

This essay is a shortened and revised version of chapter 8 of my book *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 2003).

IN THE WAKE OF MATRICIDE
A FEMINIST PROCESS PARADIGM?

by

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Feminists in religion share a critique of the “God out there” of traditional biblical religion and agree that images of God as King, Lord, and Father are images of God as a dominant male other. In one of his last books, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*,¹ process philosopher Charles Hartshorne identified the six common mistakes of theological and philosophical traditions as the assertion of God’s omnipotence, omniscience, unchanging nature and unsympathetic goodness, and the related errors of infallible revelation and immortality. Though many feminists have focused attention on the masculine and hierarchical language of biblical traditions, ideas about divine power as unchanging and unsympathetic, omnipotent and omniscient, and views of infallible revelation and immortality are integral to the understanding of God “out there” criticized by feminists. As I have suggested in my forthcoming book *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World*, each of these “theological mistakes” results from a prior ontological mistake, a denial of the body that is based in a rejection of the female body through which we come into the physical world. I suggest that the theological

mistakes of traditional theologies and philosophies of religion are rooted in unacknowledged matricide. Yet the traditional ideas are so deeply engrained in language and culture that it is difficult for any of us to speak of Goddess or God without consciously or unconsciously referring to them. A feminist process paradigm can help us to avoid these mistakes.

In my book I ask a simple question. *“Is the source of the commonly accepted mistakes of classical theological traditions a rejection of embodied life that begins with rejection of the female body?”* In other words, are the six theological mistakes embedded in ways of thinking that are inherently anti-female? This is a feminist question that was not asked by Hartshorne. Yet it is crucially important that we understand that the six theological mistakes identified by Hartshorne arise not only from denying our bodies and the earth body, but more specifically from denying the female body that gave us birth. If we recognize that the six theological mistakes occur within a way of thinking that is inherently anti-female, we can see how important it is for feminists to avoid them.

One of the earliest insights of feminist theology was that women have been viewed as secondary or subordinate in dualistic anti-body traditions that follow Plato in making a sharp distinction between God and the unchanging soul on the one hand, and the changing body and nature on the other. Feminists have shown that in dualistic traditions created by men, the rational soul of man is associated with the unchanging immortal realm of (a male) God, while woman is identified with the body, nature, and death. Feminists have called this way of thinking hierarchical dualism because one set of qualities—the unchanging, the rational, the soul, the male—is valued more

highly than the other—the changing, the natural, the body, the female. In such traditions, God must be imaged as male because maleness is associated with the soul and spirit. In such traditions God cannot be imaged as female because femaleness is associated with the body, nature, and death, and these in turn are imagined to be antithetical to the spirit.² From this perspective, the six theological mistakes can be understood to arise within a way of thinking that is not only dualistic and anti-body, but also inherently anti-female and matricidal.

“But,” it might be objected, “anti-body thinking need not be anti-female. It only became so because men projected the body they despised onto women. After all,” it might be added, “women are just as capable of rejecting the body as men. Look at the female saints who starved themselves to death. If women had created dualistic traditions, they might have been anti-male.”³

It is true that women have been enthusiastic supporters of anti-body traditions in the west and in the east. Still, it is not sheer coincidence that dualistic traditions have a particular antipathy toward the female body. Dualistic traditions not only reject the body but the whole physical world of which the body is a part. Thus dualistic traditions inevitably take a negative view of physical birth through a female body. Indeed many dualistic traditions contrast (inferior) physical birth to (superior) spiritual birth or re-birth.

Socrates called himself a midwife of the soul. Circumcision rites claim male blood as more holy than the blood of birth. Baptism names water consecrated by men more powerful than the waters of birth. Enlightenment has been understood as release from the realm of birth and death. Most dualistic anti-body traditions originated in cultures where there were more ancient traditions

that made a positive association between the body of the mother and the creative powers of the earth or Goddess. Thus, dualistic anti-body traditions not only reject the body of the mother, but also the body of the earth and the body of Goddess. *“But is it matricide?”* It could be argued that denying the body that gives us birth is not “matricide” or “mother-murder” but technically speaking “mother-denial.” However the tradition of Platonic dualism arose in the ambience of the repeated performance of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. In this trilogy, Orestes avenges the death of his father by killing his mother. At his trial the Goddess Athena justifies her vote in favor of the “mother-murderer” with the words, “No mother ever gave me birth.”⁴ There are good reasons for considering that rejection of the body of the mother is at heart matricide, justifying mother murder.

If dualistic philosophies began in matricide, then most feminists would agree that they are inevitably anti-female. As feminists begin to reshape and recreate religious traditions, finding ways of affirming the spirit in the body and especially in the female body has been an important concern. Most spiritual feminists understand that imagining alternatives to dualistic habits of thought is essential if the body (and the female body in particular) is to be affirmed. I believe that “a feminist process paradigm” can help us to transform traditional understandings of the divine and the world that have been detrimental to women.

