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Unmasking the Systemic Problem of Evil in Theology: A Feminist Critique

Esther McIntosh

Introduction

Philosophical and theological approaches to suffering and the problem of evil in the global North are primarily constructed along analytic and systematic lines; indeed, the analytic and systematic nature of academic responses to suffering and the problem of evil are prized as the serious and complex work of philosophical theologians and philosophers of religion. In essence, such approaches are concerned with claims regarding the existence of the Christian God – held to be omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent – and the existence of evil. Arguments countering the existence or definition of the Christian God rest either on the unlikely probability that such a God exists given the extent of evil evident in the world, or on the logical impossibility of such a God co-existing with evil. Christian philosophers of religion and systematic theologians seek, therefore, to counter the negative conclusions aimed at in both of the above approaches by mounting either theodicies intended to explain the existence of evil without compromising the conception of God or defences that render the existence of both God and evil logically compatible. Regardless of the success or otherwise of such theodicies and defences when considered from a purely intellectual perspective, feminist and womanist scholars find them wanting: an argument may be intellectually coherent or follow a logical pattern without necessarily being useful or adequate when considered from an alternative perspective. Theodicies are, on the whole, written from a perspective of privilege and their analysis of evil is abstract; these are serious limitations when considered from the perspectives of the marginalized.

Certainly, both hypothetical and real-life cases of pain and suffering are drawn upon in theodicies and defences, from Bambi dying in the forest to the most extreme and horrific suffering meted out by dictators and torturers in situations of genocide and war. Conceptually, then, "evil" has a broad remit encompassing all harms, including premature death, caused to sentient beings, whether these occur as a result of so-called natural evil – earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, debilitating or terminal illness – or whether the cause is another human being whose acts are referred to as moral evil. Consequently, both pain and suffering are equated with evil, with the former referring to a physical state and the latter often referring to a mental state, such as despair. Contrastingly, "good" indicates the opposite of evil for sentient beings: flourishing, improvement and so on. Attempts to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of God assert that divine goodness (a concept that

transcends human goodness and is, ultimately, beyond human understanding) is certain and, at some future point, will defeat evil: in the here and now it may seem as if the wicked prosper while the good suffer, but in the end, they will all receive their due. In order for this assertion to be at all plausible, theodicies draw upon two contrasting metaphysical notions of evil: first, privation theory, as found in Augustine and Aquinas, whereby evil does not have independent existence but is the absence of good; secondly, a dualist theory in which evil is spoken about as if it is an entity with a force of its own. For privation theory, then, natural evil occurs where there is, for example, an absence of health, or some other good is lacking; moral evil occurs as a result of human flaw (introduced into the world via "original sin", or the Fall as portrayed in the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and developed by Augustine).[1] Even if evil can be understood as a lack or absence, it is frequently contrasted with good in a dualistic sense, and this has been problematic for women, and for any other groups perceived as "other" by the dominant ruling class. Despite theoretically claiming that all humans are sinful or evil, the history of Christian theology is replete with examples of scholarly interpretations of biblical texts and philosophical and theological treatises arguing that women are more evil than men: Tertullian claims that women are the Devil's gateway; Augustine asserts that women only reflect the image of God when joined with their husbands; Aquinas argues that women are defective men; biblical passages are cited to support the notion that women are inferior to men and should be silenced and controlled by them (for instance, Gen. 3:16; Prov. 31; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22; 1 Tim. 2:12 and so on).[2]

By failing to grapple with the dualisms underlying conceptions of good and evil, and, moreover, the extent to which these dualisms have been employed by those in positions of power, much of contemporary philosophical and theological thought on suffering and the problem of evil continues to support the status quo. Notwithstanding claims to the contrary, the academy and the church, along with the wider culture, is patriarchal: the dominance of White male privilege is built upon racist, sexist, classist, cisgendered, heteronormative and able-bodied theories that make universalizing claims while destroying the lives of those labelled as "other", including humans, non-human animals and the environment. In this chapter, drawing on the work of feminist and womanist scholars, I argue that suffering and the problem of evil must be understood differently when considered from the perspective of

[1] See Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*.
[2] See Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, I.1; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p. 1, q. 92; Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.10; 7.11 and *De Trinitate*, 7.7.10.

the subjugated rather than the dominant class, and, further, that contemporary analytic theology, by wilfully and deliberately ignoring or dismissing feminist and womanist theologies, continues to construct theology from the perspective of the dominant class, thereby perpetuating a moral evil.

