

Challenging Mainstream Metaphysics

– Barad’s Agential Realism and Feminist Philosophy of Religion

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Karen Barad’s agential realism is a fundamental challenge to the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness, and clears the way for a relational understanding of reality, being and becoming. Through its fusing together of ethics, ontology and epistemology it can also contribute to a further development of feminist philosophy of religion.

And we are nature.

We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature. The red-winged blackbird flies in us.

Susan Griffin¹

The aim of this paper is twofold: To present Karen Barad’s agential realism as a challenge to mainstream masculine metaphysics, and to demonstrate the relevance of Barad’s thinking for feminist philosophy of religion.

During the last century, metaphysics has been severely criticized, and often declared dead. But whether we like it or not, we cannot escape metaphysics – acknowledged or unacknowledged, a metaphysics, i.e., a basic understanding of what is real, how reality is structured and constructed, is always there, forming the ways in which we understand and deal with reality, be it in everyday life or in science. The choice is not between

saying yes or no to metaphysics, but choosing which metaphysics to accept.²

The article outlines the impact of Karen Barad's thinking on our understanding of reality, being and becoming, and demonstrates the relevance of her agential realism for feminist philosophy of religion. Barad's agential realism is presented as the cornerstone for a relational metaphysics, challenging the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness, characterized by individualism, representationalism, and dualism, with its genderized binary oppositions between mind – body; culture – nature; reason – passion; transcendent – immanent; sacred – profane, etc.

I also claim that Barad's agential realism is a fruitful perspective for an alternative understanding of religion, and an important and solid theoretical perspective for the further development of feminist philosophy of religion. I substantiate this claim through a discussion of central aspects of the feminist philosophies of religion of Pamela Sue Anderson and Grace M. Jantzen, authors of the first two monographs on the subject.³ Anderson discusses and refigures some key concepts for understanding religion and doing philosophy of religion in ways not (or at least less) limited by patriarchal preconceptions, and I will deal with three of these concepts: "rationality", "feminist standpoint epistemology" and "strong objectivity", and show how they connect to and can benefit from Barad's thinking. In this context I will also discuss the main idea in Grace Jantzen's feminist philosophy of religion, as revealed by her book title *Becoming Divine*, linking it to the strong ethical dimension of Barad's agential realism.⁴

THE RELATIONALIST CHALLENGE – BARAD'S AGENTIAL REALISM

A central trait of Western philosophy and worldview is the habit, with roots in Plato and Aristotle, to view beings or things as

separate entities, discrete individuals with intrinsic properties. This individualist assumption, that has far-reaching consequences and permeates not only philosophical discourse but also "our social institutions, our lives, and our senses of ourselves" (Scheman 1983: 226), is part of the mainstream metaphysics of separateness.

Karen Barad rejects the whole idea of "individually determinate entities with inherent properties", as "the hallmark of atomistic metaphysics" (Barad 2003: 812), and claims that the "thingification", i.e., our seeing and speaking of 'entities', 'things' and 'relata' instead of relations, distorts our understanding of the world and ourselves and of how we are related. As opposed to the atomistic metaphysics of separateness, Barad's agential realism offers a relationalist metaphysics, according to which the ontological primary is not pre-existing, ontologically separate things or objects but agentially produced *phenomena*. Barad's use of the term phenomena has its origin in Niels Bohr's philosophy-physics, where it denotes the intra-active relation between an observed object and the agencies of observation.⁵ There is, according to Bohr, no given pre-existing cut between the object of observation and the agencies of observation, but a cut is enacted in a specific context as part of the experimental set-up, the apparatus.

Through a reading together of Bohr's and Foucault's understanding of the apparatus, Barad is able to let the concept benefit from Foucault's rich sociological interpretation and thereby supersede Bohr's static laboratory style understanding, without losing sight of the material aspects of the apparatus.⁶ In Barad's usage, the apparatuses are not "static arrangements *in* the world, but rather [...] dynamic (re)configurings *of* the world" (Barad 2003: 816), and thereby both parts of phenomena, and phenomena themselves. Bohr's solution to the quandery of the wave-particle-duality of light was the insight that the expressions

“wave” and “particle” did not describe an intrinsic light-property, but the result of different specific intra-actions. Thus, the objective referent is not a separate pre-existing object with certain inherent properties or qualities (there simply *is* no such thing), but the *phenomenon*, of which the apparatus is an inextricable part. In Barad’s words:

The two different apparatuses effect different cuts, that is, draw different distinctions delineating the ‘measured object’ from the ‘measuring instrument’. In other words, they differ in their local material resolutions of the inherent ontological indeterminacy. There is no conflict because the two different results mark different intra-actions (Barad 2003: 816, n 21).

