



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists
Paderborn University, Germany

Natural Religion in Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825–1921)

Therese Boos Dykeman

Dissatisfied with revelation as the basis of religion, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, an ordained minister, inquired into the possibility of a metaphysical base, settling on a basis from Nature and science. Study of science and Nature led her to a somewhat Deistic-Daoistic theory of religion. She concluded that knowledge of the nature of God is possible through intuiting and examining the universe. Blackwell deduced a definition of God as a permanence of Absolute transcendence, who created the universe composed of “matter and force,” a universe that is in a continual “activity” of creation. So, as the highest of living beings in the universe, human beings are required to engage in this continual creating of the universe, not by creating new substances but by co-operating with the Creator in the ongoing process of equal exchanges of substances. Investigating Nature as to the nature of immortality and morality, Blackwell theorized that the indestructibility of matter and energy prove God’s immortality, and as man is a correlation, composed of matter and force, and has “personal identity proved by memory,” man as an individual self has as well immortality. The nature of the universe is that it is an evolving, interdependent whole. As such it is ever engaged in co-operating activity to achieve balance and harmony. Humanity engages in this process, physically and psychically, and so also in morality. Morals are about keeping balance and harmony in the evolution of growth and gain. Particularly, Blackwell inquired into morals regarding the equivalence of the sexes, the co-operation involved in human activity, the choices in marriage, and family. Throughout her investigations, Blackwell believed that “the great question of today, for Science and Religion equally pertains to the nature and to the duration of Personal Life” and to these questions she sought answers in Nature.

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