In challenging dualistic thinking, process philosophy pulled the rug out from under anti-female habits of thought. *“But if process philosophy is implicitly feminist, then why did Whitehead and Hartshorne not state explicitly that process philosophy is a feminist philosophy?”* I think it is fair to say that

this thought never occurred to either of them. Commenting on the history of science, Whitehead said, *“There are some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them.”*⁵ I imagine that the idea that whole traditions of philosophical thinking had for centuries been systematically anti-female, is an idea that simply did not occur to either Whitehead or Hartshorne. What are we to make of this rather serious oversight of these two great thinkers?⁶ The conclusion I would draw is that they were men of their own times, not ours. Whitehead and Hartshorne knew that some philosophers were male chauvinists,⁷ but they assumed that philosophical systems were gender neutral because no other way of putting things ever occurred to them.

That another way of putting things has occurred to us is testimony to the revolutionary power of the feminist movement of the last three decades of the twentieth century. Feminism has taught us to scrutinize all theories for explicit and implicit gender bias. Feminist thinking can help us to understand that the “theological mistakes” identified by Hartshorne are based in matricide. Insofar as this insight remains unspoken in process philosophy, its implications for transforming inherited traditions is incompletely understood. A “feminist process paradigm” will make it clear that process philosophy provides alternatives to ways of thinking that are inherently anti-female. When it is made clear, then feminists will be more likely to understand how process philosophy can be helpful to us as we go about re-imagining theological traditions.

If the theological mistakes of conceiving of divine power as unchanging and unsympathetic, omnipotent and omniscient, and the related views of infallible revelation and immortality are rooted in matricide, then spiritual feminists ought to avoid them at all costs. Yet we have not always been consistent about this. If we can become clear about the source of the mistakes of theological traditions, then we can take care to avoid them. As we search for other ways of thinking about the divine and the world, we will recognize the importance of the alternatives offered by process philosophy for our feminist efforts. In fact, many if not most feminist theologians and theologians, myself included, have been moving in the direction of affirming the process values of change, embodiment, relationship, sympathy (understanding, love, or compassion), creative freedom, enjoyment, and power with rather than power over. I suggest that recognizing that these values are interconnected and thus require each other, can aid all of us in our efforts to reimagine the divine and the world.

Now I would like to consider some of the ways that process philosophy can be helpful to feminists. From the beginning spiritual feminists understood that affirming the changing body and especially the changing female body was a priority. At the first gathering of women theologians at Grailville in 1972, a widely reprinted retelling of the story of Adam and Eve entitled “The Coming of Lilith” challenged the symbolic association of the naked female body with sin and evil.⁸ At about the same time, a group of women created a summer solstice ritual in which they formed a symbolic birth canal in order to birth each other into a circle of women. They raised power by placing their hands on each other’s bellies. They marked each other’s faces with

menstrual blood saying: *“This is the blood that promises renewal. This is the blood that promises sustenance. This is the blood that promises life.”*⁹ In the ensuing years, Audre Lorde’s groundbreaking essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” was adopted as a kind of manifesto by Jewish, Christian, and Goddess feminists because it gave us permission to trust the feelings--including sexual feelings--of joy and pleasure that we experience in our bodies.¹⁰ Women also began to create rituals to celebrate menarche, birth, and menopause. The popularity of images of the naked female body of the Goddess in feminist art and ritual is testimony to women’s hunger for symbols that express the creative and sacred powers of the female body.¹¹ This theme was picked up in the controversial Christian feminist prayer to Sophia that re-imagines “women in your image. With warm nectar between our thighs.”¹² Though many traditions of yoga understand it to be a method that leads to the transcendence of the body, feminist teachers and practitioners are more likely to understand yoga as a way of finding the spirit in the body and in the body as female.¹³ Similarly feminists tend to view meditation not as a way to escape the world of birth-and-death, but to learn to live more comfortably within it.¹⁴ Like yoga, meditation can help us to become aware of the connections between body, mind, and spirit.

