

Susanne Claxton. *Heidegger's Gods: An Ecofeminist Perspective.* Rowman & Littlefield 2017. 176 pp. \$120.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781786602428); \$39.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781786602435).

Susanne Claxton has taken on an exceedingly ambitious project. Building on a succinct and careful reading of Martin Heidegger's later thought, including very clear and insightful explanations of some of his most difficult concepts, she develops a highly original and timely ecofeminist critique of modernity, and eco-phenomenological call for the rediscovery of *dwelling* as the best solution to the moral problems facing the world today. Claxton brings a strong command of Heidegger's thought into constructive engagement with ecofeminist theory, eco-phenomenology, Giorgio Agamben, Nietzsche, and the mythological figure of Lilith in an eclectic group of seven chapters that nevertheless achieves a bold unity, although this is most clear only in the later chapters.

Following an initial introduction to the overall project, Claxton begins her careful reading of Heidegger's later thought in chapter two and three—together they make up nearly half of the book. She offers an insightful and fresh, if not always original, introduction to basic concepts Heidegger developed in his engagement with Greek thinking, including *a-letheia*, *physis*, and Logos, as well as other signature Heidegger terms of art, such as 'dwelling' and 'the Fourfold.' These last two are particularly important for Claxton's project.

Chapter three, 'Poetry and the Gods,' is a thorough and enlightening discussion of Heidegger's engagement with Hölderlin's poetry. This is the longest chapter in the book, and includes some of the most insightful comments on Heidegger's relationship to poetry, and to Hölderlin in particular. Claxton really establishes herself as a scholar of Heidegger's later thought in this chapter. Following Heidegger's lead, she brilliantly frames the chapter by responding to a set of questions Heidegger offers by way of response to the initial lines of Hölderlin's poem 'The Archipelago,' that is, 'What is the poet's own'? What proper element is allotted to him? To where does the decree compel him? From where does it come? How does it compel?' (43). In this way Claxton manages to continue her conceptual clarification from chapter two, fills out her earlier discussion of 'the Fourfold,' the distinction between 'meditative' and 'calculative' thinking, and the Heideggerian sense of the correlative pair, knowledge and tenderness. Finally, she relates all of this to 'dwelling,' which is central to her vision of a way forward in late modernity. Overall, Claxton does an excellent job elucidating Heidegger.

Having finished the necessary preliminary work of conceptual clarification, Claxton turns to her central problematic armed with an arsenal of Heideggerian concepts. Chapter four, 'Our Loss of Dwelling,' is an exploration and explanation of the ecofeminist critique of modernity which interprets our late modern dilemma, as the title suggests, in terms of a loss of 'dwelling.' In particular, Claxton isolates four aspects of ecofeminist critique which most ecofeminist theory identifies as the causes at the root of our contemporary social, political, and environmental crises. These are 'the scientific revolution and the resultant mechanistic materialist model of the universe, capitalism, patriarchy and patriarchal religions, and *self and other dualisms*' (85).

The term disenchantment is commonly used to describe the first item on this list, although Claxton never uses this term. She parses this in terms of an 'epochal shift' from an understanding of nature as in some sense 'alive' to a vision of the universe as 'simple, dead and inert matter,' without significance independent of human subjective projection of value, usually in terms of narrow utility. As Claxton puts it, 'a former sacred wood became only so many potential square feet of lumber' (85). The second element in the set of core ecofeminist causal explanations of our current problems is global capitalism, also common to critiques of modernity not self-consciously operating within the

sphere of a feminist critique. Though these two elements of the ecofeminist critique are shared by others, ecofeminist theory, however, contributes the idea that nature and women have uniquely shared interests, and that the domination and exploitation of women and nature are inseparable.

