

St. Catherine University

From the Selected Works of Colleen Carpenter

September, 2016

Enfolding Violence, Unfolding Hope: Emerging Clouds of Possibility for Women in Roman Catholicism

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/colleen-carpenter/4/>

Zygon[®]

Journal of
RELIGION & SCIENCE



SEPTEMBER 2016

VOLUME 51 NUMBER 3

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Catherine Keller's Cloud of the Impossible: A Symposium

with Kirk Wegter-McNelly, "Religious Hypotheses and the Apophatic, Relational Theology of Catherine Keller"; Carol Wayne White, "Aporetic Possibilities in Catherine Keller's Cloud of the Impossible"; Donovan O. Schaefer, "The Fault in Us: Ethics, Infinity, and Celestial Bodies"; Colleen Mary Carpenter, "Enfolding Violence, Unfolding Hope: Emerging Clouds of Possibility for Women in Roman Catholicism"; and Catherine Keller, "Theology, Science, and Cloud of the Impossible."

ENFOLDING VIOLENCE, UNFOLDING HOPE: EMERGING CLOUDS OF POSSIBILITY FOR WOMEN IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM

by Colleen Mary Carpenter

Abstract. In an effort to think through possible impossibilities, and enfold current problems within Catholicism into the luminous darkness of the cloud of the im/possible, this response to Catherine Keller's *Cloud of the Impossible* considers what might happen should Keller's cloud of mindful unknowing and nonseparable difference billow over and through one particular Catholic conundrum: how to respond to the terrifying reality of domestic violence in the context of a marriage defined as indissoluble, imperishable—inescapable.

Keywords: Catholicism; domestic violence; indissolubility; Catherine Keller; women

It is perhaps not surprising that the mystery and ecstasy, the humble unknowing and the dizzying nonseparability, the overwhelming light and the luminous darkness described by Catholic mystics is not in fact part of the experience of everyday Catholics. Instead of contemplating the contradictions and complications of a relentlessly unknowable Infinity, the majority of Catholics embrace a quite knowable faith: there is the Catechism; there are rules; and there are answers. Hence the surprise and shock that greeted Pope Francis's famous question, "Who am I to judge?" One can almost hear the stunned, even angry, response: "Who are you? You're

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the Pope! Go ahead, judges; we need to know where we stand—and where those people over there stand, too." Knowing where we stand, of course, can be deeply comforting—especially when we are also quite certain about where we stand with respect to someone else. Yet the mystics refuse to offer us this comfort: standing with them feels far closer to tumbling through utterly insubstantial clouds than to standing on solid ground.

In *Cloud of the Impossible*, Catherine Keller stands with Nicholas of Cusa, Alfred North Whitehead, Walt Whitman, and Judith Butler (among a cloud/crowd of other philosophers, scientists, mystics, dreamers, and poets) in order to entangle the reader in a theology of possible impossibility and indeterminate intimacy. Her exploration of knowing and not-knowing, of difference and (non)separability, and of clouds and cosmology, enfolds philosophy, theology, physics, and poetry, and unfolds a vision of entangled connections and oppositions, a veritable perichoresis of possibilities. The book is dizzying, delightful, and demanding; it is also (at least for me, as a Roman Catholic feminist theologian) a deeply frustrating reminder of what is not possible in my church today. Of course, I'm fairly certain that seeing only the impossible and sinking under its weight means that I have missed the point entirely. In an effort, then, to think through possible impossibilities, and unfold current problems within Catholicism into the luminous darkness of the cloud of the im/possible, I would like to imagine what might happen should Keller's *Cloud* billow over and through one particular Catholic conundrum: how to respond to the terrifying reality of domestic violence in the context of a marriage defined as indissoluble, imperishable—inescapable.

Keller does not explicitly address this particular issue in her book, and yet it is also true that her understanding of apophatic entanglement and the demands it places on us in terms of understanding and engaging with the relationships that give shape to our lives leads directly to an approach to this impasse that gives me new hope for how the Church might engage its followers in cultivating faithful practices of discipleship in the midst of difficult (that is, ridiculously common, even everyday) situations. Keller describes what is involved in "discerning a threefold alter-knowing" for a theory/theology that folds in and out of practice, and it is this *discernment*, and this threefold *alter-knowing*, that I believe can make a difference in this situation (and, of course, in many others) (Keller 2015, 27). The practice of *discernment* has a long and rich history within Catholic spirituality—although it is often associated with and even limited to the spiritually "advanced," including the ordained (men) and explicitly excluding women, whose spiritual experiences, as Sidney Callahan reminds us in *Women Who Hear Voices*, are often suspect (Callahan 2003, 7–11, 25, 28). Similarly, *knowledge* (of God, of the world, of truth) is not, historically, associated with women, who were excluded not just from theological training but from almost all higher education well into the

nineteenth century. But Keller's description of alter-knowing points us towards an alter-practice that may well open new doors for contemporary theology and theologians—and for women trapped in the theological-spiritual-physical-practical tangle of a violent marriage. The three aspects of such alter-knowing, which fold and unfold around and between us, enfolding creative and constructive engagement with a particular reality, are "mindful nonknowing . . . constituent relationality . . . [and] manifold justice" (Keller 2015, 27). Each of these will appear in the following discussion, and the origami of their engagement will shape the possibilities for both discernment and action.

The tangle of issues surrounding women, violence, and Catholic teaching can be approached in a distant, emotionless, resolutely rational manner, focusing on history, doctrine, inadequate or misguided interpretation, and unfortunate though understandably inescapable events—but this bloodless knowing is nothing short of wildly misleading. Should one pursue an alter-knowing of the same tangle of issues, then one must begin not with ideas but with human beings, and indeed not with an objective separation between scholar and research but with an appreciation and understanding of the complex, confounding, constituent relationality that binds them together. In pursuit of this alter-knowing, the scholar is not charged with untangling the knot but with demonstrating its connection to other knots, other tangles—and to recognizing her place in the midst of it all. For me, this has meant confronting the fact that the tangle I am sorting through is not simply about anonymous "women" confronting unspecified "violence" related to generic "Catholic teaching," but instead is inescapably about the particular women that I have come to know in my classroom: *my students* are among those entangled by teachings that demean and by actions that leave them bruised and bleeding.

