

Book reviews

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Philip Clayton *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*. (Grand Rapids MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000). Pp. xv + 516.
\$40.00, £25.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 8028 3885 5.

This is an ambitious and important book that seeks to look again at the resources of modern philosophy since Descartes for addressing the problem of God. It displays many excellences, and there is much to be learned from it. It is eminently thorough in discussing some of the major figures in modern metaphysics, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher. Hegel is discussed somewhat briefly on a number of occasions, but it appears there will be a sequel volume to this book in which Hegel will be more extensively discussed and, going on the hints of this book, also severely criticized.

A major thesis of the book is that theologies that speak of divine perfection reached a certain culmination and impasse with Leibniz. Given the impasse, Clayton holds that our attentions must focus on the notion of the infinite as the most fruitful key concept to rethink the idea of God. Here the notion of the infinite and the whole tend to shade into each other interchangeably and I will mention this again. But there is a positive thesis also explored here in which the philosophies of immanence since Spinoza are treated with great sympathy. This sympathy comes less from their concern with immanence than for their making the notion of the whole ultimate. It is not that Clayton is a defender of pantheism – not at all. There is, for instance, a judicious discussion of some of Spinoza's contemporaries, not all of whom were merely 'reactionary' traditionalists, giving to chewing the theological carpet at the mere mention of the name of Spinoza. Against what he perceives as some of the defects of traditional theism, Clayton opts for some form of panentheism, and in his concluding chapter he offers some guidelines concerning the appropriate form that contemporary panentheism might take.

This is a large book and strides over a very extensive terrain, with admirable erudition and energetic intellectual engagement. A short review cannot do justice to its richness. It looks with an essentially sympathetic eye on post-Cartesian philosophies of God. The overall mode of approach reveals an interesting

blending of interpretative (hermeneutical) and argumentative resources. On the whole, it is the argumentative approaches of 'natural theology' that come through, though the hermeneutical dimensions are not absent, and perhaps this is understandable since the author is himself engaged with the relation between science and religion and theology. It is the rational and evidential grounds of claims about God that are central – even though the fuller evaluation of these grounds entails that one interpret the full range of the philosopher discussed. The rounded philosophical vision is approached through the implicit or explicit view of God that is at work in the philosopher.

Clayton's book consists of four parts. Part 1 deals with the context of modern thought for God. It begins with a very wide-ranging review of current approaches. This is very helpful and instructive, and could serve as an excellent summary of the *status questionis* of some major strands of contemporary discussion – most especially in light of the philosophy of science, and continuous with the author's other works such as *Explanation from Physics to Philosophy: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* and the Templeton Prize-winning *God and Contemporary Science*. Part 1 also has an extensive discussion of Descartes' view of God. Clayton's concern is how we are pointed beyond the *Cogito* towards a theology of the infinite.

Part 2 of the book concerns itself with the fate of perfect-being theology. After a general discussion of the idea of an infinite and perfect God, in successive chapters it discusses the impasse of perfect-being theology, first in Leibniz, then in Kant's critique of theology and beyond, and finally in terms of the use of limit notions and how they help us take some steps beyond Kant.

Part 3 is devoted to a more constructive opening towards a theology of the infinite, and in three chapters. First, it deals with the temptations of immanence in Spinoza. Here, Spinoza's One is discussed, as well as the birth of pantheism. A chapter follows on Fichte and the atheism strife, with reference to the limits of the notion of divine personhood. The final chapter bears on the issue of going beyond the 'God beyond God'. While this language brings Paul Tillich to mind, its major concerns is Schelling's theology of freedom. God's freedom, as well as the freedom of the creature is at issue, in the context of a kind of post-classical theism with a strong pantheistic accent.

