

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 39 | Issue 2

Article 8

4-1-2022

Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea, eds., VOICES FROM THE EDGE: CENTERING MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVES IN ANALYTIC THEOLOGY

Alicia Finch

Northern Illinois University, afinch@niu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Finch, Alicia (2022) "Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea, eds., VOICES FROM THE EDGE: CENTERING MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVES IN ANALYTIC THEOLOGY," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 39: Iss. 2, Article 8.

DOI: [10.37977/faithphil.2022.39.2.8](https://doi.org/10.37977/faithphil.2022.39.2.8)

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol39/iss2/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

Voices from the Edge: Centering Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology, edited by Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. x + 236. \$80.00 (hardcover)

ALICIA FINCH, Northern Illinois University

Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea begin their introduction to this outstanding collection of previously unpublished essays by noting that “over the past several decades, scholars working in biblical, theological, and religious studies have increasingly attended to the substantive ways in which our experiences and understanding of God, and God’s relation to the world, are (partially) structured by our experiences and concepts of race, gender, disability, and sexuality” (1). However, within the sub-discipline of *analytic theology* (i.e., “roughly speaking, theology that is done more or less in conformity with the style and ambitions of analytic philosophy, and in conversation with the literatures of both analytic philosophy and contemporary and historical theology” (2)), “these topics have not received the same level of attention . . . as other more traditional topics” (1).

But what exactly is the *harm* in leaving these topics off the relevant agenda? In short, “the discipline has missed out on an entire range of epistemic goods that differently positioned theologians might offer” (2). While acknowledging that there is only so much that a single collection of essays can do, Panchuk and Rea express their hope that this collection of essays “will contribute to ameliorating these harms” (2).

In my view, this volume achieves precisely what Panchuk and Rea hoped it would. By engaging with scholarly work on race, gender, disability, and sexuality, the essays obviously address topics that analytic theologians tend not to address. Because each essay is an instance of analytic theology, this volume demonstrates that there is no conflict between (a) addressing the relevant topics and (b) making use of the analytic methodology. Moreover, because each essay is an instance of analytic theology *done well*, anyone who reads this volume will be in a position to recognize that the topics of race, gender, disability, and sexuality are theologically important. Indeed, these essays collectively make the case that the discipline of analytic theology is epistemically impoverished to the extent that it leaves these topics off its agenda.

Unfortunately, I cannot do justice to the nuanced argumentation that these essays offer. Instead, I will simply note the structure of this volume and offer a brief summary of each essay included herein.



With respect to structure, the book is divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a “central area of analytic theology”: (1) methodological principles; (2) the intersection of social identities with religious epistemology; and (3) the connections among eschatology, ante-mortem suffering, and ante-mortem social perceptions of bodies (11).

The methodology section includes, first, Helen De Cruz’s “Seeking out Epistemic Friction in the Philosophy of Religion.” In this essay, De Cruz argues that “a deliberate seeking out of epistemic friction benefits philosophers of religion” (24). Though De Cruz does not explicitly *define* epistemic friction, she suggests that it may be characterized in terms of the *resistance* one encounters when confronting a perspective different from one’s own, “for instance, when people from a dominant social or racial group are confronted with the perspective of marginalized people” (24). If all members of an epistemic community share the same perspective, their community will offer them very few opportunities for epistemic friction.

From a purely epistemic perspective—if one focuses only on epistemic goods—a lack of epistemic friction is problematic for at least two reasons. First, “the psychological literature shows that diversity consistently trumps ability in problem-solving tasks presented to groups. For example, diverse groups of problem-solvers beat more homogenous higher ability groups when working on focused solutions” (30). Second, members of marginalized groups (qua marginalized) may have philosophical insights that members of the dominant group (qua dominant) lack. Invoking DuBois’s notion of *double consciousness*, De Cruz here emphasizes a point that is taken for granted in many disciplines outside of philosophy: in order to survive, members of marginalized groups must learn to see the world not only from their own (marginalized) perspectives, but from the perspective of members of the dominant group. I take De Cruz to be suggesting that those who see the world from more than one perspective are able to develop insights that are unavailable to those who see the world from no perspective other than their own.

