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## **[Review of] John Clayton, Religions, Reasons, and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion**

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[Review of] John Clayton, *Religions, Reasons, and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, Prepared for publication by Anne M. Blackburn and Thomas D. Carroll Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, xvii + 372 pp. Cl. \$100.00, #ISBN-10:0521421047 (hard back)

This book, a collection of related papers by the late John Clayton, who taught Philosophy of Religion at Lancaster University and then at Boston University, represents a valuable approach to the emerging field of cross-cultural philosophy of religion. Clayton provides a series of case studies in the history of theistic proofs: he attends to their place in Anselm, in Thomas Jefferson, in insightful and original comparisons of Udayana and al-Ghazali, and of Hume and Ramanuja, and then one chapter each on theistic proofs in early modern France, England, and Germany. Though not ground-breaking, these careful and elegantly written accounts have an agenda. They seek to trace the emergence and the limits of what Clayton refers to as the Enlightenment Project, that is, "the attempt to identify and to justify without recourse to outside authority or private passion but by the exercise of reason and the limits of experience alone" (p. 21). Clayton maintains that because the Enlightenment Project involves the attempt to find a nonperspectival perspective, it ends in irony and paradox. He therefore proposes that philosophy of religion reorient itself away from the "pretension" of grounding or undermining religious claims and toward the "more modest" aim of clarifying differences between religious claims (p. 41).

The most original and important product of Clayton's case studies concerns the distinctly religious uses of philosophical arguments. Clayton begins by pointing out that the various proofs of the existence of God have been employed in different kinds of contexts. They have been made and contested within a religious tradition (call this the intra-traditional context), between religious traditions (an inter-traditional context), and between a religious tradition and its secular critics (an extra-traditional context). When philosophers of religion treat theistic arguments as if they are meant to persuade those outside one's religious tradition, they focus on either the inter- or the extra-traditional contexts, and they focus on the justificatory use of such arguments. But Clayton turns attention to the intra-traditional uses. He finds that religious arguments have been used for a wide range of purposes in addition to justifying religious beliefs to those who do not already share them. For example, theistic arguments have been used for polemical purposes, that is, to correct defective or deviant beliefs about the nature of God. They have also been used for hermeneutic purposes, to assist with the proper reading of sacred texts; and for edificatory purposes, to build up the community, its sense of well-being and its solidarity. Theistic proofs have thus been employed not only to convince the outsider but also to "correct the heretic, give courage to the waverer, edify the faithful, guide the interpretation of texts, express awe and wonder" (p. 299). All of these internally directed purposes Clayton illustrates with detailed examples from both the East and West. Philosophers of religion have rarely talked about proofs with this degree of appreciation for their contribution to the religious life.

The editors of this book suggest that the method at work in Clayton's studies is genealogical (pp. xv, 100). They are right that, like Michel Foucault, Clayton does not assume that all the criteria of rationality are universal; instead, both investigate what might be called local rationalities. Also like Foucault, Clayton's approach is non-teleological: his histories of the religious use of argument do not look back on events from a perspective of what they should or will lead to. They contextualize. But Foucault's goal for his genealogical method was to

write a history that dispenses with subjects (*Power/Knowledge* [New York, 1980], 117) and that is far from Clayton's approach. Clayton does attend to institutional contexts—to a minimal extent—but his goal is not to get at the micropractices that would give rise, for example, to the ontological argument as an effect, but rather to get at (to use one of his chapter titles) “the otherness of Anselm.” If Clayton's method needs any label, it is not so much Foucaultean as it is Wittgensteinian. Clayton indexes rationality to practices and practices to cultural institutions not to eliminate the subject but rather (à la Peter Winch) to identify the point of the activity in the eyes of the subjects involved. This is why Clayton uses the term “forms of life” throughout the book. On this approach, the context of a claim is itself part of the claim's analysis (p. 305) and philosophy seeks to provide a comparative grammar of religions. But Clayton's Wittgensteinianism, thankfully, does not balkanize different religious traditions by immunizing them from external critique. It therefore leaves the door open for those who wish to pursue philosophy of religion's evaluative task.

In the end, Clayton does not deny but merely sets aside the fact that religious traditions have used theistic proofs to justify their beliefs. He is clear that he does not rule out external critique of religious claims. But given his internal focus, he says little about what that critical project will look like once one accepts the idea of rationalities in the plural. Nevertheless, Clayton's essays illustrate one way in which attention to context might be integrated into the philosophy of religion, and how such attention can reveal the rich but overlooked uses of theistic arguments.