Much feminist work in religion has focused on relationship and interconnection, alleging that women’s bodily experiences attune women to relationships, that women’s way of knowing is through relationships, or that women have a special ability to sense the human connection to nature and the web of life. Many women have been drawn to Jungian thinking because it values aspects of life that have been traditionally been called female or

feminine, including the body, the unconscious, intuition, and relationship. Some Christian feminists have begun to develop a more relational view of the world, or what they call a theology of “mutuality.”¹⁵ Many of them, along with Jewish and other feminist thinkers, have been inspired by Martin Buber’s depiction of “I-Thou” relationships with other people, with nature, and with God. Goddess feminists, eco-feminists, Asian Christian feminists, and some western women inspired by non-western religions speak of the web of relationships in which we are enmeshed as “the web of life,” and urge greater concern for non-human life.¹⁶

At the same time the meaning of the body, the female body, relationship, and interconnection have become highly contested questions within feminist thinking in religion. While many women have felt affirmed by images, rituals, and theories that celebrate the female body, relationship, and interconnection, others have found them limiting. Critics ask whether some feminists end up affirming conventional gender dichotomies, even if we do not intend to do so. *“Do rituals that celebrate menstruation, birth, and menopause reinforce the idea that woman’s primary role is motherhood and perhaps even that her place is in the home? Do images of the naked female body of the Goddess simply continue a long tradition of associating women with the body and nature, but not with the mind and freedom? What about the male body? What about women who do not to have children? Women whose sexuality is directed to other women? Women who do not have partners? Women in abusive relationships?”*

Some academic feminists use the term “essentialism” (as in women are “essentially” embodied and relational) to characterize feminist standpoints

that they feel lock women into one set of possible roles and behaviors while excluding others.¹⁷ They point out that theories that assert a dichotomy between male and female characteristics or ways of being limit the possibilities of both women and men. Those who are uncomfortable with the emphasis on the female body, relationship, and interconnection in the thinking of other feminists have legitimate concerns. It is important to value the female mind as much as the female body. It is important to affirm that women are free and creative individuals. It is important to recognize that men as well as women are embodied. It is important to remember that relationships come in many varieties and that they can harm as well as nurture and heal. It is important that feminists not create new stereotypes that limit women's creativity and freedom before women have even had a chance to exercise it.

Process philosophy offers a perspective in which the concerns of both sides in what has become a sometimes acrimonious debate can be taken into account. In process philosophy, the importance of body, relationship, and connection to nature is affirmed as in many feminist theologies and theologies. Process philosophy also clearly understands that men as well as women are embodied, related, and interconnected in the web of life. The male body as well as the female body changes and dies. Men as well as women are internally related to others. Men as well as women are part of nature. Process philosophy offers a holistic understanding of the world in which change and embodiment and interdependence are affirmed for all individuals—women, men, animals, cells, the smallest particles of an atom, and Goddess/God. In such a world women can express creative freedom within our bodies, relationships, and connections to changing life. Process

philosophy legitimates feminist re-imaginings of divine power through the lens of the female body and its connections to nature. Yet process philosophy reminds us that all bodies—male as well as female, non-human as well as human—are part of the divine body and thus can function as images of divinity.

While affirming that all individuals are embodied, related, and interconnected, process philosophy views all individuals as free and creative--from the smallest particle of an atom to Goddess/God. Thus for process philosophy there is no question of choosing mind over body or body over mind. Mind and body are one continuum. It is as true to say that all individuals are free and creative as it is to say that all individuals are embodied and related to others. In process philosophy all free and creative individuals are embodied, and all embodied individuals are related to other free and creative individuals. To imagine that freedom is somehow antithetical to relationship and embodiment (as many philosophies and many individuals, including some feminists, have done) is quite simply a mistake in thought. This does not mean that embodiment never limits the choices we have. All choices are limited choices. To wish it to be otherwise is also a mistake. Nor does it mean that individuals never experience conflicts between the responsibilities inherent in relationships and individual needs for free and creative expression. But there is no essential or necessary conflict between embodiment and relationship and interconnection on the one side and creative freedom on the other. Nor is there any need to state that women are more embodied, relational, and interconnected than men, for these qualities define all individuals. Process philosophy suggests that rather than

arguing about who is right and who is wrong, feminists might join together in imagining a world in which embodiment, relationship, and creative freedom are understood to be components of all life in the universe.¹⁸

While spiritual feminists share a critique of the “God-out-there” of traditional theism, unrelated to the world, we are not always certain about how to define the relation of Goddess/God to the world. *“Should we call ourselves pantheists? Mystics? Polytheists? Monotheists? What do we mean by these terms?”* I like to think that process philosophy’s “pan-en-theism” affirms the best insights of monotheism, mystical pantheism, and polytheism, while avoiding the mistakes associated with traditional dualistic theism. Pan-en-theism means that that the world is “in” Goddess/God.¹⁹ In process thought, the world is “in” Goddess/God because Goddess/God sympathetically feels the feelings of every creature. Insofar as the world is also understood to be the body of Goddess/God,²⁰ panentheism can also be said to mean that Goddess/God is “in” the world, is felt by and included in every creature. Panentheism differs from traditional theism in not radically separating God from the world. Yet panentheism shares with monotheism “the intuition of unity,” the sense that the divine power is a unifying principle in the world. The divine power keeps the creative process of the universe from deteriorating into chaos. Panentheism shares with biblical religion the understanding that the divine power can be related to as “Thou,” that divine power is personal and cares about individuals and the world. Yet more clearly than biblical religion, panentheism asserts that divine power is always the power of persuasion, not coercion, power with, not power over. Because it understands the world to be the body of Goddess/God, panentheism agrees

with mystical pantheism that the world is sacred. Though not asserting a multiplicity of divine powers, panentheism, like polytheism, is open to a wide range of images and symbols for divine power, as many as the individuals that make up the divine body.

