

# Chapter 1

## Redeeming the Present

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What does it mean to do feminist moral philosophy with notions of utopia and transformation as points of reference? What characteristics are necessary for moral philosophy to address, criticize and ultimately redeem the present – a present whose constitutive ingredients include massive inequalities of gender, ‘race’, and economic and cultural resources?<sup>1</sup>

Grace Jantzen, in whose honour this volume has been assembled, was John Rylands Research Professor of Religion, Culture and Gender at the University of Manchester. Born in 1948 in Saskatchewan in Western Canada into a strict Mennonite farming family, she studied at the Universities of Saskatchewan and Calgary before moving to Oxford, where she completed a DPhil – her second doctoral degree – on *The Doctrine of Divine Incorporeality*. She taught Philosophy of Religion at King’s College London for fifteen years until her move to Manchester in 1995. She remained there until her death from cancer in May 2006.

Her publications were many and distinguished, beginning with *God’s World, God’s Body*,<sup>2</sup> a development of her doctoral work on the doctrine of God and the enduring philosophical question of God’s embodiment. Probably the most popular – in terms of best-selling and most widely-read – of her works was her study of the female medieval mystical writer and teacher, Julian of Norwich, as exemplar of a holistic, life-affirming theology. This contained many of the seeds of later work, brought especially to fruition in *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*<sup>3</sup> which argued that conventional characterizations of ‘mysticism’ (Grace always tried to avoid ‘isms’) as privatized, interior and ineffable were calculated to silence the distinctive voice of women mystics, for whom such experience offered a powerful source of religious authority. Whilst Grace was not concerned primarily to rehabilitate the Christian tradition, her work provided a powerful demonstration of how ‘voices of dissent’ against the predominant weight of patriarchy had always existed, albeit on the margins of the institutional Church, and how those seeking alternative patterns of belief and practice today might learn from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Grace Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, *Feminist Theory*, 2/2 (2001): pp. 219–32, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Grace Jantzen, *God’s World, God’s Body* (Philadelphia, PA, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).

Her next major book, *Becoming Divine*<sup>4</sup> reflected her growing interest in the work of Luce Irigaray and the significance of continental philosophy and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis. She used these critical tools to develop a critique of Western modernity's preoccupation with death and violence and the envisioning of an alternative 'symbolic', as earlier interests, of God's corporeality and the possibilities of pantheism, fused with Irigaray's Feuerbachian positing of a 'divine horizon' towards which women in particular, denied autonomous identity within the Law of the Father, might thereby realize new models of human flourishing. Latterly, and up to the time of her final illness, Grace had embarked on an ambitious project of tracing the roots of violence in Western culture from the Greeks to the present day. *Foundations of Violence*,<sup>5</sup> volume 1 of the series *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, was the only volume to be completed before her death, but further volumes, edited by Morny Joy and Jeremy Carrette, will be published posthumously. Yet the critical motif was, even to the end, complemented by the trajectory towards the articulation of an alternative: in *Foundations of Violence*, we see, alongside her customary exposure of Western symbolic of death and violence, the emergence of the articulation of a 'new imaginary of beauty'.<sup>6</sup>

At the heart of her work was a concern for the way in which a preoccupation with death and violence had distorted the Western cultural imagination, with corresponding pathological implications. She argued that the central symbolic of necrophilia – a morbid obsession with death, as much by its neurotic avoidance and displacement as its explicit veneration – infused virtually every aspect of Western thought. In particular, she regarded Christianity's veneration of a transcendent, disembodied, dispassionate God, its institutionalisation of a desire for other-worldly salvation as flight from immanent, material existence, serving as a major buttress to the 'moral imaginary' of death. Grace saw the exposure of the religious roots of violence as essential if Western culture was to come to a new understanding: a purely secular conception of culture, in which religion is 'bracketed out' of the public realm, would be incapable of addressing and rooting out the causes of the Western condition. Furthermore, the culture of death and violence was, in her view, implicitly but thoroughly gendered. An androcentric culture which defined its own exemplary understandings of virtue and human destiny around the assumption of violence and individualism as the norm, would inevitably determine such norms via the negation and subordination of their opposites – women, the feminine, nature – which represented to such a necrophilic culture the threat of contingency, embodiment and finitude. It was therefore appropriate that the title of Grace's post at Manchester should reflect her

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<sup>4</sup> Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Grace Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence 1: Death and the Displacement of Beauty* (London and New York, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 67.

insistence on the powerful triangulation of religion, culture and gender in shaping the distinctive contours of Western modernity.

In this introductory essay, I have chosen to take a thematic approach to Grace's work, complementing Morny Joy's more chronological treatment in Part One, in order to identify some of the major motifs of Grace's ground-breaking work. I once argued in the context of a discussion of Western feminist theology that it was characterized by a dynamic of 'critique' and 'reconstruction'.<sup>7</sup> It denotes an approach which exposes what is assumed to be taken for granted and objective knowledge as androcentric, before moving on to develop a more representative or authentic tradition, often founded on the inclusion of formerly excluded voices and experiences.<sup>8</sup> In re-reading Grace's work, and engaging with the essays collected in this volume, I am struck by her adoption of a similar approach, which she characterized as one of 'diagnosis' and 'transformation'.<sup>9</sup> This constitutes a strong thread throughout the various phases of her career: from her refusal of the inevitability of the *habitus* of necrophilia and the exposure of dualistic systems of thought, to the telling of alternative stories about women's religious experiences and voices and the celebration of the radical possibilities of life and beauty. Grace used the sharpest tools of philosophical critique to read against the grain of the present in order to 'redeem' it.<sup>10</sup> With its intention both to destabilize the present and to envisage radical alternatives, Grace's life-long intellectual endeavours did indeed resemble a kind of utopian thought, or as she put it, 'sketches towards a counterhistory'.<sup>11</sup>

We can perhaps begin to see how by the end of her life Grace felt the need to move to the foundational work of mapping the genealogy – the origins and inter-relationships – of the Western moral imaginary, as 'deeply rooted in competition, death and gendered violence'.<sup>12</sup> Yet it was its very constructedness and contingency that demanded its exposure; and the devices of psychoanalytic theory, continental philosophy and Foucauldian cultural history were consistently deployed in strategies of critique and reconstruction. I will return to this theme later when considering key elements of Grace's critical methodology.

