

Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, editors  
*Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*  
New York: Fordham University Press, 2011 (ISBN 978-0-823-23326-7)

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"Love is as dangerous as it is powerful."  
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Planetary Loves*, 60

*Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* emerged out of a colloquium hosted in November 2007 by the theological school at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey that brought prominent postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak into dialogue with postcolonial theologians. Postcolonial theology is "marked . . . by unprecedented preoccupation with the effects of empires old and new, and productive engagement with the field of postcolonial studies" (4). This edited collection is comprised of three sections: "Introductions," "Conversations," and "Appropriations"; it consists of eighteen chapters. Rather than attempt to provide a detailed account of the arguments in each of the chapters, I provide a brief overview of the structure of the anthology, and identify and discuss the book's central concepts and themes. In doing so, I examine their significance for contemporary feminist philosophy and feminist love studies in the twenty-first century.

The authors in *Planetary Loves* engage with Spivak's work in a variety of ways. In the introductory section, two chapters discuss her role in co-founding postcolonial studies and the relationship between her work and that of contemporary theologians. These two chapters are followed by a chapter that aligns Spivak's notion of planetarity with animist liberation theology, which moves beyond the anthropocentrism of a liberation theology directed solely at humans to include all sentient and nonsentient beings, and a response. The four chapters in this section are helpful for situating the book, tracing the trajectory of Spivak's work, and clarifying some of her ideas. "Conversations" consists of a

conversation on love between Spivak and four colloquium participants, then three chapters and Spivak's response; this section reads somewhat like conference proceedings because of its structure. In the final section of the anthology, "Appropriations," authors engage with Spivak's work by criticizing, extending, or applying it. Before I discuss their applications and criticisms of Spivak, I need to clarify her central concepts underlying the book: planetarity and love.

Spivak offers the concept of "the planetary" as an alternative to the globe; the latter, according to her, is abstract, demarcated by lines, and characterized by a flat and universal system of exchange. For her, the planetary offers an alternative to the uniformity of globalization: "Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines. . . . The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (27). The planetary, for Spivak, provides a counterpoint to the globe. The globe is mapped, divided, and seems under human control, but the planetary (and the connected concept of "planetarity") is irreducible in its alterity, and thus cannot be appropriated in the same way. The planetary is in contrast to the globe (and its corollary, globalization) by being embodied and whole rather than abstract and divided; it challenges identitarian logic and undoes divisions. Although anti-nationalist, planetarity's irreducible plurality challenges the homogeneity of globalization, and is more akin to cosmopolitanism. For instance, essays by Namsoon Kang, Dawn Martin, and Sharon Betcher in *Planetary Loves* explore the relationship between planetarity and cosmopolitanism. Spivak's concept of planetarity offers a new way to think about humanity's collective future, the necessity of addressing global issues without either resorting to false universals, or to re-inscribing and essentializing difference. Moreover, Spivak intentionally positions planetarity not as opposite to current concepts of globalization but as something wholly other, even uncanny (*unheimlich*, literally unhomelike).

For Spivak and her interlocutors, planetarity does some heavy lifting ontologically, epistemologically, and most of all, ethically. For example, in her essay, "Planetary Subjects after the Death of Geography," Jenna Tiitsman questions ignoring the very real (not virtual) lines of telecommunications and technology that circle the globe. She argues that the concept of planetarity obscures relations of dependence that are built into the global through material inequalities. In order to think beyond the global, we must first acknowledge the material practices that have divided the globe and continue not only to divide it, but to connect it.

From another perspective, Ellen Armour in "Planetary Sightings? Negotiating Sexual Differences in Globalization's Shadow" uses Spivak's concept of planetarity to analyze the rift in the Anglican community over issues of LGBTQ full inclusion. She maps out lines of alliance and convergence between socially conservative Anglicans in the global North and some Anglican communities in African countries; both deny full inclusion of gays and lesbians in the hierarchy of the Anglican Church. The number of Nigerian Anglicans alone (15–20 million members) is nearly seven times greater than the total

number of Anglicans in the global North (2.5 million); this huge difference in membership shifts the balance of power to the global South, at least with respect to sheer numbers. Of course, neither the Anglicans in the global South nor in the global North speak with one voice. Moreover, progressives on LGBTQ issues have also made cross-border alliances. Armour effectively argues that these new alliances across the traditional boundaries of global North and global South undermine conventionally held ways of dividing the world, unsettle Northerners championing a progressive global LGBTQ rights agenda, and should make us re-examine the role of Christianity in neo-colonialism.

