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Angela Roothaan, *Indigenous, Modern and Postcolonial Relations to Nature: Negotiating the Environment* (London and New York: Routledge 2019), 180 pp.

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Recently, ecocriticism has witnessed a growing number of publications that strive to accommodate the diversity of epistemological claims on the environment made by different communities across the globe. To name a few examples, Elisabeth DeLoughrey et al.'s *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (2015), Scott Slovic et al.'s *Ecocriticism from the Global South* (2015), and, more recently, Stuart Cooke's and Peter Denney's *Transcultural Ecocriticism* (2021) bring together global literary and, more broadly, cultural perspectives by intersecting the discourse of environmental studies with postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives. Angela Roothaan's study *Indigenous, Modern and Postcolonial relations to Nature: Negotiating the Environment* contributes to this body of scholarship by filling a gap in ecocritical literature as it aims to create an international philosophical framework to negotiate different environmental epistemologies. By considering Indigenous relations to the natural world as they are expressed in shamanistic and spirit ontologies, Roothaan takes different ways of living on this earth to the level of a politics of epistemology, uncovering in the process the inherently political nature of Western philosophy and science and their exclusive materialist and empiricist claim to knowledge production.

From the outset, Roothaan states that it is not her aim to devise "a single generalized 'shamanistic' or 'indigenous' worldview or way of life" which would romantically counter the "evil of modernity" (15). Instead, she seeks to investigate where these 'spirited' realities and the realities of modernity clash, with respect to both their historical and existential situatedness. The first chapter points out that spirit ontologies are historical and locally varying ways of relating to the natural world, foregrounding the diversity of Indigenous perspectives from across the globe. At the same time, however, it also refuses a singular idea of 'modernity' by emphasising that rejection of spirits from the Western history of ideas has been contested by a variety of Western thinkers.

In this respect, chapter two looks at the work of anthropologists who have challenged modernism from within by inventing ways of reversing the ancient vs. modern dualism and adopting non-dualistic approaches to the natural world. Eduardo Kohn's work, for example, is presented as "a process of reconstruction that does not necessarily aim at a 'true' representation of 'animist' ways of being in the world" (34). Still, Roothaan contends that the work of Kohn and other thinkers, such as Val Plumwood, for example,

is inevitably limited by the untranslatability of discourses articulating different ways of being in the world and by reducing Indigenous ontologies to “functional analyses of material life” (36). The true challenge, according to her, involves taking seriously the possibility that shamanistic practices express a set of relations to the world that entail criticism of modernist dualism.

The third chapter examines how the modern demarcation of scientific rationalism was accompanied by an exclusion of spirits from Western epistemology. It provides a discussion of Immanuel Kant’s critique of Emanuel Swedenborg’s work in which Swedenborg dealt with realities excluded from the empirical worldview. Kant’s epistemology is shown to have emerged from the banishment of a spirit ontology. Though Kantian morality is commonly considered ‘autonomous’, that is free from ‘natural’ impulses, Roothaan points out that in his writing, Kant embraced the idea of free will, even though “theoretical reason cannot accept such a thing to exist in the world as science knows it” (58). However, while morality was saved in this way within the confines of the rational, it was detached from the spiritual and enabled the suppression of beings that it declared to be not fully reasonable or human.

Chapters four and five shift the focus to Western thinkers who became frustrated by the limits imposed upon knowledge by Kantian rationalism. William James, Carl-Gustav Jung and Jacques Derrida are discussed with respect to how their approaches to epistemology enable an opening up of Western thought to a return of the spiritual. Scholars of postcolonial and critical animal studies will be familiar with most of the terms introduced in chapter five as it is concerned with how these approaches problematise the othering of animals and the way they overlap with the animalistic nature of human beings. Roothaan points out that the predominant focus on continental philosophy in the West explains why the recent attempts to accommodate shamanism philosophically in Western academic discourse have come from anthropologists of the ontological turn rather than philosophers by training who have been confined by the straitjacket of the philosophical canon. The work of Stephen Muecke also comes to mind here, particularly his *Ancient & Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy* (2004), in which he attempted to create the possibility of an academic field of Australian Indigenous philosophy. As he more recently stated elsewhere, “one of the reasons why the door to departments of philosophy has remained closed is that the dominant philosophical tradition is analytic” (“Indigenous” 3).

Examples of spirited approaches to the natural world in the context of postcolonial economy and politics are at the heart of the last three chapters. Chapter six discusses Placide Tempels’s work *Bantu Philosophy* (1956), considered to have set the ground for the ontological turn in anthropology. Roothaan explains that Tempels approached the experience of the spirited world of people in Congo without dehumanizing them by changing the framework of and ‘Africanizing’ both theology and philosophy, treating different systems of thought as epistemologically equal. Chapters seven and eight address the clash between global nature conservation policies and local, embodied relations to the environment. Roothaan proposes an approach to different epistemologies that foregrounds knowledge as perspectival and adopts the condition of possibility based on

relation and life-enhancement, as well as what matters in a particular situation, rather than the Kantian condition derived from causality, space and time.

Through its recurrent critiques of what Bruno Latour calls modernist practices of “purification” (*Never 10*), as well as its emphasis on epistemological pluralism, the book shows that countering the exclusion of spirits and questioning the definition of the human and the non-human go hand-in-hand in raising awareness of what precludes truly open intercultural communication in philosophy across the world. Though Roothaan presents an understanding of the ‘postcolonial’ primarily in terms of critiques of racism in modern philosophy (Césaire, Fanon and Said), it is also extended to a critique of technologically-driven philosophy, as well as ‘othering’ of Indigenous knowledge in academia and beyond. In this context, Indigenous approaches to the natural world and Indigeneity more broadly are understood as embracing spirited realities, providing a different sense of the human to the one articulated by the majority of Western philosophical discourse. Even though Roothaan emphasizes that there is a great variety of Indigenous approaches to the world, her approach is necessarily limited by a somewhat generalized treatment of ‘nature’ and Indigenous philosophies, foregrounding notions of ‘spirits’ and the human and the non-human. As such, it does not examine how ‘Indigeneity’ reframes and rearticulates other relevant notions such as those of place, space, belonging and movement. Despite this drawback, the study is an engaging and complex exploration of the current epistemological claims on the natural world, pointing out that the Western philosophy and science are but one way of dealing with life and death.

Works Cited

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