I teach at St. Catherine University, one of the few remaining women's colleges in the United States. Before arriving at St. Kate's ten years ago, I had certainly studied enough feminist history and theology to know perfectly well that violence against women was a pervasive reality—but I had never confronted it in person. I still thought of connection and relationship as key *positive* elements of feminist reflection: I had not bothered to consider that connection—entanglement—can be suffocating, even deadly; I slid past the fact that a web of relationships can entrap a person, holding her fast in strong, sticky threads. The first time a student came to me to talk about being raped, I was shocked and overwhelmed; the first time I got an email from a student saying that she couldn't come to class the next day because her ex-boyfriend, who had promised to kill her, had just gotten out of prison and her family was insisting that she come home until they could figure out how to deal with this, I was stunned. I am no longer surprised: I have conversations like this with my students every semester. I now see faces instead of numbers when I read the statistics put out by the

U.S. Department of Justice (National Network to End Domestic Violence 2004), stating that approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the United States every year, and one in four women experiences rape and/or physical assault by an intimate partner at some point during her life (Thaden and Thoennes 2000, iii). But I was still new at St. Kate's when the following incident took place; it unfolded in my classroom as a complete surprise. I have been reconsidering what happened since reading *Cloud of the Impossible*, and while I always knew it was a remarkable experience, I have begun to think that what I witnessed was not simply a significant practical discussion of embodied ethics, but far more than that: it was, I believe now, a deeply theological consideration of "the presence of holiness in the flesh of ordinary existence" (Keller 2015, 5).

It was late in the semester, nearly the last class. It was a weekend class, which means adult returning students, women in their 20s and 30s and 40s, trying to finish a degree that had gotten lost along the way, or trying to find a new way forward in their lives. We were reading Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*, and the topic for this particular class session was his chapter on the moral necessity of telling the truth, no matter what it costs. Thurman acknowledges that deception has always been a useful tool for those whose backs are against the wall—it enables people to fight back against their oppressors in small ways when the situation is such that fighting back openly is not possible. But he goes on to say that while yes, it seems to work; and yes, it can feel really good . . . ultimately, it's the wrong choice to make. And it's the wrong choice because *choosing* to lie will ultimately lead to *becoming* a lie; telling lies, even in the service of standing up against evil, is ultimately self-destructive. He's very clear: telling the truth may well get you killed. But do it anyway, he says: it's the only way to preserve your integrity, to maintain your own sense of dignity (Thurman [1949]1996, 58–73, esp. 70).

I usually open this discussion by taking the contrary position, saying that this sounds quite noble and all, but surely there are times when it is right to lie, when lying is good and right and necessary. Thurman's gone too far, hasn't he? And invariably someone agrees, and usually brings up the Nazis at the door with a Jewish family hiding upstairs. But on this particular day, when I challenged my students to come up with a situation in which lying was the right thing to do, no one said anything. I waited for a bit, and then someone finally spoke up: "You should lie," she said slowly; "if you know he'll hit you if you tell the truth." And as I was struggling to find something—anything—to say in response, I heard another voice from the back of the room: "Tell the truth. He's going to hit you anyway."

What followed was perhaps the most incredible hour of class I have ever been privileged to experience. Twenty women spoke about what it was like to face violence—from their husbands, or from other family members, or

in their neighborhood, or in the country they fled before coming to the United States. Everyone had something to say, even the women who hadn't said a word all semester. They spoke passionately about the struggles they faced trying to make loving choices, to protect their children, to protect themselves, and to find ways to teach their children about love instead of hate and anger. The courage and honesty on display were astonishing. Some admitted to not knowing what to do about a particular situation; others offered their own stories in response—gently, generously, not with the demand that her classmate do the same but simply with the hope that her classmate might find a new idea, a new perspective, or at the very least a sense of not being alone.

These women were clearly doing everything in their power to find the right way forward in complex and difficult situations. Their knowing (of their own lives, of the particularities of the situation within which they were working) was deep and rich; their unknowing (of the "right" answers) was fiercely honest, painfully raw, and humbly, generously open. How do you live with dignity in the face of violence? *I wanted us to be a family, but I had to get them away from him*. Do you really forgive your abuser seventy times seven times, or is that just suicide? *This is what I chose; I am still not sure if I did the right thing*. When you forgive, are you modeling Christ to your children, or teaching them that violence is a normal and acceptable part of family life? *This isn't what I wanted; I never thought I'd be here; I did the best I could*. How does one discern how to respond to violence in a way that is loving, forgiving—and preserves one's own dignity and self-worth? *I will not teach my children to hate; I will not let him win*. Thurman's ideas about truth and deception surfaced repeatedly—as did his words about fear, about hatred, and about love. Not everyone agreed with his prescriptions—but it was also clear that engaging with him, and responding to his challenges, enabled the students to articulate their choices and decisions in ways they hadn't quite thought through before. Their knowing and unknowing and unknowing took shape in their give and take with one another; their understanding of themselves not simply as individual actors but as parts of a relational whole (with their children, parents, siblings, spouse, or others) was evident in both how they saw their power to influence others and their powerlessness to be completely free of others; their commitment to justice for themselves and their children was at the center of everything.

With that conversation in mind—the discernment in action among women who mindfully wrestled with the "wounded and amorous relationality" at the center of their lives (Keller 2015, 37), I'd like to turn to the problem of Catholic marriage and domestic violence. A Catholic woman in a violent marriage often ends up not just in physical danger but also in spiritual crisis because of the conflict between the realities of her dangerous (and potentially life-threatening) marriage and the requirements of

current Catholic teaching. Many Catholics assume that the indissolubility of marriage trumps all other considerations: you're married; you're married forever; if violence is a part of your marriage, so be it. Perhaps it's God's will; perhaps this is your cross to bear. As one woman explained her situation:

Doing God's will means being kind to my neighbors no matter what it takes, following the Ten Commandments to the best of my ability and then some. And loving my husband, loving other people, basically the love thing. No matter what. That's what God basically wants. My husband has stolen from me. My husband has beaten me, and I still love my husband unconditionally (Reimer-Barry 2007, 130).

Such an attitude is perhaps unusual today, but it is not, in some ways, particularly surprising. Many Catholic women see it as a religious duty to stay married no matter what; many priests have told abused women to return to their abusers. However, in recent years there has been a significant change: it is now widely accepted by Catholic laypeople and explicitly taught by priests and bishops that no one has an obligation to remain in a violent marriage. In their 2002 pastoral letter, "When I Cry for Help," the U.S. Catholic Bishops state clearly:

[V]iolence against women, inside or outside the home, is *never* justified. Violence in any form—physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal—is sinful; often, it is a crime as well. . . . Finally, we emphasize that no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. Some abused women believe that church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Church. Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage (USCCB 2002).