The Problem with Dualism: Women as Evil

As we have identified above, theodicies and defences relating to suffering and the problem of evil consider moral evil in the abstract despite drawing on real examples; that is, the arguments move from the real example to the question of God's goodness and explanations as to how a good God permits evil, but, in so doing, they fail to grapple with the systemic evil of patriarchy. Patriarchy, as a system in which men (usually White, middle-class, cishet men) hold a disproportionate amount of power, sustains inequalities and injustices that result in manifold suffering; theodicies fail to challenge theologies that legitimize those inequalities, from sexism and homophobia to classism, racism, colonialism and the destruction of the environment. During the last two years, we have witnessed the global pandemic caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 pose a greater threat to the lives of the global majority and those living in the global South than to those in the global North; we have seen racialized police violence lead to the death of George Floyd and to renewed Black Lives Matter protests, while the then President of the United States, Donald Trump, courted White supremacists and evangelicals; in the UK we witnessed the differential police and media coverage of the murders – femicide – of Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallman and Sarah Everard, as well as the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in religious organizations. Around the world, resistance and backlash are evident as hate crime and homophobic attacks rise, while trans rights and access to abortion are restricted. Condemnation of these evils amongst theological and church circles lacks teeth if the underlying systems of power and their theological justification remains intact.

Yet, as we have noted above, the inequality between men and women is commonly found in the works of the Church Fathers; this inequality is bound up with a series of dualisms that pervade Christian theology. In her analysis of the book of Proverbs, Pamela J. Milne explores the image of a good woman as Woman Wisdom, alongside the image of a bad woman depicted as Strange Woman.[3] She finds that the descriptions of these two types of

[3] Pamela J. Milne, "Voicing Embodied Evil: Gynophobic Images of Women in Post-Exilic Biblical and Intertestamental Text", *Feminist Theology* 10:30 (2002), 61–69.

women are significant for their impact upon men: good women are valuable wives "more precious than rubies" (Prov. 31.10), enriching their husbands' lives; whereas, by contrast, bad women are of no such value, they seduce men and destroy their lives (Prov. 5.3-5). Significantly, however, Proverbs makes it clear that the two types of women are not easily distinguishable by their words; hence, "what is a duality in the abstract becomes one in experience".[4] In consequence, therefore, Proverbs can be read as a warning against all women – the trope of the *femme fatale* in popular culture - thus, in Milne's words, "it is hardly surprising that … men would be fearful and distrustful of women as women".[5] Such fear may beget violence, violence directed at and endangering women more than men. Against this biblical backdrop, a theology of women as evil and in need of control by men is formed and cemented over centuries in ways that favour those in positions of power. In addition, this dualism of good and evil is intertwined with binary conceptions of race, gender and sexuality presented as immutable and divinely ordained. Summarising this development Rosemary Radford Ruether states:

> Western religious and philosophical thought, with its various syntheses of Hebrew, Greek and Christian themes, exhibits a tendency to identify ontological dualism, spirit and matter, mind and body, with a good/evil dichotomy. This, in turn, becomes identified with gender and class hierarchy. Ruling class males come to be seen as closer to mind and reason, women and lower class people as closer to the bodily.[6]

For Ruether, this erroneous subject/object hierarchical structure provides the ideological basis from which the ruling class define themselves as superior and in a rightful position of authority over all those they deem to be inferior: "men over women, whites over blacks, masters over slaves".[7] Furthermore, as less rational beings than men, women's salvific potential is called into question. As we have mentioned, for Augustine women do not fully possess the *imago Dei* and for Aquinas women are defective males, which leads easily into the claim that the incarnation is necessarily in male form because only maleness is sufficient;

[4] Ibid., 65.
[5] Ibid., 69.
[6] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5:1 (1992), 26–39, 26.
[7] Ibid., 27.

consequently, the foundation from which to build an exclusively male priesthood is established and women (in Roman Catholicism at least) are denied this role.

Moreover, since the ontological dualism of mind and body is simultaneously a moral dualism between good and evil, the ruling male elite seek to institute the good by controlling all that is evil, which, in this case, is all other humans and non-humans. Drawing on the biblical story of Adam and Eve, Eve is singled out as the bringer of evil and the usurper of male control providing the grounds from which to demonize all women and enforce their re-submission. The characteristics assigned to women are extended to slaves and servants, other races and other religions resulting in that which Ruether identifies as "exploitation", "demonization" and idealization".[8] On the one hand, the perception of others as less rational is warrant for their exploitation; on the other hand, embedded in forceful subjugation is a fear of being overthrown that leads to demonization in an effort to suppress the threat of the other even further: women are burned or drowned as witches and slaves are hanged as rapists. Somewhat ironically, idealized versions of good women and slaves exist alongside their exploitation and demonization: virgins are idealized for their sexual innocence, and dutiful slaves are idealized for their servile demeanour.