This introductory chapter is therefore structured around a series of binary constructs which formed recurrent motifs in Grace's work, and seem to me to exemplify her strategy of diagnosis and transformation: Necrophilia and Natality;

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Graham, 'Feminist Theology: Northern', in William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (eds) *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford and New York, 2003), pp. 210–26.

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London, 1983; second edn, Boston, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Grace Jantzen, 'Before the Rooster Crows: The Betrayal of Knowledge in Modernity', *Literature and Theology*, 15/1 (2001): pp. 1–24, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', *Feminist Theory*, 2/2 (2001): pp. 219–32.

<sup>11</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics', *Hypatia*, 9/4 (1994): pp. 186–206, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 223.

God as Transcendence or Immanence; Salvation or Flourishing; and knowledge as dispassionate or transformative. Yet in taking this approach, I have no wish to portray her work as simply reinscribing the dualistic systems she sought to deconstruct. Thus, in my final section, I will focus on her adoption of key methodological tools, and argue that her use of Foucauldian cultural history, psychoanalysis and continental philosophy demonstrates how she sought to transcend such dualisms in favour of a truly dialectical approach. This rejection of binary thinking extended to her attempts to dissolve the dichotomy between theory and practice, since she also refused to allow her intellectual pursuits to become hide-bound by the relative security of the academy. Indeed, she regarded her intellectual endeavours as imperative if the grip of what she termed the ‘moral imaginary’ of the West was to be rooted out.

This culminated in *Foundations of Violence*, where the mapping of historical examples as indicative of the broader analytical framework of necrophilia/nativity becomes central. As Jeremy Carrette points out in his essay, however, it was necessary to provide a full theoretical exposition of this task before embarking on the historical project. From her early forays into the nature of God as an embodied, immanent being, to her alliance of feminist and ecological thought in *God's World, God's Body*, through to the sustained engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis and its feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray, to the final ambition of her last (and now continuing posthumously) project which seeks to put historical flesh on the theoretical bones, therefore, Grace's career was dedicated to a demonstration of the power of *thinking* differently in order to *act* differently.

### **Necrophilia/Nativity**

Birth is the basis of every person's existence, which by that very fact is always already material, embodied, gendered, and connected with other human beings and with human history ... If anyone will become divine, it will be as an embodied, gendered, situated self: there can be no other selves than selves of woman born.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of Grace's work, as we have seen, was the contention that Western culture is defined by what she termed the ‘moral imaginary’ which is grounded in death and gendered violence. Death is the ‘guiding motif in the construction of rationality’<sup>14</sup> which shapes the logic of the Western moral imaginary.

The tradition of Western philosophy from Plato onwards has been to represent the human condition as one bounded by death. It reaches its epitome in the work of Martin Heidegger, who argues that death guarantees the authenticity of our lives. The anticipation of the rupture of death defines our individuality – but as Grace

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<sup>13</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Nativity’, p. 227.

argued, this was a subjectivity founded in isolation and violence: psychoanalytically speaking, it evokes the separation from the mother that denotes the formation of the ego in the infant and ultimately the establishment of gender identity.

The motif of death as the defining event for our humanity is echoed elsewhere in Western culture. But Grace's question was why this resulted in a culture of anxiety and repression. Psychoanalytical theory is often deployed to demonstrate how the unspoken ubiquity of death is repressed and yet constantly threatens to disrupt our security. This cultural anxiety expresses itself in a moral imaginary that valorizes invulnerability, detachment, disembodied reason and longs for immortality, either in fantasies of escape to other worlds or in cults of youth and beauty. It also displaces itself into other fears, most notably fear of the maternal, the feminine, and of nature – all of which embody, literally, the things of contingency and materialism which serve as uncomfortable reminders of humanity's dependence and finitude. The doctrines of salvation and life after death are symptomatic of Western modernity's desire to long for a world and existence beyond the temporal and physical, with a resulting indifference to political transformation and material flourishing.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, fascination with other worlds and space flights, even consumer cults of eternal youth, reflect an implicit distaste for this world, embodiment and human finitude.<sup>16</sup>

Yet Grace's question is, consistently this: why should it be the prospect of our death – as mortals – and not the fact of our births – as natals – which so preoccupies the Western imaginary? Even if death were acknowledged as that which inevitably circumscribes human lives, why does this not translate into an ethic of recognising our fragility and thus our interdependence, rather than a means of effecting the formation of a subjectivity that reinforces the values of mastery, detachment and anxiety? It is this exposure of the hidden workings of the logic of necrophilia, a challenge to its inevitability as determining the human condition, and the articulation of an alternative ethic of natality, that characterises Grace's work.

