

\*Hi all, Brianne here; I've annotated this reading to help you

# The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy

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Who is Marjorie Suchocki? (sounds like Soo-haw-kee)

a "substance [-oriented] philosophy" describes "God" as unchanging, unmoved, unaffected, fixed substance

*The marginal position of women within the Western tradition provides a critical vantage point for feminist redevelopment of the notion of God. Feminists tend to replace the classical categories of substance philosophies traditionally used for God with relational categories often drawn from organic philosophies. They also project the dynamic character of language itself into the discussion of God. This essay focuses on these issues as they are developed by **Mary Daly** and **Rebecca Chopp**.*

Suchocki will be doing her analysis using the work of these two authors

The new wave of feminism desperately needs to be not only many-faceted but cosmic and ultimately religious in its vision. This means reaching outward and inward toward the God beyond and beneath the gods who have stolen our identity. (Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*)

The notion of God has come under increasing critique in the recent past as scholars have dealt more seriously with the cultural roots of knowledge and with the question of the ability of language to express adequately any ontological reality beyond human experience. Although philosophers from a variety of perspectives have addressed these issues, feminists have arguably created the most devastating critique and the most constructive responses. Their sociological position on the boundary of a male-dominated tradition has given them a perspective that clearly shows the androcentric and cultural biases of traditional notions of God, even though feminists also encounter the common problem of critiquing categories they have to some extent internalized. Boundaries participate in the regions they define.

In this essay I explore feminist thought on the topic of God, giving major attention to Mary Daly and Rebecca Chopp. Both write from a strong background in the Christian tradition, with Daly vehemently rejecting this tradition in favor of totally new modes of talking about metabeing, and Chopp staying more intentionally within her tradition. Ironically, however, Daly may reflect her rejected tradition more fully than she desires, so that both women

together illustrate the possibilities for redeveloping the concept of God within the Western philosophical tradition.

The feminist critique of the concept of God is best characterized by Mary Daly's early comment, "If God is male, then the male is God" (1973, 19). Characteristics traditionally attributed to God, such as strength, wisdom, immutability, dependability, and righteousness, are similar to values stereotypically attributed to men, whereas the corollary values applied to humanity, such as weakness, ignorance, vacillation, and sinfulness, are stereotypically applied to women. Thus the concept of God as male serves to define men and male roles, and to reinforce the inferior definition and roles of women. How, then, is it a concept of *God* rather than androcentricism in faint disguise?

Responses to this question by feminist philosophers of religion include (1) rejection of the transcendence of God in favor of a totally immanent God, (2) replacement of God with Goddess, (3) reconsideration of the linguistic structure by which we name a reality beyond ourselves as God at all, and (4) reconceptualization of the presuppositions concerning the nature of reality as a whole, whether God or the world. Mary Daly offers an insightful illustration of all of these moves. Her works span—and arguably inaugurate—the past three decades of feminist reconsideration of God. Her own passionate journeying details successively the various ways of dealing with God and sexism.

In her earliest book, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), Daly offered a modest proposal. She exposed the patriarchal bias against women that pervades Christian history and reasonably suggested that such bias is against the Christian gospel. She recommended procedures by which the post-Vatican II church might more fittingly embody the grace of God in structures of equality for women, and she offered suggestions for changes in the concept of God that must parallel such changes. In a tentative way, she suggested that "vague identifications of God with the male sex" pervaded Christian theology, despite the paradox that "the masculine God" was held to be "above sex." She asked, "What can 'masculine' mean if predicated of a Being in which there is no sex?" (1968, 181), and went on to advocate reconsideration of notions such as the masculinity of God, omnipotence, immutability, and providence. These are suggestions only in this her first book; they would be developed later in her second book *Beyond God the Father* (1973). As for the reception of *The Church and the Second Sex*, Daly unfortunately did not account for the great depths to which patriarchy had molded the consciousness and the conscience of the church, nor the enormous threat to privilege and power that her proposals entailed: her book was not well received by the church hierarchy. However, it became the ground-breaking book in feminist philosophy of religion, launching an age of consciousness-raising among women.