“Panentheism” is not a word that is likely to slip easily into everyday language. Still, I suggest that feminists who have rejected the “God out there” of dualistic theism, may find that panentheism expresses our new understanding of the divine in the world more clearly than theism, monotheism, pantheism, or polytheism. Theism is associated with dualism, radical separation, and power over. Monotheism carries the baggage of religious intolerance. Pantheism has difficulty asserting that individuals other than Goddess/God really exist. Polytheism denies that there is a unity underlying multiplicity. Panentheism affirms divine presence in a co-created world.

Panentheism offers a new way of thinking about the question of how individuals are related to the whole, a question which has traditionally been called “the problem of the one and the many.” From traditional perspectives there are two options: either individuals are real; or all is one. Yet both of these options are problematic. To say that individuals are real takes account of our common sense understanding of individuality, difference, and freedom. Yet from most traditional perspectives, it leaves individuals separate from each other and from the divine ground and power. Against this view, monists have asserted that--contrary to ordinary perception--all is one. Yet monism cannot explain individuality, difference, and creative freedom. Because it offers an understanding of the relationship of all individuals to each other and

to the divine ground that does not obscure individuality, difference, and creative freedom, process philosophy offers new way of thinking about an age-old question.

Panentheism is compatible with the intuitions of Goddess feminists and eco-feminists that the earth and its processes of birth, death, and regeneration are sacred. Similar views are found in the symbols of indigenous religions, for example in the images of Changing Woman of the Navajos and Oshun the Goddess of flowing waters of African and African-American religions. Acceptance or affirmation of change in non-western religions such as Taoism or Buddhism is one reason that many feminists have turned to them. Christian eco-feminists have also begun to imagine the world as the body of God.²¹ Some Jewish feminists understand Shekhina as “She Who Dwells Within” (the changing world).²² Yet feminists who affirm Goddess/God’s relation to the changing world are often accused of romantically clinging to pre-modern ways of viewing the world that cannot be reconciled with science.

Process philosophy can help us to affirm ancient visions of the changing earth as sacred, while expanding traditional understandings to include evolution. Many ancient peoples imagined the starry heavens as a backdrop to life on earth. Yet we know that the earth is but one of the planets that circle our sun, which is one of millions of stars in the universe. It is unlikely that life occurs only on planet earth. While it was appropriate for ancient peoples to speak of earth as Goddess, it may be more appropriate for us to understand that the world or the universe as the body of Goddess/God. Process philosophy supports the feminist intuition that the earth body is

sacred, while helping us to clarify our thinking and expand our vision.

Process philosophy also makes it clear that the desire to save the earth and its creatures is not misplaced romanticism.²³

In order to justify criticism of biblical images of God as Lord, King, and Father, some spiritual feminists have appealed to the traditional argument that all images of God are limited because they are human creations. *“Biblical images,”* we have said, *“are the creations of men. As such have no eternal validity.”* Mary Daly and more recently Elizabeth Johnson have asserted that a way of thinking found in Roman Catholic theology called the *via negativa*, or the negative way, can be a helpful tool for feminist theology.²⁴ The *via negativa* states that because all conceptions of God are human conceptions, it is easier to say what God is “not” than to say what God “is.” For example, we may say “a mighty fortress is our God, “ but we know that God is “not” really a fortress. If the negative way is true, then God is also “not” a Father, “not” a Lord, and “not” a King, even though traditional religious authorities may claim divine sanction for these images. If all images of God are human creations, then female imagery for God is just as appropriate as male imagery. The negative way justifies Johnson’s use of the radically new name “She Who Is” for the divine power. Johnson cleverly turns tradition against itself. Protestant theologian Sallie McFague uses a similar logic when she says that all of our language about divine reality is “metaphor” because God is in some sense wholly other.²⁵