Although Barad writes about “measurements”, her agential realism is applicable also outside the scientific laboratory. As Joseph Rouse has remarked: “Any causal intra-action is implicitly a measurement in Barad’s sense” (Rouse 2004: 158, n8), which means that her theorizing about relations, *relata* and phenomena has relevance also for extra-scientific intra-activity.

A consequence of agential realism’s relational ontology is that it is the phenomenon and not some independent, separate object that is “the primary ontological unit” (Barad 2007: 139). It is important to notice, however, that to Barad

... phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed, or the results of measurements; rather, *phenomena are the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting ‘agencies’*. That is, phenomena are ontologically primitive relations – relations without pre-existing *relata* (ibid.).

According to the pervasive individualism and atomism of mainstream masculine metaphysics, *relata* are, as an obvious matter of fact, seen as prior to relations, but to Barad

... relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing *relata*; rather, the mutual ontological dependence of *relata* – the relation – is the ontological primitive [...] *relata* only exist *within* phenomena as a result of specific intra-actions (i.e., there are no independent *relata*, only *relata-within-relations*) (Barad 2007: 429, n14).

To my mind Barad is right in holding that

[t]he notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or *relata*) represents a profound conceptual shift (Barad 2007: 139).

Instead of separately pre-existing “things”, there for us to interact with, Barad gives an account of a relational “production of material bodies”, through “agential intra-acting” (Barad 2003: 814). Instead of a separately existing object of knowledge, detected and measured as to its inherent properties by a singular neatly demarcated individual subject, we get a phenomenon understood as “the inseparability of ‘observed object’ and ‘the agencies of observation’” (ibid.). Since the ontological primitive for Barad is the (relational) phenomenon, and “*relata* only exist *within* phenomena as a result of specific intra-actions” (815, n 20), *relata* are not ontologically separate individuals pre-existing interaction, but rather agentially separable *dividuals* emerging through intra-actions.⁷ According to the prevalent metaphysics of separateness, the ontological separateness of observer and observed, of knower and known, is the very condition for objectivity. From this perspective it seems obvious that the possibility for objectivity is lost if the separateness is denied. But while objectivity according to a metaphysics of separateness demands ontological separateness between the subject and object of knowledge, objectivity according to a relational metaphysics is secured through agential separability, that is the possibility to sep-

arate the object from the agencies of observation as related parts of the phenomenon, produced or materialized by the apparatus.

For Barad it is phenomena “produced through specific causal intra-actions involving multiple apparatuses of bodily production”, that constitutes reality, i.e., “[r]eality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena” (2007: 140).⁸ In a note Barad makes clear that she uses the term phenomenon in another way than the phenomenologists and Kant, stating that

... it makes no sense to talk about independently existing things as somehow behind or as the causes of phenomena. In a sense, there are no noumena, only phenomena (Barad 2007: 429, n18).

This amounts to a rejection of yet another aspect of the metaphysics of separateness: representationalism, that is the idea that the world I perceive and live in is not the real world, but an *appearance* of the Real, posited as in some way behind or beyond the perceived world. Intertwined with this ontological stance is an epistemology according to which an idea is true in so far as it corresponds to, that is adequately represents the really Real, or the world as it is in-itself. Thus, there is held to be a split between things-in-themselves and our representations of them, and language is seen as having a mediating function between us and the world. Through its

performative understanding of discursive practices [agential realism] challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Unlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being (Barad 2007: 133).

Through this presentation of some key perspectives of Barad’s agential realism, an alternative to the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness has crystallized: A metaphysics of relatedness, characterized by an intra-active relationalism, viewing things as things-in-phenomena and ourselves as being in direct engagement with the world through our material-discursive practices, intra-actively producing both subject and object, responsible for our intra-acting within and as parts of the world, for the apparatuses and phenomena we let constitute reality. Now let us move on to show some aspects of the potential of Barad’s thinking through applying it to feminist philosophy of religion.

