

## Introduction

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This issue of *Body and Religion* brings to the forefront several key topics in which the focus on embodiment helps to make visible the workings of the construction of religion on transformational religious futurisms, politics and gendered reproductive agency, and a revisiting of assumptions about early Buddhist gendered monastic codes. These articles are followed by a collection of short essays and responses that I have called “Conversations with Sam,” which capture the rich dialogue that took place on a panel at the American Academy of Religion conference in November 2022 focused on Sam Gill’s book, *The Proper Study of Religion*. While this serves as a deep, multivocal book review, the essays also weave together references to Gill’s influential oeuvre of publications over decades of his esteemed career. We can think of no better way to honor Sam as he moves into retirement.

As this issue of the journal is not focused on a single theme, I will briefly highlight the focus of each article and point to some of the authors’ contributions to the field.

In the first article, ‘Timeless tenet, temporal tenant: a scholarly inquiry into radical longevity in Shia Islam,’ Faezeh Izadi takes us through a case study composed of a variety of perspectives within Twelver Shia Islam on bodily enhancement as a form of transhumanism. In particular, this form of Islam’s central tenet of a Mahdi who is temporarily in hiding opens the door to interpretations about the role of the body as part of fulfilling the Mahdi’s current and future return out of a state of occultation. Besides the figure of the Mahdi, Izadi explores how these theological ideas have a bearing on understandings of human life extension, as sanctioned within

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religious constructs. Izadi engages with sources on Islamic reasoning and Mujtahids' correspondence about their legal perspectives on technologies used for life extension as part of her analysis, demonstrating a wide range of views rather than a monolithic Twelver Shia position.

The next two articles focus on the intersection of reproductive labor and religion. While the hope was to have an entire issue on this theme, based on a collection of papers given at the American Academy of Religion conference in November 2022, the overturning by the US Supreme Court of *Roe v. Wade's* (1973) constitutional right to abortion care with the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision led to many challenges for our intended authors as experts on reproduction and religion. These included demands on their time for speaking engagements, commitments to activism, shifting groundworks that were changing the premise of their arguments, and as female-identified authors, ongoing family and care work that continues to fall disproportionately along gendered lines and which impacts the careers of female scholars. I am mentioning these as some of the reasons given to me for not being able to get papers revised and submitted for review over a two-year period. I am grateful for all the authors who were and are handling a lot, and even though we finally ended up with just two articles, they are published on the shoulders of other authors with whom they were in dialogue during this watershed moment.

In the first of these two articles, Elizabeth M. Freese offers us an important review of how Genesis 1–3 has been employed by self-identified Christian conservative perspectives in framing reproductive labor and anti-abortion stances. In her article, 'Toward Eve's Exodus: un-misrecognizing androcentric reproductive labor ideology in Christian right rhetoric and Genesis 1–3,' Freese reads against an interpretation of life beginning at fertilization in the narrative of Eve and redirects attention to the patriarchal underpinnings that have had a more significant impact on agency in reproductive labor. Freese calls for a new narrative reading of Eve that reclaims that pro/creation agency out from under patriarchal oppressions which continue to be enforced through religious authority by those associated with the Christian right politically.

In the second article, 'The theological vindication of resistance against enforced motherhood,' Mary Nickel revisits the case study of 19th-century suffragists who have often been (mis)quoted as part of anti-abortion perspectives. Nickel argues for recentering not only bodily autonomy in suffragist writings on motherhood and agency, but also deepens the theological underpinnings of that bodily autonomy such that religious authority works for rather than against choice in reproductive labor. This is perhaps

one way that Freese's call for a new narrative is applied on the ground historically, as well as within contemporary discourse.

Our fourth article in this issue takes us into ancient India, exploring the shaping of the bodies of Buddhist nuns, *bhikkhuni*, ascetics who have rejected reproductive labor through their vows of celibacy, but who experienced a whole other set of restrictions related to bodily autonomy connected to their groundbreaking, unusual roles in relation to monks and society. In her article, 'A capable defiler: redefining the body of the *bhikkhuni*', Harsha Gautam reassesses the minor rules in the monastic code related to nuns, of which there are many more rules especially in bodily comportment than for monks. In examining these rules, she affirms the role of gender parity in being able to achieve enlightenment within different gendered bodies. However, the types of transgressions connected to female bodies demonstrate a deepening of misogynistic views, according to Gautam, which she posits helped to contribute to the decline in communities of Buddhist nuns over time.

These four articles provide insights into textual interpretations of Muslim law, Biblical pro/creation, and Buddhist monastic codes, as well as shed light on historical and contemporary perspectives on authority-making within the lives of everyday religious practitioners. The authors demonstrate facility with the multiple methods necessary for interdisciplinary work at the complex intersection of body and religion. As the Conversations with Sam Gill essays and his responses highlight, our understanding of embodiment requires multiple perspective-taking and approaches that necessarily co-exist to enrich the ways that a focus on questions about bodies help scholars of religion to get to the heart of what matters most. I think Sam would whole-heartedly agree, and would maybe even note that we haven't pushed the conversation far enough in centralizing bodied knowledge. I will let the essayists speak for themselves on these matters, and hope you will enjoy hearing Sam continue to charge us to get even more into our bodies every chance that we get.