This is an enormous step forward—a dramatic pastoral change. Significantly, "When I Call for Help" even includes specific suggestions for pastors on how to make the parish not just a safe place where abused women can come for help, but a place where domestic violence is publicly named and condemned as sinful. The bishops suggest using liturgies to "draw attention to violence and abuse," pointing out that "just a mention of domestic violence [in a homily] lets abused women know that someone cares." Even more significant in terms of discernment, the bishops recommend "describe[ing] what abuse is [in homilies] so that women begin to recognize and name what is happening to them" (USCCB 2002). Here the role of the Church is not to prescribe/proscribe a particular course of action, but to aid laypeople (especially, though not exclusively, women) in discernment—in interpreting, understanding, and responding to the particularities of their own lives. Here is an alter-knowing that is utterly unlike centuries of Christian understanding of (avoidance of) domestic violence: The Church is mindful of what it does not know about particular marriages, and of what women themselves might not know/understand

about their own experience; the complex relationships joining and binding church ministers, abused spouses, abusers, children of violent marriages, friends and family members and indeed the rest of the community are acknowledged in the suggestion that the liturgy is a key place to address violence; and the call for justice is heard in the push for each parish to become a place of safety, and a place where violence is named, confronted, and condemned.

Interestingly, this alter-knowing of domestic violence is shaped by the limitations of what can be known about the best way to respond to a given abusive situation. "When I Call for Help" is a document that recognizes the limited, background role of the priest (or other representative or minister of the Church), and further recognizes that there is no simple, "one-size-fits-all" response to abuse. The unknown inherent in the situation is emphasized; the church minister—who is almost certainly used to assuming authority, knowledge, and power in pastoral situations—is reminded that he is in a situation where being the expert-in-charge is not at all appropriate and indeed could well be harmful. The document sets out the role of priests, deacons, and lay ministers in responding to abuse as one in which they are to "Listen to and believe the victim's story; Help her to assess the danger to herself and her children; and refer her to counseling and other specialized services" (USCCB 2002). The victim of domestic violence is seen here as a moral agent who needs support in the difficult choices that lie ahead—the church minister is not there to "save" her, or provide simple answers, but to offer concrete help as *the woman herself discerns how she wants to respond to her particular situation*. The fact that the "right" response to such a situation is not easily nor definitively knowable is emphasized by the pointed reminder that leaving her abuser significantly increases a battered woman's risk of being killed—meaning that a choice that may well be life-saving in some cases can be deadly in others. The risks involved in confronting or attempting to escape an abusive marriage are not just mentioned but highlighted in the text, followed by this important statement: "*Ultimately, abused women must make their own decisions about staying or leaving*" (USCCB 2002; italics in original). With these words, the Church is taking a step back, ceding choice/authority/power to the woman at the center of the situation, and recognizing that "the right thing to do" is a prudential judgment not strictly knowable by an outsider.

Beyond this (already significant) recognition of the knowable uncertainty involved in responding to violence, "When I Call for Help" even suggests that the Church's mindful nonknowing with respect to an abusive marriage does and must extend to whether or not the relationship is irretrievably broken. Restoration of the relationship is recommended *if possible*—and if that is not possible, then the minister's task is to accompany the woman in mourning the loss of the relationship (USCCB 2002). This recognition that not all relationships can be repaired is helpful especially

to those women who have assumed that their Catholic faith means that they cannot leave, or that leaving would make them the guilty party who destroyed the marriage. The bishops recognize that this misunderstanding must be confronted head-on, and thus they say quite clearly, "The person being assaulted needs to know that acting to end the abuse does not violate the marriage promises . . . violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage" (USCCB 2002).

And yet, despite the bishops' turn towards recognizing an abused woman's competence and responsibility to discern her own way forward, problems still remain. Leaving an abusive marriage is one thing; ending it is another, and the Catholic Church insists that ending a valid marriage is not possible. Catholic teaching on the indissolubility of marriage allows for the legitimacy of the physical separation of spouses in some circumstances, but nothing more than that. In the eyes of the Church, the marriage still exists, even if the spouses go through a legal (civil) divorce. Without an annulment (and it is far from certain that one could be granted, because violence and abuse are not canonical grounds for declaring a marriage invalid), a woman is still joined to her abuser by the indissoluble bond of marriage. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

There are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation. The Christian community is called to help these persons live out their situation in a Christian manner and in fidelity to their marriage bond which remains indissoluble (Catechism 1995, 1649).

This understanding of indissolubility, based on a particular (and not incontestable) interpretation of Scripture, sacrament, and law, ignores and indeed runs roughshod over both mercy and justice. Mercy would free an abused woman from the shackles of a destructive and potentially deadly relationship whose core promise to love and honor has been betrayed and broken by her husband; justice demands—at minimum—that the abuser be removed from further opportunity to harm her. Both of these are thwarted in the Catechism's understanding of violence and marriage—or rather, in its construction of a particular idea of marriage in defiance of any engaged/embodied understanding of violence. And it is not simply that mercy is lacking and justice denied—more than that, there is a particular cruelty in insisting on the indissolubility of a marriage destroyed by domestic violence. Not only does it seem heartless to require that someone who has only known damaging and distorted love can never even hope to experience a love that is healthy and life-giving, but indissolubility in this situation is cruel in that it actively works against what we now understand

about recovery from the profound psychological damage done by domestic violence. In many cases, domestic violence is experienced as "prolonged, repeated trauma . . . [which] creates a special type of relationship, one of coercive control" (Herman 1992, 74). As psychiatrist and trauma specialist Judith Herman explains:

The methods of establishing control over another person are based upon the systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection. Methods of psychological control are designed to instill terror and helplessness and to destroy the victim's sense of self in relation to others. Although violence is a universal method of terror, the perpetrator may use violence infrequently, as a last resort. It is not necessary to use violence often to keep the victim in a constant state of fear. The threat of death or serious harm is much more frequent than the actual resort to violence. Threats against others are often as effective as direct threats against the women. Battered women, for example, frequently report that their abuser has threatened to kill their children, their parents, or any friends who harbor them, should they attempt to escape. (Herman 77)

Recovering from the trauma of a relationship of coercive control is a long, difficult process. For the Church to insist, as a woman attempts to negotiate this process and reconstitute her life (and indeed, her very "sense of self"), that she is *bound by God forever to her abuser in a relationship of faithfulness to him* is, simply, horrifying. It is an insistence that the abuser still gets to control her life—and as such it is a participation in his abuse. It is utterly and completely wrong. Contrast this understanding of indissolubility with Keller's description of self-implicating nonseparability: "The folds of past are unfolded and refolded in relation to the possibilities of future. This does not expunge any entanglement. But it *unmarks the knots that render entanglement a captivity and relationship a trap*" (Keller 2015, 288; italics in original). Here the idea of connection/entanglement is not abandoned—with respect to a marriage, the bond is not dismissed as unimportant, fragile, or meaningless—and yet the *possibilities of the future* remain open. Indissolubility definitively shuts down any possibility of newness in the future; nonseparability recognizes the reality of human connection, even vowed connection, while making the im/possible claim that entanglement does not and cannot preclude freedom, newness, and hope. Such an understanding of the limits of relationality is not an abandonment of the reality of nonseparability, "but an emancipation of mystery from mystification" (Keller 2015, 288).