Process philosophy as we have seen, asserts that all human knowing is fragmentary. But this is not the same as saying that we can know “nothing” about Goddess/God. The problem with the negative way is that it is rooted in

the dualistic understanding that there is an absolute discontinuity or impassible gulf between divinity and humanity. In other words the negative way and its assertion that we can know “nothing” about God is based in the notion of radical divine transcendence of the world. As we have seen this notion is rooted in the first “theological mistake,” the assertion that God does not participate in the changing world. From the standpoint of the negative way which relativizes everything we say about Goddess/God, it is not possible to say that the divine power is love rather than hate. Nor is it possible to say that the Goddess/God is more like a father delighting in his child’s growing freedom and independence than like a father punishing a child for not doing as it was told. Theologies built on the negative way generally appeal to revelation to bridge the gulf between divinity and humanity. If the revelation is associated with the Bible or any traditional religion, then all of the problems associated with patriarchal traditions are reintroduced. If, on the other hand, contemporary experience is the source of new revelation, the negative way can tell us only that all images of divinity are relative. This protects against the danger of imagining that any particular understanding of divinity is absolute. Beyond that it does not provide any concrete help in evaluating religious symbols.

In contrast to theologies built on the negative way, process philosophy can construct positive alternatives to traditional understandings and imagery, because it does not begin with the notion that the difference between Goddess/God and the world is absolute and unbridgeable. In other words, when we assert that the divine power is in some sense immanent in the world, a *via positiva* or positive way that asserts the likeness of divine power to the

world becomes possible. For process philosophy Goddess/God is in significant ways like other individuals. Embodiment, relationship, and creative freedom are shared by all individuals from the smallest atom to Goddess/God, though in vastly differing degrees. Because of this, we can know “something” about Goddess/God in and through knowing the world. Process philosophy asserts that we must recognize the fragmentariness of all human knowledge, but it does not agree with the assumption behind the negative way that we can know “nothing” about the nature of Goddess/God. Process philosophy can help us see that the negative way, while a useful interim strategy, will not serve feminist interests in the long run because it is based in the first “theological mistake,” a mistake that begins with denying the body as female. In contrast, process philosophy affirms that we can know “something” about the divine nature. Our understanding is fragmentary, but it can provide a more sophisticated tool for evaluating theologies and religious symbolism than the negative way.

This discussion of the *via negativa* and the *via positiva* can also help us to situate feminist work in religion in relation to deconstructionism. Insofar as it assumes that all human knowledge is fragmentary, process philosophy agrees with deconstructionism that issues of perspective and power are involved in all constructions of “truth.” Process philosophy agrees with deconstructionism that we cannot know the truth with “absolute” “certainty” nor express it in a “global” or “universal” fashion. On the other hand, when radical deconstructionism states that we can therefore know “nothing” about reality, it bears an uncanny resemblance to the *via negativa* in which it may be rooted. In contrast to radical deconstructionism, process philosophy asserts

that fragmentary knowing is possible and that we can talk about the greater and lesser adequacy of ideas and frameworks for understanding embodied, embedded life. Process philosophy also suggests that not all personal and social relationships are based in “the will to power” or power over. For process philosophy power with is also possible. At the same time, deconstructionism, like Marxism and Freudianism, can help process thinkers to understand and explicated the ways that power over functions in contemporary socially constructed worlds.

Feminist spirituality rejects the “God-out-there,” separate from the world and relating to it as a ruler or judge. Most spiritual feminists intuitively sense that Goddess/God is intimately related to the world. Many also recognize that the idea that God is absolutely independent of the world and relationships is a “theological mistake.” At the same time, many feminists are wary of making what has been called the error of “anthropomorphism,” that is, of attributing human qualities to God. Though we may invoke Goddess, Sophia, or Shekhina in our prayers, meditations, or rituals, some of us shy away from asserting that we think of the divine power as a “person” who “cares” about the world. We have been told that it is “childish” or “egocentric” or “irrational” to imagine that the divine power “really” cares about our individual lives. And we may worry that if we think of divine power as personal, we will end up re-imagining God as a dominating other.

Yet process philosophy asserts that the divine sympathy is not mere metaphor from within the system of process philosophy, the divine sympathy is the most accurate way of describing divine power. This means that though Goddess/God is not “a person exactly like ourselves,” Goddess/God is

“personal” if by that we mean Goddess/God is “the eternal Thou,” capable of feeling and feeling the feelings of others in a profound way. For process philosophy, as we have seen, all individuals are capable of feeling and feeling the feelings of others, though in vastly differing degrees. To affirm this capacity of atoms and cells yet to deny it to Goddess/God does not make any sense from a process point of view.²⁶ This does not prove that the Goddess/God exists, but it does show that us that it is not “childish” or “irrational” to speak of the divine power (if we are going to speak of it at all) as caring and loving and therefore as personal.