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION BENEFITING FROM BARAD

In *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Pamela Sue Anderson uses and refigures some key concepts for understanding religion and doing philosophy of religion in ways not (or at least less) limited by patriarchal preconceptions. In the following I will deal with three of these concepts: “rationality”, “feminist standpoint epistemology” and “strong objectivity”, and show how they connect to and can benefit from Barad’s thinking. In this context I will also discuss the main idea in Grace M. Jantzen’s feminist philosophy of religion, expressed by her Irigarayan book title *Becoming Divine*, and its strong affinity with the ethical dimension of Barad’s agential realism.

REFIGURING RATIONALITY

In discussing rationality, Anderson is very careful in her criticism of the concept, so as not to render feminist philosophy of religion vulnerable to accusations of irrationality – the central topic of her book is, after all, “the rationality of religious belief” (Anderson 1998: 31). What she wants to do is to “expose the inadequacy and weakness of

rational justifications of religious belief, especially those of the dominant empirical realist forms of theism” (ibid).⁹

A key question when discussing rationality is, of course, *whose* rationality? And Anderson (under)states that “[r]ationality has come to seem inadequate insofar as it has been equated with masculinity and the male subject” (ibid). For Anderson the way to a refigured rationality, delivered from its masculine bias, goes through a shift of focus from the justification of belief to the *construction* of belief – a change that not only affects religious belief but also knowledge at large, since knowledge, as a consequence of the mainstream masculine metaphysics, is equated with justified true belief – where what is considered as “justified” are beliefs bolstered by a masculine biased reason.

In maintaining the rationality of religious belief, while criticizing an empiricist understanding of this rationality, Anderson asks: “Whose reason gives justification or warrant to Christian realist forms of theism?” And her answer is, not surprisingly, that the owner of this reason is “the white European man” (ibid: 36). Thus, in its alleged default position reason is ethnocentric and androcentric, manifesting, once again, the mainstream masculine metaphysics, that too long has been allowed to truncate, depreciate and make inaccessible considerable parts of human experiential potential.

Anderson states that “the epistemological framework by which one’s beliefs are constructed makes all the difference”, and she declares that “a feminist philosophy of religion has a crucial role to play in transforming the overall framework of belief in contemporary philosophy of religion” – a contemporary framework she describes as “biased according to sex/gender, race, ethnicity, and class” (33). But a transformation of the epistemological framework needs to be linked to and supported by an alternative metaphysical or ontological outlook, and this is exactly what the ontoepistemol-

ogy of Barad’s agential realism offers, providing both an alternative way to understand reality, and to understand our understanding of it and our participation in its becoming. Barad’s account of the entanglement of being and knowing in the production of phenomena through intra-active relationality is an important tool for refiguring rationality, and stresses the agential-constructive aspect of the world’s “worlding”.¹⁰ In opposition to the concept of “discovery” which manifests the idea of pre-existing passive entities or objects just laying there ready to be detected by a separate volitionally interacting individual subject, Barad’s concept of agential intra-active production manifests the idea of an interdependent entanglement where the relational process, involving the multilayered apparatus, is the primary in and through which phenomena emerge as articulations of the world. Justification is also something quite different in an agential realist perspective. As phenomena are produced, so justification is produced, and it is not a once and for all thing, but an ongoing process – truth happens.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY AND STRONG OBJECTIVITY

Barad is stressing the firm opposition to epistemological relativism shown by prominent feminist science studies scholars as Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, who have developed and represent “nonrelativist antirealist positions” (Barad 2007: 44). Barad shares their nonrelativist perspective, but prefers to characterize her position as a brand of realism.¹¹