Rather than accept the slippery, uncertain cloudiness of unknowing and nonseparability, however, some might hold fast to solid, traditional, unclouded definitions. One might argue, in the case of an abusive marriage, that surely such a relationship was never a valid marriage in the first place; surely an annulment is possible. [Surely we do not need to cede the

definition of marriage to the discernment of women; surely the laws and structures already in place—if interpreted properly—are sufficient to deal even with our contemporary understanding of domestic violence; surely there is a limit to the nonknowing we have to face.] Perhaps, perhaps not. The presence of violence in a marriage is not enough to make a marriage invalid; rather, there has to be some defect present from the very beginning. What if the violence didn't begin until after the wedding? Must one then somehow "prove" that the perpetrator was psychologically incapable of entering into a marriage, that his later violence should be seen as evidence of pre-existing psychopathology? Those who have studied trauma victims and their abusers note that "little is known about the mind of the perpetrator. . . . His most consistent feature, in both the testimony of victims and the observations of psychologists, is his apparent normality. Ordinary concepts of psychopathology fail to define or comprehend him" (Herman 1992: 75). How, then, does one prove that a pathology exists—or that it began before the wedding—when it is impossible to define such a pathology in the first place?

In the end, looking to the annulment process as a way to deal with abusive marriages is the wrong path to take, and not just because proving a psychological impediment to a marriage destroyed by abuse may well be impossible. Seeking an annulment after escaping an abusive marriage means, in the end, that a woman is *relying on other people* to make a legal judgment about what happened to her, and how she ought to move forward in her life. Given the complex reality of trauma, and the importance of the *re-establishment of one's compromised autonomy* in the recovery from trauma, it is clear that putting one's future in someone else's hands is exactly the wrong thing to do. Thus the status of an abusive marriage (has it been irretrievably damaged, or is there still hope for some sort of renewal?) should not be an issue of church law, but should instead be recognized as an issue of discernment—which the Church can and should aid in, but whose resolution ultimately rests with the traumatized and recovering woman.

Which leads me back to my classroom, and the discussion that took place around Howard Thurman's challenge to the Christian reader that discipleship requires always telling the truth. My students saw that as a legitimate demand—and yet one that might or might not apply in their own lives. Their own free decision, not a demand or a law imposed from without, was central to their understanding of themselves as women of integrity. Moreover, they were willing to explore the possibility that their first response to the demand for truth might well be wrong; they listened to their classmates: they engaged in the hard work of discernment. In their work with one another that day, and in the choices they had already made, the question "How shall we greet the unknown before us?" (Keller 2015, 286) confronted them, challenged them—and called them to new

understandings of "questionable love" (Keller 2015, 288), new ways to live in the beclouded gap between nonknowing and acting in the here and now.

Where that gap has been shaped/ripped open/pushed apart by the trauma of domestic violence, the Church has recognized that it is important to support a woman's work of discernment around the issue of how to protect herself—whether or not to leave (temporarily or permanently), whether or not to decide to divorce her abuser. "When I Call for Help" structures the Church's role in such a case as a resource, a support—but not as decision maker. If this is true for discerning the first step in dealing with domestic violence (i.e., ending the violence), it can be—should be—equally true in the next step, that is, in a woman's work to recover from that violence. Insisting on the legal process of annulment, or a legal definition of indissolubility or consent or sacrament is *not useful here*, and is instead actively harmful. Women need resources to help them discern how to move forward in a life that has been forever shaped by violence; the Church could choose to find ways to be a support and resource here as well as at the earlier stage. I imagine here the Church as a guide, as an inspiration, as a creative source of possibilities that enable a woman to move towards personal, physical safety while at the same time moving towards a deeper, richer experience of discipleship. I dream of a Church that humbly recognizes the im/possibility inherent in violent, sinful situations (all human situations), and that does not respond with LED-bright definitions and proclamations that attempt to banish all shadows but instead with candle-soft stories and poetry that help illuminate the cloudy darkness within which we live and move and have our being.

Women—my students—face violence all the time. They recognize how difficult it is to respond in a way that honors God, honors themselves, honors their commitments to others; they work to enfold the violence that breaks into their lives into a wider narrative of responsive, questioning, questionable, questing love. Their choices take shape as strength unfolds in and through weakness and refolds back again; as creative decisions fold over crushing mistakes; and as their courage enfolds their entangled relationships in "trembling hospitality" (Keller 2015, 302). "*How shall we greet the unknown before us?*" they ask; "*How then shall we live?*" And I have heard them answer, again and again, in the classroom and in my office, at school and at home, in determination and in generosity, in anger and in hope, and always with wild surprising dazzling unending beauty: *with all my heart with all my heart with all my heart*.

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Catherine Keller's Cloud of the Impossible: A Symposium

with Kirk Wæger-McNelly, "Religious Hypotheses and the Apophatic, Relational Theology of Catherine Keller"; Carol Wayne White, "Aporetic Possibilities in Catherine Keller's Cloud of the Impossible"; Donovan O. Schaefer, "The Fault in Us: Ethics, Infinity, and Celestial Bodies"; Colleen Mary Carpenter, "Enfolding Violence, Unfolding Hope: Emerging Clouds of Possibility for Women in Roman Catholicism"; and Catherine Keller, "Theology, Science, and Cloud of the Impossible."

THEOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND CLOUD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

by Catherine Keller

Abstract. As a work of constructive theology attentive to the deconstructive edge of theology itself, *Cloud of the Impossible* offers a contemplative space for fresh transdisciplinary encounters. The ancient apophatic practice (of "unsaying," *docta ignorantia*) here fosters a knowledge tuned to its own currently indeterminate edges. The present conversation surfaces issues of religion in relation to both science and ethics. It effects a multilateral advance in thinking the "apophatic entanglement" by which a relational ontology, with its attention to the materiality of our fragile planetary interdependence, is intensified through a theology of disciplined uncertainty.