The moral imaginary is described at one stage as equating with Bourdieu's 'cultural unconscious',<sup>17</sup> or the images, metaphors and narratives (including, as we shall see, the implicit anthropologies and soteriologies that define our assumptions about what it means to be human and what we must do to be saved) that help to construct our cultural values. But how does the 'moral imaginary' relate to other concepts Grace used, such as the 'symbolic', after Luce Irigaray, or Bourdieu's 'habitus' and Foucault's 'episteme'? Are they all loosely equivalent, meaning the language and thought patterns of a given civilization? Certainly, all these terms variously describe the taken-for-granted, inhabited reality of Western culture: the rules, or grammar, that guide and generate the logic of our moral reasoning. In later work, the influence of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', with its emphasis on

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<sup>15</sup> Grace Jantzen, 'The Gendered Politics of Flourishing and Salvation' in Vincent Brümmer and Marcel Sarot (eds) *Happiness, Well-Being and The Meaning of Life* (Kampen, 1996), pp. 58–75, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, 1, p. 37; Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 274.

<sup>17</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', *The Monist*, 80/2, (1997): pp. 266–85, p. 267.

reflexivity and lived experience, grew in significance. Thus, the moral imaginary constitutes ‘that which is taken-for-granted, the space – literal and figurative – from which moral thinking is done.’<sup>18</sup> The moral imaginary is not an abstract theory or philosophical system, therefore, such as Kant’s categorical imperative, but a common-sense world, rooted in the everyday practices of making sense of things: the ‘central narratives, myths and icons of a society’.<sup>19</sup>

In some of the contributions that follow, this pairing of necrophilia and natality, so central to Grace’s work, is developed in several directions. Morny Joy celebrates Grace’s affirmation of life and love amidst the culture of death – a reminder of her enduring concern to read ‘against the grain’ of conventional readings in order to bring alternative interpretations into being. Frances Ward examines the poetry of John Donne, arguing that although his preoccupation with death appears to place him firmly within a necrophilic symbolic, the recurrent interplay of natality and necrophilia in his work suggests an altogether more complex relationship. This may begin to challenge the very dichotomy of Grace’s diagnostic itself. The Woodbrooke Quaker collective offers detailed historical illustrations of the way in which these motifs played out in the religious and political witness of the Society of Friends. In considering how an ethic of natality would differ from one of necrophilia, Mary Elizabeth Moore’s account of two inspirational women adds further historical substance to Grace’s analysis. Nanci Hogan’s paper highlights the implications of an ethic of natality for the discourse of human rights. Grace’s perennial insistence on the vital need to engage with institutional religion as a potent well-spring of the moral imaginary of death is exonerated by Hogan’s account of what happens when a lack of ‘religious literacy’ both fails to address the pathological influence of religion and inhibits an account of cultural difference that could facilitate women’s agency.

### **Transcendence/Immanence**

The emphasis on the omnipotent, detached ‘God out there’ is ... not unrelated to the ideal of neutral, detached reasoning, which is in turn part of the fantasy of an ungendered, non-embodied rational mind, separate from all else, living towards a world beyond, expressive, in short, of an imaginary of death.<sup>20</sup>

As I have already hinted, Grace believed that religious ideas were integral to the Western moral imaginary. Like many feminist scholars of religion, Grace was faced with the casual secularism of much Western academic feminism, which neither accounted for the phenomenon of religious feminism, nor (more importantly for Grace’s concerns), considered how religious and theological concepts continued

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<sup>18</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing; Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing; Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 203.

<sup>20</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 209.

to underpin the Western moral imaginary, despite the processes of secularization. Even in a post-Christian age, doctrines of God and notions of divinity are crucial to the logic of a necrophilic imaginary, providing key images of what it means to be human, the nature of reality, human relations with non-human nature, what constitutes virtue and fulfilment for humanity, and so on. Following Luce Irigaray, therefore, Grace argued that what is represented as divine, as ultimate, underwrites Western modernity's notion of exemplary personhood, 'a goal of human endeavour, that against which human thought and conduct must be measured'.<sup>21</sup> Alongside the pairing of necrophilia and natality, therefore, is a further set of oppositions to do with the nature of God, and how notions of a transcendent and dispassionate divinity form an essential underpinning of Western modernity's ideals of rationality, immortality and individualism.

Much of feminist theology of the 1980s and 1990s was concerned with the gender of God, or the relationship between Trinitarian theology and feminist thought; but this was not Grace's main focus. Perhaps this is indicative of her ability to step beyond the binary logic, such that she was not simply concerned to replace paternal imagery with that of a maternal God, but to expose the material, cultural and psychological effects of a particular way of thinking about God: to expose the real effects that our collective thought-forms have upon lived experience.

She believed that transformation required a shift from the dualism of Western monotheism towards the pluralism of pantheism. The binary system of dualism fosters the construction of a subjectivity founded on ontology as separation, which originates in constructions of subjectivity grounded upon the rupture of the maternal bond, the transcendence of nature, embodiment and the non-rational. In common with other feminist theologians such as Rosemary Ruether,<sup>22</sup> Grace argues that the elevation of God over creation sanctions other systems of domination and separation: male/female, colonizers/colonized, master/slave, humanity/nature. Such a masculinist and dualistic symbolic must therefore be dismantled, not reformed, and replaced by an alternative. Grace explores two models of divinity: pantheism,<sup>23</sup> and Irigaray's notion of 'becoming divine'.<sup>24</sup>

Grace developed Irigaray's contention that if women are to develop an autonomous subjectivity, they need an alternative divine symbolic to which to relate. 'Thus':

although proceeding by way of critique carries the task that arguing on the same turf actually serves to reinforce it, there is no other place to begin than with the concept of 'good old God', the God who forms the onto-theological underpinning of the symbolic in which western women and men are constituted

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<sup>21</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), pp. 72–92.

<sup>23</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics'; Jantzen 'Feminism and Pantheism'.