For me, process philosophy’s understanding of the divine sympathy and therefore of the “personal” nature of Goddess/God is a strength, not a weakness. The notion of the divine sympathy makes sense of the widespread use of personal imagery for divine power in most of the world religions as well as in feminist spirituality. The divine sympathy is a way of understanding the experience that many of us have had that divine power is present in our lives, sharing our joy and our suffering. For me the divine sympathy is a way of naming the divine presence “with me” that I experienced dramatically in times of crisis and that I also experience daily in less dramatic ways. In other words, I find personal imagery for Goddess/God necessary and appropriate, because I experience Goddess/God as caring about my life and the life of other individuals in the world. It is sometimes said (even in the Goddess movement) that we use anthropomorphic imagery because it affects us deeply, even though we don’t really believe that the divine power is personal. Yet if this really is our view, then I think it would be more appropriate to dispense with personal imagery as Marcia Falk does.²⁷

There is no doubt that if compared to traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, process philosophy's understanding of Goddess/God is more feminine than masculine. The divine sympathy, as Hartshorne said, has more in common with traditional understandings of a mother's love for her children than it does with traditional notions of masculine power, including traditional notions of fatherhood. The process view offers a philosophical understanding consistent with feminists' intuitions that imagining divine power as Goddess and God-She requires changes in the way we think about divine power and its relation to the world. Like many feminist theologies and theologues, process philosophy stresses what has been called the divine "immanence"—change, embodiment, relatedness, and interconnection.²⁸ Yet process philosophy asserts that there also are ways in which Goddess/God is absolute or transcendent. It can thus help us to affirm the traditionally feminine attributes of embodiment and relatedness, while not losing sight of human, nonhuman, and divine freedom and creativity, which have usually been thought of as masculine.

"But," it might be asked, "does process philosophy idealizes divine power by associating it more with good than with evil. "Isn't Goddess/God equally as present in earthquakes and small pox as in sunny skies and healthy bodies? In rage as well as love? In war as well as in peace? Do we really want to 'sanitize' divine power by imagining it as 'Good'? Especially when there is so much evil in our world?" These are important questions and I doubt that all feminists will agree on the answers to them. Yet I find process philosophy's answer compelling. Insofar as the world is the body of Goddess/God, both good and evil are included within Goddess/God's body. It

is also true that Goddess/God is “with us” in sickness and in health, in suffering as well as joy. However, though all is included in the divine body, it is not true to say that Goddess/God is equally present in good and evil, love and hate, creation and destruction. As the soul of the world body, as a personal presence in the world, Goddess/God is always on the side of the “good,” which is to say on the side of understanding, compassion, enjoyment, and love. In other words, Goddess/God is always trying to help us to co-create the conditions in which the greatest number of individuals can enjoy life. Some feminists may find that this is to limit Goddess/God. They prefer to say that divine power is unlimited in the sense of being “All” in an unqualified way, equally good and evil. Yet the question arises as to whether a Goddess/God that is equally inclusive of good and evil is indifferent to the suffering in the world. If so, is such a divine power one with whom we would wish to enter into relationship? *“Is a divine power that can make no distinction between loving a child and raping it, nor between Auschwitz and a loving home, worthy of our worship?”* Hartshorne answered this question when he said, *“Either God really does love all beings . . . or religion seems a vast fraud.”*²⁹ I agree with Hartshorne that a divine power that is not compassionate and loving is not one I would want to worship. Still, I find it unlikely that either intellectual or moral arguments that Goddess/God is love, compassion, and understanding will convince anyone who does not already have an experience or intuition of the power of love divine, all loves excelling.

The notion that Goddess/God is love is reminiscent of the liberating and life-affirming aspects of Christianity. There is no doubt that Whitehead, Hartshorne, and I, along with many others, learned about the love of God in

Christian churches. But Whitehead and Hartshorne did not understand the views of the world they proposed as narrowly or exclusively Christian. Hartshorne said that Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel's understanding of the divine in the world was remarkably close to the process view, though worked out independently.³⁰ There are many connections between Martin Buber's worldview and that of process philosophy. Both Whitehead and Hartshorne understood that the view of the self they presented was anticipated by Buddhism. Hartshorne felt that there are strands within Hinduism that are very similar to process thinking.³¹ There are connections between the Tao and process. Many indigenous traditions share with process philosophy the understanding that the world is alive and that the divine power is present in it. Though the notion of God as love has been identified with certain forms of Christianity, this idea is not uniquely Christian, nor has it always been central in Christianity. Process philosophy can acknowledge its debt to Christianity in affirming that Goddess/God is love, while clearly distinguishing its vision from biblical language and imagery, the errors of classical theology, and the emphasis on self-sacrifice in many forms of Christianity.³²

For some the idea that Goddess/God is love evokes the repressed, colorless, asexual, always sweet and clean, never angry or dirty, self-sacrificing model of Christian womanhood handed down from the nineteenth century. Many of us have known mothers and grandmothers, schoolteachers and Sunday school teachers who exude "Christian love," yet just underneath it, are seething with repressed anger. Inevitably their love feels like control.