Keywords: Karen Barad; *Cloud of the Impossible*; cosmology; Nicholas of Cusa; ecology; feminist ethics; mysticism; pantheism; quantum entanglement; relationality

A COSMOLOGICAL COINCIDENTIA

Cloud of the Impossible caught its name from a fifteenth century meditation on the contradictory tensions in our own thinking—points of high pressure that cannot be resolved by simply rejecting one term or its opposite. A disciplined attention to our own incomprehension must come into play. With his notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum* the theologian Nicholas of Cusa was not however counseling a pious acceptance of mystery, but a risky press into the rolling darkness, a courage of complexification. Only

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so might a luminous insight break through, might a third place spring momentarily open. "Hence, I experience how necessary it is for me to enter into the cloud and to admit the coincidence of opposites, above all capacity for reason, and to seek there the truth where impossibility confronts me" (Nicholas of Cusa 1997, *De Visio Dei*; see Keller 2015, 99).

For many readers of *Zygon* there is surely no binary opposition more in need of confrontation than that between science and religion. It lurks behind every break down of communication *vis-à-vis* reason and faith, realism and fantasy, the secular and the religious, old or new atheism vs any age of theology, and so on. So it does not confine itself to academic symposia or methodological presumptions but fuels vast public antagonisms, as in, per exemplum, the politics of Islamophobia ("only secularism permits democracy!") or on the other side, U.S. religious denial of climate change ("secularism's front for world government!"). And so the long-term conversation of religion and science can and often does work disarmingly, pluralistically, even counter-apocalyptically, through particular and so relationally possible analyses. Its practice of a highly focused interdisciplinarity has fostered the critical and constructive coinciding of what culturally has verged on impossibility.

Nicholas of Cusa's "cloud of the impossible" invokes the whole lineage of negative theology—from the medieval *Cloud of Unknowing* back to the third century mystical reading of Moses' encounter with God "in the dark cloud" (Gregory of Nyssa; see Keller 2015, Chapter 2). This is a theology of profound not-knowing, or more precisely, of *knowing ignorance: docta ignorantia*, knowing where your knowledge fades out and darkness begins. In other words it is an early Renaissance rendition of the mysticism of "saying away," *apophasis*, in contrast to the *kataphasis*, the saying, of theological propositions as the truth. But would Cusa even recognize his cloud amidst the struggles and illuminations of settled current religion—science interdiscipline?

Without a moment's hesitation. In terms of the relation of *scientia* to *theologia*, I read the Cusan method as the way not taken by modernity, a tragically lost opportunity. I have to admit that I—like most scholars either of religion or of science—was clueless that Nicholas of Cusa had already figured out that the Earth is neither fixed nor the center of the universe. I had thought that was Copernicus and Galileo in the next century. No. They did the measurements and provided mathematical models. And Cusa had wasted no time with the idea of a heliocentric universe, but postulated an acentric one. For there can be no physical center of a universe made in the likeness of the infinite, the boundless: it takes a perimeter to have a center. I was already susceptible to Cusa's negative theology—where "the precise truth shines forth incomprehensibly in the darkness of our knowing," where the One is not opposed to multiplicity but unfolds "in and as" it (Keller 2015, 92). But the realization that he was way ahead

of anyone else in terms of this concrete, cosmological, indeed scientific knowledge: this took me off guard. It was the rigorous humility of his unknowing that opened him—beyond scholastic certainties—to what was cosmologically then considered an impossibility: the Earth as a mobile speck within a "contractedly infinite" universe (or indeed multiverse, as Mary Jane Rubenstein reads him in *Worlds Without End* [2014, 78ff.]).

In other words, without attention to what we do *not* know, a breakthrough in knowledge remains impossible. My *Cloud of the Impossible*, however, is not about Cusa. He is for this book the pivotal ancestor, because he accomplished a crossover in thinking that I argue we need *now*: that between nonknowing and nonseparability, between a mystical apophysis and a cosmological relationality. And he does it in the same line of thinking by which he unfolds a new sense of the universe: the infinity of divinity, which is by definition unknowable in finite language, unfolds in the multiplicity of finitudes. As all things are in it and it is in all things, so all things are—through the universe—in each other. This is a panentheism that, far more than its mystical antecedents, takes the material multiplicity of the *pan* seriously (in this anticipating process theology). The crossover becomes critical now in new ways: apophatic theology can minister to the loss of God. Undoing propositional God-certainties, it also eludes the negative certainty of atheism. It lets us sit with "the incertitude of the void" (Joyce [1922] 2016, 1015).

APOPHATIC ENTANGLEMENT

Nor can *Cloud* claim to be "about" science. Indeed I do not offer deep credentials in the science–religion interchange, which is a highly specialized conversation with its own discursive communities and archives. My early study of Whiteheadian cosmology and involvement in the process theological network did layer into me the importance for theology and for ecology of this interdiscipline; and my *Face of the Deep* did have its chapter on complexity and chaos theory as interpretive of the creation from chaos (the *creatio ex profundis* as an alternative to the *creatio ex nihilo*.) The feminist relationalism that drove me into theology in the first place could not, cannot abstain from serious engagements with the meaning of *matter*—or else our bodies remain pawns in the zero-sum game with all that matters. Given, however, my one, admittedly long, chapter on quantum physics, "Spooky Entanglements," and given more broadly my preoccupation with theological cosmology, I am glad for the present symposium. Certainly my dawning awareness of the stunning implications of quantum nonlocality was a major instigator of the book's key metaphor, that of "apophatic entanglement." It performs its own *coincidentia oppositorum*, a kind of chiasmus between the ancient tradition of negative theology and current planetary materializations of relationalism.

The apophatically smudged entanglement unfolds across multiple, deeply disparate registers, wherein some interplay of a mindful unknowing and a rigorous, which is to say socially and ecologically responsible, attention to interdependence comes into play. For just where we are confronted by the unexpected, we encounter the uncertainty of relationship. It may take the form of quantum uncertainty, of economic contradictions, of religio-ethnic agonism, of ecological disaster. Apophatic entanglement will not solve our ecosocial problems for us. I do not know what, if anything, will. (Do you?) However, I hope it is a concept that empowers some imaginative risk-taking at the edge of the impossible, some instigation of wider and wilder coalitions.

Such cooperative movements will not sustain themselves without fresh and emergent coalescences of the dialogue between science and religion. The practicality of such conversation becomes clear, for instance—to pluck a text in sight as I write—in Philip Clayton's solicitation of "the interconnectedness at the microphysical level (waves, fields, plasma clouds, etc.)," as "far greater than classical physics ever imagined," within the context of a book that in its highly successful Chinese version is stirring a new line of approach to "ecological civilization" in the People's Republic (Clayton and Heinzkehr 2014, 146).