In the second entry in the methodology section, “Toward an Analytic Theology of Liberation,” Sameer Yadav considers why so few—if any—analytic theologians embrace *liberation theology* (LT). According to Yadav, the defining feature of LT is a “commitment to . . . the ambition to *do theology in service of the cognitive and practical goals of securing freedom for groups who suffer social or political oppression* [where] this ambition is intended to serve . . . as a meta-theological norm for theology as such” (50). Yadav proposes that “proponents of AT fail to engage with or in LT principally because [a] they misconstrue LT as engaged in an enterprise aimed at the moral or ethical consequences of Christian theology rather than as theology per se or because [b] they recognize LT’s claim that a liberative ambition is an obligatory norm for (good) Christian theology per se, but regard that claim as obviously false” (52). Given that the first response is based on a misunderstanding of LT, Yadav turns his attention to the second.

More to the point, Yadav sets out to defend the thesis that (good) Christian theology qua (good) Christian theology aims “not merely at truth, but also at justice for the socially and politically oppressed” (54). In support of this claim, Yadav points out that even if one is firmly committed to the goal of theory construction (where theory construction is construed “in terms of amassing truths or acquiring knowledge”), one must choose what to theorize *about*; one must choose, that is, one’s subject matter. From here, Yadav offers a subtle, extended argument for the thesis that as long as a theologian’s choice of subject matter is appropriately related to the goal of liberating the oppressed, that theologian’s work thereby adheres to LT’s meta-theological norm for theology as such.

Yadav next addresses *Christian* analytic theologians in particular, arguing that their scholarly work ought to adhere to the relevant meta-theological norm. Here, Yadav notes that “in the Gospels we find Jesus emphasizing that those invested in the success and maintenance of various worldly systems of oppressive power, including religious people thus invested, are those who fail to properly discern the theologically trivial from the weighty. Those who adopt the vantage of the oppressed, however, occupy a position of privileged access to revelatory knowledge” (69). In light of this Gospel message, Yadav suggests, Christian analytic theologians have every reason to allow a concern for the liberation of the oppressed to guide their choice of subject matter and, hence, every reason to engage in and with LT.

Amy Peeler’s “Mary as Mediator” is the final entry in the methodology section. Peeler compellingly argues that “people of many different identities can *meet up at Mary*, so to speak, and use continued reflection on her story—and on the way her story has been understood and appropriated by others—not only to sharpen their own views but also to have them challenged” (77). According to Peeler, Mary’s story is a particularly good “meeting place” for people of different theological communities: “First, her story is more limited than that of Jesus” and, as such, it is “feasible for focused analysis” (77). Second, “Mary’s story—her combination of identities—provide the ground for taking up especially pertinent actions for our time (77). Emphasizing Mary’s identities as Jewish, poor, and a woman, Peeler notes that “her story says that God redeems all people through his covenant people the Jews . . . champions the poor [and] chooses to work in and through women” (91). Finally, “Unlike other female characters, her story is one that creates deep-seated divisions and therefore provides a meaningful test case for being able to create a space for conversation” (77). Given the history of intense debate between Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding Marian theology, “If common space is possible with Mary’s story, it is a real achievement” (77).

The section devoted to the intersection of social identities and religious epistemology begins with Teri Merrick’s “Non-deference to Religious Authority: Epistemic Arrogance or Justice?” In this essay, Merrick effectively brings the philosophical literature on *epistemic injustice* and *epistemic*

oppression into contact with recent discussions of *epistemic authority*. She begins by homing in on Linda Zagzebski's view that "I can trust my [religious] tradition more than my own experiences in many cases" (Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 201); in such cases, she suggests, trust in my religious tradition "is an expression of the virtue of intellectual humility" (Zagzebski 199).

Confronted with this suggestion, one might suppose that, on Zagzebski's view, to *fail* to trust one's religious tradition is to manifest the vice of epistemic arrogance. Indeed, one might suppose that it follows from Zagzebski's view that anyone who identifies with a particular religious tradition has only two choices: fall into epistemic arrogance or uncritically defer to the authorities within one's tradition. However, Merrick persuasively argues that if we consider Zagzebski's view in light of both (i) what Christianity teaches us about Christ's relationship to the oppressed and (ii) the nature of epistemic oppression, we will recognize that epistemic justice actually *requires us* to question religious authorities.