Both Tiitsman's and Armour's essays discuss specific issues of cross-border alliance and conflict, issues that still must be addressed even though the shift to planetarity aims to move us toward a common project of transnational ecological sustainability. This common project involves not only a shift in our thinking about our shared home, the planet, but also about our relationship to others. Spivak calls for love as the most powerful way to connect with others and with the planet.

Several authors in the collection engage with Spivak's call for love "as a supplement to collective effort" (55). Interestingly, two different authors propose that Spivak's notion of love has resonance with non-Western conceptions. Pui-Lan Kwok associates it with the Chinese idea of *qing*, which captures the interrelationship of the self with all beings and nature; Kwok also relates this idea of love to animism. She calls for an animist liberation theology that includes sentient and nonsentient existence connected by "radical relationality," that is, love (33, 42). In a later essay, W. Anne Joh relates Spivak's idea of love to the Korean concept of *jeong*, which combines *agape*, *philia*, and *eros*. Like *qing*, *jeong* captures an idea that often eludes Western terminology; *jeong* is about sustaining relationality. These two essays, along with the second section of the book—comprised of a conversation with Spivak on love, three papers addressing this theme, and her response to the papers—provide a sketch of Spivak's idea of love.

Love, for Spivak, is, therefore, a "supplement to the collective effort" of learning about original, practical ecological philosophies of the world (55). Love involves attentiveness and a leaning toward the Other. Spivak sees love as fundamental for ethical relations, both among individuals, and writ large. She claims: "We must learn 'love' (a simple name for ethical responsibility-in-singularity) . . . in view of the impossibility of communication" (230). Love involves "slow attentive mind changing (on both sides)" (230). Love, then, is an attentive relation to the Other, a willingness to understand, an openness to transformation, and a recognition that complete understanding of the Other in their plurality and specificity is impossible. We are warned, too, about the misuses and dangers of love. Love should not be confused with charity or benevolence; it undermines relations of neo-colonialism and hierarchy rather than perpetuates them. Spivak also discusses love as "contaminated" by its fundamental role in reproductive heteronormativity; she claims that reproductive heteronormativity frames our understanding of love. So, in order to use love positively as she proposes to do, and as feminist love studies advocates, we must "live that double bind" (60). Hence Spivak's claim that "Love is as dangerous as it is powerful" (60).

Although I am sympathetic to Spivak's notion of love, it is not clear to me that it fully escapes its entanglement in reproductive heteronormativity, or its association with romance and sentimentality. Love, like planetarity, is meant to break us out of settled notions; it is a way of "detranscendentalizing" ethics (80). *Planetary Loves* provides an entry point into rethinking postcolonialism through the new ideas of love and planetarity; both aim to break us out of current ways of thinking with regard to self and Other. Love allows us to encounter others without reducing the Other's alterity simply to sameness or difference; sameness and difference both rely on a comparison between the other and oneself, and also assume oneself as the norm. In contrast to seeing the Other in relation to oneself, encountering Others with love is a chance to learn without assuming that we share a common language or identity. As several authors point out, this encounter with the Other and the practice of translation share an important feature. Translation can never fully capture the meaning of what is being translated, but is always an imperfect process of interpretation. Following Derridean deconstruction, there is always an excess of meaning that defies translation; likewise the Other is irreducible in her plurality and specificity. For Spivak and several authors in this volume, love offers a connection to the other that recognizes them in their uniqueness and specificity; love is radical relationality. Like the practice of translation, love offers a connection open to multiple meanings and ways of being.

Love refers primarily to a way of attending to Others and recognizing our ethical responsibility; introducing the concept of planetarity is meant to displace other ways of conceptualizing the globe, and thus provide alternatives to globalization that are neither the "same system of exchange everywhere" nor a postcolonialism that reinscribes binary thinking (27). The concept of planetarity is meant to unify humanity, bringing us together around the "new universalism of planetary health" (81). Engaging in this collective project of planetary health requires learning from the "original practical ecological philosophies of the world . . . this learning can only be attempted through the supplementation of collective effort by love" (32). As Pui-Lan Kwok notes: "The idea of 'planetary loves' invites us to join a discussion and participate from many vantage points, because it encourages a capacious imagination that encompasses all the sentient and non-sentient forms of existence" (32). Whereas postcolonial theory arises from the framework of the colonization and subsequent struggles for independence of nation-states, planetary love calls for us to come together beyond these arbitrary geopolitical boundaries.

