

**Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea, eds. *Voices from the Edge: Centering Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. x+256 pp. \$88.00 (hbk).**

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My first encounter with analytic theology was ten years ago when, as a graduate student in theology, I was asked to participate in the Center for Philosophy of Religion's annual Logos Workshop. As a feminist systematic theologian and Rahner scholar, I was a stranger in a strange land. Many of the methods, tools, and questions I encountered at the workshop were new to me, and I was often perplexed at the shape conversations took even when they were about my own research topics. Much of this is to be expected in crossing disciplinary borders—I have found the process of traveling across them to be immensely helpful in my own work, forcing me to make explicit what I can get away with assuming in my own field for instance—but my inability to grok what was said was exacerbated here by a broader disconnect between analytic theology and theology as a whole.

And yet I continued to participate because contrary to its reputation, what I encountered in this space was a warm community of sharp-minded thinkers who helped me to become a more careful theologian and a clearer writer. Both that community and my own participation in it are due in large part to the work of Michael Rea, as he has worked to make the disciplines of analytic theology and philosophy of religion more inclusive. The need for such work is not separate from the disconnect described above. As Rea and co-organizer Michelle Panchuk wrote in their call for proposals for the 2018 Logos Workshop, "Race, Gender, Ability, and Class: Expanding Conversations in Analytic Theology," while "scholars working in biblical, theological and religious studies have increasingly paid attention to the substantive ways that our experiences and understanding of God and God's relation to the world are structured by our experiences and concepts of race, gender, ability, and class... these topics have not received nearly the same level of attention from analytic theologians and philosophers of religion."<sup>1</sup> Insofar as analytic theology has emerged as a distinct intellectual tradition, it has also operated largely separate from concerns about race, gender, ability, and class—or, more broadly, as they gloss it here, "voices from the edge." For those who missed out on the conference, final versions of seven of the ten papers are included here, as well as additional chapters by Helen De Cruz and Kathryn Pogin.<sup>2</sup>

Expanding on the call for papers in their introduction, Panchuk and Rea note that "analytic theology has a reputation for being inhospitable to careful and experientially informed

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the conference, see <https://philreligion.nd.edu/events/logos-workshop/logos-2018/>

<sup>2</sup> De Cruz' paper from the conference was published in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by two contributors to *Voices from the Edge*, Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe.

exploration of the various philosophical-theological issues connected with culturally and theologically marginalized social identities”—a reputation they diagnose as being due in part to who does analytic theology, the culture of analytic theology, and what they argue are “misconceptions about the *nature of the activity* of analytic theology” (1).

Panchuk and Rea define *analytic theology* as “an interdisciplinary activity that prioritizes explanatory theorizing and a *certain kind* of clarity and rigour in argumentation—namely, whatever clarity and rigour come from trying, as much as possible, to work with well-understood primitive concepts and concepts defined in terms of those, and to lay bare the presuppositions, premises, and inferential moves in one’s own arguments” (2–3). In Part 1 of the introduction, they offer a helpful overview of criticisms that have been levied against analytic theology: that it is committed to the kind of realism that makes it inapplicable at best or hostile at worst to thinking about social construction; that it prioritizes the universal over the particular, the abstract over the historical; and it presupposes a God’s-eye-view that is not only false but naturalizes the perspective of those with privilege (3–4). As the editors argue, however, these are largely misconceptions: the first criticism fails to recognize that both the work of analytic philosophers who espouse many different kinds of realism and some of whom already do work on social identities, and that many feminist philosophers and philosophers of race (e.g. Charles Mills and Sally Haslanger) do not see social construction and realism as contradictory (4–5); the second that while there is certainly a visible trend toward it, abstraction and universalization are not essential to the project of analytic theology (6); and third, that the work of feminist epistemologists like Sally Haslanger and Rae Langton show that it is not analytic theorizing as such, but instead the presumption of one’s own objectivity is the problem. Against this, Panchuk and Rea argue that, correctly applied, the tools of analytic philosophy can be used to deepen understandings of social identity and perspective, and therefore inoculate against the tendency to naturalize social structures (10–11).

In Part 2 of the introduction they introduce the chapters in this volume, helpfully organizing them in three categories: “methodological principles, the intersection of social identities with religious epistemology, and the connections among eschatology, ante-mortem suffering, and ante-mortem social perceptions of bodies” (11) arguing at the end that together they “make an invaluable contribution to the fields of analytic theology and philosophy of religion” (18).

According to our editors, centering “voices from the edge” is not merely a matter of increasing who does analytic theology and what counts as analytic theology, as if one can just add diversity and stir. Previous exclusion of voices from the edge has not merely rendered the work of analytic theology incomplete, but has distorted it (1–2). With this in mind they list four ways in which they hope this volume will address the epistemic dysfunction within analytic theology:

- “1. Expanding the range of topics recognized by analytic theologians as theologically important.
2. Expanding the range of social identities represented in the discipline.
3. Deploying arguments for the importance of the first two contributions.
4. Expanding our understanding of what it looks like to do analytic theology well” (2).

