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# INTRODUCTION: FAITH, RATIONALITY AND THE PASSIONS

Sarah Coakley

The papers gathered in this issue of *Faith and Philosophy* were first presented at the “Faith, Rationality and the Passions” conference which I convened at the University of Cambridge, January 11–13, 2010. They have been lightly edited and revised for this issue, after the customary readers’ reports. I would like to record my particular gratitude to the John Templeton Foundation for generously funding the symposium, to Dr. Mary Ann Meyers of the Foundation for making all the practical arrangements for the conference with her customary grace, and to the editor of *Faith and Philosophy*, Professor Thomas Flint, for kindly agreeing to publish these papers together. Readers of *Faith and Philosophy* may also like to know that the remaining papers from the conference (gathered into a second, thematic cluster) are due to appear in a related journal issue: that of *Modern Theology* for April 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Taken together, the papers represent—as will be specially clear from this issue—a certain revisionary re-thinking of the relation of “reason” (however construed) and “passion” or “emotion” in certain classic Western philosophical sources. If one had to identify a prime uniting theme in the papers gathered here, it is that the supposed “modern” disjunction of reason and feeling in Western philosophy has been vastly exaggerated in late-modern renditions, if not actively manipulated by the secondary literature: neither Descartes nor Kant (nor even Kierkegaard), when carefully and discerningly read, propose any such disjunction. Essays by John Cottingham (Descartes), John Hare (Kant), and Merold Westphal (Kierkegaard) make this point penetratingly, whilst also indicating how careful the reader must be in understanding the *various* ways in which “reason,”

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<sup>1</sup>The papers gathered in the forthcoming *Modern Theology* issue (April, 2011) are: Sarah Coakley, “Introduction: Faith, Rationality and the Passions”; William Cavanaugh, “The Invention of Fanaticism and the Myth of Religious Violence”; Catherine Pickstock, “The Late Arrival of Language: Word, Nature and the Divine in Plato’s *Cratylus*”; Columba Stewart, O.S.B., “Evagrius and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and Passions”; John Milbank, “Hume *versus* Kant: Faith, Reasoning and Feeling”; Thomas Dixon, “Revolting Passions”; Stephen Mulhall, “Wittgenstein on Faith, Rationality and the Passions”; Gerald Clore, “Psychology and the Rationality of Emotion”; Michael Spezio, “The Neuroscience of Emotion and Reasoning in Social Contexts: Implications for Moral Theology”; Sarah Coakley, “Postscript: What (if Anything) can the Sciences Tell Philosophy and Theology about Faith, Rationality and the Passions?”



“passion,” “feeling” and “faith” are to be construed in the works of the philosophers under review. Each presents a distinctive view. Douglas Hedley’s paper on de Maistre likewise indicates how a lesser-known Enlightenment thinker has been wrongly pilloried as a defender of dark passion and violence, when his philosophical interests were, on the contrary, fuelled by neo-Platonic, and specifically Origenist, interests in a universalist theodicy.

A second, and sub-theme, in this collection is one that probes behind this early modern and modern heritage on the reason/feeling theme, and asks how the thought of Augustine and Aquinas prepares us for the twists that occur later in the West—as reason is progressively secularized, and “passion” transmuted into “emotion.”<sup>2</sup> The integrative readings that mark the papers on modern philosophers in this issue find their historical backcloth in Paul Griffiths’s rendition of the significance of rightly-ordered passion in Augustine, and Eleonore Stump’s suggestive re-reading of Thomas’s virtue theory—as profoundly engaged with affective transformation. The latter paper, especially, is bound to be controversial amongst virtue theorists who read Thomas as an “Aristotelian” of a certain stripe. If Stump is correct, their presumption that Thomas disjoins feeling and reason is distorted by another, modern, misreading: one that drives a wedge between “Humean” and “Kantian” assessments of feeling in the ethical realm. Moreover, such readings also misleadingly bracket away the significance of the third part of the *Summa Theologiae*, and especially the treatment of pneumatology there, for Thomas’s rich understanding of the virtuous life.

Finally, this collection of essays is book-ended by two papers which, rather than attempting re-readings of classic sources as such, make normative suggestions for contemporary philosophical method and for the philosophical theory of emotions, respectively, and especially as they relate to religious faith. Charles Taylor’s broad-ranging essay presents a systematic assault on what he perceives as the myth of “disengaged” scientific reason, and urges the reconsideration of “meaning-making” (including religious meaning-making) as endemic to the pursuit of “rationality,” *tout court*. Finally, Peter Goldie surveys the field of recent secular philosophy of emotions, and concludes that theological ethics may—perhaps surprisingly—have much to learn from it, despite its apparently reductive presumptions. Again, the task of an integrative approach to reason, feeling, and faith opens up creatively to the future, strongly assisted by bold re-readings of the classic Western philosophical heritage.

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<sup>2</sup>The birth of “emotion” as a category replacing (but not entirely coterminous with) “passion” is surprisingly late, as this collection of essays indicates. For a precise historical account of this transition see Thomas Dixon’s essay in the *Modern Theology* issue (n. 1), and *ibid.*, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).