The stress I mentioned in Part 1 above, that focuses on the rational coherence of certain modern views of God, can underplay other considerations that have made complications for modern man in affirming God. There are many such complications, of course, but an issue not adequately addressed is how the re-configuration of being in the modern world-picture yields a version of reason in which discernment of the ambiguous signs of God is harder and harder to effect. In modernity we find a struggle against the equivocalities of being, and a project for the greatest possible univocalization of being, including God. Thus, we make what initially seems perplexing and indeterminate more and more subject to

mathematical measure, and thus determinate, and if not determinate, then at least determinable in principle. Is God subject to such a project of univocal determination? This is also connected to a project of increasing our power over the given conditions of being, with the view to our autonomous self-determination. Hence, difficulties are made for us to grant those given conditions that make us patient to any power more ultimate than our own. If we want to absolutize our own autonomy, we must relativize transcendence. If transcendence is absolute, we must relativize autonomy. Hence for moderns who choose autonomy first, every appeal to transcendence as other to us is fraught with reservation, if not recoil or even revolt.

Consider here Clayton's discussion of Descartes. It is conducted out of hearing of the Pascalian distinction of the *esprit de géométrie* and the *esprit de finesse*. It takes the surface of Descartes' texts at face value, with at times an almost innocent hermeneutical trust. I mean innocent of the 'dream' of Descartes as emblematic of the modern project, and this is not the love and praise of God but the mastery and possession of nature, and if God can help to underwrite that, thank God, but if not, as many of Descartes' successors show, we will do without God. Clayton dismisses any suggestion that there is a dimension of rhetorical dissimulation in Descartes, as if the times he wrote in were not fraught with danger. And so his withdrawal of *La Monde* is a blessing for him, since Descartes seems not happy with it. It has nothing to do with fear and trembling lest Descartes run foul of the theological authorities and hence abort his great dream and project.

However, it is hard to evict Pascal out of the mind, and the call for finesse – and also his true remarks that the proofs touch only part of us, and we soon fall outside their influence when we are not considering them. 'Descartes – useless and uncertain' – Clayton would have nothing to do with this Pascalian judgement and warning. Geometry may help us handle the surface of argumentation; but without finesse we lack the hermeneutical discernment concerning the point of Descartes' whole project. If you dismiss Pascal as a modern 'irrationalist', remember his genius as a 'geometrician' was of the highest order – higher than Descartes, one sometimes suspects. Pascal knew from within both geometry and finesse. He is difficult to dismiss as just an irrationalist.

That the book is very much geared to Descartes and his successors might make one wonder about the relative short shrift the pre-modern philosophical theologians seem to get. One often wonders if there is, in fact, a significant diminution in the quality of philosophical theology after Descartes. This is not the standpoint of this book. The issue is not a simple matter of juxtaposing modern and pre-modern, as if there were a univocal homogeneous measure they shared. Consider Augustine and Descartes. Some forms of certain arguments used by Descartes are there in Augustine, and Clayton does mention in a sentence something of this Platonic, Augustinian resonance in the word 'meditations'. But surface

similarities notwithstanding, we are in different worlds. Augustine is gripped by God; God is not a problem; God precipitates a perplexity and seeking on which spiritual life and death hang. God is not a placeholder in an epistemological or metaphysical scheme that, in any event, underwrites another project, the mathematization of nature. If Augustine is taken as exemplifying something absolutely non-negotiable in relation to God – a living relation to a living God – then there is something anaemic in Descartes. Is Descartes gripped by God? His arguments are interesting, of course, and Clayton does pay them close attention. We can learn from that, but if we take the arguments to exhaust the problem of God in modernity, we are looking with one eye open, one eye shut.

Perhaps the major positive ambition of this book is to work towards a theology of the infinite. There is no doubting the eminent seriousness of the author and the admirable competence he brings to bear on his ambitious task. The entire enterprise is premised on a rejection of a dualistic sense of transcendence, and an acceptance of the idea of the whole as setting the proper terms for theology beyond the supposed dualisms of more traditional approaches. One can sympathize with a hesitation about dualistic ways of putting the relations of God and world, human and divine, transcendence and immanence. A form of panentheism is suggested as beyond the supernatural dualism of traditional transcendence and the naturalistic reduction risked by certain pantheisms of immanence. One would have to ask if the more robust sense of divine transcendence we find in the tradition of Biblical religion is here given up for a philosophical panentheism that, on the surface anyway, seems easier to square with naturalistic immanence, whether of modern science, or modern approaches to human life. But what kind of a God are we left to worship? One might feel astonishment, perhaps awe before the whole, panentheistically qualified. But adoration? If God is not adorable, is God God?

