

Hasana Sharp and Chloe Taylor (editors)

Feminist Philosophies of Life

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The framework of "feminist philosophy of life" rethinks the vitalisms of past philosophy with an orientation toward the moral and political issues of the anthropocene. Feminist philosophy of life draws together new materialism, posthumanism, eco-feminism, bioethics, biopower, and disability studies, finding common ground in a shared commitment to embodiment and lived experience, and a conviction that the material conditions of life, and particularly the conditions necessary to sustain and foster life, are of immediate concern to philosophers. As such, philosophy of life is paradigmatic of feminist commitments: a refusal to dichotomize theory and practice, matter and form; and an insistence that the life of the body--particularly marginalized and vulnerable bodies--is worthy of the most serious scholarly attention.

Hasana Sharp and Chloe Taylor's edited collection, *Feminist Philosophies of Life*, consists of three sections: "New Feminist Philosophies of Life," which lays the theoretical groundwork for the field from multiple perspectives; "Lived Experience," which reflects on embodied experience as a source of philosophical and methodological insight; and "Precarious Lives," which considers the application of feminist philosophies of life to pressing social and ethical questions. Together, these sections brilliantly capture this nascent field. The book includes contributions from some of the most established and influential figures in philosophy of life, such as Elizabeth Grosz and Cynthia Willett, along with up-and-coming scholars. The texts collected in this book demonstrate both rigorous attention to the metaphysical issues raised by posthumanism and materialism, and a deep engagement with feminist political action.

Grosz's text is concerned with ontological questions related to material and immaterial substance, but, like many of the authors in the collection, she makes manifest the connection of her work to feminist political action. Following Spinoza and Deleuze, Grosz makes a strong case for the relevance of ontology to political action, delivering a ringing defense of the role of philosophers within social movements through her account of the community of thought and action. This leads to a "more inclusive way of understanding feminist politics and theory in their intimate interrelations" (44). By bridging ontological and activist concerns, Grosz provides an excellent introduction to the diverse and politically committed work that follows.

Astrida Neimanis, an idiosyncratic and original scholar, "thinks with" the crucial matter of water. She deepens the environmentalist motto that "water is life" through her Irigarayan reflections: it is "a life that intimately connects our own individual emergence from a maternal, watery womb, to multispecies planetary survival" (51). With her characteristically insightful approach, Neimanis draws on the ever-flowing and heterogeneous materiality of water as a material-semiotic foundation for an "ethics of responsivity toward waters both common and different, and toward bodies that are intimately close but also distant and dispersed" (52).

In the third chapter, Sharp and Willett engage in a joint project to lay out the common ground between their respective approaches: Willett's "ethics of eros" and Sharp's "politics of renaturalization." Rather than focusing on differences in position or competing to take a preeminent role in the nascent field of "philosophies of life," Willett and Sharp cooperate to draw out common concerns: to support nurturing and caregiving labor, to prevent environmental destruction, and most manifestly, to encourage respect and ethical responsivity toward the nonhuman and perhaps even nonliving. Although this chapter does not cover much new ground for a reader familiar with Sharp and Willett's work, it is a fine introduction. Both Sharp and Willett make astute use of images and examples from the animal kingdom in order to demonstrate the possibility for a nonanthropocentric ethical responsivity to the vulnerability and interdependency of material life.

Lynne Huffer brings an important dose of skepticism to the volume, wondering if so-called new materialists are in fact falling victim to the abstractions of a new vitalism or uncritically reiterating the disciplinary strategies of biopower. Through a genealogical approach, Huffer considers how life itself comes to be seen as a unitary concept and an object of knowledge. Most important, Huffer articulates a persuasive argument against Grosz's call to surrender entirely to the "force of the real," or the metaphysical grounds of philosophy of life (an argument that reappears, somewhat surprisingly, in Judith Butler's insistence on pre-ontological, nondiscursive life). Although Grosz's and Butler's use of life is illuminating, Huffer shows that it is necessary to note the noninnocence and contingency of our conception of life and of the discourses in which it appears.