<sup>24</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*.

as subjects. However, the recognition of the interaction of this divinity with the western masculinised psyche quickly opens doors to creative possibilities, not only of religious conceptualization but also of ethical engagement.<sup>25</sup>

For example, therefore, to move beyond the polarity of transcendence and immanence is not a question of simply reversing the hierarchy, but disputing the terms on which the fault-lines, or logic, of the distinction itself. As Grace argues, at the root of this is recognition that the privileged pair only achieves coherence via the repression of its other: 'Transcendence is not the opposite of immanence: indeed, immanence is a necessary condition of transcendence, since no-one can achieve intelligence or creativity without the requisite physical complexity'.<sup>26</sup> Some of this echoes models of emergent consciousness in evolutionary anthropology which argues that non-corporeal capacities such as language, imagination and even religious experience can be regarded as 'emergent' properties and thus thoroughly compatible with models of physiological development.<sup>27</sup> 'It is our actual physical embodiment and our bodily experiences out of which our conscious selves develop, and which constitute each of us as individuals.'<sup>28</sup>

Transcendence and immanence, consciousness and embodiment, mind and body, are thus interdependent, not polarised; but like classical Marxist ideology, the dominant half of each pairing conceals the circumstances of its own production by obscuring its dependence on its repressed other, which functions as 'the sign of an absence, an absence which is overcome by reason's access to a disembodied and mastering truth'.<sup>29</sup> Yet for Grace, 'transcendence' is that which surpasses and exceeds the material, not that which denies or suppresses; it is, more appropriately, the inverse of reductionism, as an expression of the irreducibility of being. It denotes that which is 'ever beyond present activity ... not reducible to the set of physical particulars of the material universe'.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in a gesture forwards to a more comprehensive discussion of Irigaray's work in *Becoming Divine*, Grace calls upon her notion of the 'sensible transcendental' as the liberating concept of the divine against which those excluded from the privileges of Western moral imaginary can set their own aspirations.

The transcendent and the immanent are not to be seen as opposites. Rather, the sensible transcendental, the pantheistic projection of the female divine, opens out what has hitherto been seen as a set of polarities into a play of diversities, 'bringing the god to life through us'.<sup>31</sup> This needs to be pan/theism rather than secularism or

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<sup>25</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 270.

<sup>26</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> J. Wentzel Van Huysteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 282.

<sup>29</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 282.

<sup>30</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 271.

<sup>31</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 277.

humanism, however, since the power of the Western symbolic is still fuelled by its horizon of ontotheology. It requires the fluidity of a divine horizon of becoming rather than the reified notion of being. Clare Greer argues in her essay, however, that Grace's adoption of pantheism is a strategy for articulating a notion of divinity not modelled on absolute difference or otherness, what Greer refers to as the tension (or dialectic?) of univocity and equivocity. How is God 'other', both of and not of the world? Is it possible to speak of God as necessarily other, or transcendent, without reproducing the old devices of the dispassionate, Platonic divinity?

### Salvation/Flourishing

a symbolic that celebrates natality, makes for flourishing, prompts action for love of the world as contrasted with a symbolic which shuts down on flourishing for some or all people or for the earth.<sup>32</sup>

Another dimension of the distorted logic of the Western moral imaginary is, according to Grace, its grounding in a symbolic of salvation rather than that of flourishing. If 'becoming divine' was about identifying new horizons of becoming that ally oneself with *amor mundi*, love of the world and the realization of the ultimate preciousness of all nats, then a further concept, of flourishing, also articulated Grace's conviction that the Western moral imaginary needed re-orienting away from necrophilic values and towards more life-giving values. Grace was not alone in developing the concept of flourishing within ethics and moral philosophy, since a revival of interest in Aristotelian virtue ethics, pioneered by writers such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Martha Nussbaum, generated renewed interest in teleological accounts of the good as opposed to Kantian and utilitarian perspectives.

Yet Grace coupled discussion of the basic criteria of a life well-lived – the means by which we might aim towards an ethic that cultivated human flourishing – with her earlier convictions about the need to displace the logic of necrophilia with one of natality. The virtues by which one might cultivate the ultimate end of flourishing were those which promoted the values of life, creativity, diversity and justice, rather than death or fear of death; and in her discussion of a pantheistic world-view, and her plentiful use of organic and agricultural metaphors<sup>33</sup> she hints at a broader creation-centred appropriation of flourishing that might extend beyond human justice-making towards non-human animals, the environment and the planet as a whole. Indeed, in his essay, Peter Manley Scott takes this route, seeking an ethic which draws on the notion of 'posthuman nature' that appreciates the interdependence of humans, nature and technologies: one that desires the flourishing of all creation rather than bolstering a hierarchy of being. Mary Elizabeth Moore, too, discusses how for the author Beatrix Potter, beauty

<sup>32</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Jantzen, 'The Gendered Politics of Flourishing and Salvation', p. 63ff.

and love of nature became the focus for her own spiritual journey. Like Grace, of course, this was expressed in particular in a love of the landscape of the English Lake District.

Unusually, Grace began by identifying the roots of flourishing in Biblical concepts,<sup>34</sup> and it is prefigured by the this-worldly theology of *God's World, God's Body*, which in turn builds on tentative forays in her early work into discussions of whether or not God could have a body.<sup>35</sup> Yet it was unusual for her to begin with the classic tradition of Christianity, since she was not particularly interested in the rehabilitation of Christian tradition, in the way of Rosemary Radford Ruether or Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This is perhaps the major difference between her strategy of 'transformation', rather than the feminist theological dynamic of critique and reconstruction, in that she speaks of a 'transformative moral imaginary' to succeed the destructive moral imaginary of death and violence.<sup>36</sup> Whilst flourishing is prefigured in the Biblical and classical tradition, therefore, it is of more interest to her to see how such concepts can be renewed for today.