Q1 What

*Beyond God the Father* was published five years later, and gave an answer to her own earlier suggestions relative to theology. With wonderful boldness she gave every theme within the Christian mythos a feminist reinterpretation. Echoing both process thought and Paul Tillich in much of the work, she assumed a position and perspective “on the boundary” of Christianity (patriarchal space) and asked “for whom” and “from whose perspective” theological judgments concerning the fall, sin, and redemption were fashioned. She exposed the hidden male authorship and agenda behind so-called universal pronouncements, considered the Christian concepts now nakedly exposed before her, and re clothed them in feminist dress. Her accomplishment is astounding, but the fundamental supposition operating throughout the work shows her boundary position to be more engrained within the tradition than she acknowledged. She never raised the question of the legitimacy of the fundamental Christian categories of thought; rather, she only questioned the male-oriented manner in which these categories were developed. Masculinist interpretation is countered with feminist interpretation, as if each essential concept were somehow ontologically deeper than its interpretation, pre-existing its linguistic and historical forms. This supposition is important, since it re-emerges in her fifth book, *Wickedary* (co-authored with Jane Caputi), as an assumption concerning the ontological status of language.

Each of Daly's reinterpretations of Christian categories invites dialogue, but for the purposes of this present investigation, I turn to her development of God as Verb (and I follow Daly's usage of capitalization and hyphenation). Daly translates Paul Tillich's “ground of Being” into Be-ing, and eventually, in echoes of Whiteheadian thought, to Becoming, or God the Verb. Her answer to the masculinization of God under patriarchy is the de-reification of God, positing God as dynamic energy, ever unfolding, drawing creation toward itself. God the Verb in this work is very much a transcendent God, but no longer in a way that suggests an “over and above” creation. Rather, God is in advance of creation, always transcending history by evoking new history, feminist history. The Unfolding Verb is the empowerment of women and the call to the Sisterhood of all humankind in new modes of community.

Many of the ideas of God Daly uses in this work are similar to those used in theology generally during the period: Wolfhart Pannenberg extensively developed the notion of “God as the Power of the Future”; process theologians such as John B. Cobb, Jr. had long worked with a notion of God as dynamic becoming; and Paul Tillich's own “on the boundary” position dealt with a God who was the Ground of Being and source of the “courage to be” in the face of existential anxiety. In Daly's integration of these positions, they became more than the sum of their parts. By integrating them within the framework of an angry “NO!” to sexism, Daly demonstrated that a new concept of God requires not only a new configuration of all thought patterns, but also a new configu-

ration of society itself. Conversely, construction of a new society must proceed through a total revisioning of its theoretical grounding.

In the next few years Daly did indeed go beyond *Beyond God the Father*, but she never refuted this work as she did *The Church and the Second Sex*, even though *Beyond God the Father* contains an implicit endorsement of Christianity in its feminist interpretation of its key concepts. In *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Daly redefined her boundary position as no longer attached to Christianity in any fashion. To the contrary, *Gyn/Ecology* is a violent rejection of Christianity and its notion of God on the basis of Christianity's own inherent violence toward women and toward the environment. In scathing rhetoric Daly satirizes the Christian God as trinity, naming its integral necrophiliac effects through such horrors as the atomic bomb, which was initially tested in 1945 at a site named "Trinity." The Christian God is irredeemable, being the epitome of maleness, which by now in this work is also to say the epitome of evil.

Gone is the relatively transcendent "God the Verb" of *Beyond God the Father*; transcendence is overshadowed by a deeper immanence. The book *Gyn/Ecology* itself is a primal form of immanence, described as a verb spun as a "gynocentric manifestation of the Intransitive Verb" (1978, 23). This Intransitive Verb is no longer a God above, nor even, in this book, the Unfolding Verb that calls us into a new future. Rather, the Intransitive Verb is the female Self. In place of the Word become Flesh, Daly sees the Verb become verbalized in radical metapatriarchal feminist writing, but the source of this Verb is the female Self of that psychic space beyond patriarchy called the Background. The language of unfolding first used in *Beyond God the Father* to describe God the Verb is now ascribed to the female Self, who is divine. The Verb becomes wholly immanent, incarnate in women's Background Selves and in the words spun from that space. The parallels with Christian theology are obvious: within the latter, the transcendent God becomes present within history through incarnation, creating a human/divine person. For Daly, the Verb becomes the female Self, and the Self is both divine and human.

