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John Clayton, RELIGIONS, REASONS AND GODS: ESSAYS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Nancy Frankenberry

(every genuinely real entity is at least minimally an experiencer) with the absolutism of F. H. Bradley (everything real is experienced by one absolute being)—what he calls "Pantheistic Idealism." He believes it "serves the cause of religion in the best sense" (p. 473). For him, any metaphysics seeks "absolute truth about the nature of reality," and he wants this absolute truth "made peculiarly perspicuous to him," which in turn means being able to "imagine" it (p. 476). Sprigge says he cannot imagine the unexperienced—it will always turn out to be part of a wider whole that is an experience. Thus concrete reality (as distinct from the abstractions of science) "consists of innumerable streams of experience interacting with each other," and all are included, eternally, "within a single absolute all-embracing experience or consciousness" (pp. 483–486). This eternal "all-embracing consciousness" Sprigge calls "God," though he admits there might be some dispute about the matter (p. 487). But he insists there is religious value in this view, whether or not it is orthodoxly Christian (he believes it does support "Jesus's two great commandments"); it has at least personal if not communal religious value, "[f]or it reassures us that somehow reality is not so fleeting or so bad as it often seems" (p. 529), though I am not clear how reassuring it is to be told that what is fleeting or bad is unreal.

No space remains for criticism, but only for a word of encouragement to potential readers. Those members of traditional theistic communities who believe in a personal God who is active in human history and who answers petitionary prayers may find Sprigge's "eternal consciousness" remote and inert. Those who consider time to be not illusory but the key to reality may find Sprigge's eternalism problematic, though they may warm to his panexperientialism. Those pursuing some au courant program of tough-minded naturalism will probably just ignore this book. All, however, could learn from this wise and learned philosopher. "The serious thinker will attend to all arguments which have been put forward by figures of any intellectual pretensions and accept or dismiss them independently of how far their conclusions fit the mood of any particular time" (p. 224). Sprigge is a serious thinker, no matter what the current mood, and he deserves wider attention than he is likely to get.

Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion, by John Clayton, prepared for publication by Anne M. Blackburn and Thomas D. Carroll. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. vii +372 . $100 (hardback).

NANCY FRANKENBERRY, Dartmouth College

Cross-cultural philosophy of religion is honored more often by expectation than by execution. In this book we find both great expectations (for what John Clayton hoped to finish before his untimely death) and rational execution (based largely on the text of Clayton's Stanton Lectures). Indeed, the very reasonableness of the essays and chapters assembled

here and admirably prepared for publication by Anne M. Blackburn and Thomas D. Carroll may disguise the difficulty of executing Clayton's single aim throughout these chapters: to historicize the operations of "rationality" by taking theistic proofs as test cases and studying their varied uses in pre-modern and modern contexts. Clayton's overall thesis—if so rich and multi-layered a work of scholarship can be boiled down—is that all instances of reasoning and argument occur within historically particular contexts and the failure to trace out these particularities leads to philosophical distortions. While this may seem a commonplace assumption today, the investigation of its consequences and its application to topics in the philosophy of religion is not.

The introductory chapter, "Claims, Contexts and Contestability," highlights the notion of "group solidarity" and its enhancement as it functioned in the pre-modern uses of theistic proofs *within* traditions, rather than *between* them. Something similar is visible in modern contexts, too, Clayton suggests. In "Thomas Jefferson and the Study of Religion," he pursues the theme of the parochial character of "natural religion," despite its pretension to provide a universal discourse, a limitation that he finds still afflicts philosophy of religion. Can a model be developed to handle contemporary religious pluralism? The first methodological requirement, as Clayton shows in "Common Ground and Defensible Difference," is to recognize cultural and religious diversity as a positive good, a recognition already illustrated by *kalam* in Islamic cultures, by disputation or *vada* in Brahmanical circles in India, and by reports of doctrinal controversies in the Buddhist *pitakas*. In the title essay, "Religions, Reasons, and Gods," Clayton's main thesis appears and becomes the anchor for the rest of the book. Briefly put, purveyors of proofs were preaching to a choir, not pitching apologetics to a critic, hence the relevance of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion in emphasizing "forms of life." The stimulating effect of this chapter, however, derives from the layered use of specific cross-cultural examples and comparisons that amply illustrate Clayton's thesis across Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Western theology.