Clayton seems to use the notions of the whole and the infinite interchangeably, but one might argue that only the presumption of an immanent holism will allow anything like their identification. We will more likely be the sons of Elea than of Jerusalem. Suppose, against immanent holism, you say: God is God and nothing but God is God. Then we are dealing with something absolutely singular that cannot be dealt with on the terms of immanent holism. Suppose also, for instance, the notion of creation *ex nihilo* merits more serious attention as a way of naming the singular and hyperbolic transcendence of God. But it too is very hard to accommodate to any holistic vision. While I do not mean it quite in Levinas's sense, one could say that the notion of the infinite ruptures the primacy of the whole.

That these two notions are almost interchangeable here suggests that, despite overt signs of aversion, Clayton is closer to the line of Hegel than he would like. Hegel talks about the bad infinite (the infinite of succession) and calls his holistic infinite the true one. For Hegel the true infinite is the absolutely self-mediating

whole. But if there is a hyperbolic singularity to the God of creation, Hegel's true infinite is a false infinite. Clayton promises his own showdown with Hegel, but if he has already joined the pantheists, the showdown will be with perhaps modernity's greatest pantheist, but on terms that are themselves pantheistic. What if the qualified sense of divine 'otherness' that pantheism offers us is a counterfeit double of the transcendence of the infinite God beyond the whole, such as we find in the biblical tradition? We do need to rethink the meaning of the infinite, but will the terms of holistic pantheism prove finally adequate? It will be very instructive in the sequel to this recommended book to see if, and how, Clayton escapes Hegel's clutches.

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William Lane Craig *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). Pp. xi + 279. £62.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 7923 6668 9.

This book forms part of a tetralogy of books by William Lane Craig, published within the last three years, on the nature of time. The other books are: *The Tensed Theory of Time: a Critical Examination*, and *The Tenseless Theory of Time: a Critical Examination* (both Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000, and both reviewed in *Religious Studies*, 38 (2002), 489–498); and *God, Time and Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, reviewed in *Religious Studies*, 38 (2002), 363–366). This set represents the culmination of Craig's thinking over the course of many years on the relationship between the tensed/tenseless debate over time, modern cosmology, and theism. He has always been a productive writer – indeed, prodigiously productive – and this latest collection is a monumental and very ambitious contribution to the field.

To provide some background: Craig has in numerous places, including the works listed above, defended a tensed, or A-theory of time, according to which there is an objective and non-relational distinction between past, present and future. An event is present, not merely in relation to some arbitrary time or event, but absolutely. Moreover what is present is constantly changing, a feature of time often described as 'becoming'. This is also combined with a 'presentist' view according to which only what is present is real (though not all A-theorists are presentists). Craig thus rejects the tenseless, or B-theory, according to which all times are equally real, no time is privileged in any significant sense, and our division of time into past, present and future is merely a reflection of our

temporal perspective. Now if the A-theory is correct, then simultaneity is absolute, and not relative, since if two events are both absolutely present, then they are absolutely simultaneous. This conflicts with the Special Theory of Relativity, on its standard interpretation, according to which events are only simultaneous relative to an inertial frame (i.e. a co-ordinate system defined by some non-accelerating group of objects at rest with respect to each other). A consequence of this standard interpretation is that time and space are not entirely independent of one another: the spatial and temporal separation of events co-vary in systematic ways from one inertial frame to another. Consequently, there is no absolute space and no absolute time, no absolute motion and no absolute length. The door is left open, however, for an absolute *space-time* (absolute in the sense of having an existence independently of its contents). Some philosophers have attempted to reconcile the A-theory with the relativity of simultaneity, but it can plausibly be argued that at best this results, not in a modified A-theory, but in a tenseless, B-theory, substitute for becoming. Craig is not one of those philosophers. He sees a direct conflict here, and, bravely, rejects the relativity of simultaneity. Although the A-theory makes a number of appearances (it being the focal point of other works), it is the absoluteness of simultaneity itself that is the focus of this volume.