Daly's language in *Gyn/Ecology* often includes references to Goddess, but the term does not seem to refer to that which is beyond the self, whether created through women's worship or pre-existing all humanity in association with earth (see, for example, such views in Carol Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite* [1987], and the volume edited by Judith Plaskow and Christ, *Weaving the Visions* [1989]). For Daly, the Goddess seems to be solely the Goddess-within, or a name for woman's experience of her own activity as be-ing, know-ing, unfolding in metapatriarchal discovery of herSelf. God the Unfolding Verb of *Beyond God the Father* is the immanent female Self in *Gyn/Ecology*.

The total immanence of God or Goddess within women and/or within human communities of women and men marks the works of a number of feminists who explicitly name themselves Christian. Carter Heyward rejects the transcendence of God, redefining God as the power of love within

community. For her, as for Daly, the self participates in divinity, but whereas Daly sees the divine Self inherently present in the depths of every woman (not men), Heyward does not identify divinity with the self, but with the power experienced by selves in communal togetherness. In her *The Redemption of God* (1982), God appears wholly immanent, to the point that God's own being is created in and through the human community. This immanence is mythologically contextualized in the collected essays of *Our Passion for Justice* (1984), where the ongoing creation of God through human community is itself generated by a God who is neither apart from creation nor reducible to creation, but forever with creation. In *Touching Our Strength*, God is "the empowering sparks of ourselves in relation" (1989, 3).

Rosemary Radford Ruether, while generally far removed from Daly's rhetoric and separatist feminist stance, nonetheless echoes in more muted language the spirit of Daly's transmutation of God first into Verb and then into the verb that expresses and is the female Self within each woman. In *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), Ruether replaces the patriarchal word "God" with "God/ess" to name the reality to whom religion attempts to point. She is concerned to connect God/ess with the matrix of nature and with our own unfolding possibilities. She concludes her discussion of God/ess in consonance with Daly: "The liberating encounter with God/ess is always an encounter with our authentic selves resurrected from underneath the alienated self" (Ruether 1983, 71). Daly's parallel to this is woman's moving beyond her "foreground," which is alienation from herself in patriarchally defined space, to the Background, which is her inner, psychically authentic female space where she becomes Self, or Goddess. Ruether continues her text: "It [the liberating encounter] is not experienced against, but in and through relationships, healing our broken relations with our bodies, with other people, with nature" (71). For Ruether, as for Heyward and Daly in her *Gyn/Ecology* phase, the divine is deeply immanent. In *Gaia and God* (1992), Ruether's sense of the divine is a "personal center of the universal process, with which all the small centers of personal being dialogue in the conversation that continually creates and recreates the world" (1992, 253). The transcendence of the patriarchal God has given way to a radically immanent form of deity.

Daly's next book, *Pure Lust* (1984) spirals yet further into what she calls her metapatriarchal spinning away from Christianity. Again, as in her earlier works, her movement *away* from Christianity nonetheless continuously uses Christianity and its symbols as her touchstone. The biting satire of *Gyn/Ecology* gives way to a lighter laughter as she explores some of the constructive virtues of metapatriarchal space, where biophilia displaces necrophilia. Gone now is the use of the word Goddess introduced into *Gyn/Ecology*, replaced by metabeing: "The word *metabeing* is used here to Name Realms of active participation in the Powers of Be-ing. Be-ing, the Verb, cannot without gross falsification be reified into a noun, whether that noun be identified as 'Supreme Being,' or

'God,' or 'Goddess' (singular or plural). When I choose to use such words as Goddess it is to point Metaphorically to the Powers of Be-ing, the Active Verb in whose potency all biophilic reality participates" (1984, 26). Given the fact that for Daly the Self is no static term, but is itself a process of unfolding, the identification of Self with God (or Goddess or Supreme Being) is not reification. However, in this passage and *Pure Lust* as a whole Daly uses language that reintroduces the reality of the Verb as that in which the feminist community participates, but nonetheless as a reality that is not reducible to human community. Thus Verb is again both immanent *and* transcendent. In a sense, Daly has moved from transcendence and immanence in *Beyond God the Father* to immanence in *Gyn/Ecology* to immanence and transcendence in *Pure Lust*.

In *Wickedary* (1987, with Caputi) Daly completes the circle. There she reconstructs the Christian mythos, not through reinterpretation of basic concepts as in *Beyond God the Father*, but in a recasting of the Christian eschatological story, sans Christ (although one could argue that Daly herself takes that place as the female messiah she invoked in *Beyond God the Father*). She recasts this story through increasing her use of mythic language—a method that begins to appear in the conclusions of both *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust* but that intensifies in *Wickedary*. The content of this mythology still derives from that vision of reality presupposed beneath the masculinist and feminist theological interpretations in *Beyond God the Father*. The paradox, of course, is that she has explicitly rejected this vision of reality even while she continues to use it in transmuted form.

