like, mysterious even to ourselves. And despite Freud’s attempt to promote analysis as a way of shoring up the structures of the fragile ego, his work leaves us with a sense that it is the unconscious drives and desires that dominate human life and practice. For Nietzsche, human life and culture is framed by the tension between the Apollonian, culture-creating self and the Dionysian celebration of nature and the instincts. His solution to this tension is rather different from Freud’s: despite the exhortation at the end of *The Birth of Tragedy* that we should ‘sacrifice in the temple of both gods’ ([1870–71] 1957: 146), it is ultimately by embracing Dionysus, by saying yes to life, that it is possible to live ‘beyond good and evil’.¹⁵ Indeed, the failure to engage with Dionysus, the natural world of the passions and instincts, leads to the death of Apollonian culture. As Nietzsche puts it in his usual, highly provocative language: ‘because you had deserted Dionysus, you were in turn deserted by Apollo’ (1957: 69). The artificiality of reason and the world that it can create cannot survive if it fails to be grounded in an awareness of the potentiality of other forces – violence, sex, and death – to shape human experience.

Reading Nietzsche and Freud gives a sense of the tension between the different experiences of being human, and also the difficulties of holding these poles in balance. It may well be impossible to balance these different views of what it is to be human – neither Freud nor Nietzsche seems able, ultimately, to do this. But even if this idea of balance is impossible to maintain, it is worth attempting. Pursuing that tension rather than focusing on only one aspect of our humanity leads me to seek a re-reading of figures who inform the shape of philosophical discussions of religion but who are considered in ways that over-simplify or distort their ideas. The ideas of significant figures in the development of western religious sensibilities are invariably read through a rationalist glass where strange comments or inconsistencies are ironed out or omitted. Aspects of their thought that cohere with the assumption that religious belief, to be taken seriously, must be reasonable become the aspects that are emphasized. Augustine provides a fine example of what happens to a thinker when this methodology is employed.

Augustine’s work is invariably presented purely in terms of those aspects that offer a rational basis for religious belief. His ideas on how to reconcile evil with the goodness of God (*City of God* XII–XIV) or his systematic discussion of how time relates to God (*Confessions* XI) are considered at length. Those aspects of his

14 This claim is most fully expressed in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).

15 Camille Paglia uses Nietzsche’s model of the tension between Apollo and Dionysus in her *Sexual Personae* (London: Penguin, 1991): ‘Art is form struggling to wake from the nightmare of nature’ (p. 39).

thought that seem to suggest 'baser' worries and more troubling understandings of what religion might involve are ignored. Time and again, for example, Augustine returns to the troubling case of the penile erection that denies the control of the will (*Confessions* X, 30; *On Marriage and Concupiscence* I, 7; *City of God*, XIV, 16, 20, 23). Not only does male ejaculation affect the loss of the mind that is, remember, the location of the image of God (*City of God*, XIV, 16): the very ability of the penis to spontaneously erect suggests that the body might well be stronger than the mind. To adapt Hume's famous comment, penile erection suggests that reason really might be the slave of the passions! We might argue that dismissing such reflections is valid: after all, his discussion of theological matters is of wider importance than his rather idiosyncratic musings on the trials of having a male body. Such editorial bias (which seems to shape the way in which Augustine's ideas are integrated into many university courses) means that we fail to consider his ideas in an appropriately rounded way. Indeed, the assumption seems to be that logical argument and reasoned debate is more significant for understanding Augustine than the more 'irrational' concerns that he appears to have. Feminist theologians have consistently shown the limitations of a theology that avoids taking seriously the sexual realm:¹⁶ without an understanding of the way in which Augustine's sexuality shapes his theology and spirituality, it is impossible to get to grips with the complexity of his ideas. Reason *and* desire inform his writing. For Augustine, spontaneous erection is not just inconvenient, it threatens the very idea that 'I' might be made in the image of God and thus ensures that he develop an account of evil that explains this troublesome feature. To neglect this aspect of his thought is to seriously misrepresent the issues that shape his theology.