After an excellent, and very scholarly, historical exposition of the development of relativity theory, two main anti-relativistic strategies are pursued. The first is to point out that the standard interpretation was, historically, based on a discredited, positivistic, epistemological inference, viz. that it is impossible experimentally to detect the difference between a frame in constant absolute motion from one at absolute rest, therefore there is no difference. The second is to defend an alternative, 'neo-Lorentzian', explanation of the undetectability of absolute motion. Much of the book, in fact, is taken up with a detailed – though generally reasonably accessible – exposition of this alternative interpretation of the data. Those looking for a discussion of Craig's approach to the special and general theories of relativity, and his rejection of the standard interpretation should consult the review by Yuri Balashov and Michel Janssen in the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. Here I want comment on a feature of the book that will be of particular interest to readers of this journal, namely its theological theme.

Craig's aim is nothing less than the resurrection of the Newtonian conception of space and time as independent and absolute. In fact – and this is what makes his contribution so distinctive – Craig's conception is more thoroughly Newtonian than other contemporary defences of absolutism in that he is aiming at a *theological* vision of time and space. Metaphysics is now so thoroughly secularized, one can easily lose sight of the fact that the origins of the absolutism/relativism debate were theological, or at least informed by theistic doctrine. In a number of places, Newton expresses his view that God stands in a peculiarly

intimate relation to time and space, describing the latter in the *Opticks* as the 'sensorium' of God. This was explicitly taken up in the famous correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke. Leibniz attacks Newton's divine space with theological considerations of his own: if space itself extended infinitely beyond the boundaries of the finite universe, God would have had no reason to create the universe in this part of space rather than that part of space. But God does nothing without a reason. A similar conundrum is raised by absolute time: why create the universe then and not earlier, or later? Theological issues are similarly to the fore in an earlier, less well-known, correspondence on space between Descartes and Henry More. For More, the eternal and omnipresent existence of God is simply a consequence of space and time being among God's attributes. This theistic dimension of the debate has all but been lost in modern discussions of the absolutism/relationism controversy, and a number of commentators on Newton have tended to regard his religious musings as marginal and easily detachable from his metaphysical and cosmological system. Craig argues that this is not only to misunderstand Newton; it also makes us less critical of arguments from a contentious physics to a similarly contentious metaphysical picture of time. We need to take on Newton's project afresh, and examine the consequences of theism for relativity. As he writes,

... even if we do not go so far as Newton in including discourse about God in scientific theorizing, still it is clear that if we are prepared to draw metaphysical inferences about the nature of space, time and space-time on the basis of physical science, then we must also be ready to entertain theistic metaphysical hypotheses such as Newton deemed relevant. I have argued elsewhere that Newton was correct in thinking not only that God exists but also that God is (at least since the moment of creation) temporal. It remains to be seen what impact such a hypothesis will have our interpretation of relativity theory. (121)

That is a profound challenge. I am tempted to say, however, that it still remains to be seen. A theological theory of time and space in the fullest sense would be one that started from a particular conception of God and which derived from that conception a series of doctrines concerning time and space. One can read Leibniz's appeal to Divine rationality against absolute space and time in that light. With Newton, it is less clear. Craig certainly offers convincing evidence that for Newton theological issues were central to his thinking, and not just marginal decoration. He is perhaps less successful in making it transparent just what relation Newton's God has to Newton's cosmos. We are told not to think of Newton's God as somehow constituting space and time. But then what explains the intimacy of the connection? And what else would prevent us from seeing a conflict between God's existence in space and time, and his transcendence of that framework? In any case, a theological theory in its fullest sense is not what Craig offers in this volume. Admittedly, his references to God's ability to determine whether or not two spatially separated events were simultaneous are intended to