The very move to mythological narrative rather than rational reflection on the mythos is itself powerful, given the deep awareness in our own day that all religions live from a primal mythos concerning the nature of existence, the problematic aspects of existence, and some form of resolution. By working directly with the mythos, rather than interpreting it in rationalistic categories, Daly is attempting to refashion the fundamental sensitivity from which we live. She reconfigures the lines etched so deeply into our psyches. In this she shares the spirit of post-Christian or non-Christian feminists who work in the Wicce and/or Goddess movements (cf. Starhawk, Z. Budapest, Carol Christ). She differs, however, in the profoundly Christian structure of the mythos she develops (or redevelops).

Daly introduced this mythological method in her two earlier works, where she concluded each volume with construction of a dramatic scene of female biophilic fantasy as a coda to each work. In *Wickedary*, she places the fantasy between her introductory narrative and the Word-Web redefinitions of words that constitute more than half of this work. What we see in her myth is the "Peaceable Kingdom" of Christian lore, where the interconnectedness of all things (except men) is finally realized. Creatures of earth, sea, and sky join in the hilarity of women as they romp toward the eschatological banquet. There

is also the resurrection of the just, so that great women of the past are alive again, joining in the throng. Full communion is established, as each one, whether of earth, sea, or sky, experiences the gift of speech for sharing with all others. Once again, the Verb has become verbs, even while remaining dynamically as Verb. Through its "verbing," the Verb sparks and spins in and through all in the creation of the beloved community. There are signs and wonders in the heavens, and, throughout, all are guided by a directing or controlling principle, the ever-unfolding Good as Verb.

Who, then, is "God" in Mary Daly's lexicon? "Be-ing the Verb, understood in multiple and diverse manifestations, e.g., Knowing, Creating, Loving, Unfolding—and through diverse Metaphors—e.g., the Fates, Changing Woman (Estsan Atlehi, Creatrix of the Navaho People), Shekhina (female divine Presence in Hebrew lore)" (1987, 88). This Verb is both immanent ("The ultimate Guide of each Weaver/Journeyer is her Final Cause, her indwelling, unfolding Purpose" [1987, 44]), and to some extent transcendent ("Goddess the Verb: Metaphor for Ultimate/Intimate Reality, the constantly Unfolding Verb of Verbs in which all be-ing participates; Metaphor of Metabeing" [1978, 76]). The Verb draws us toward realization of the reality of the interconnectedness of all existence, human and nonhuman, and toward the creation of life-loving communities. Daly's post-Christian God is very familiar to feminists who remain within the Christian tradition and in fact raises the question as to how thoroughly if at all Daly has succeeded in transcending rather than transforming her once-claimed tradition.

There are three pathways for the construction of the concept of God intimated in this final understanding of God in Daly's works: mythic, linguistic, and metaphysical. Mythically, as noted, Daly moves to the narrative of redemption that is presupposed by Christian concepts and recasts that narrative first in feminist adaptations and then in mythic terms. The systematic development of concepts falls away in order to make use of the more fundamental story. The power of the story is its ability to draw directly from the Christian mythic imagination. Thus *Wickedary's* myth is not a contradiction of *Beyond God the Father's* concepts; it is instead a different way of expressing the mythos that also gives rise to thought.

With regard to the linguistic move, Daly has been fascinated by the nature and role of language throughout her works. In *Beyond God the Father* Christian concepts have a strange status beyond their interpretation. In her following three works, language itself takes on a transcendent function. It is not simply that deity is named as the Verb; rather, it's as if verbs and all other words have ontological status apart from human usage, almost like Platonic forms of old, or the realism of medieval philosophy. These words reside within women: "Yet Wild words (e.g., words such as Amazon, Spinster, Virago, Angel) continue to live in Musing women's Metamemory. From these depths they howl and yell inside the women who have been made into their prisons and guards. Re-

membering women hear these howls as Calls of the Wild within and join the gagged Hag-words/Nag-words who Nag us into Naming" (1987, 34). But words are in some sense independent of women: there is a Race of Words (1987, 36), imprisoned in women much like the ancient gnostic myths of light imprisoned within finite being. Words are freed when spoken, and once spoken, they act as liberators in their turn. Words are "angels," messengers from the Verb come to empower us for our own participation in Be-ing. Even though Daly's spinning of such thoughts often is couched in fantasy, the deep ontological sense goes beyond fantasy: in the Dalyan cosmos, the Verb sends off sparks that are verbs, empowering, releasing, and dancing with the community of freed Women. "God" is Word is Verb.