Claxton isolates a third core cause in ecofeminist critique: patriarchy in all its manifold forms, but especially patriarchal religion. Claxton believes that there was another, conceptually parallel, but historically prior, 'epochal shift' in human understanding, that 'around roughly 4500 BCE ... there was a move away from long-standing, earth-based, goddess-worshipping religions, in which both the earth's and women's fertility were seen as sacred and revered accordingly, in favor of the worship of sky gods, who were distant and removed from the earth and its people yet believed to rule over them,' which process, per Claxton, lead to patriarchal organization of society and patriarchal religion. This is a move, Claxton asserts, from immanent divinity to the 'merely transcendent,' which climaxes in the Judeo-Christian tradition (91). Finally, under the heading of *Self and other dualisms*, which Claxton always italicizes, falls a group of causes related to unmasking systems or structures of domination rooted in masculine value bias, the norming of the masculine side of a set of value dualisms. Claxton closes chapter three with a discussion of Nietzsche's critique of religion and the ecofeminist critique of patriarchal religion. She reads Nietzsche as an ecofeminist ally insofar as his scathing critique of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition dovetails with the ecofeminist's critique of transcendence as the result of patriarchal systems of power and domination of nature and woman.

Chapter five is Claxton's most original contribution. She develops the mythology of 'Lilith' with the conceptual apparatus borrowed from Giorgio Agamben. The figure of Lilith, a semi-demonic female in Jewish mythology, emerges as 'representative not of woman alone, but of that aspect of embodied human existence that is *non-rational* human sexuality' (117), that is, human sexuality 'in its purest form... as that which exists prior to and independently of the realm of reason as a pre-phenomenological experience of an embodied being' (119). This excursus on the figure of Lilith, however, doesn't fit neatly into the scheme of the project; it is not clear what her analysis of this obscure mythological figure adds to the overall project, except to offer a rationale for her excellent explanation of Agamben's conceptual tools. It sometimes feels hurried, and the fit with Agamben's thought can seem tendentious. Although she does return to Agamben's thought in subsequent chapters, she doesn't bring her extended discussion of myth to bear on her thesis. That said, it may well be that Claxton simply needs to develop her thought on the she-demon more thoroughly, perhaps in a second book-length project.

Claxton returns to Heidegger in chapter five, and addresses the debate between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism as this familiar debate in environmental ethics plays out in the context of eco-phenomenology. Claxton finds both positions attractive, but also problematic, and develops a novel position between the two, which she deems *Daseincentrism*. She works out her position here in close constructive engagement with Iain Thomson, whose work reinforces the importance and continuing relevance of Heideggerian phenomenology to environmental ethics. Relying heavily on Thomson's important work in eco-phenomenology, Claxton develops a third way (or, in her use of Agamben's terminology, a 'hinge'). As part of her argument she also attempts to reconcile Nietzschean contempt for 'otherworlds,' and transcendent religion, which she shares, and Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as ontotheology, which is inseparable from his critique of Nietzsche. For such a project to work, Claxton needs some form of transcendence that doesn't lead to devaluing this world, the 'earth.' It remains unclear whether Claxton's appeal to Thomson's concept of 'transcendent ethical realism' can adequately supply the requisite weakly transcendent ground of value, or an immanent anchor of value. A simpler approach, of course, would be to reject the Nietzschean cynicism, and embrace a more robust pluralism open to varieties of transcendence.

The best chapters of the book are the early Heidegger chapters, especially her detailed exposition of 'Poetry and the Gods.' Claxton is an excellent, competent, and lucid reader of the later Heidegger. The work is also notable for the way it brings together ecofeminist theory, later Heidegger and eco-phenomenology in a comprehensive philosophical vision which gives the book its overall coherence. It will be an important work for anyone working at the intersection of phenomenology, feminism and environmental ethics. Students of Heidegger will undoubtedly delight in her innovative application of his work, as well as her deft analysis of the most pressing problems facing humanity in late modernity.

The book closes on a hopeful note; the final chapter develops the idea that the solution lies in a rediscovery of dwelling. If she has been successful, Claxton has given voice, however tentatively, to the possibility that poetic dwelling is an achievement available to all, and through this renewed hope for humanity and the earth.

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