CLOUD EFFECTS

While my *Cloud* as a text will not drift far beyond a scholarly readership, I hope its effects upon constructive theological speech *do*. It remains deconstructively self-questioning in its Christianity, but concludes with a shameless avowal of the entangling second testament love teaching. Apophatic entanglement is of course worth *speaking* only if it can address, and help others to address, the unspeakable horrors of past and coming history. So perhaps this is why I have long preferred the strategy of a *transdisciplinary* theological conversation to mere interdisciplinary. Transdisciplinarity in this retains a methodological kinship to religion itself, which involves always its own subjective, social, and cosmic participation. It works then in the interest not just of conversation but of *transformation*. If it sometimes transgresses the boundaries of any particular discipline, and so, perhaps, of a more constrained exchange between disciplines, it is to heighten *interdisciplinary* attention to sociality, ecology, and ethics.

Such transdisciplinarity comes through beautifully in the contributions of the four other scholars in this symposium. Each takes religion, differently, into a dense and urgently materializing force-field of reflection. When apophatic entanglement emerges from its interaction with this quartet of readers, it finds especially its method and its ethics clarified, indeed enhanced. Two of the essays lend welcome language to the discursive strategy that is at stake, first in the context of the tension of religion

and science in Kirk Wegter-McNelly's readings, and next in terms of a broader interplay of religion and naturalism in that of Carol Wayne White. The other two essays address the question of ethics. Donovan Schaefer worries about the chilling effect of quantum talk on attention to warm bodies. Colleen Carpenter delivers a case study in theological ethics, in which apophatic entanglement is applied to a set of acutely vulnerable bodies. These four readings together test the idea of the chiasmus of our nonknowing and our nonseparability.

APOPHASIS AND HYPOTHESIS

Or so I might have said before reading Kirk Wegter-McNelly's reflection, which argues persuasively for a distinction between the testability of scientific hypotheses and the relative *untestability* of faith. Might I nonetheless hold out for *some* sense of the testing, the trying of both the commitments of faith and the propositions of theology—experiential rather than empirical, yielding existential confirmation rather than experimental proof? But I accept with gratitude the sense of "religious hypotheses" that this distinction of testabilities lets Wegter-McNelly put into contrastive relation with scientific ones. He elegantly links the notion of hypothesis to the apophatic, and does it succinctly for both religion and science. This is a splendid move. It offers theology a strong concept for its own experiments in language; and this only works because at the same time it honors the margin of uncertainty that is the actual subject of scientific hypothesis. What is already known requires no hypothesis, yet a hypothesis is not mere ignorance—any more than it is simply knowledge. So in this context we might agree: hypothesis without apophasis is mere hype.

I welcome the following paraphrase he offers of apophatic entanglement: "To embrace a hypothesis as a hypothesis is to enter into a committed relationship with an idea, known and yet not known, for the sake of engaging the world and seeing it in a particular way" (Wegter-McNelly 2016, 761). One may argue that it is dangerous to speak of climate change as hypothesis rather than proven fact. Yet of course there is massive uncertainty as to the when and where and how much of the complex effects of global warming. Thus stereotypes of scientific knowledge as certainty are allowing the religio-economic right to deny climate change: they point to the uncertainty as proof that the science is wrong. And we see that just repeating the known facts, and its 97 percent consensus, does not do the trick. A heftier notion of hypothesis will improve public discussion, we might say. *Cloud* Chapter 9, "Broken Touch: Ecology of the Im/Possible," narrates the planetary entanglement that now threatens us with ecological apocalypse. Fortunately we may unfold *apokalypsis* in *apophasis*: doom is not certain.

Of course the feedback loops of the climate macrosystem seem distant from the quantum microcosm of entanglement itself. So let me confess

that Wegter-McNelly's important book, *Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (2011), which is the first systematic theological engagement of quantum nonlocality, was a boon to my engagement of physics. It performs its own im/possibility, made possible by his background in physics and yielding a doctrinally concentrated foreground. I lack both. Yet his more systematic theology meets religious uncertainty unflinchingly. I cannot help but set his wise comment on the "help my unbelief" of Mark's gospel next to James Joyce's rendition: "I believe, O lord, help my unbelief. That is, help me to believe or help me to unbelieve?" [Joyce [1922] 2016, 1078–79] Does the entangled God on occasion help us actively to unbelieve—to twist free from belief itself? Into just love? Just a hypothesis.

Wegter-McNelly concludes with a charming allusion to the "wish you were here" that paraphrases the medieval *Cloud of Unknowing*. The anonymous (suitably) author is responding to a question about what God is, what we can say about God: "I have no idea. For with your question you have brought me into that same darkness where I wish you were yourself" (Keller 2015, 84).

THE CLOUD THAT COULD

By a meaningful coincidence, Carol Wayne White's essay ends with its own allusion to that medieval cloud. She is considering how the more we know about the universe, the more we face "the absconded God who hides in a cloud of unknowing" (White 2016b, 779). White no more than I would launch the hypothesis of a God who plays hide and go seek with us. Indeed she does not pursue the God-hypothesis, either to advance or to repudiate it.

As a religious naturalist White pursues the alternative of a cosmological relationalism, setting forth nature as the sole reality. But unlike the "nature" of some forms of naturalism, White does not mistake natural reality for objects of exterior human observation. Nor does it ever lack for mystery. Indeed she wrote a book on the remarkable mystic and naturalist Anne Conway, the seventeenth century viscountess who sets forth a revolutionary vision of endless creaturely interrelation as a resistance to the triumph in her time of the Cartesian and Newtonian mechanists (White 2009). But now this author is addressing the possibility of a scientifically tuned and spiritually charged naturalism for our epoch. Indeed it realizes itself in her just published *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (White 2016a). Beyond presumptions of Black theism, her luminous naturalism exposes how the complex embodiment of the human has been masked by its diseased anthropocentrism, systemically coupled with racialization. Intriguingly, in confronting the depredations of the transcendental signifier "human," she offers a new humanism. Even

if I might not risk that noun, I understand the dangers of losing its best potentiality in pursuit of mechanical or animal natures.

I am gratified that Carol Wayne White finds in the *Cloud* the sort of solidarity in thought and in materialization for which it had been written. I hope that in its resonance with her own unfolding work, the religious depths and the scientific rigors required for ethical transformation will be further stimulated. The mattering of Black lives, of nonhuman lives, of all the planetary collectives of humanly, economically, sexually, ecologically vulnerable lives, demands of us new kinds of creativity as well as action. Impossibility is no excuse to evade the work of White's radically relational "sacred humanity." I wish however I had thought of her anagram of *cloud* and *could*. It teases out old Cusa's *posse ipsum*, the possibility itself which is the "can do," the last name for "God," an infinite that does not do for us or to us but is the possibility of what we *could* yet do (Keller 2015, 47–48). Impossible though it seems.