It is not surprising, then, that the last three chapters of the book take up issues of cosmopolitanism in relation to Spivak's idea of planetary love; both cosmopolitanism and planetary love encourage us to go beyond divisions and boundaries. Namsoon Kang develops a cosmopolitan theology that transcends the multiple boundaries that divide us. She outlines different ways to think about cosmopolitanism: as trans-provincialism, as universal rights, and as radical hospitality. She calls for an approach to theology that, like cosmopolitanism, transcends boundaries of nation, community, and identity. She urges us to move from a politics of identity to a politics of multiple solidarities, solidarities across boundaries, identities, and religions. The cosmopolitan theology she

proposes is a theology of radical affirmation of the Other and a discourse of counter-empire.

Continuing the theme of cosmopolitanism in her essay, Dawn Martin associates the utopian aspect of planetarity with the kingdom of God, "[t]he kingdom of God, therefore, is like a cosmopolis" where all beings live in peace and harmony in their diversity. She likens this to Pax Terra, a peaceful earth. Drawing on Walter D. Mignolo's account of critical cosmopolitanism that sees diversity as a universal cosmopolitan project, Martin adopts his idea of conviviality as a way of living together that goes "beyond benevolent recognition . . . and humanitarian pleas for inclusion" (285). Martin discusses the tensions within cosmopolitanism between particulars and the universal, and argues that Spivak's planetarity, like Mignolo's critical cosmopolitanism, offers an alternative that combines the universal with the particular. For instance, Spivak combines the two when she says, "[a]n ethical position must entail universalization of the singular" (292).

Fleshing out the notion of cosmopolitanism, Sharon Betcher, in her essay "Crip/tography: of Karma and Cosmopolis," explores what it means to rethink the global city from a spatial and embodied perspective. She questions "the rubric of civility" that guides behavior among strangers in cities, pointing out that it often obscures differences that matter under the guise of neutrality. As she puts it: "Where civility offloads responsibility, and where liberal theological anthropology has been conflated with it, civility cedes its interests to imperialism, avoids the encounter with strangeness, refuses to engage and therefore to live with difference by putting difference . . . in geographic set aside" (315). She argues that civility masks both structural and personal power differences. For example, Vancouver aimed to clear its parks of homeless people in preparation for the Olympics. And on a personal level, she reports that a New York City employee enforced "no loitering rules" and refused to let her sit, in spite of her disability. Betcher claims that civility operates on multiple levels; spatially it protects the practices of individual rights and sovereignty while also exacerbating the divide between the rich and the poor because civility masks both difference and interdependence. Civility, by assuming that our primary relation as humans is independence from one another, not only obscures, but also devalues relations of dependence. Moreover, the primary values of globalization are market values, and this reduces people to their productivity and usefulness. Betcher analyzes the spatial, conceptual, and geopolitical aspects of global cities showing how too often the aestheticized image of the global city involves divisions within the city that reproduce colonialism.

*Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* is a wide-ranging book engaging with Spivak's work; it covers topics from cosmopolitanism to rereadings of Biblical texts, as well as the texts and ideas of other religious traditions. The volume is uneven in a number of ways: between essays that closely engage with religious texts, and those that make more general political or ethical arguments; among the styles in the three different sections; and in the quality of the chapters. Although aimed primarily at scholars in theology and religious studies, feminist philosophers working on Spivak or postcolonial theory may find *Planetary Loves* useful.

Feminist philosophers "looking for love" will find in many of the essays a sustained engagement with Spivak's use of it, and its possible applications. However, love may not be able to do all the ethical and political work that Spivak wishes it to. She claims love is "more essential to move the world than 'the collective efforts to change laws, relations of production, systems of education, and healthcare,'" but clearly we need both love and collective action to change unjust and oppressive economic, social, legislative, and educational systems (259). Likewise, in "overwriting the globe," planetarity risks ignoring the fault lines of power and privilege that currently structure our world. For example, so-called "developing countries" and indigenous peoples still too often lose out to overdeveloped countries and wealthy corporate interests, especially with respect to global issues such as ecological (planetary) health. So long as that is the case, glossing over differences of power and social locations will serve to perpetuate systemic injustice and structural inequality rather than alleviate it. Embracing the project of working together for ecological justice may require novel concepts, such as planetary love, but it also requires an awareness of power differences and structural injustice, as well as multiple and cross-cutting alliances.