She links her vision of flourishing with gendered concepts of well-being and salvation,<sup>37</sup> which underpins Western Christianity's dualistic understanding of nature, the self, and embodiment.<sup>38</sup> Later, she drew more on the notion of beauty as an essential device for envisaging an alternative aesthetics of flourishing,<sup>39</sup> once more echoing other voices in moral philosophy that link ethics and aesthetics. 'Flourishing' is thus related to the ontological privileging of natality: a model of absorption into 'life in all its fullness' rather than rescue from a world of corruption and death. It also signals a shift from an individualistic salvation to a collective enterprise of flourishing: 'The recognition that we are embodied, gendered selves and therefore socially situated means that it is within that social nexus, not as disembodied solitary thinkers, that we must become divine'.<sup>40</sup>

Mary Grey develops Grace's discussion of flourishing as a category for thinking in new ways about people with disabilities. She argues that it can function as a kind of ethical ideal or *telos* of well-being that avoids prescriptive models of perfection (which may themselves be rooted in a chronic fear of vulnerability and imperfection, akin to Jantzen's exposure of a moral imaginary of necrophilia founded on repression and fear of death). A flawed or differently-abled body reminds our culture of our bodily contingency and dependence, so we try to demonise or marginalise those who bear such reminders. Grey's analysis is further endorsement of the ubiquity of the norms of necrophilia in all aspects of Western culture.

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<sup>34</sup> Jantzen, 'The Gendered Politics of Flourishing and Salvation', pp. 58–9.

<sup>35</sup> Jantzen, 'On Worshipping an Embodied God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, VIII/3 (1978): pp. 511–19.

<sup>36</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 219.

<sup>37</sup> Jantzen, 'The Gendered Politics of Flourishing and Salvation', p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Jantzen, 'The Gendered Politics of Flourishing and Salvation', p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 209.

In her essay, Pamela Anderson notes resonances with Grace's work in the philosophy of Spinoza and Ricoeur. The philosopher nurtures that which is life-giving, which for Anderson are desire and yearning, the rejection of the dispassionate genderless disembodied God/deity, choosing instead to think from experience and draw upon an embodied sensuality in the work of a new kind of rationality. This is echoed by both Morny Joy and Ursula King in their respective considerations of Grace's account of women medieval mystics. The divinity of which these mystics speak is far from a traditional model of the 'unmoved mover', and Joy and King point out how the mystics articulated their religious experience in the language of sexual passion and sensual joy. I am reminded here, too, of the poster of the feminist critic and poet Audre Lorde that used to adorn Grace's living-room wall, and how Lorde's famous essay, 'Uses of the Erotic' might be applied to such divine encounters. In that respect, we can see a continuity between Grace's early work on divine embodiment and pantheism, and the necessity of a religious language that adopts the vernacular of sensuality rather than pure reason.

### **The Construction of 'Religion' and the Task of Philosophy of Religion**

A feminist philosophy of religion is ... one which must show the bias and sterility of masculinist (supposedly neutral) pursuits of the discipline. However, it must go on to the creative effort of developing a feminist imaginary which will enable the divine becoming of women.<sup>41</sup>

Grace was concerned not only with displacing a masculinist and necrophilic moral imaginary with a symbolic founded in natality, but also with the way in which a culture of necrophilia, with its elevation of disinterested, disembodied subjectivity and obsession with immortality and the denial of death also distorted our understanding of what it meant to be religious, and correspondingly how the study of religion should proceed. A consistent thread running throughout her work was a critique of the way in which Anglo-American philosophy of religion had defined the terms on which the West conceived of, and practised, religion. She was concerned with a critique of religion as rationality, God as transcendent and scholarship as disinterested, in favour of the religious life as one of 'becoming divine', of divinity as immanence, and the vocation of the intellectual as one of transformation, passion and engagement.

Thus, she begins *Becoming Divine* with questions about the ultimate aim of intellectual enquiry: 'why do they do it?' she asks.<sup>42</sup> 'What is the fundamental task of the philosophy of religion?'<sup>43</sup> Once again, she juxtaposes the alternatives as a binary pairing: whereas traditional philosophy of religion concerns itself with

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<sup>41</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 6.

questions of the existence of God, the truthfulness of doctrine, or the coherence of claims about the nature and being of God, she states her intention, along with Luce Irigaray, to chart a very different course: ‘our fundamental moral obligation is to become divine; and the task of philosophy of religion must be to enable that becoming, or else it is ultimately useless’.<sup>44</sup>

This introduces two important strands: not only is she arguing for a different conception of the divine, but note also how this is a highly partisan understanding of the philosophy of religion. It is not about academic debate in some way abstracted from the concerns of everyday living, but knowledge generated in order to equip us for lives of virtue and wisdom. As Grace argues, this is probably closer to the traditional model of the ancient Greeks, but constituted something of a departure from conventions of value-neutrality favoured by the Western academy – although not, in general, amongst feminist scholars. Knowledge is to be put to work for the purposes of social justice. Grace’s students and colleagues were familiar with her question, ‘who benefits?’<sup>45</sup> Just as God is not dispassionate and unmoved by creation, neither is the academic to remain in his or her ivory tower without some thought for the relevance of their scholarship to the total sum of human flourishing.