Finally, there is the reconfiguration of our basic conception of reality. By going beyond doctrine to the underlying story, Daly attempts to bypass the metaphysical suppositions of the doctrines. In both the reconceptualization of doctrine in *Beyond God the Father* and in the mythos of *Wickedary*, she implicitly replaces one metaphysical world with another. She throws off the metaphysics of substance presupposed by Christian concepts, and draws instead from a more fluid process/relational orientation. In a sense, one can read Daly as an illustration of what can happen to the Christian interpretation of existence when a relational metaphysics is substituted for a substantive metaphysics. Daly relies on the same mythic structure that undergirded Christian philosophies of substance, but like many another philosopher in the twentieth-century Christian tradition, she rejects the substance philosophy without rejecting the underlying mythos. She spins it instead into the more fluid forms of relational philosophy.

Thus while Daly vehemently proclaims herself to be one who has radically rejected Christianity, one can read her work as Christianity in a revised form. Her latest work, *Outercourse* (1992), validates this interpretation, since the book is a "hagiography" that could only emerge from the Christian tradition. The book is a biographical account of her own journey as the paradigmatic journey of Everywoman; one could argue that she is the female Christ. She has left the Christian tradition only to embody its myths in new metaphysical forms.

In a sense, then, Daly illustrates a Christian feminist response to the notion of God in covert form. She provides an interesting contrast with Rebecca Chopp, a feminist Christian philosopher who shares Daly's feminist passion but with an explicit intent not to reject Christian faith but to transform it. For Chopp, as for Daly, the point of transformation is the concept of God. But whereas Daly uses myth, language, and metaphysics, Chopp is more directly involved in language as the primary instrument for overcoming the patriarchalization of God. She develops this most explicitly in her book, *The Power to Speak* (1989).



Quite unlike Daly, Chopp relies heavily and explicitly on Christian biblical texts for her revisioning of God. Like Daly, her metaphor for God refers to language itself: God is Word. Historically, the reference to God as Word had to do with God's logos as the ordering principle of creation, become incarnate in Jesus Christ; for Chopp, the reference is not so much the ancient connotation of logos as it is the contemporary connotations of semiotics. Chopp recognizes language as both definer and limit of our human existence. Word, as the metaphor for God, is liminal language drawn from the boundaries of our experience, pointing as a double referent toward ourselves, but also beyond ourselves toward that creative power that draws us toward our good. Like Daly's Verb, Chopp's Word empowers us toward community. Whereas Daly emphasizes the interconnectedness of the new community, Chopp emphasizes the justice of that community. This would be but a difference of emphasis *save for the fact that by including men within the community of justice*, Chopp envisions a more thoroughly interconnected community than does Daly.

Daly's Verb spins off angelic verbs that call women to recall old female wisdom; the verbs then become incarnate within women in their speaking. As speech, these verbs awaken other women toward recalling and remembering their strength, so that together, through the verbs, women's community of connectedness with themselves and all nature is established. Chopp's Word breathes in and around the many words contained within the biblical texts of Christian tradition. Through the words, the Word itself is communicated, empowering the hearers of the Word toward liberated communities beyond sexism, racism, classism, and anthropocentrism. For Chopp, as for Daly, there is an ontological power to the Word/Verb that includes but transcends the words of the text. Humans grasp the Word through words, but holding on to the Word, they find that the Word itself has already held onto them and, indeed, enabled their hearing of the words. The Word is a word of grace. The Word lives through humans, is communicated through textual words, but ultimately may transcend both texts and humanity. It is best heard not from the given order of society, but in one's approach to society from the margins, from that place of double vision where one sees things as they are publicly defined, but also as they are privately experienced *from the different matrix of the margins*. While Chopp's "Word" may be read as a metaphor for God, it is not as one alongside the more primal metaphor of God as Father. To the contrary: Chopp reads God as Father as inevitably and necessarily requiring a public/private dichotomy that makes the public sphere of men dependent on the private and subordinate sphere of women. A supplemental metaphor is not sufficient to dislodge patriarchy and its necessarily entailed sexism. Rather, the Word is the "perfectly open sign" that cannot be relegated to any one order, since as "open" it necessarily generates a multiplicity of orders. God as "Word" is precisely undefined; "Word" generates "words" unendingly. The only quali-