TANGLES OF DIFFERENCE

For Donovan Schaefer, however, "the infinite need not apply." For the job of ethicist, that is. I would agree, but only because I notice the infinite always already there. Not as the engine of human ethics but as its milieu. It does not do the applying—we have to do that. Especially when it comes to ethics, that is, to applications of our apophatic entanglement to the precariously tangled matter of human life. Schaefer is arguing with (more with, than against) my recourse to both Cusan and quantum registers, macro and micro. But he makes no bones about his feeling that "the ethical dimension of relationality is left cold in the quantum field." For him ethics has "nothing to do" with the remoteness of the quantum scale, and indeed "nothing to do with 'infinity' at all."

Any time I hear "nothing to do with" I go apophatic. I wonder which entanglement is being concealed. But I take Schaefer's concern seriously. Indeed, in a certain way I agree. I do not derive ethics from any "quantum ontology." Rather, I read both quantum and ethics as exemplifying a relational ontology. Perhaps my dependence on the genius of Karen Barad's interpretation of Bohr's indeterminacy by way of a relational ontology has given a false impression (Barad 2007). Barad does espy a responsiveness at the level of the quantum phenomenon—an "agential intra-activity" that always already entangles its observer. And that responsiveness cannot be dualistically divided from what at the human level we call responsibility. But again, this is no reductive derivation but rather a refusal of the matter/mind dichotomy. She is one of the expert witnesses of quantum physics I will continue to rely on, among the many I cite who consider the doctrinaire bifurcation of the physical and the biological scales to be both premature and arbitrary. Of course links between the quantum and the

biological level remain—hypothetical. Nonetheless my quantum chapter remains one of ten, and I wonder why there is almost no reference to all the subsequent chapters that develop at a perhaps burdensome (but not infinite) scale the interhuman, interspecies, intraplanetary registers of ethically weighted materialization.

The boundlessness of spacetime and the translation by negative theology of God into the not-finite does indeed cloud every phenomenon, from this perspective: that is, it prevents the sharp separation that confuses *difference* with *division*. Hence I consider the *in-fini*, the unfinished—as the margin of incertitude at which the boundaries between my body and my keyboard, between my coffee and those humans and nonhumans who were used in its production, between my thinking and Schaefer's, are never absolute. Of course the infinite is handling a problem of *God-talk* for me as a theologian, especially that of the unquestionable separation between God and world, which perhaps is no problem for Schaefer as a scholar of religion. But the subversive theological impact of the infinite has then little to do (I do not say nothing!) with mere distance, with dark chilling reaches of universe or universes. Nor does it resemble the omnipotence or unresponsiveness of a traditional transcendence (to which James's "finite god" meaningfully opposed itself.) It is of interest, *inter-esse*, in its being-between every finitude, in its undoing the hard boundary and thus actually intensifying, indeed heating up, difference. It is a *coincidentia* of intimacy and infinity that invites this work of theological cosmology and so drives its critique of anthropocentrism. That is a critique we share, and to which Donovan Schaefer's new book applying affect theory to the study of religion makes an exciting contribution (Schaefer 2015). With his mastery of a wide spectrum of recent biology, he marvelously wires religion and its affectivity right through our animality.

I can here only briefly mention a few remaining issues. I would not have my use of the term "other" confused with the "Wholly Other." By the same token I am surprised to be found so closely tied to Levinas, whose notion of exteriority seems to me to weaken the work of ethical relation and certainly to rule out my notion of entangled difference. I do salute the Levinasian infinite glimpsed in the face of the other—precisely in its intimacy. But his exteriority does not abide the mutual constitution of subjects. Indeed its insistently anti-ontological exteriority may finally collapse the alternatives of totality and infinity that his ethics promises. So I agree then with Schaefer's (Derridean) critique of the Levinasian anthropocentrism. And I never remain with "the face," but explore our multifaceted creaturality as ethical obligation. Yet of course by way of Whitehead, Barad, or Deleuze, or Mel Chen's "animacy," or the first chapter of Genesis, I also resist rendering the real distinctions of the organic and the inorganic as, yet again, the dualism. So I would not for example know

how to say that ethics is grounded in our animal bodies but has nothing to do with the elements *making up* the animal.

Still, relatively speaking, ethics describes a human evolution. But then another confusion arises, given Schaefer's rich sense of human animality and our implied entanglement in innumerable other animals. Why does he ask as mocking questions: "Shall we continue in death, that the microbiome might abound? Could we be even more relational, like the Jain saints who cover their mouths . . . ?" Don't the microbes and the insects also count as *animals*—not quanta? Where does Schaefer want us to draw the line on moral relevance? Cannot we affirm even their bloodless contributions to our life-systems, and respect the dissident symbolism even of Jain asceticism—without covering over either our differences or our mouths?

I hope that minding our entangled difference leads beyond the fear that to affirm vast creaturely diversity not only democratizes our relational field but leads to "an undifferentiated one." Finding ourselves "amidst a democracy of fellow creatures" (Whitehead) brings us not into oneness but interrelation. And then might it be more fruitful to notice developments in quantum biology rather than to pit Darwin against quantum? Schaefer helpfully explains the evolutionary advantage of "sociality and ethicality" for "survival and reproduction." But does the language of survival and reproduction—far from quantum queerness!—then really suffice to motivate ethics? If so, let us chase away the whole cloudy crowd of creatures. Why bother then to distinguish between the unfathomable intimacies of the infinite—and Hegel's "bad infinite," just an ever further extension of the same? Chilling indeed. But finally I suspect Schaefer and I coincide rather warmly in an animal, animate religious affectivity, indispensable for the motivation of science or ethics—even if I retain an affect of wonder, concern, perhaps love, for the impossibly turbulent, demanding, expanding cloud crowd. And yet it confronts us only as the particular: the *unknown embodied before us*. As a New Yorker I join in the sing-along with Leonard Cohen: "And lost among the subway crowds I try to catch your eye." And yours . . .

If I thought apophatic entanglement would assure good ethical choices, it would have already disqualified itself. So with gratitude for his thoughtful critique, I agree with Schaefer's association of the cloud's ethical practice less with a moral imperative and more with Foucault's "technology of the self"—inasmuch as we may read the latter as Deleuze does, as an interiority effected by an enfolding of the world. Then we may relieve that technology of its own relentless anthropocentrism, in the interest perhaps of the darkly luminous humanistic naturalism of Carol Wayne White, and in the spirit of Wegter-McNelly's religious hypothesis. Does such a self-formative process take the place of moral imperatives? Not altogether, according to *Cloud's* concluding reflection on the biblical love-imperative, as subjected to its own self-implicating questionability. The relationality of doing unto

another as you would have done unto yourself—discernible on just about every spiritual path of the world traditions—undoes any self-sufficiently self-forming subject. Even as its imperative does haunt our doings.