The struggle against suffering and injustice and towards flourishing takes precedence, beyond comparison, to the resolution of intellectual problems; and although it is important that the struggle is an intelligent one, there is no excuse for theory ever becoming a distraction from the struggle for justice itself.<sup>46</sup>

Grace regarded her work as no ivory tower theorising, but a project to put academic pursuits to work in the pursuit of transformation. This was in keeping with the contrast she drew between knowledge which pertained to be deductive, theoretical, universal and objective and that which – as she believed – more accurately reflected the origins of all knowledge and discourse in contingent lived experience. Echoing feminist moral philosophers such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings<sup>47</sup> she argues for the inductive and experiential basis of all moral reasoning, an understanding that extends to her own commitment to scholarship that eschews pretensions of value-neutrality in favour of openly acknowledging its own partiality.

Grace was also exercised by what she saw as the necessity for privileged intellectuals to put scholarship to work in projects of critical transformation. Academics and intellectuals have a responsibility to foster transformative thinking ‘in ways that open us to thinking and living to promote human flourishing’.<sup>48</sup> The problem was that by embracing value-neutrality in the name of disinterested objective scholarship, the academy had allowed ‘intellectual endeavour [to be

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<sup>44</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 264.

<sup>47</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 203, n. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 227.

redefined] as no longer a threat, no longer in active engagement with public life'.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Grace insisted both that knowledge always emanated from situated, embodied positions, and in turn such knowledge had a responsibility to return to and enrich, such real lives and contexts. The problem was that the 'big questions' of suffering, evil and the existence of God had become divorced from any kind of lived experience, with the result that they remained abstractions: 'if the philosophy of religion is to engage with ideas of suffering and salvation, these cannot be treated as abstract concepts but as occurring within actual narratable individual lives'.<sup>50</sup>

She thereby challenges the dispassionate stance of Anglo-American analytical philosophy of religion with its emphasis on 'the justification of truth-claims and the effort to assure believers of the credibility of their beliefs ... The idea that it might be part of the function of the philosophy of religion to project or imagine new religious ideas, a new God or gods as female, or as couple(s), or anything else hardly enters their pages'.<sup>51</sup> For practical theologians, this is familiar territory, reminiscent of the hierarchy of systematic theology over practical theology.<sup>52</sup> In reaction to models of theology as primarily a matter of propositional belief, or correspondence with revealed truth, however, liberation and contextual theologies insist on the primacy of *orthopraxis* over orthodoxy, in which 'talk about God' is regarded as a discourse intended to promote faithful praxis, in which 'truth' is performative, evaluated according to principles of justice and the doing of the divine will. There are many parallels in this to Grace's agenda: at the beginning of an article for the journal *Feminist Theory*, for example, she asks, 'What does it mean to do feminist moral philosophy with notions of utopia and transformation as points of reference?'<sup>53</sup> She seeks, like practical theologians, therefore, to re-conceive her discipline as a form of practical wisdom, directed towards the cultivation of virtue, justice and flourishing.

The traditional view, however, has been that religion is about belief, and philosophical theology is about justifying the coherence and credibility of such belief. Yet if Grace was not overtly interested in orthopraxis, she was interested in the role of religion in constructing and maintaining a particular symbolic, the images, narratives and values that determine Western culture. This is about who has the power to define the nature of authentic and authoritative religious experience; but this is contingent upon implicit understandings of the nature of God, knowledge and meaning. To refuse to uphold truth as correspondence with propositional belief also entails a break with 'good old God' and a break with an onto-theological tradition, into an alternative concept of the divine as yet to be

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<sup>49</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 343.

<sup>50</sup> Jantzen, 'Necrophilia and Natality: What does it mean to be religious?', *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 19/1 (1998): pp. 101–21, p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 219.

the actualised horizon of becoming. ‘Divinity in the face of natalis is a horizon of becoming, a process of divinity ever new, just as natality is the possibility of new beginnings’.<sup>54</sup>

It is also, essentially, a break with realism, since Grace is more interested in the creative possibilities for and the pursuit of transformation towards an ethic of flourishing and natality. Talk about God must by necessity open up new rules of discourse, new models of subjectivity – but to remain locked in the paradigm of propositional truth would be to limit such possibilities. This resonates with her contention that the search for a new moral imaginary is informed by its efficacy in serving ‘the practice of justice’.<sup>55</sup>

What counts as authoritative knowledge, scholarship and religious experience within this perspective? The fundamental categories by which the practice of religion, the nature of God, even the conventions under which religion is studied and researched, are subjected to scrutiny and revealed to be conventions – invariably shaped by a hierarchy of value that prizes rationality, value-neutrality, detached transcendence above other qualities, a hierarchy that is also fundamentally gendered. This critical trajectory was nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in her memorable work on the social construction of ‘mysticism’.<sup>56</sup> Whilst the explicit engagement with Foucault’s methods only fully emerged after *Becoming Divine* it is still possible to see *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* as attempting a ‘genealogy’ of mysticism in that it seeks to expose the implicit biases underpinning the construction of axiomatic terms.<sup>57</sup> ‘Who counts as a mystic?’ she asks.<sup>58</sup>

As Ursula King comments in her essay, ‘there exists hardly a more beleaguered category than “mysticism” in the current academic study of religion’<sup>59</sup>: as she argues, there are only mystical experiences, and not a generic ‘ism’. She places Grace’s work in the context of other scholarship, feminist and non-feminist, which explores the rhetorical devices mystics used to communicate, how they were able to claim space for themselves and what it took for their voices to be heard and preserved. However, Grace was especially critical of the ambivalent legacy of William James in this respect: widely regarded as the originator of modern studies of religious experience, he nevertheless generated a school of thought which regarded religious experience as one of interiority, as essentially subjective and psychological,<sup>60</sup> which extended to the postmodern upsurge in interest in forms of ‘spirituality’. Other writers in this volume take their cue from this: for example, Kate Stogdon extends Grace’s critique of spirituality as apolitical and privatized,

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<sup>54</sup> Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 254.