fier of God as “Word” is drawn from biblical texts that indicate God’s concern for the flourishing of existence. Unlike God as Father, with its exclusive blessing of patriarchy, God as “Word” conveys an inclusive blessing, and thus contradicts and *replaces* God as Father. Thus for Chopp, as well as for Daly, a feminist reconstruction of God takes us “beyond God the father.”

No more than Daly does Chopp wish to reify deity, but Chopp, working more self-consciously within the limitations as well as the power of language, dares do no more than point to the open Sign that we experience in our liminality. It is sufficient that the Word calls us and empowers us in the various forms of just communities that we can achieve.

Daly’s use of myth clearly implies a metaphysics of becoming, and her brilliant use of language illustrates rather than contradicts this metaphysics. Chopp’s equally strong use of language moves in a different direction. For Chopp, language may well point beyond itself, but the power of language points most clearly to the sociological world of the humans who use it. Language implies a mystery and empowerment that is more than the human community, but the very naming of this mystery as “Word” underscores the origins of its naming not only in human community, but also within the very specific community of Christians.

Both Daly and Chopp argue that God is a guiding force toward organized complexity in more deeply relational forms of human community. Daly’s Unfolding Verb, or the Metabeing that is the Power of Be-ing, guides or lures all creatures outside of patriarchy toward an idealized community. Chopp’s Word as Perfectly Open Sign generates a multiplicity of orders all ordered toward a process of transformation into community and communities. Chopp’s development is a Christian philosophy of religion, and Daly’s is a proclaimed post-Christian philosophy of religion.

Precisely because she rejects Christianity, Daly provides the most interesting case of how feminist vision can transform Christianity. Her journey from reasonable reformist to “boundary” Christian to radical post-Christian, with the corollary transition from God the Verb to immanent Goddess to transcendent/immanent Goddess to the final Metapatriarchal Unfolding Verb, covers most of the feminist options within philosophy of religion for dealing with the issue of God. Daly highlights for us the ways by which God can be released from maleness, and the radical turn toward immanence that this release entails. The violence and necrophilia associated with the patriarchal God are countered with a vision of cosmic interconnectedness and biophilia, and the male-dominated society of the church is countered with a woman-and-nature free community for the celebration of life.

Through both Rebecca Chopp and Mary Daly one can see the depths of the problem of reconstructing the notion of God in an antisexist fashion within Western philosophy of religion. They illustrate the varieties of ways that feminists have sought to deal with the reality that the concept of God inherited

in Western culture is so thoroughly enmeshed in the patriarchal oppression of women that the concept not only reflects this oppression but also fosters it. Both work from the supposition that only a radical reconfiguration of Western symbols and categories is sufficient to address the problem of reconstruction. Given the pervasiveness of the issues, to change only metaphors or only myths or only metaphysics is insufficient; all three must be part of the feminist reconstructive agenda.

Feminist reconstruction of the concept of God, using methods such as those of Daly and Chopp, insists finally that all concepts of God be tested heuristically by their effect on human community. For Daly, the litmus test is not only the well-being of women who finally become themselves, but it is also the total destruction of patriarchy. For Chopp, the test is not so much the destruction of patriarchy as the transformation of patriarchy into communities of emancipation into inclusive well-being.

The feminist reconstruction of the idea of God, then, uses the perspective from the margins of a male discipline to give a radical critique of traditional categories. Friedrich Nietzsche once posed the question concerning philosophy's sufficiency for self-criticism with the expression, "Can a tool measure itself?" With regard to the idea of God, a feminist response would simply be, "Yes, using the leverage of women's marginality in the culture and in the philosophical disciplines." From the margins, women reconfigure the center. In the process, they insist that the ultimate judge of any philosophical thinking is not simply coherence and consistency, but the pragmatic criterion of the philosophy's impact on communities of inclusive well-being. Their various modes of reconstructing the notion of God await the judgment of this test.

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