ABUSIVE ENTANGLEMENTS

The fourth voice in this responsive quartet conveys a clarity that will allow a provisional resolution. In a case study that speaks for itself, Colleen Carpenter has offered (what I still do want to call) a test of (what I still will call) the ethics of apophatic entanglement. Unexpectedly, this engaged ecological theologian here takes on the thorny problem of marriage ethics within Roman Catholicism. Hearing her students greeting “the unknown before us” with courageous honesty, she burrows deep into the question of domestic violence. The way she lays out the impasse of the Roman Catholic tradition on the question of the indissolubility of marriage offers a concentrated model for ethical argument. She first sets forth the crucial and promising breakthrough of the 2002 Bishops’ letter acknowledging that “violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage (USCCB 2002)” (Carpenter 2016, 802). On this basis her argument against the traditional and still standing teaching that marriage is indissoluble seems irrefutable. For it is precisely her refusal to give up on her tradition that enables her to confront the contradiction and push into its cloud of impossibility.

It will not help for this Protestant feminist to enter this specific fray—especially since I am aglow about *Laudato Si?*—but I am pleased to find I have inadvertently contributed some ammunition. I admire Carpenter’s deployment of apophatic entanglement and its question/able love in her answer to the unquestionability of the marriage ethos. I must repeat the language of the crucial distinction she draws: “Indissolubility definitively shuts down any possibility of newness in the future; nonseparability recognizes the reality of human connection, even vowed connection, while making the im/possible claim that entanglement does not and cannot preclude freedom, newness, and hope” (Carpenter 2016, 805).

With this move we can affirm the spirit of the marital vow while refusing the violence of its legalism. For indeed at a certain level the old patriarchs are not wrong: there is a permanence in any marriage. If two atoms once entangled can never be separated—all the less so, two humans! Once entwined, we will remain parts of one another willy nilly. Divorce does not expunge you—or the effects of your violence—from my life, and it is counterproductive psychologically to pretend otherwise. Abuse never is erased. But that nonseparability is precisely a reason for divorce: the longer I stay with you the more influence you will have on my life, and on all those I influence. Therefore I am responsible to distance myself from abusive influences upon me—precisely *because* a relationship is not external to who I am, who I become. Separation is an illusion, but the differential force

of divorce is not. No doubt originally the church was simply channeling the gospel injunction against divorce, failing to contextualize it. Jesus was addressing a cultural context in which only men could initiate divorce, and they could do so casually; women were the victims of divorce, easy to cast out and replace. Divorce itself in such a context was an expression of patriarchal injustice. And what is context—textually or socially—but the indeterminately bounded complex of our entanglements?

Carpenter offers a powerful bit of contextual theology, sharing the story of the courage of her students sharing their stories of abuse and violence. Beautifully, she cites Howard Thurman on the importance and the risk of truth telling. It is worth noting here that Thurman wrote a book whose title is a citation of the ancient trope of apophatic mysticism: “The Luminous Darkness.” I had found him at the root of a rhizome combining the apophatic praxis of the Quakers and of Gandhi with Martin Luther King, Jr., for whom Thurman was a spiritual mentor and teacher of resistance to systemic violence (Keller 2015, 34ff.). Carpenter’s meditation demonstrates a deft oscillation between the vivid particularity of her students’ stories and the systemic suffering they share, demanding systemic response. The great cloud-crowd of witnesses to violence, in this case, marital violence against women, is not going unheard.

To the final call for a religion that will no longer “attempt to banish all shadows but instead with candle-soft stories and poetry that help illuminate the cloudy darkness within which we live and move and have our being” (Carpenter 2016, 807)—I mutter a transdisciplinary “amen.” Such theopoetics enacts its own religious hypotheses. Scientific hypotheses examine the play of shadows across the whole light spectrum. And in this zygon of reconnection between the disciplines, I offer my thanks to all four respondents, for considering ways not taken and ways yet possible—as we confront what without such gracious collaboration might remain impossible.

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Reviews

Maimonides—Medical Aphorisms Treatises 16–21. [Kitāb al-fusūl fī al-tibb] A Parallel Arabic–English Edition. Edited, translated, and annotated by Gerrit Bos. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2015. xxix + 204 pp. US \$89.95.

This volume is the fourth and most recent in a series projected for seven, making the twenty-five medical aphorisms treatises of Spanish-born Rabbi, philosopher, and physician Moshe ben Maimon/Musa bin Maimon (1135–1204 CE), also known as Rambam, accessible to contemporary research in a well-done critical edition. It is part of an ambitious endeavor to publish all of the medical works by this prolific medieval author, an undertaking nestled within the overarching Middle Eastern Texts initiative sponsored by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Given the very specialized subject matter and its excellent scholarly presentation, in addition to the high quality of the printing of both the English and the Arabic (and the occasional Hebrew), the binding, and the overall layout of the book, the price is just a token and appears to be heavily subsidized. The support for such truly scholastic enterprise is to be lauded, especially in a time obsessed with scientific and technological progress at the expense of caring for the cultivation of historical awareness.

The core of the book consists of the annotated bilingual, side-by-side presentation of the collections of Maimonides' medical aphorisms about women (16, pp. 1–16), the regimen of health (17, pp. 17–36), physical exercise (18, pp. 37–44), bathing (19, pp. 45–60), foods, beverages, and their consumption (20, pp. 61–94), and drugs (21, pp. 95–138). (The pagination is unusual, with odd pages on the verso.) The core is preceded by a list of "Sigla and Abbreviations," a foreword by the publisher, an introduction by the editor, and a catalogue-like critical listing of existing manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-fusūl fī al-tibb* (pp. ix–xxix). The edition is supplemented by a critical comparison of the Arabic text with the Hebrew translations and the translations into English (pp. 140–43), extensive notes to the English translation (pp. 144–77), three separate bibliographies (translations of works by or attributed to Maimonides, editions of works by Galen, general bibliography; pp. 178–85), a subject index to the English translation, a "botanicals" [!] index (pp. 186–200), and a list of addenda and corrigenda to the fifteen treatises previously published in volumes 1–3 of the series.

While the reviewer cannot comment on the Arabic, he noted with delight the thoroughgoing critical editorial method applied and the care taken to present the texts in as correct a manner as possible. This is scholarship at its best. It invites serious engagement with the materials thus presented even by those who are not philologists of classical or medieval Arabic. Maimonides' works open a window into the way of thinking about health care by an accomplished physician in the high Middle Ages in and around the Mediterranean Sea; Maimonides died in Cairo, Egypt. Thus, his medical aphorisms reflect not only the multicultural reality in