This leads me to some tentative conclusions about how a philosophy of religion might proceed. If it is to offer any insight into the phenomenon of religion, it must offer a wider analysis of the sources of religious belief than can be undertaken if it simply continues in its attempt to provide justifications – or rejections – of belief based on reason alone. In developing such a philosophy of religion, revisiting Freud can be particularly helpful.

At this point I need to say something about my reading of Freud, given that it is possible to read Freud in two very different ways. Most commonly, there is the reading of Freud as a rationalist, committed to eradicating the superstitious and fallacious connections that religion makes between thought and the external world. When philosophers of religion have engaged with Freud's ideas it is this Freud that tends to take centre stage (see Mackie 1982: 196; Clarke and Byrne 1993: 173–87). And for some this can lead to the easy dismissal of his ideas: his theories are overly dependent on the analysis of neurotic patients; his theories are reductionist; his natural history of religion is dependent upon a primal history for which there is no evidence, and so on.¹⁷

16 See for example the work of Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart (*Introducing Body Theology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)) in developing 'body theologies' that take seriously sexuality as a fundamental part of spirituality.

17 See Peter Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 200–202 for a synopsis of such criticisms.

But there is a second Freud: the Freud James DiCenso refers to as ‘the other Freud’ (DiCenso 1999). This is the Freud who undermines the claim that reason is the foremost power in the processes that determine human being, postulating instead the powerful workings of the unconscious. It is this Freud that I find useful for developing a philosophy of religion that moves beyond reason, and which is thus capable of understanding religion in a rather different and more convincing way. At the heart of this reading lies Freud’s ideas on psychopathology, and I hope to show that, contrary to his own intentions, it is these ideas that actually ground religious belief and action more firmly at the heart of what it is to be human.

As is often the case, the two Freuds are to be found side by side. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud attempts to ground his theory of religion in an (allegedly) historical act of patricide that acts as a form of group memory. Adopting Darwin’s claim that the ‘primal horde’ was the first structure for human society, Freud argues that in this original family grouping, the father was the only male entitled to sex with the women. Frustrated, his sons murder him in order to have access to the women. Having killed him, however, they are overcome with guilt and instigate a yearly celebration of a meal where the totem animal that stood as a symbol for the group is killed in commemoration of the original murder of the father. All religion, Freud claims, is based upon the repressed guilt and remorse felt throughout the generations for this primal act. Indeed, the concept of God is seen to develop from the inability of any of the original brothers to take on the role of the father, and thus they long for his return: this he does in the idealized form of God.¹⁸

Setting such an account in pre-history is difficult, indeed impossible, to establish. Yet interpreting Freud’s story in mythopoetic terms may be more valuable: and it is in precisely this kind of literary way that later continental thinkers have engaged with Freud. What, for example, does this idea of patricide suggest on a psychic level? For Jacques Lacan, the murder of the father – the voice of authority – is necessary in order to open up the possibility of pleasure. Yet the father does not stay dead, but rather returns with the prohibitions against pleasure more strongly in place than before (see Lacan, ‘The Death of God’ in Ward 1997: 42). Julia Kristeva offers a similar rendition that focuses on this story as a way of engaging with the psychodrama of childhood. The father is the one who breaks the symbiotic union of mother and child. This is necessary for language to develop and with it the possibility of individuation. Yet the father’s role is ambiguous: we lose the mother, ‘la Chose’ (‘the Thing’), with whom we long to be reunited, even as we gain the tools to become individuals. Under this reading, the ambiguity of the Father-God is expressed through this story of a primal patricide. Religion, understood thus, provides an important set of stories for illuminating the desires and losses that form the basis for adulthood (see Kristeva in Ward 1997: 223–32; also Kristeva 1989).

An alternative reading can also be offered for Freud’s account of the connection between religious ritual and neurotic illness. In ‘Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices’ (1907) Freud outlines the similarities between the obsessive actions through which the neurotic seeks to render safe their frightening world and religious rituals.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), section IV, Penguin Freud Library, vol. 13, pp. 203–5.