In response, Ruether argues for "two kinds of revolution".[9] First, equality for human beings requires that relations of domination and subordination are eradicated; social, political and economic power needs to be shared equitably. Secondly, she avoids characterizing the oppressor as evil or idealizing the oppressed as good, instead recognizing the capacity for good and evil in all, whilst, fundamentally, paying attention to the radically different positions of power and privilege that have been held by some and not by others. In other words, simply rethinking the dualisms of mind/body, good/evil and their ideological connections with race and gender will not be sufficient to achieve equality if the power structures that accompany them are not dismantled.

Responding to Ruether, Iain Torrance admits that dualist ideologies in Christian theology have resulted in hierarchies, and he acknowledges that fear begets violence; nevertheless, he argues in favour of maintaining the subject/object dualism and, suggests that, rather than justifying human goodness, we place our hope in eschatology.[10] It is staggering that Torrance makes no mention of the fact that subject/object dualism is intertwined with

[8] Ibid., 32.
[9] Ibid., 33.
[10] Iain Torrance, "A Response to Professor Rosemary Radford Ruether's 'Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Ethics'", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5:1 (1992), 40–43.

demarcation along the lines of race and gender, or that Ruether is critiquing the equation of ruling class men as rational and good and everyone else as irrational and evil. Torrance's invoking of eschatology does nothing to challenge systemic injustices or rebalance power relations that have made it possible for some to be oppressors; hence, he side-steps the crux of Ruether's argument, reverting to a level of abstraction that avoids engaging with the substance of her analysis, namely, the suffering of the oppressed legitimized by theology.

By contrast, Kathleen M. Sands calls the narrative of the Fall "a theology of victim-blaming".[11] She contends that, while the theory of original sin is intended to apply to all human beings, the notion of inborn flaw will be absorbed most deeply by the oppressed: "Indeed, the internalization of evils whose origins are external is a hallmark of abuse".[12] Furthermore, the theological "solution" for humans who are deemed to be at fault as a result of the Fall is that of vicarious atonement. Drawing on the notion of the "suffering servant" in the Hebrew Bible (see Isa. 53:4-6), echoed in several New Testament passages (such as Matt. 8:17; Acts 8:32; John 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:22), only the perfectly innocent incarnate Son of God can take on himself the punishment that humans deserve, thus satisfying the concept of divine justice; a theory found in the works of, amongst others, Luther and Calvin.[13] In effect, the retelling of the narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ idealizes the notion of suffering, but this idealization is imbued more fully by those with the least power.[14]

Intersectionality: The Evils We Suffer

Conversely, Emilie M. Townes asserts that "womanist ethical reflection rejects suffering as God's will and understands suffering as outrage".[15] Against the history of slavery, she contends that, while the Black church finds much with which to identify in the biblical story of the exodus and the suffering of Israel, "the inevitability and desirability of suffering needs to be challenged".[16] For African-American women, subjected to

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[11] Kathleen M. Sands, "Tragedy, Theology and Feminism in the Time After Time", *New Literary History* 35:1 (2004), 41–61, 53.
[12] Ibid.
[13] See Martin Luther, "Second Sermon on Luke 24:36-47", *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2 and John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xv-xvii.
[14] For a more detailed discussion of the motif of sacrifice and how this works against women in patriarchal Christianity, see Esther McIntosh, "The Concept of Sacrifice: A Reconsideration of the Feminist Critique", *International Journal of Public Theology* 1:2 (2007), 210–229.
[15] Emilie M. Townes, "Living in the New Jerusalem: The Rhetoric and Movement of Liberation in the House of Evil", in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 78–91, 78. The term "womanist" comes from Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, 1983).
[16] Townes, "Living in the New Jerusalem", 84.

