From Meditation to Contemplation: Broadening the Borders of Philosophy

Abstract: The medieval 'meditations' genre invites its readers to imaginatively engage with scenes from scripture in ways that generate particular emotional responses - joy, sorrow, compassion, etc. In its emphasis on feeling, meditation was seen as an activity particularly suited for women and their closer ties with the body. Meditation was also originally viewed as an activity distinct from contemplation, which was portrayed as a 'higher', more intellective pursuit. Yet meditation was intended to increase love, and love was understood both to increase knowledge - knowledge of the same sort that contemplation also claimed to yield - and to unite the lover with the loved. Over time, then, the widespread popularity of medieval meditation opens up space for women's claims to knowledge to be heard because of (rather than despite) their association with the body.