Nor Anderson wants to go down the relativist road, and that is one of the reasons she finds strong objectivity and feminist standpoint epistemology attractive. In her account of feminist standpoint epistemology’s understanding of the subject, Anderson points out that as embodied the subject always is visible and located, and in these

aspects “not fundamentally different from the objects of their knowledge” (Anderson 1998: 86). Here Anderson quotes Harding, saying that “the same kinds of social forces that shape objects of knowledge also shape (but do not determine) knowers and their (epistemological) projects” (ibid.). Thus, “subjects are not isolated individuals but communities of knowers”, and as “agents of knowledge”, the subjects are “multiple, heterogeneous, and contradictory or incoherent” (ibid.). Anderson’s perspective rests on the interactive model where there is an unambiguous line of demarcation between subject and object, although they are both embodied and more complex than in the mainstream masculine model. In my opinion this is one of the crucial points where Anderson’s position could benefit from Barad’s agential realism, with its rich concept of the apparatus, and her analysis of the intra-active production of subject and object.

The alleged objectivity based on the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness is considered by Anderson (as well as Barad) to be a weak objectivity, since it conceals its biases and masquerades as neutral. Once the possibility of neutrality is debunked and the genderized rationality behind the objectivist idea is exposed as distorting and narrowing our understanding of the world, one must seek objectivity elsewhere. Instead of seeing the social and constructive aspects of knowledge-making as detrimental to objectivity, feminist standpoint epistemology claims that it is the very social nature of knowledge that vouches for a strong objectivity. An open and self-reflexive social processing constitutes a force that generates the best possible beliefs. And for Anderson the key point is “to construct less partial beliefs by thinking from the position of marginalized others” (Anderson 1998: 81). In Barad’s agential realism, however, objectivity is turned into something more than merely a view from somewhere.¹² To challenge the epistemology

linked to mainstream masculine metaphysics it is not enough “to welcome females, slaves, children, animals, and other dispossessed Others [...] into the fold of knowers but to better account for the ontology of knowing” (Barad 2007: 378). The latter, however, is, in Barad’s perspective, not achieved through a more adequate and democratic mediation, but through doing away with the whole idea of mediation, replacing it with an understanding of us as being in direct engagement in and with the world through our intra-active material-discursive practices.

AN ONTOEPISTEMOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

A paradigmatic difference between Anderson and Barad lies in Anderson’s acceptance of the idea of an “ontological separation of consciousness and its world” (Anderson 1998: 89), and the understanding of language as having “a mediating function” (151). Using Barad’s agential realism, with its intra-active understanding of being and becoming, and its stress on us being parts of the world we observe (“nature seeing nature”, as Griffin puts it in my opening quote), Anderson would not need to bridge any ontological separation, because there would no longer *be* any separation. Being *of* the world we are, in Barad’s view, agentially separable but not ontologically separate from the world.

For Anderson “[t]he crucial difference between the traditional male theist or atheist and the feminists philosopher [...] is the revised feminist concept of rationality” (Anderson 1998: 214); for Barad the key question is the revised concept of *reality*. Anderson’s Kantian reassertion that “rationality and reality do not correspond perfectly due to the limitations of human reason” (215) displays an epistemological perspective anchored in a metaphysics of separateness, while Barad’s ontoepistemological stance opens up for an alternative relational

understanding of reality, according to which “our knowledge-making practices are social-material enactments that contribute to, and are part of, the phenomena we describe” (Barad 2007: 26).

Anderson is successful in her task of displaying the patriarchal bias in the philosophy of religion as well as in religious, especially Christian religious thinking. It seems to me, however, that she does not heed Haraway’s warning not to settle for a “manoeuvre within inherited Western analytic traditions, a manoeuvre begun in dialectics, but stopping short of the needed revisions” (Haraway 1991: 198).

What is needed is not to make the medium more adequate. Neither is it enough to refigure our understanding of the object(s) of religious experience, but to actively reconstitute these very objects. This calls for a more radical approach than Anderson’s. At the end of her book she finds herself “left with the query: To what sort of deity is one rationally justified in giving devotion? Or what sort of belief, if any, can be constructed concerning a personal deity?” (Anderson 1998: 228). In her concluding section she also asks: “Can belief in the existence of a personal deity be rationally justified for men and women?” (227). As I understand her, she means that the answer depends on how we understand the word “exist”, but in my perspective the preoccupation with the question of God’s existence, as well as the whole discussion of rationally justified belief, is a symptom of the masculine metaphysics of separateness.¹³

The main question for a relationalist philosophy of religion is not *if* there is a God in a mainstream metaphysical meaning, but *how* we can understand the idea of God and God’s relationality.