"intersectional" oppressions on the grounds of sex, race and class, the Christian concepts of self-sacrifice and evil are forced upon them "as tools of repression".[17] Alternatively, by centring the empty cross rather than the crucifixion, Townes shifts the focus from obedience and submission to liberation and justice: "The resurrection moves the oppressed past suffering to pain and struggle and from pain and struggle to new life and wholeness."[18]

Similarly, reflecting on the ways in which Jesus' suffering is understood as a motif for Christianity, Jacquelyn Grant highlights the distinction between the "servanthood" of White women and the "servitude" of Black women.[19] She explains:

> As I examined the words and work of nineteenth-century feminists, I found that white women were challenging the fact that they were relegated to the level of "'servants of men." They were incensed because they were being treated as second-class citizens in the larger society, and second-class Christians in the church. Certainly, any perusal of history in general, and women's history in particular, validates their claim.[20]

In spite of the evident servanthood of White women, their subjugation does not capture the multidimensional oppression of Black women. She continues: "an examination of Black women's reality reveals that they are further removed from the topside of history. In fact, African-American women have been the 'servants of the servants'".[21]

For African-American women, therefore, servanthood is, in fact, a form of "servitude" that shifts the question of theodicy from one in which the characteristics of God are challenged by the generalized existence of pain and suffering to one that reflects the lived experience of African-American women as economically poor, victimized and abused, under the power and control of the dominant (White) class. Thus, the central question, in Grant's words, becomes "why does God permit the suffering of Black women? Or even more pointedly, does God condone the fact that Black women are systematically relegated to being

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[17] Ibid., 87. For exploration of the "intersectional" oppression of Black women, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1:8 (1989), 139–167.
[18] Townes, "Living in the New Jerusalem", 85.
[19] Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood: And the Deliverance of Discipleship", in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 199–218.
[20] Ibid., 200.
[21] Ibid.

‘servants of servants’?”[22] From this perspective, the motif of servanthood is highly problematic: it keeps Black women in positions of subordination, pain and suffering. The logic of enslavement portrayed Black women as more physically capable than their White counterparts, expecting them to work in the fields and care for their master’s children, in contrast with the portrayal of White women as delicate and in need of protection. Hence, the understanding of Black women *as* women is undermined by the priority given to a definition of White femininity that excludes Black women and prevents solidarity amongst women. Furthermore, African-American women are dominated by the White women who employ and exploit them as domestic workers.

Feminist theologies claim to start from the experience of women, but, Grant asks: “Is it the experience of the daughters of slaveholders or the experience of the daughters of slaves?”[23] An overly spiritualized theology of servanthood has radically different connotations for White and Black women, but it is empowering for neither. Barriers to liberation from misogynoir are multiplied by the complicity of White women in racism and Black men in sexism. White women have sought their own liberation at the expense of Black women, aligning themselves with White male power and the privilege afforded to their racialized group. Additionally, as Frances E. Wood remarks: “Absent from the Black church is any substantive discussion of gender justice as it pertains to women.”[24] She observes that African-American women, even within the Christian community, are disregarded as “permissible victims”.[25] Black churches have absorbed a sexist hierarchy of male leadership from White Christianity that is enmeshed with a romanticization of suffering that prevents Black women from obtaining equality. Moreover, women who speak out against domestic violence in Black households risk accusations of “maligning African-American manhood”.[26] Systems of racism and sexism that perpetuate moral evil – the pain and suffering of Black women – will never be eradicated if the theologies we espouse sustain the patriarchal status quo under the pretence that “malestream” theology consists of non-negotiable truths.

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 209.
[24] Frances E. Wood, “‘Take My Yoke Upon You’: The Role of the Church in the Oppression of African-American Women”, in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 37–47, 41.
[25] Ibid., 40.
[26] Ibid., 42.

Indeed, the narratives of freed, previously enslaved, people reveal that slavery itself was understood as evil.[27] The Christian theology that developed amongst African-Americans is far from identical with the version handed down by White slave owners. On the contrary, enslaved people, Delores S. Williams discovers, resist accepting that the ordering of society in which they are controlled and degraded by slave owners is natural or divinely ordained, nor do they accept that Black people are inherently more sinful than White ones: "Rather, certain patterns of human relations that yield cruelty and enslavement are thought to be sinful and evil".[28] Williams, drawing on the biblical notion of defilement as a punishable sin (see Matt. 15:17-20), relates the abuse of Black women's bodies, including their exclusion from notions of womanhood as promulgated by White supremacists, to a devaluation of their worth that is coterminous with social sin.[29]

