

This is a good introductory book; much better than any of the other available books which are intended as introductions to Catholic bioethics. It is better written and organised than May's, and is more up to date. It is comprehensive, accessible, and will no doubt act as a catalyst for further interest in the subject amongst students. However, its main weakness is that it has a pious tone running throughout. I fear this may well be off-putting, especially to sceptics both inside and outside the Church. I think this is a shame, because a slightly different tone would have given the book much wider appeal, and would in no way have diluted the sense of passion for the Church's teaching which Austriaco clearly has.

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THINKING THROUGH FEELING: GOD, EMOTION AND PASSIBILITY by **Anastasia Philippa Scrutton**, *Continuum*, New York and London, 2011, pp. ix + 227, £65, hbk

The idea that God suffers and thus by implication has emotions is now commonplace in some branches of theology despite its departure from orthodoxy. Traditionally, impassibilists have variously contested this, arguing for instance that attributing an emotional life to God is in some sense to make God subject to creation and thereby to challenge his omnipotence and other attributes. Passibilists, on the other hand, frequently maintain that only a suffering, empathic God can help but have also suggested that God might freely choose to undergo suffering in order to do this.

Anastasia Philippa Scrutton expands this arena with her interesting, thought-provoking book that combines a historically and philosophically well-informed exploration of emotions with a nuanced understanding of 'how varied – and sometimes mutually incompatible – understandings of impassibility were in the early church' (p. 2). So varied, she argues, that some early 'impassibilist' positions closely resemble what we might view nowadays as examples of passibilism. Many such early impassibilists, she indicates, were as much if not more motivated to defend God's perfection and sinlessness, and so to 'protect' him from unruly and potential sinful passions, than to proclaim his changelessness. Scrutton's claim, therefore, is that 'some modern forms of passibilism may not be as much of a break from tradition as has generally been perceived' (p. 2). Indeed she 'proposes these moderate positions as routes through the seemingly insurmountable impasse between impassibilism and passibilism' (p. 2). But despite her well-argued thesis I must confess to becoming increasingly sceptical as to whether there is any such simple, *univocal*, middle way.

After a scene-setting introduction, the first two chapters form the foundations for the remainder. In Chapter 1, Scrutton provides a well-informed overview of philosophical and historical views of passibilism and impassibilism and the reasons for the shift from the latter in the twentieth century; this she sees as reflecting the needs of modern theology 'to speak to challenges to faith arising from our increase awareness of human and animal suffering' (p. 3). Next, in Chapter 2, she treats the ragbag and multi-dimensional categories of emotions as having 'family resemblances' with each other. Here, in what is really the nub of the book, Scrutton revives the Augustinian and Thomist distinction between the affections and the passions recasting it as a 'spectrum . . . rather than two entirely distinct kinds of phenomena' claiming that it allows us to posit certain emotions of God (mainly the affections), while excluding those that would conflict with God's omnipotence, omniscience, incorporeality and moral perfection' (generally the passions) (p. 4, parenthetical material added).

Opening a much-needed three way discussion in Chapter 3 ‘between the impassibility debate in theology, contemporary philosophy of emotion, and pre-modern conceptions of human experience’ (p. 56), Scrutton is able to endorse the recently revived idea in the philosophy of emotion that ‘some emotions are intelligent and/or cognitive while others are more visceral... [which] resonates with the passions-affectations distinction’ (p. 65). Chapter 3 also foregrounds the crucial idea – crucial for Anastasia Scrutton’s overall claims that is – that some sorts of knowledge can *only* be attained experientially, and that if God is not to be excluded from such knowing God too must ‘experience’ in some way, though this may be via empathic knowing in the case of ‘morally dubious states’ and not ‘first-hand (which would call into question God’s moral perfection)’ (p. 98). The problem here, it seems to me, is how to make the best of a difficult job of fully preserving all the attributes in principle, and which to relax if necessary. Less charitably, it looks suspiciously as if Scrutton secures the one (God’s perfection) while simultaneously finessing the other (God’s omniscience); more charitably, and with an open mind, she might be offering a skilfully charted empathetic route out of a theological impasse.

The following three chapters are an important and systematic test for Scrutton’s thesis. These contain a perspicacious analysis of three affective states: compassion, anger and jealousy. There was much useful material here, though useful, in my opinion, as much for students of the human condition in general and theological anthropology in particular as for those interested in systematic theology. For instance, Scrutton suggests that compassion ‘reveals that people matter deeply... and that empathy provides a form of knowledge of other people’s feelings that cannot be gained through non-empathetic means’ (p. 100). Anger, less fashionable than compassion nowadays as a God attribute, is also given a refreshing new treatment, as too is jealousy. ‘God’ we are told, ‘is not an abstract principle, but a fully relational person’ (p. 106) with qualities including forgiveness; ‘anger is integral to the idea of forgiveness and therefore it is necessary to attribute anger to God if we uphold the idea of divine forgiveness’ (p. 110). Jealousy is linked with the positive force of *eros* first, and both are then attributed to God as well as *agape*. The final two chapters round up with a discussion of will and divine omnipotence and the body and divine incorporeality. Chapter 7 has God ‘choosing’ to suffer, while Chapter 8 has God precluded from experiencing physically grounded passions, via what felt to me, a simple (male) reader, a somewhat convoluted, not altogether convincing, semi-dualist analysis of the male sexual response.

So does the book work? I do have considerable reservations about Scrutton’s seemingly univocal ascriptions of personhood and being-ness to God, the sense that God changes, and the assumption that since, it seems, *we* can only know experientially or propositionally – which is arguable in itself – the same *must* be true of God, through an implied proportional analogy. The notion of an experiencing God as a relational *being* jars with me, I confess, rather than a God who tenderly holds all being, human relationality, thoughts, feelings, and experience in existence, and who in that sense knows us more intimately than we do ourselves, warts, passions and all, and yet is not, by implication, subject to time, change, or movement from ignorance to fuller knowledge and being. That said, this book is a thoughtful and well-argued contribution, which deserves to be taken seriously, and with the potential to re-energise what is possibly a tired debate.

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