If theistic arguments were to be studied now in terms of the religious forms of life in which they are embedded, how might comparative philosophy of religion proceed? Clayton's approach is developed further in Part II. In "Ramanuja, Hume and 'Comparative Philosophy': Remarks on the *Sribhasya* and the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," he explores a comparison of the different interpretative communities to which Ramanuja and Hume belonged, historicizing these as distinct but comparable modes of rationality in terms of their grounds, motives and ends. Taking up "Piety and the Proofs" in Chapter 6, Clayton again emphasizes the topic of the communities, or forms of life, in which theistic arguments operate, here in relation to al-Ghazali and Udayana. The most explicit attention to the question of audience and genre is given in "The Otherness of Anselm" where, in an interesting reversal of what many secularists uphold, Clayton concludes:

> If the religious uses of argument I have been trying to elucidate in this essay are not uses with which we ourselves can identify, that may be because we do not identify with the kinds of activities with

> which those uses of arguments were associated. Indeed, if theistic arguments no longer make sense to many of us today, this may be because we no longer find it possible to participate in the forms of life in which they were once so firmly embedded. . . . It is not because they make no sense to us that we no longer participate, but because we do not participate, they no longer make sense. (pp. 176–177)

In Part III, alert to the differences between pre-modern and modern contexts of theistic arguments, Clayton treats the transition from the former to the latter under three regionalized comparative accounts: France and the Netherlands; Germany; and Britain. Here is a nuanced and detailed history of the rise of atheism in France and the fading of the argument from design in Britain. All three chapters in Part III engage intellectual debates from the seventeenth century into the nineteenth. The historical work of these chapters begins with "The Debate about God in Early-Modern French Philosophy," taking up Bayle and Mesher; Voltaire and Rousseau; Diderot and d'Holbach. It then centers on "The Enlightenment Project and the Debate about God in early-modern German Philosophy" (chiefly Mendelssohn and Kant) and a fascinating account of "The Debate about God in early-modern British philosophy," completed and adapted by Thomas Carroll. Two strands of theistic argumentation are distinguished: a justificatory one and an expressivist one. Although Clayton is careful not to press these into a dualism, it is hard not to hear echoes of the old cognitive vs. non-cognitive debates of analytic philosophers of religion. About the theistic arguments themselves, Clayton finds, in keeping with the anti-foundationalism of our current philosophical climate, that "their function is more to serve as tokens of belief than to provide its grounds" (p. 299).

This book takes philosophy of religion a welcome distance from such unhistoricized notions as religion in general, utopian reason, and the generic God of theism. Having given up these three interlinked legacies of the Enlightenment, what are we left with? A diversity of religions, reasons, and gods, Clayton says, and "no way in advance to say how things must go" (p. 305). The kind of significance theistic arguments can still have for philosophy, hinted at in Kant, is clarification of the character of divine agency within a given religion's understanding of God—or "the scandal of manifold particularities," as Clayton calls it (p. 308). In the debate, for example, between Naiyayikas and Buddhists in medieval India, and between Saadya Gaon and Ghazali, different notions of causality figure in arguments about a divine cause, and what count as reasons in one context do not count in another. Clayton's nuanced and careful contextualizing succeeds in showing not only highly specific ways in which cross-cultural theistic debates are tradition-constituted in different ways but also how they are tradition-constituting in the course of ongoing debates a tradition has about itself. Most refreshingly, he points the way to seeing a new form of philosophy of religion in which "the clarification of difference, and not just the achievement of agreement, is a legitimate end of argument" (p. 309). An epilogue to the final chapter on "Beyond the 'Enlightenment Project'?" delivers a clever twist on Hume's "what havoc must we make?" Well worth reading, too, is an Appendix: The 1997 Hulsean Sermon.