Stephen Seely, always a piquant contributor to materialist thought, offers a defense of Irigaray's materialist and realist philosophy of sexual difference. In particular, Seely focuses on defending Irigaray's claim--which has since become a cornerstone of Grosz's work and of his own--that nature is itself fundamentally sexed. In order to ground this account, Seely interprets "sex" as material exchange across difference, a definition that includes asexually reproducing life forms. Seely's description of many life forms as "infinitely sexed" at times seems to resemble Deleuze's ideas more than it does Irigaray's career-long emphasis on two human sexes, and the status of other differences such as race and ability is left unexamined in the text. Seely's nonbinary and nonheteronormative conception of sex is very welcome, but I'm left wondering how far the conception of sex can be stretched before it loses its cogency, or at least the material specificity that is central to Irigaray's thought.

Rachel Loewen Walker, Danielle Peers, and Lindsay Eales describe a dance performance by variously abled dancers as a "diffraction" that subtly alters both thought and lived experience. The experiences related to the dance performance and the concept of diffraction do not always

illuminate one another to the extent that the authors hope, and the choice to rely on Deleuze's concept of a disruptive and transformative "event" enables them to avoid the questions of citationality and normativity embedded in a dance performance (available, at least in excerpted form, online) that, while beautiful and joyful, also alludes to traditional dance tropes significantly. Does the performance command radical respect for disabled bodies in their full difference, or merely make the case for inclusion? Nonetheless, Walker, Peers, and Eales provide a wonderful example of CRIPSiE's performance as an embodied and dynamic political engagement, but their arguments for its diffractive effects are not entirely persuasive, and contribute a strongly interdisciplinary perspective to the volume.

Florentien Verhage's work thinks through important methodological concerns in light of the philosophy of Gloria Anzaldúa. She describes a methodology that centers that which is most marginal, shifts continually in an attempt to transform our vision and relationships, and "limps along" with the complications of materiality and life. This dynamic and "limping" philosophy is practiced in part through collective rituals that interrupt our vision and reshape our relations: in particular, the ritual of protest. (Verhage's example is all the more relevant in an era of massive protests against Trump, starting with the Women's March.) Verhage describes protests as joyful, fecund interhuman action that should be seen as central to the practice of feminist philosophy. I will share Verhage's vision with my own feminist philosophy students and suggest this reading to anyone in a position to teach methodology.

In another useful contribution to feminist methodology, Christine Daigle uses Beauvoir's literary and autobiographical writings as a methodological model for nonsystematic and interdisciplinary feminist philosophy. In Beauvoir's thought, meaning is given through the projects we set for ourselves, in intersubjective context. Daigle argues that Beauvoir's autobiographical and literary writing embodies this feminist methodology of self-creation, and that such writing is a source of insight into "multi-faceted, historical, embodied" human life. Like Verhage, Daigle argues that pure and systematic philosophy is not possible without suppressing the embodied complexity and variety of life, and argues for an expanded conception of feminist philosophical practice that centers creative and activist work.

Ada Jaarsma's chapter uses the Kierkegaardian concept of "leveling"--mathematical abstraction from the individual that she identifies with statistical reasoning--to understand the ways in which cancer patients come to lack solidarity, and to focus on individual medical treatments as opposed to collective investigations into the environmental causes of cancer. Jaarsma argues that "leveling" not only renders cancer patients compliant but is more generally responsible for the fact "that individuals themselves uphold the very ideological scripts that undermine their own and others' freedom." Curiously, Jaarsma's arguments sometimes rely on statistics, as does the epidemiological research she advocates for. Jaarsma softens her stance toward statistical reasoning in the last section, arguing that the real source of bad faith in leveling is that it is used specifically to evade anxiety. Like Barbara Ehrenreich's "Welcome to Cancerland," Jaarsma's work is effective as an indictment of insistently optimistic, pink-ribboned "cancer warrior" culture; it is less persuasive as an indictment of statistical "leveling" itself.

The last section of *Feminist Philosophies of Life*, entitled "Precarious Lives" in an homage to Butler, is especially lively and illuminating, as it engages directly with controversial social issues.