If reality is no pre-existing, observer-independent reality “out there”, but constituted by phenomena in and through continuously ongoing intra-action, then, there is no external observer-independent God, and thus no given divine gender. This

makes the relationalist perspective very interesting for a feminist philosophy of religion aiming at a transformation and revitalization of our understanding of the divine. In our continuous intra-active participation, through our material-discursive practices, in the world’s becoming, there are vast opportunities for renewing the religious symbolic and thereby open up for new ways of experiencing and understanding the divine.

DIVINE BEING AND THE APPARATUS OF RELIGIOUS PRODUCTION

As presented above, one of the key concepts of Barad’s agential realism is the apparatus, a concept Barad forges under inspiration mainly from Bohr, Foucault and Haraway, denoting the multi-layered material-discursive practices that are productive of phenomena. Barad underlines, quoting Haraway, that it is impossible to know beforehand what constitutes an apparatus, this

... cannot be known in advance of engaging in the always messy projects of description, narration, intervention, inhabiting, conversing, exchanging, and building. The point is to get at how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the processes, in order to foster some forms of life and not others (Haraway 1994: 63, quoted in Barad 2007: 449, n 11).

As agential parts of the world’s worlding we cannot but participate in this process, the question is how we do this, if we participate in a responsible way or not. Barad states that:

what we need is something like an *ethico-onto-epistem-ology* – an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being – since each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is

remade again, because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter (Barad 2007: 185).

One way to express the goal of such a responsible mode of intra-acting as part of the world is to use Luce Irigaray's concept of "becoming divine", from her article "Divine Women", where she deals with God in a way that transcends the concept of a "personal deity":

[God] shows a way. It is the engine of a more perfect becoming. It is the vector, the bow-string, the horizon extended between the farthest past and the farthest future, the most passive and active – permanent and always in tension. God holds no obligation over our needs except to become. No task, no obligation burdens us except that one: become divine, become perfect.¹⁴

This Irigarayan conception of God and the divine is used and advocated by Grace M. Jantzen in *Becoming Divine*. Instead of conceptualizing the divine as a being, as a disembodied "omni-everything Lord God" (Jantzen 1999: 275), Jantzen, under inspiration from Irigaray, conceptualizes it as a goal, an ideal, as the "horizon for human becoming" (12f, 275 et passim). A crucial aspect for Jantzen is that this human becoming divine is not an individual project but a "becoming divine for and with one another" (99), with an explicit focus on life *before*, and not after death, one of the core categories in her religious symbolic being *natality*, instead of the category commonly used to designate "Man's" situation: mortality.¹⁵

Jantzen is critical to the prevailing metaphysics of separateness and expresses the need for "a strategy that overcomes the series of binaries" (270), and to overcome the binaries transcendent – immanent, and sacred – profane, she makes use of another Irigarayan concept, that of a *sensible transcendental*:

... a *sensible transcendental* that comes into being through us, of which *we would be* the mediators and bridges. Not only in mourning for the dead God of Nietzsche, not waiting passively for the god to come, but by conjuring him up among us, within us, as resurrection and transfiguration of blood, of flesh, through a language and an ethics that is ours (Irigaray 1993: 129, quoted in Jantzen 1999: 253).

This active construction of an immanent transcendence can be viewed as a feminist amendment of the apparatus of religious production, making possible alternative ways of experiencing and understanding the divine. Because of its making it possible to overcome the separation of sacred and profane, of God and world, Jantzen sees the idea of the sensible transcendental as a "pantheistic projection of the female divine", which "opens out what has hitherto been seen as a set of polarities into a play of diversities", thereby offering "new horizons for becoming which are rooted in gendered embodiment" (Jantzen 1999: 272).