Neurotic ceremonials ‘consist in making small adjustments to particular everyday actions, small additions or restrictions or arrangements, which have always to be carried out in the same, or in a methodically varied, manner’ (Freud [1907] 1985: 32). These actions might appear meaningless: but for the patient this is far from the case, for ‘any deviation from the ceremonial is visited with intolerable anxiety’ (Freud [1907] 1985: 32). The ceremonial is ‘a “sacred act”’ (Freud [1907] 1985: 32): similar to, although not exactly like, a religious ritual, most notably because these actions do not have the public and communal quality of religious practice, but are rather forms of ‘private religion’ (Freud [1907] 1985: 33). Freud’s work is dedicated to showing how such actions are related to specific repressed events in the patient’s life. These actions are thus highly meaningful, providing ways of coping – however inappropriately – with unresolved issues and repressed instincts.

Of course, Freud’s intention in exposing the sources of such actions is to cure the patient: once the origin of the obsessive act is revealed the patient will be able to let go of the action. And the same goes for the illusion that is religion, for religion is ‘a universal obsessional neurosis’ (Freud [1907] 1985: 40). Yet this very description of religion as ‘a *universal* obsessional neurosis’ presumably suggests much about how humans generally attempt, in much the same way as neurotics, to come to an accommodation with the world that threatens to consume and destroy them. Indeed, Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) is committed to showing how we are all, to a greater or lesser extent, neurotic animals: we are all in some sense mysterious to ourselves, and it is through monitoring slips of the tongue, the things that we lose and forget, that we can come to some sense of who that mysterious person is.

All of which suggests it is going to be difficult to talk of the human person as in any straightforward way defined by their conscious and rational lives. Freud seems to struggle with accepting the implications of his own theory on the unconscious, and this is perhaps best seen in his attempt to make a distinction between the superstitious person and the scientific rationalist. This distinction lies in the attitude taken towards chance. For Freud, there are chance events in terms of the things that happen in the external world; but there are no ‘internal (psychical) accidental events’ (Freud [1901] 1991: 320). The superstitious/religious person reverses this position: for this person, there are no accidental events in the external world for all is open to manipulation by the self or, in the case of the religious, by God. Freud sums this difference up in the following way: the superstitious person seeks to ‘project outwards a motivation which I look for within’ (Freud [1901] 1991: 320). But what I find interesting here is that he accepts that there is common ground. Both are attempting to make sense of the world: as Freud puts it, ‘the compulsion not to let chance count as chance *but to interpret it is common to us both*’ (Freud [1901] 1991: 320; my emphasis).

For me, the interest lies less in making a distinction between two types of attitude, and more in the common ground that lies between the two positions. To make such a connection is even more pressing when one considers Freud’s reflections on his own behaviour. Despite this critical voice, he accepts that he is not immune from seeking such connections between his internal and external worlds:

One morning...when I was passing through a room in my dressing-gown with straw slippers on my feet, I yielded to a sudden impulse and hurled one of my slippers from my foot at the wall, causing a beautiful little marble Venus to fall down from its bracket. As it broke into pieces, I quoted quite unmoved these lines from Busch: 'Oh! The Venus! Lost is she!...' This wild conduct and my calm acceptance of the damage are to be explained in terms of the situation at the time. One of my family was gravely ill, and secretly I had already given up hope of her recovery. That morning I had learned that there had been a great improvement, and I know I had said to myself: 'So she is going to live after all!' My attack of destructive fury served therefore to express a feeling of gratitude to fate and allowed me to perform a 'sacrificial act' – rather as if I had made a vow to sacrifice something or other as a thank-offering if she recovered her health! (Freud [1901] 1991: 222–3)

Something very powerful is being expressed here: even the most committed rationalist is not able to evade seeking to make an intimate connection between his internal hopes and the external world that surrounds him. In this sense the attempt to divide superstition or religion from other forms of behaviour is not particularly helpful. We could – with Phillips – consider Freud's action as merely superstitious: the position that Freud encourages us to take by dealing with this story in a light-hearted manner. But we could think about this action rather differently. We could think of it as an action that reveals something of the precarious nature of things, of how we all long for a connection with the world, for a sense that the unfeeling vastness that is the universe might care about us after all; and also how we might attempt to bring about a reconciliation with the powerful forces that threaten to crush us.