<sup>55</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup> Jantzen, ‘Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics’; Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*.

<sup>57</sup> Jantzen, ‘Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics’, pp. 188, 197, 203.

<sup>58</sup> Jantzen, ‘Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics’.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 7, p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Jantzen, ‘Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics’, pp. 192, 202.

but follows her example of ‘reading against the grain’, in her case of Ignatian retreat-making. Picking up on Grace’s concern with whether or not the material world and embodied experience is a diversion from or route into, the divine, Stogdon argues that the intention of the Ignatian tradition is not to conquer or repress desire but to ‘school’ it in the service of discernment and creative agency.

### **Beyond Dualism: Toward a Renewed Moral Imaginary**

The creativity of imagination empowered by desire for newness is inspired by the counter-narratives and alternative perspectives of exteriority, and guided by values of natality and flourishing. It is this imagination that is set free by attentiveness to the life and beauty that emerged ever and again as contrasted with the sordid violence that structures the narrative of the West, and develops a poetics of transformation. In concrete terms, what is required is a painstaking genealogy not only of the religious violence that has formed the West but also of the voices of resistance, beauty and hope. Only by reading history can philosophers of religion be effective in helping to bring newness into the world.<sup>61</sup>

In this section, I want to focus on the way in which Grace used particular critical disciplines and techniques in the service of her process of diagnosis and transformation. Her concern to excavate the roots of the culture of death led her to the discipline of psychoanalysis, not only as one of the ‘master discourses of modernity’<sup>62</sup> in its diagnosis of Western subjectivity but as a transformative tool as a means of mapping an alternative. As Jeremy Carrette points out in this volume and elsewhere, this remained incomplete in Grace’s work before her death, but his essay begins to indicate the contours of some of that transformative thinking, not least in the shape of other feminist critiques. Grace believed that her philosophical enquiries held strong analogies with the therapeutic functions of psychoanalysis, in her quest for the deep-seated roots of the ‘cultural neurosis’ of Western modernity.<sup>63</sup> Lacanian psychoanalysis provided a powerful diagnosis of gendered subjectivity forged through separation from all that is deemed ‘other’. Under the Law of the Father, which privileges masculine subjectivity, the psychic journey from the imaginary to the symbolic is affected via repression of the bonds with the maternal. Yet the symbols, myths and narratives of a culture will be designed to reinforce that repression. Another psychoanalytic concept, displacement, also worked to indicate how the repressed object of fear or anxiety acquires a surrogate, which in turn becomes substituted for the primary object: thus, by association, repression of birth and natality becomes denigration of the maternal, the embodied, the feminine and the material world.

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<sup>61</sup> Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 4.

Foucauldian tools were also a central part of her critical and reconstructive project. From Foucault's method of genealogy, she took on the task of 'a history of the present': of problematising the presuppositions of Western modernity, thereby questioning the inevitability of a moral imaginary of violence and death. Yet if Foucault's work is about exposing the episteme of modernity and the ways in which regimes of scientific enquiry and taxonomy plot the fault-lines that circumscribe our notions of normality and pathology, Grace turned also to deconstruction and psychoanalysis to trace the desires and repressions that inform the moral imaginary, and ultimately to expose its deeply gendered character. Thus, after Derrida, she asked what a dominant discourse might simultaneously repress and depend upon for its own stability and coherence, arguing that the 'death-dealing structures of modernity'<sup>64</sup> rested upon the repression of birth and natality. This is consistent with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, in terms of the moral imaginary as something that precedes our birth and yet is internalised in the process of our socialisation.

To excavate the roots of the present, however, is but a first step on the journey of transformation. If the current moral imaginary is not inevitable,<sup>65</sup> then the task becomes one of imagining new, life-giving alternatives; and this is where the creative task of philosophy, for Grace, comes into its own. The mapping of the contours of a different cultural imaginary, founded on natality, has many resonances with creative arts, such as the invention of forms of utopia.<sup>66</sup> This was perhaps one of the reasons why towards the end of her life Grace's thinking was focusing more on constructing an alternative 'new imaginary of beauty'<sup>67</sup> not simply as an object of aesthetic contemplation but in terms of its political, generative power.

The notion of utopia figures strongly in much feminist writing, and represents far more than functioning as a broad term of idealism. Rather, it performs much of the same task as envisaged by Grace's work: its positing of using refracted modes of thinking, such as alien cultures, or parallel universes, or alternative histories precisely harnesses our imaginations to render, as Mark Muesse has put it, 'the strange familiar and the familiar strange'.<sup>68</sup> Fantastic, speculative and utopian literature has long functioned as a form of social critique, which displaces or 'estranges' us from the familiar; and once it has been disrupted in this way, new possibilities can be fabricated. It is therefore no accident that much utopian thinking has functioned as radical social critique.<sup>69</sup> Yet, like Grace's philosophical method, its political character rests in its ability to emancipate the imagination as much

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<sup>64</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*.

<sup>68</sup> Mark W. Muesse, 'Religious Studies and "Heaven's Gate": Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange', in Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.) *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London, 1999), pp. 390–94.