"Is the disembodied, repressed, and self-sacrificing image of Christian love

that many of us have experienced what process philosophy means when it says that Goddess/God is love?” This question is easily answered from a process perspective. Process philosophy says that life is to be enjoyed in the body and in relationship. Those who love life share this love with others. Loving one’s neighbor as oneself is part of relational life. But self-sacrifice is neither the goal nor the meaning of life.

The image of repressed and self-sacrificing love raises another question for feminists: *“Is expressing anger compatible with love?”*³³ Whitehead and Hartshorne did not address this question directly. In the liberal Protestant Christianity of their upbringing, biblical depictions of the divine anger were assumed to reflect lower stages in the development of religious consciousness. Hartshorne wrote about the joys of a stormy relationship with his wife Dorothy, but he never addressed the relation of anger and love from a philosophical point of view. It goes without saying that neither Whitehead nor Hartshorne understood himself to be part of an oppressed group seeking liberation.

In contrast feminists and others know the healing power of anger when it allows us to react against injustice—both personally and politically. *“You can’t do that any more—not to me and not to us!” “No! Never again!”* For many of us expressing anger has been a powerful stimulus to personal and political transformation. Feminist ethicist Beverly Harrison challenged narrow understandings of Christian love when she wrote that expressing anger can be a work of love, offering others a chance to learn, encoding the hope that change is possible.³⁴ In my life expressing anger at those who uphold structures of injustice has helped to create change. In my spiritual journey,

expressing anger at both God and Goddess has played a pivotal role, as I have discussed earlier. Yet women—and I am one of them--know the destructive power of violent anger turned against us in situations of unequal power, often by fathers, brothers, husbands, and lovers, all too often in drunken or drug-induced rages. In the social and political worlds as well, the anger of the powerful has often been turned against those who lack the power to fight back. Women have also experienced the destructive force of women's anger turned on self and other. Clearly anger is not a simple matter. It can heal and harm.

Can process philosophy's understanding of divine sympathy for human feelings be expanded to include sympathy for our anger? If the notion of the divine sympathy means that the divine power feels all the feelings of the world, then it must also be true that Goddess/God feels our anger and the hurt that caused it. In this sense our anger is "in" Goddess/God and will always be in Goddess/God. When the expression of anger is healing or transforming, Goddess/God must also be with us in our anger. When anger needs to be expressed for healing or transformation, Goddess/God might even be imagined as persuading us to get angry. Feminists can expand process philosophy's understanding of the divine sympathy to include sympathy for our anger. As we do so, it becomes clear that process philosophy can embrace the notion that the expression of anger can be a work of love. Yet we must always recall that in situations of unequal power relations or with force, anger can be deadly. Even when not deadly, repeated venting of angry feelings can be unproductive, closing off rather than opening dialogue. This suggests that the critical question about anger is not whether to repress it

(which can be harmful to the self) or to express it (which can be harmful to others). The real question is how to acknowledge anger and the situations that cause it, while transforming anger into forms of energy that harm neither the self nor others.³⁵ This means that we need to recognize that becoming aware of our anger is only in the first step in a process of transformation. In the long run we need to find creative solutions to the problems that give rise to anger.

“If our anger can be creative,” you might be wondering, *“what about the anger of Goddess/God? Can it be creative too?”* Most of us are familiar with biblical images of the anger of God. In *Exodus* God cast the horses and the horsemen of the Pharaoh into the sea so that the Hebrew slaves could escape their pursuers. The prophets said that God turned his anger against his own people, allowing the cities and towns of Israel and Judah to be destroyed because the Hebrew people sacrificed on mountaintops and ignored the cries of the widow at the gate. Christians imagine that God will unleash his righteous anger on the wicked on judgment day. In our own times, oppressed people have appealed to the divine anger as legitimating their struggles for liberation. In each of these traditions, in different ways, the divine anger is understood to be an aspect of the divine concern for justice.