In Jantzen's pantheist perspective the material and the divine are not separate but inextricably linked in a mutual process of being and becoming, in a way similar to Barad's material-discursive practices as parts in and of the world's intra-active becoming. As Barad rejects the idea of a world beyond the phenomenal world, Jantzen rejects the idea of "a *locus* of being and truth *outside* the world, from which the world and all that is in it is derivative", an idea she holds to be constitutive of "the western masculinist symbolic" (274). While Anderson focuses on how the religious symbolic of the west is suffering from a patriarchal bias, Jantzen stresses how

... the masculinist symbolic of the west is undergirded by a concept of God as Divine Father, a God who is also Word, and in his eternal disembodiment, omnipotence, and omniscience is the epitome of value (10).¹⁶

An acknowledgment of this mutual patriarchal-theological lending of support makes visible feminist philosophy of religion as a substantial factor for destabilizing the mainstream masculine metaphysics that not only hampers philosophy of religion but also pervades our life as a whole.

In this paper I have tried to show that Barad's agential realism is a well thought through and well argued prolific theoretical foundation for a disruption of the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness, and for the furtherance of feminist philosophy of religion. Pamela Sue Anderson's refiguring of rationality, her critique of empirical realist theism, and her advocacy of standpoint epistemology and a revised concept of objectivity, are all of the greatest importance for a feminist philosophy of religion. However, although necessary, her epistemological stance is not sufficient for the needed transformation and revitalization of philosophy of religion. Arguably, notwithstanding its acute understanding of the dynamics of being and becoming, and its fruitful focus on natality, neither Grace Jantzen's ethical stance is sufficient in itself. Feminist philosophy of religion could benefit substantially from Barad's ethico-ontoepistemological agential realism, amalgamating a robust realist outlook with an acknowledgment of our participation in the world's intra-active becoming, making plain our responsibility for what forms of life we foster – and for what kind of divinity that comes to matter. The hope is for a philosophy and a science rooted in an inclusive relationalist metaphysics, and for a feminist philosophy of religion in which “divine being” is not understood as referring to a divine being seen as a separate pre-existing entity but rather as divine *being*, a relational mode of responsible living as an intra-acting part of the world's ongoing becoming – a being that is also a doing.

NOTES

1. Susan Griffin, in *Woman and Nature, The Roaring Inside Her*, p 226.
2. In the call for papers for their seminal book *Discovering reality – Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka expressed the importance of giving attention “to the underlying theories of knowledge and to the metaphysics which mirror and support patriarchal belief and practice” (Harding & Hintikka (eds.) 1983: ix). In her preface to the second edition, 2003, Harding points to the good and bad news that the texts and issues raised is still highly relevant, since, as she understates it, “mainstream epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and philosophy of science, as practiced in the natural and social sciences as well as in philosophy, have not yet fully adopted feminist insights” (Harding & Hintikka (eds.) 2003: xi).
3. In *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion – The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (1998), Pamela Sue Anderson focuses on the epistemological frameworks of belief, and wants “to expose a scandal of largely unacknowledged proportions in the circular reasoning of patriarchal forms of theism” (49). In *Becoming Divine – Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1999), Grace M. Jantzen criticises the preoccupation with the rational justification of beliefs within mainstream philosophy of religion, and argues for a prioritization of the ethical over the epistemological and ontological.
4. Jantzen borrows the concept of “becoming divine” from Luce Irigaray (see Irigaray 1993: 68, and Irigaray 1986: 9 (see note 14 below)). For both Jantzen and Irigaray “becoming divine” means to become fully human. Jantzen claims that feminism usually ignores or downplays Irigaray's insistence on the importance of the ideas of God and the divine for human fulfilment (Jantzen 1999: 7, n 1).
5. For a more thorough presentation and discussion of Bohr's concept of the phenomenon and its relevance for the philosophy of religion, see my article “On Getting the Referent of Religious Experience Right – Relationalism and Bohr's Concept of ‘Phenomena’” 2011.
6. On Foucault's understanding of *dispositif* (apparatus), see Foucault 1977: “What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the

said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (194).

It is important to notice that Barad's *apparatuses* are agential and open-ended, and not like the static and determining apparatuses of Louis Althusser (Barad 2007: 451, n 25).

7. The term "dividual" is not used by Barad, but I find it adequate to express the non-dualist relatedness at the root of her metaphysics. The term is borrowed from the American Anthropologist McKim Marriot, who uses it in his article "Hindu transactions: diversity without dualism", to describe an alternative concept of personhood to be found in South Asia: "persons [...] are not thought in South Asia to be 'individual', that is, indivisible, bonded units, as they are in much of Western social and psychological theory as well as in common sense. Instead, it appears that persons are generally thought by the South Asians to be 'dividual' or divisible. To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogenous material influences" (Marriot 1976: 111).