<sup>69</sup> Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester, 2002) pp. 55–9.

as release material forces for change. In an essay published posthumously, Grace came closest to spelling out the strong connections between the critical, diagnostic excavation of a necrophilic imaginary and the cultivation of creative imagination in the pursuit of change. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's work on utopia, she stresses the capacity of literature or narratives that deliberately abandons familiar territory, swims against the stream of inevitability or predictability and from its 'exterior' position, starts to imagine alternative futures.<sup>70</sup> The practice of 'reading against the grain' informs her use of Hannah Arendt's work. This is not to take her out of context or offer an anachronistic reading that attempts to edit or make apologies for her views. It is more to take the work in new, suggestive and creative directions even if they are not those the author herself would have foreseen.<sup>71</sup>

In representing the major themes of Grace's work via a series of oppositional pairings, I am aware of the risk that by stylising her work in terms of a series of dualisms, I simply collude in their reinforcement, rather than their deconstruction. Yet she was always concerned to resist this tendency, since there are plenty of references in her work to the dangers of this approach.<sup>72</sup> Whilst the dominant discourses of necrophilia that beset the Western moral imaginary are dependent on their repressed others, she is concerned to destabilise the entire structure of such binary thinking as well as their out-workings. It is not enough, she argued, to reverse hierarchies or valorise the subordinated or repressed categories of 'feminine' subjectivity, since this would be to commend categories that were themselves the products of distorted imaginary. 'What is needed instead is a strategy that overcomes the series of dualisms and offers scope for integration as well as for respect and honour of diversity'.<sup>73</sup> The intention is thus to construct transformative categories for a renewed moral imaginary that do not simply 'mirror' or invert the values of necrophilia. Yet the question is whether there is scope within the reconstructed categories for ambivalence or contradiction, a 'shadow' side to beauty or natality. Alyda Faber suggests this much in her review of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* when she compares Grace's evocation of beauty with Kathleen Sands' more tragic representation of life and beauty as inherently fragile and ephemeral.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, as she always emphatically insisted, Grace's use of Arendt's natality is a long way from any kind of celebration of 'Mother God' or goddesses, or of the maternal as unimpeachable; but the tendency is, admittedly, to locate virtue entirely on one side of the binary divide, at the expense of an exploration of moral ambivalence.

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<sup>70</sup> Jantzen, 'On Philosophers (Not) Reading History: Narrative and Utopia', in Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner (eds), *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience* (London, 2007), pp. 177–90, pp. 189–90.

<sup>71</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*.

<sup>72</sup> Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Jantzen, 'Feminism and Pantheism', p. 275.

<sup>74</sup> Alyda Faber, 'Review: *Foundations of Violence*', *Ars Disputandi* [<http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>] 5 (2005).

Graham Ward's essay in this volume provides us with an example of how binary thinking has infected both the moral and theological imaginary, but also how such a dualism might be transcended. Ward argues for the interdependence of matter and spirit, the material and metaphysical, despite attempts of Western philosophy and theology to divide and oppose them. This attains a particular expression in contemporary consumerist obsessions with body image and appearance – a corruption of beauty as classically conceived – when the substance of matter and flesh are reduced to superficial appearance. Ward stresses the metaphorical substance of the body amidst a thicker fabric of associations; in particular, he is concerned to rehabilitate the metaphysics of the 'body politic' and to remind us that the apparatuses of the State exercise tangible effects on the bodies, as much as the minds, of its citizens. Whilst Ward takes his argument into sacramental and ecclesiological territory into which Grace would not have ventured, there is a parallel with her work in his conviction to heal the separation of body and spirit in the interests of a renewed political vision. If the world is God's body, he argues, then human beings share in the redemption of the world by virtue of their participation in Christ's body. The positing of the Body of Christ as the organizing metaphor for the body politic locates the redeemed and transfigured human body as an artefact of the greater ecclesial body, but its origins in divine grace mean its political nature is irreducible to temporal norms.

I have stressed all along Grace's insistence that in order to act differently, we have to learn to think differently: but how exactly did she see the relationship between thought and action, between the worlds of the imaginary and material culture? Grace deployed several terms to describe the orientations of Western culture, by which she means the set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, or a system of symbols representing particular world-views by which people orientate their lives. For many, however, such a definition itself falls prey to idealism, in which it takes little account of material culture or the practices of labour by which people 'build worlds' not just of meaning but of physical artefacts and technologies and tangible social institutions – such as penitentiaries, asylums and clinics – which are both purveyors of value and disciplines of the body. It is in her use of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, underpinned by his robust conceptualisation of practice, that she perhaps comes closest to this more materialist concept. Certainly, one could claim that in her use of Foucauldian critique and in the constant subject matter of violence and death, her argument could not fail but to engage with material culture; but there is still a question as to whether the Western moral imaginary is theorised as effectively 'all in the mind' at the expense of a more thorough-going analysis of the material, economic and technological manifestations of culture.

In the introduction to one of her last essays, Grace asks, 'How does newness enter the world? How can such newness disrupt the violence of (post)modernity, violence whose perpetrators often invoke the names of God? And how can philosophers of religion and theologians help to change the world rather than be

reduced to ineffectual hand-wringing, or worse, be complicit in the violence?<sup>75</sup> These questions take us to the heart of her vocation as critical and transformative thinker. She consistently asked what it would mean to do feminist moral philosophy and philosophy of religion with the values of natality and flourishing, rather than violence and death, at their heart. Just as her concept of religion and the divine eschewed abstract and disinterested interpretations, so she extended that to an understanding of her own work as an intellectual. Her project was one which sought 'to address, criticize and ultimately *redeem* the present'<sup>76</sup> (my emphasis): an intriguing use of religious language, but consistent with her view that no knowledge is neutral and that part of the responsibility of the intellectual was to contribute constructively not only to a critique of the values of Western modernity but to its fundamental reorientation. Thus, her critical and reconstructive task was directed towards the articulation of a 'transformative moral imaginary',<sup>77</sup> one liberated from a preoccupation with mortality and violence, towards one grounded in flourishing and natality.

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<sup>75</sup> Jantzen, 'On Philosophers (Not) Reading History: Narrative and Utopia', p. 177.

<sup>76</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 219.

<sup>77</sup> Jantzen, 'Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality', p. 219.