Similarly, reflecting on the lived experiences of Brazilian women, Ivone Gebara understands evil as that which prevents equality in human relationships and justifies the destruction of the environment: "the kind of evil present in institutions and social structures".[30] In common with the feminist and womanist scholars we have encountered above, she finds that theological debate concerning the nature of evil "has always given preference to evil as men perceive it, with no reference to the evil actually borne by women. Evil as women know it has been reduced to silence".[31] Theology presents the experiences of men in positions of power as if they are universal human experiences; hence, the realities of the lives of impoverished women in Brazil, for example, are rendered invisible. Women who lack public power and status are subjected to intersectional oppressions that lead to desperation in the search for food and clean water and a lack of choice and bodily autonomy in sex work; hence, Gebara writes of evil in the plural: the evils that the poorest women suffer.[32] Considered in light of the structures present in the lives of women who are kept in positions of subordination, she opposes the promotion of sacrifice as the means by which to escape evil; instead, expanding on the preferential option for the poor, as found in liberation theology, Gebara states: "I am persuaded that this unjust situation demands not only

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[27] See Delores S. Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin", in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 130–149, 137–138.
[28] Ibid., 138.
[29] Ibid., 143–145.
[30] Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002; originally published as *Le mal au féminin*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 1.
[31] Ibid., 7.
[32] Ibid., 14.

economic, social, and cultural reform but also a theological revision radically transforming the image of God as one who demands suffering."[33]

Adding nuance to her exploration of women's narratives through her definition of evil as that which "destroys or harms human relations", Gebara is careful to point out that women can be both victims and perpetrators.[34] Women who advocate patriarchal models of gendered hierarchies in their home or in their church, who criticise other women for not conforming to a submissive stereotype of Christian womanhood, are complicit in perpetuating evil, whilst suffering from it themselves. Women who experience some measure of privilege – whether on the grounds of race, class, sexuality or marital status – and remain silent regarding social injustices perpetrated against victims of racism, classism and heteropatriarchy, in order to maintain that privilege, function as accomplices sustaining the status quo.

Freedom from evil for marginalized women is bound up with self-determination: in Williams' words, the transition from unworthiness to "somebodiness".[35] In this respect, the image of Jesus on the cross has resonance with the evils that women suffer in as much as it represents "concrete suffering … physical, psychological, and social".[36] Moreover, unlike mainstream theology, which glorifies the crucifixion as the ultimate sacrifice, Gebara claims that:

> The suffering of the crucified, of a man upon the cross … is certainly no greater than that of prostitutes stoned to death, of a mother whose child is wrenched from her, of revolutionaries struggling for liberty, of so many nameless men and women who have fought for the good of their brothers and sisters … [It] is not greater than the mass murder of indigenous peoples … It is not greater than that of women who see their children die of hunger because of the greed of those who hold economic power.[37]

By shining a light on the crosses of women, Gebara makes it becomes possible to see and condemn the evils that women suffer. Likewise, she brings salvation out of the shadow of an eschatology that reinforces systemic oppressions and finds moments of salvation in the midst of suffering: a shared meal that assuages hunger, vegetation that sprouts after a drought,

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[33] Ibid., 90.
[34] Ibid., 96.
[35] Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin", 145.
[36] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 110.
[37] Ibid., 116.

"tenderness in the midst of daily violence".[38] Salvation need not be abstract and universal, but, rather, "mini-salvations"[39] occur in relation to specific evils of oppression affecting specific people.

Concluding Remarks: Evil and the Persistence of Androcentrism in Analytic Theology

At the theological level, Gebara asserts that "[e]vil is making people believe that one knows the will of God, that one can teach it or even impose it".[40] Her words are a stark reminder to theological projects that reduce evil to the level of abstraction, that fail to critique a canon that is male dominated, that render the evils that women suffer invisible, that portray women as more evil than men, or that fail to dismantle the power imbalances inherent in heteropatriarchy so as to unmask the moral evils that their abstraction conceals. She states: "While there is always a level of abstraction in human thought and language, when the abstraction becomes an ideology that promotes the dominance of the knowledge of some over others, this abstraction is no longer knowledge but the politics of domination."[41]