8. The concept of "apparatuses of bodily production" has its origin in Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", where she presents it as "a category useful to a feminist theory of situated knowledges" (Haraway 1991: 200). Important to Barad is Haraway's understanding that the objects of knowledge are produced: "bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their *boundaries* materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not pre-exist as such" (ibid: 200f). The same understanding is expressed in Barad's view that there are no things-in-themselves only things-in-phenomena, that is, produced by apparatuses, which are to be seen as part of the phenomena. Can we apply this thinking to religion? Should we alongside apparatuses of bodily production, and for example apparatuses of literary production, also acknowledge apparatuses of "religious production", or apparatuses producing religious experiences?

9. A paradigmatic statement of the form of theism Anderson targets is Richard Swinburne: "I take the proposition 'God exists' (and the equivalent proposition 'There is a God') to be logically equivalent to 'there exists a person without a body (i.e., a spirit) who is eternal, is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things'" (Swinburne 1991: 8; quoted from Anderson 1998: 15).

10. The term used in Barad 2010: 265. Originally used by Heidegger as "die Welt weltet" (see Heidegger [1935], 2000, *Introduction to Metaphysics*).

11. Perhaps the root to Barad's choice to call her approach *agential realism* can be found in Haraway's statement: "The approach I am recommending is not a version of 'realism', which has proved a rather poor way of engaging with the world's active agency" (Haraway 1991: 199).

12. Barad warns us not to "conflate [Haraway's] notion of 'situated' with the specification of one's social location along a set of axes referencing one's identity [--] Situated knowledge is not merely about knowing or seeing from somewhere (as in having a perspective) [--] not solely an epistemological matter [...] but an ontological (ontoepistemological) one" (Barad 2007: 471f, n 45).

13. I agree with Justus Buchler's comment in *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*: "[t]he question whether God 'exists' or does not is a symptom of deficiency in the categorical equipment of a metaphysics. The use of 'exist' in such a context tacitly shapes a crude conception of the subject-matter under debate [...] The critical question must be, not whether God exists, nor whether there is an 'entity' which satisfies the scheme of traits by which the concept of God is perpetuated, but in what way a natural complex thus discriminated is to be understood, analyzed, and experientially encompassed; or, in what way it is to be further discriminated and found related" (Buchler 1990: 8).

14. Luce Irigaray, "Divine Women," trans. Stephen Muecke (Sydney: Local Consumption Occasional Papers 8, 1986), p 9. Quote taken from Kim, St. Ville & Simonaitis (ed.) 1993: 125f.

15. The idea of "natality" as central to the understanding of our existence is inspired by Hannah Arendt (see Jantzen 1999: 144).

16. This demonstrates the validity of Jacques Derrida's concept of *phallogocentrism*, used in his 1973 essay "La question du style" (in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui?*, Union générale d'éditions, Paris), where he combines the terms *phallogocentrism* (denoting the hierarchized patriarchal dualism) and *logocentrism* (which for Derrida not only denotes representationalism but also "the tendency [...] to interpret the Word (*Logos*) in its full theological sense ('In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God')" (Burke 1994: 42)) to show that the masculinist and the religious symbolic are underpinning and mutually supporting each other.

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SUMMARY

Challenging Mainstream Metaphysics – Barad's Agential Realism and Feminist Philosophy of Religion

The article outlines the impact of Barad's thinking on our understanding of reality, being and becoming at large, and demonstrates the relevance of her agential realism for feminist philosophy of religion. Barad's agential realism is presented as the cornerstone of a relationalist metaphysics, challenging the mainstream masculine metaphysics of separateness. Agential realism is also applied as a fruitful perspective for an alternative understanding of religion, and as an important and solid theoretical perspective for the further development of feminist philosophy of religion. The latter claim is substantiated through a discussion of Pamela Sue Anderson's and Grace Jantzen's feminist philosophies of religion, showing how they can benefit from and find support in Barad's ontoepistemological metaphysics.

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