The first two chapters provide a strong contribution to goal #3. In “Seeking out Epistemic Friction in the Philosophy of Religion,” Helen De Cruz argues that disagreements between philosophers of religion ought to be embraced rather than resolved. Using the results of her own work in experimental philosophy, particularly surveying philosophers about the origins of their beliefs and research interests, De Cruz notes that many disagreements between philosophers of religion are arbitrary (for example, due to their faith backgrounds, themselves often dependent on family of origin, location, and so on). Because the demographics of analytic philosophy of religion do not match the broader population, and those demographics matter in terms of what kind of research is done, the pursuit of truth and objectivity requires actively seeking out alternate perspectives or, in the language of Jose Medina, engaging in “epistemic friction.” Additionally, those from marginalized perspectives, precisely because they often have to understand both their own and more dominant frameworks in order to survive in the world, are more likely to have unique insights. As the editors note in the introduction, De Cruz’ work not only offers a theoretical justification for expanding the who and what of analytic theology, but serves as something of a proof of concept: what kind of analytic theology is possible when one engages not only Anglo-analytic philosophy and Christian theology, but brings Du Bois in conversation with the *Zhuangzi*.

The second chapter in the methodology section, Sameer Yadav’s “Toward an Analytic Theology of Liberation,” helpfully holds a mirror up to the discipline, asking: “What *kinds* of theology are ruled out by the methodological commitments of AT? Is AT more conducive for certain conceptions of Christian theology than others?” (47). In answering this question, Yadav notes that analytic theology “has been most conducive to generating traditional and orthodox Christian theology and least conducive to generating the revisionary projects of liberation theology” (47). Correcting William Wood—who has argued that analytic theology does not formally require adherence to orthodox Christianity, but has empirically tended to support it—Yadav notes that heterodox figures like Schleiermacher have been welcome conversation partners. What has been excluded instead are liberation theologies and issues of social oppression. In what follows, Yadav offers an account of liberation theology as a “meta-theological proposal about the proper content and method of Christian theology” (53) pitched to convince analytic theologians that their work should be guided “not only by epistemic value, but also by the moral and prudential value of liberation for the socially and politically oppressed” (53). Doing so, however, will require “significant revision in the *content*, the *constituency*, and the *canon* of theology as standardly construed in AT” (71).

The rest of the chapters work well to anticipate challenges to the methodological claims made by De Cruz and Yadav, and to flesh out just what such an expanded understanding of analytic theology looks like. Of particular note are the first three chapters of the next section which each offer ways of understanding the relationship between people on the margins and religious institutions and authorities, particularly when they appear in conflict. Teri Merrick provides a helpful correction to Linda Zagzebski’s *Epistemic Authority*. While she agrees that we have good reason to trust authorities over our own individual experiences, Merrick argues that epistemic oppression is an exception: “Non-deference to the authority of one’s religious community is not always a matter of epistemic arrogance. Rather, it may be, and most certainly will be, required in order to cultivate the virtues of epistemic justice” (98). The example she offers, drawing from her own research, is churches who claim doctrinally that gender is binary, but do not consult folks with intersex conditions as epistemic peers in the development of doctrine. Building on Michelle Panchuk’s article “The Shattered Spiritual Self,” Joshua Cockayne, David Eford, and Jack Warman offer a social epistemology of shattered faith. They

argue that “the actions of other people can cause a person to lose their faith in God,” (124) focusing in particular on the impact of exclusion from worship (such as when LGBTQ Christians are formally excommunicated or made to feel unwelcome). And Theresa W. Tobin and Dawne Moon track how white supremacy impacts the operation of homophobia and transphobia in Black churches, particularly in fostering what they call “sacramental shame.”

The remaining chapters offer examples of such theology in practice: Amy Peeler’s appeal to Mary in thinking about women’s ministry, Kathryn Pogin’s criticism of traditional theories of atonement, bringing feminist and womanist theological critiques in conversation with work in epistemic justice, Blake Hereth’s imagination of what justice would require the afterlife to look like for trans folks, and Kevin Timpe’s argument that there will be disabilities in heaven.

Alongside a special issue of *Res Philosophica* and another edited volume *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion*—each of which not only share contributors but are cited explicitly in this volume—*Voices from the Edge* represents a deep and necessary shift in analytic theology and philosophy of religion. If the “clarity” and “rigour” of analytic theology are not to function in exclusionary ways (work in epistemic justice, which so many of the chapters in this volume depend, warns us that what is easily intelligible is not politically neutral), I think the contributors of this volume are right that it must address epistemic dysfunction head on—seeking out epistemic friction and expanding what voices are listened to. This book should therefore be required reading for anyone in either discipline.

But this volume also does something much bolder than Panchuk and Rea name in their introduction. It does not just set a new tone for analytic theology and philosophy of religion, but brings analytic theology into deeper conversation with theology as a whole. Amidst debate over the relationship between analytic theology and systematic theology, this volume shows how tools and insights from the analytic tradition can strengthen theological reflection, and how fruitful analytic theology is when it engages recent work in feminist, womanist, queer, and Black liberation theologies as these chapters do. For this reason, I also recommend this text to theologians and scholars of religion new to and/or skeptical of the analytic tradition.