At least since classical times, the divine anger has been a controversial subject. Theologians in the classical tradition denied that God could have any feelings at all, since to feel is to change and God does not change. They were particularly concerned that biblical images of the divine anger suggested God was moody and capriciousness. In contrast to classical traditions, process philosophy affirms that Goddess/God feels the feelings of the world

with the greatest sympathy imaginable. At the same time, process philosophy insists that the divine power is persuasion not coercion, power with not power over. In the Bible and in Jewish and Christian traditions, the divine anger is most frequently imagined to include the power to destroy the wicked. Such power is a clear example of power over, the power of a tyrant God. If what is meant by the divine anger is the power to destroy the wicked, then it is clear that process philosophy cannot affirm it, because process philosophy denies that divine power is coercive. In some cases the anger of the biblical God is described as having been provoked by jealousy. Often the Hebrews who worship other divinities are compared to adulterous wives or prostitutes who sleep around. This sort of anger is possessive, egocentric, and expressed in terms of a husband's ownership of his wife. Theologically it is associated with exclusive rather than inclusive monotheism. Such anger is not be compatible with the process view of the divine sympathy.³⁶ This leaves open the question of whether there is another sense in which we would want to affirm that Goddess/God expresses anger in the form of persuasion or power with. This possibility is consistent with process philosophy, as long as it clear that divine anger is not intended to intimidate or harm, but is a moment in a process of creative transformation.

In the course of today's lecture I have argued that the six theological mistakes identified by Hartshorne are rooted in a prior ontological error, the denial of the female body that gives us birth into this world, an error that I have called matricide. Process philosophy, I suggest, is incompletely understood when its feminist implications remain unspoken. A "feminist process paradigm" can help us to understand the truly revolutionary

implications of *process* philosophy. At the same time it can help feminists in religion to guard against falling into familiar habits of thought that are rooted in a denial of the body and the world, in other words in matricide. Thank you for your attention.

Complete references will be found in *She Who Changes*.

¹ *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

² This is a commonplace in feminist theological analysis; see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*; Judith Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*; Naomi Goldenberg, *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); and *Laughter of Aphrodite*, among many others.

³ Rita Gross in *Buddhism after Patriarchy* makes a similar argument. Few other feminists have advanced it, perhaps because most feminists are not interested in promoting or validating the ascetic worldview.

⁴ See Paul Roche, trans., *The Orestes Plays of Aeschylus* (New York: New American Library, 1962), *The Eumenides*, 190.

⁵ *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967 (1925), 48.

⁶ An allusion to Hartshorne's *Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers: An Evaluation of Western Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

⁷ See Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light*, 62-64.

⁸ See Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader on Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979 (1989), .

⁹ See *Laughter of Aphrodite*, 126.

¹⁰ See *Weaving the Visions*, . Carter Heyward, Rita Nakashima Brock, Judith Plaskow, and I are among those who have used Lorde's ideas in feminist work in religion.

¹¹ See Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989); also see Meinrad Craighead, *The Mother's Songs: Images of God the Mother* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), whose work has appealed to Christian, Jewish, and Goddess feminists.

¹² See the Introduction.

¹³ Angela Farmer, *The Feminine Unfolding* (videotape), (Hohokus, NJ: Transit Media, 1999); also see Laura Cornell, *The Moon Salutation: Expression of the Feminine in Body, Psyche, Spirit* (Oakland, CA: Yogeshwari Publications, 2000).

¹⁴ See Rita Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*; and Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment; Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ The use of this term is widespread, see for example, Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God*.

¹⁶ The use of this term is also widespread, see for example, Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-Feminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

¹⁷ See Sheila Greeve Davaney, "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience, in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret Miles, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987), .

¹⁸ Catherine Keller's *From a Broken Web* discusses the relational self from a process standpoint.

¹⁹ As discussed in chapter two.

²⁰ The idea that the world is the body of God is affirmed by Hartshorne, but not Whitehead, as I have said.

²¹ See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God*.

²² See Lynn Gottlieb, *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of a Renewed Judaism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

²³ Sallie McFague and Nancy Howell have both used process philosophy to make this point; see *The Body of God* and *A Feminist Cosmology*.

²⁴ See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; and Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1992).

²⁵ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982).

²⁶ This is the part of the ontological argument advanced by Hartshorne in which he asserts that the divine power if it is to be affirmed at all, must be imagined as sympathetic and loving. See *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962).

²⁷ Marcia Falk's prayers are discussed in the Introduction and later in this chapter.

²⁸ See Starhawk, "Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality," in *Reweaving the World*, 73.

²⁹ *The Divine Relativity*, 25.

³⁰ "Transcendence and Immanence," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. ? , 21.

³¹ See Hartshorne, "Transcendence and Immanence," 19-20.

³² Influenced by process philosophy, Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker in *Proverbs of Ashes* and in a forthcoming book tentatively title *Night and Fire* question the centrality of the notion of self-sacrifice as a model for understanding the crucifixion of Jesus.

³³ Thanks to Judith Plaskow for prodding me to reflect on the relation of anger and love in human and divine life.

³⁴ See Beverly Harrison, "Anger as a Work of Love," in *Weaving the Visions*, .

³⁵ Thanks to Rita Gross for this suggestion.

³⁶ Thanks to Miriam Robbins Dexter for reminding me to mention this.