The next essay in the religious epistemology section is Joshua Cockayne, David Efird, and Jack Warman's "Shattered Faith: The Social Epistemology of Deconversion by Spiritually Violent Religious Trauma." In this essay, the authors attempt to undermine the popular view that "if being hurt by the church causes you to lose faith in God, then your faith was in people, not God" (119). More precisely, they argue for the thesis that "it's possible for some to have faith in God, and then lose that faith due to the actions of others, particularly church people, who shame the former with religious texts and rituals" (119).

Their argument is constituted by a philosophical account of how exactly deconversion-by-others might occur. Two concepts are crucial to their account: love and shame. With respect to love, Cockayne, et al. emphasize that (i) having strong faith in God entails loving God and (ii) loving God entails desiring union with Him (126). Moreover, (iii) the desire for union with God naturally drives a person of faith to *engage with* and *reveal themselves* to Him. So, (iv) a person's *faith in* God naturally leads to that person's *engagement with* and *self-revelation to* Him. With respect to shame, Cockayne, et al. emphasize that (v) feeling shame before God naturally drives a person to *hide from* God; in their shame, they desire not to be seen by Him. Of course, the shame-driven desire to hide from God is obviously at odds with the love-driven desire to engage with and reveal oneself to Him; if someone with faith in God feels shame before Him, that person will experience an internal struggle, and may vacillate between acting on their love-driven and shame-driven desires.

Of course, one might suppose that this is simply the human condition: on the one hand, we are drawn to God, who is holy; on the other hand, our (proper) shame drives us to hide from Him. But Cockayne, et al. draw our attention to cases in which *some* faithful Church members are encouraged to believe that they (and others like them) are much more shameful—and,

hence, ought to feel much greater shame before God—than others (who are not like them) ought to feel. The authors suggest that in such a case, the person's shame before God might grow so strong that the desire to hide from Him drives out any desire for engagement or self-revelation. Of course, once that happens, the desire for union with God is gone and, with it, faith in Him.

If the actions of others can cause a person of faith to experience so much shame that the person loses their desire for union with God, and if desire for union with God is essential to faith, then it is obviously possible for someone to lose their faith as result of the actions of others. And, according to Cockayne, et al., not only *can* the actions of others cause a person of faith to experience shame of the relevant sort, but “This is just the sort of shame many lesbian and gay Christians are made to feel, as if their natures were ‘defective’ . . . labelled as sinners, and so labelled as those rejected, even hated, by God” (134–5). When members of a church use religious texts and rituals to shame one of their own (e.g., a lesbian or gay Christian), “Church hurt really can cause deconversion” (137).

Theresa W. Tobin and Dawne Moon's “Sacramental Shame in Black Churches: How Racism and Respectability Politics Shape the Experiences of Black LGBTQ and Same-Gender-Loving Christians” perfectly complements Cockayne, et al.'s. They begin by introducing the notion of *sacramental shame*: “In the sacramental shame dynamic, churches require LGBTQ people constantly to feel and display shame about their same-sex attractions and/or gender difference as the sign that they want to be worthy of God's love and dwell in God's presence” (144). Next, Tobin and Moon consider how sacramental shame manifests itself within the Black Church, in particular. In this context, they consider the Black Church's historical embrace of *respectability politics* (149, citing Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (Routledge, 2005), 106–8), where “Respectability politics holds Black people accountable for living up to white Christian sexual norms and proving racist stereotypes incorrect when applied to respectable Black people” (149). Tobin and Moon point out that “because respectability politics emphasizes appearances, its enactment works to conceal from the white gaze anyone who might be perceived as confirming racist stereotypes about Black sexual deviancy, including people with HIV/AIDS, gay, lesbian, or bisexual people, single mothers, and transgender people” (149).

Given the significance of respectability politics, “a distinct sacramental shame dynamic emerges in [Black] churches for their LGBTQ and same-gender-loving [SGL] members. Under the weight of respectability, Black LGBTQ and SGL Christians need to experience a sacramental shame that is both *detectable enough within* the community to give assurance that they do not repudiate God or the Black community, and simultaneously *hidden from the white gaze* in order to maintain the image of Black respectability” (150). More generally, “African-American LGBTQ Christians' intersecting modes of oppression create distinctive experiences of

sacramental shame including alienation from God, feelings of invisibility and exile, and compartmentalization" (159).