I argue that contemporary analytic theology falls under the spell of abstraction, ignoring the privilege it sustains, and, thus, propagates the moral evil of inequality in human relations. In *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* consideration of Black, womanist or queer theologies is in short supply.[42] Undeniably, Oliver D. Crisp notes (literally, in a footnote) that analytic theology could face criticism on the grounds of androcentrism, but his response reveals a misunderstanding of that criticism.[43] He assumes that the problem is that analytic theology "fails to take into account … the role of feelings"; he refers to this as "the feminist objection" and responds that "this seems rather beside the point".[44] Crisp's response is reductive and dismissive; it suggests a lack of serious engagement with feminist scholarship, as if such engagement is unnecessary because any claims to the contrary can be easily waved away. In essence, this dismissal serves to prove the point of the feminist objection: it is only from the position of privilege that the concerns of those less privileged seem insignificant and unworthy of time and attention. Crisp continues: "What is at issue is whether an analytic method can get at the truth of the matter … the

[38] Ibid., 124.
[39] Ibid., 125.
[40] Ibid., 140.
[41] Ibid., 163.
[42] Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (New York:OUP, 2009).
[43] Oliver D. Crisp, "On Analytic Theology", in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, eds. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (New York:OUP, 2009), 33–53, 51 fn 29.
[44] Ibid.

gender of those in quest of it is irrelevant."[45] Thus, by conflating feminism with "the role of feelings" and the gender of the theologian, Crisp completely disregards the systemic injustices and power relations that underlie feminist critique. In this way, contemporary analytic theology has a tendency to evade querying the limited range of voices on which it is constructed and discounts the fact that claims of truth are based on limited and partial perspectives. In fact, the few women who might refer to themselves as analytic theologians call for greater "disruption"[46] and interaction with feminist scholarship to reveal to analytic theology that which "it failed to confront in the first place".[47] Analytic theology (as with other, admittedly pre-feminist, fields of systematic theology) is still predominately reliant upon the scholarship of racist and sexist historical figures – Anselm, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Jonathan Edwards, to name a few – as if their God-talk is entirely separable from their views on gender, race, class and so on; yet, as Grant reminds us: "The language that we use to talk about God more often than not says more about the speaker than God."[48] Similarly, Amber L. Griffioen notes that "values commonly on display in analytic theology have simultaneously served both to marginalize certain voices . . . and to reinforce a particular conception of the divine".[49] She concludes that "there can hardly be any doubt that the traditional God of [analytic theology] has been used – and still is used – in ways oppressive of women and minorities".[50] Analysis is not value-neutral, and theological status is not entirely meritocratic; it is high time theologians stopped pretending that it is.

Randal Rauser's contribution to the aforementioned edited collection, *Analytic Theology*, promises a more substantial conversation with feminist scholarship, but it is a damning one. In combative style, he compares Sallie McFague's approach with that of a deceptive "used car salesperson" assessing her metaphor of God as mother, lover and friend to be no more than "intentional bullshit".[51] At best, this is a deliberate attempt to be controversial; at worst, it is an arrogant appraisal that eludes the damaging effects of male God-language that McFague is seeking to address. The methods and arguments that are

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Michelle Panchuk, "Gender and Justice: Human and Divine Gender in Analytic Theological Discourse", in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, eds. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 381-394, 381.
[47] Sarah Coakley, "On Why 'Analytic Theology' Is Not a Club", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81:3 (2013), 601–608, 604.
[48] Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood", 210.
[49] Amber L. Griffioen, "Nowhere Men and Divine *I*'s: Feminist Epistemology, Perfect Being Theism, and the God's-Eye View", *Journal of Analytic Theology* 9 (2021), 1-25, 2.
[50] Ibid., 21.
[51] Randal Rauser, "Theology as Bull Session", in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, eds. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 70–86, 79.

listened to and respected, the voices and lives that are deemed worthy of consideration, have been defined by a predominantly White male academia, as if "the truth" is impervious to the lives of actual people. If analytic theology reproduces injustice – structural evil – for the marginalized and oppressed, its only value is that of maintaining the status quo; it is of no use to those who exist outside of its privileged circles. Feminist criticism is not resolved by changing the pronouns of hypothetical examples in written scholarship; only ivory tower theology, separated from the facts and practical realities of the lived experiences of the less privileged would think so. A democratic theology that no longer replicates the moral evils of social, economic and political inequalities, Sands contends, will "explicate how power over norms is exerted and contested, how norms change in time and space, how normative decision-makers are challenged or displaced".[52] To properly address the problem of evil(s), those with privilege are required to step aside, to cede space and authority, and to centre the voices of the marginalized.

Further Reading

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Radford Ruether, Rosemary. *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1983; London: SCM Press, 2002.

Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, [1993] 2013.

[52] Sands, "Tragedy, Theology and Feminism in the Time After Time", 57.