Lisa Guenther, who has been working on mass incarceration for many years as a philosopher, teacher, and activist, addresses the coerced sterilization of women within California prisons. The example enables Guenther to analyze the connections among American eugenics, mass incarceration, and reproductive justice. True to the engaged and holistic approach of feminist philosophies of life, Guenther's expansive definition of reproductive capacities includes not only pregnancy, birth, and insemination, but also the "physical growth of a child, and also the social capacity to raise a family and to reproduce certain ways of being" (265); the latter are what she calls "social reproduction." By analyzing the ways in which mass incarceration and criminalization coerce women into sterilization, separate families, and compel children into foster care, Guenther draws out the ways in which mass incarceration is inimical to both biological and social reproduction. Guenther is able to place these practices squarely within the tradition of American eugenics. Guenther's argument is cogent and utterly compelling, and I hope that it will be widely read among scholars and in classes addressing reproductive rights, mass incarceration, and racial justice.

Continuing the theme of reproductive justice, Shannon Dea contributes something wonderful and surprising: a new perspective on the entrenched and calcified debate over the morality of abortion. Dea points out that--as anyone concerned with the moral considerability of nonhuman animals or of the environment well knows--fetuses may be morally considerable without being persons. Dea calls for a "harm reduction" approach to abortion, arguing that we should concern ourselves with the lives and suffering of both women and fetuses, "and that such concern is consistent with the view that abortions ought to be safe and accessible" (290) because safe and legal abortion effectively minimizes harms for all concerned. Dea's article is strongly argued, and by grounding her argument in the well-established public health paradigm of harm reduction, she provides a refreshingly practical and evidence-based approach. Her article would be a good fit for humanities classes discussing abortion and morality, but also for classes in public health or public policy. I look forward to teaching it in my moral philosophy classes in the future.

I am glad to see the issue of missing Aboriginal women taken up in this volume. Jane Barter Moulaison argues that this violence cannot be understood in isolation but rather as the "biopower through which the missing women were violated not only by their assailants, but also through their abandonment by the colonial society itself" (309). Moulaison is concerned with a question that is both methodological and political: how to write and act in ways that resist this violence. She looks to the families of the missing women, whose activism shows that

witness is a political act of re-narration of their identities. Such work is done, I argue, both by protesting ascriptions of their identity that would link them to what philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life" (life outside the realm of political activity and speech), but also by re-narrating their identities as Aboriginal women, women who deserve to be "remembered"--not only within their households, but also within settler colonial consciousness in Canada, and particularly, the juridical system. (311)

Where Christine Daigle argues within this volume that the act of autobiography is one that projects ourselves and others into the world as meaningful and free, the narrative act for Moulaison is specifically situated as an act of resistance to colonial violence and erasure.

Stephanie Jenkins's article aims to find a "third way" between the competing medical and social models of disability. Jenkins argues that there are shortcomings within each model, and makes a pointed critique of the social model's implicit reliance on a nature/culture dichotomy. Jenkins argues for a more radical approach to disability that will unsettle "essentialist conceptions of the human" (262) and our frames of moral considerability. Although Jenkins is utterly persuasive in arguing for the necessity of such an approach, she does not offer much specific or practical guidance.

Finally, Sharp asks if the critique of the anthropocene era must presuppose a kind of humanism. In response to Claire Colebrook's argument that climate change cannot be adequately addressed within the framework of posthumanism, Sharp argues that ecological destruction is "better understood as exposing the manly project of mastery as a failure" (329). In the last chapter of the book, Sharp argues that feminist philosophy, and posthumanism specifically, must develop pointed, integrated critiques of capitalism and environmental degradation--critiques that cannot be found in Cartesian humanism. Although Sharp's response to Colebrook is persuasive and her call to preserve the planet from mass extinction is powerfully written, the narrow framing of her argument--an academic debate over the salience of a canonical Western philosopher to conceptions of environmental justice--is a rather abstruse point on which to end a volume that stretches the borders of feminist philosophy so far beyond academic debate and the Western canon. The essay might have been more at home in an earlier section of the book.

The essays in this volume are illuminating and wide-ranging, and they are exceptionally clear in their commitment to feminist political action. Together, they draw a portrait of feminist philosophy of life as a lively and potentially transformative area in feminist thought. Daigle and Verhage argue that feminist philosophy must be practiced through activism; Guenther's, Dea's and Moulaison's contributions follow this line of thought by taking on specific social and political issues directly concerned with gender, race, class, and colonialism. This book is not only a wide-ranging introduction to feminist philosophies of life, but an inspiration to philosophy as a practice of political engagement.