Kathryn Pogin's "Conceptualizing the Atonement" is the final essay in the epistemology section. According to Pogin, traditional approaches to the Atonement send the message that "redemption [is] the result of a moral exemplar obediently and willingly submitting to unjust violence so that others might be saved" and that "Christ's suffering [is] *the act of love*" (174). Pogin raises concerns about the effects that this message might have on the faithful, especially on women who are experiencing domestic violence "in the context of a tradition that has highly valued submissiveness and nurturing behaviour in women, intact families, male authority, patience through tribulation, and forgiveness" (175). Pogin proposes that it would be natural for women in abusive relationships to think that in order to be Christ-like, they must willingly submit themselves to whatever unjust violence their abusers inflict upon them. After extensive discussion of such cases, Pogin concludes by suggesting a new interpretation of the meaning of Christ's life and death: "as an example of a life dedicated to the struggle to overcome injustice and a refusal to give up that struggle even under threat of death" (180).

The section that explores connections among eschatology, ante-mortem suffering, and ante-mortem social perceptions of bodies includes Blake Hereth's "The Shape of Trans Afterlife Justice" and Kevin Timpe's "Defiant Afterlife: Disability and Uniting Ourselves to God."

For their part, Hereth sets out to offer a "limited exploration of what a just and good afterlife would look like for trans folks who desire to transition due to gender dysphoria" (185). They ultimately defend four claims: "that gender dysphoria is a harm to trans persons who experience it, and that this harm . . . is unjust"; that trans persons have the *right* to transition in the afterlife; "that those responsible for their gender dysphoria, such as explicit transphobes but also those responsible for the adverse effects of cisnormativity, bear primary responsibility to provide resources and even labour to make it happen"; and "that trans persons, once they transition, will be afforded opportunities they were unjustly denied in life and will be given the desires of their hearts" (185).

In his contribution, Kevin Timpe considers whether any disabilities might be retained in the (heavenly) afterlife. He begins with a "quick overview of some of the Christian tradition's problematic history with respect to disability" (208). Because sin and disability have often been linked (if not conflated), many Christians have believed that "those with disabilities need to be healed to enjoy perfect union with God in the afterlife" (214).

Timpe fully acknowledges that if a particular disability "intrinsically interferes" with a person's capacity to experience "union with and worship of God," that disability must be healed before the person can enter fully into heavenly beatitude (i.e., the beatific vision). However, Timpe emphasizes, it is hardly obvious that *all* disabilities constitute impairments of the relevant sort. Moreover, unless *every* disability constitutes such an

impairment, there seems to be no reason to deny that someone might both (a) enjoy the post-mortem beatific vision and (b) retain a pre-mortem disability. At the very least, Christian discussions of the afterlife must take account of the testimony of those persons with disabilities who think that, in this life, they are every bit as *whole* as persons without disabilities, and who have no desire to be “cured” in the life that is to come.

As I have already suggested, this collection of essays collectively makes the case that the agenda for analytic theology ought to include engagement with topics such as race, gender, disability and sexuality. Even if one rejects the conclusions at which some of these essays arrive (indeed, even if one finds some of them downright offensive or antithetical to one’s religious commitments), one ought to recognize that each essay addresses a topic of theological significance. And once the theological significance of these topics is clear, it becomes difficult to deny them a place on the analytic theology agenda. Indeed, it becomes difficult to deny that analytic theology can only be *enriched* by engagement with the topics addressed here. As such, Panchuk and Rea have done the field an enormous service by creating this volume, and anyone interested in analytic theology would surely benefit from reading it.

Divine Holiness and Divine Action, by Mark C. Murphy. Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 272. \$100 (hardcover)

ALEXANDRA T. ROMANYSHYN, Seattle University

I. Summary

Mark Murphy’s latest book, *Divine Holiness & Divine Action*, articulates an account of holiness that is also supposed to provide an explanation of divine action. In the first part of the book, Murphy develops an account of holiness, and in the second he argues that holiness provides a compelling framework for understanding divine action. I will briefly summarize the main sections and themes of Murphy’s book, and then I will offer reflections on some of the main arguments that he offers.

First, in chapter 1, Murphy critiques previous theories of divine holiness. He lays out two criteria for a good account of holiness: first, a successful account should tell us what it is to be holy, and second, it should also be consistent with the general platitudes about holiness articulated by those who have mastery of the concept of holiness (10). He considers