Edward Hopper's paintings express powerfully the sense that we are ultimately alone in a world that threatens to destroy us. In *Nighthawks* (1942), probably his most famous painting, three people sit at a bar, each isolated from the other, each seeming to be absorbed in themselves and their own concerns. There seems to be no way in, and no way out into the dark, ill-defined world that forms the exterior to the bar. In *Compartment C, Car 293*, a woman sits alone reading under the remorseless glare of the carriage lights. Outside, the landscape is lit by a preternatural red sunset that extends above the forbidding darkness of a wood. In such a universe where we often experience isolation and alienation, we long for connection. The religious attempt to connect with the universe is simply one of the ways in which we attempt to do this, and it is by engaging with the different forms that this desire for connection takes – not just with those aspects that are rationally justifiable – that we open up the whole question of what it is to be this strange human animal. A philosophy of religion that is to do this effectively cannot content itself with simply providing rational justifications for religious belief, or with engaging only with a preconceived notion of what 'true' religion involves. To be human is to be more than rational: it is to be passionate and emotional too. And in this sense it may be that 'superstition' tells us more about the things that drive human beings than the clear, head-based and rational religious systems that have been superimposed on the tumultuous depths that constitute our humanity.

Conclusion

A critic may argue that in my attempt to produce a ‘post’ philosophy of religion, what I have presented is not a philosophy of religion at all – after all, I have spent much time arguing against the dominant model of the discipline as the rational discussion of religious belief. In my defence, I do not intend the overthrow of reason itself: after all, the ability to reflect is a fundamental and vital part of our humanity. With Socrates, I wish to affirm that the unexamined life is not worth living.¹⁹ My concern, however, is that over-emphasizing reason in our method and our understanding of religion means that we never adequately get to grips with the phenomena of religion. And that failure to understand the religious impulse limits our understanding of what it is to be human more generally. The weirdness of allegedly ‘bad’ religion tells us much about human beings and the connections that we all attempt to make with our world, albeit in different ways. Neglecting the place of the instincts and the emotions is to develop a one-sided vision of humanity. And this has ramifications. Greek drama provides profound examples of what happens to those who neglect to engage with the totality of what it is to be this human animal, and describes with relish the horrible fates that await those who over-emphasize reason. Hippolytus, the eponymous hero of Euripides’ play, is destroyed for preferring the cool-headed virgin hunter-goddess Artemis to the rapacious goddess of sexual desire, Aphrodite. Likewise, Pentheus in *The Bacchae* dies at the hands of the Maenads because he has ridiculed and restricted the rites of Dionysus’ followers. His attempt to instigate a form of secular government that ignores the gods in favour of human reason is also seen as leading to his downfall: the image of his mother playing with his decapitated head in her lap whilst in the midst of a Dionysiac frenzy seems peculiarly apt given this attempt to displace the passions with the mind. In these examples Euripides seems to tell us that we ignore the emotions, the desires and the passions at our peril, for they have the power to destroy us.

Such examples provide vivid examples of what happens when the world of desire, the instincts and the unconscious are ignored. Religion is not only based upon reason: its sources are to be found in the desires that drive people, the attempt to make sense of the world, and to find an accommodation with the things that threaten and disturb us. The philosopher (the lover of wisdom) should be concerned with exploring all these expressions of religiosity, not just those that conform more readily to the dictates of reason. In this way, ‘post’ philosophy of religion can provide an inroad into the wider study of what it is to be a human being: but only if it seeks to move beyond the thought forms and attitudes that it has inherited from certain forms of Christianity and their philosophical expression in some of the ideas and assumptions of the European Enlightenment.

19 We should perhaps note that writers like Martha Nussbaum have argued convincingly for a vision of Hellenistic philosophy as a form of therapy, where reason itself is defined through the engagement with the passions (see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)).