undermine the positivistic motivation for the relativity of simultaneity. But then theism and positivism conflict fairly directly anyway, and it is not really necessary, once one is standing within the theistic framework, to look in detail at the cogency or otherwise of positivistic inferences. A theological theory of time and space in a weaker sense would involve reconciling theism with a theory of time and space that has an independent, a priori, justification. That more nearly captures Craig's overall project in his tetralogy. As he concedes, what is doing the work in motivating an understanding of relativity that restores absolute simultaneity is the A-theory of time, which he has defended elsewhere on largely non-theological grounds. Although at a number of points Craig says that for God there is a privileged moment, theism does not, as far as I can see, provide an independent reason to believe in absolute simultaneity. Similarly, God could distinguish between absolute rest and constant motion – but only if we already grant the distinction in the first place.

I do not wish to detract from Craig's real achievement in this book, namely the sustained attack on the orthodox interpretation of relativity, but despite the tantalizing gestures at theological issues, there is little here to disturb the view that metaphysical discussions of the nature of space and time can take place outside the theistic context without thereby placing severe constraints on possible progress in them.

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David Basinger *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*.
(Burlington: Ashgate, 2002). Pp. vii + 123. £40.00 (Hbk), £16.99 (Pbk).
ISBN 0 7546 1521 9.

In this work David Basinger focuses on the philosophical status of the religious exclusivist in face of the reality of religious diversity. An exclusivist is one who affirms the superior truth of a single religious proposition over all alternatives or who affirms the superior truth of an entire tradition/religion over others. This is contrasted with non-exclusivists, who deny that any doctrinal perspective is superior to others, and pluralists, who make the positive claim that two or more religions are known to be equally close to the truth (a kind of composite exclusivism).

When an exclusivist religious believer recognizes the existence of religious diversity, does this recognition place any epistemic obligations on that believer? The book revolves around the answer to this question given in 'Basinger's Rule',

which states 'If a religious exclusivist wants to maximize truth and avoid error, she is under a *prima facie* obligation to attempt to resolve significant epistemic peer conflict'. Contrary to the arguments of Alvin Plantinga and Jerome Gellman, who hold that the only relevant obligation is to show that exclusivist belief remains formally warranted or justified in this situation, Basinger contends that there is a further obligation to attempt to resolve the conflict by substantive assessment of the issues.

Granting this obligation, suppose that one carries out such an assessment and is unable to resolve the issue, or even reaches the conclusion that in the current state of affairs it is not possible in principle to objectively resolve competing claims. At this point, does the uncertainty invalidate continued adherence to an exclusivist view or should it be maintained? Basinger concurs with William Alston in answering that the exclusivist is entitled to 'sit tight' with her perspective. He then considers a somewhat less stringent standard. Granted the logical right to 'sit tight', are there not arguments that indicate the balance of plausibility is against the exclusivist? Here the conversation partner is John Hick. Basinger interprets Hick as accepting exclusivism as a justifiable belief but rejecting it as implausible. He contends that Hick does not succeed in convicting exclusivism even at the bar of this weaker standard, though engagement of the argument may well lead to revised and more defensible *forms* of exclusivism, 'pared-down' versions. Basinger believes the very strength of Hick's case further buttresses the obligation stated in Basinger's Rule: such serious challenges to the plausibility of exclusivism elevate the epistemic expectation for belief assessment.

This summarizes the heart of the argument. In two further chapters, the basic perspective is applied to more specific topics. One chapter considers the exclusivist Christian claim that only 'true Christians' will spend eternity in conscious bliss with God and that all others will spend eternity in a conscious state of damnation. Basinger has particularly in view those philosophers who defend this claim by means of appeal to God's middle knowledge. Mirroring the general argument laid out above, Basinger finds the middle knowledge defence sufficient to justify exclusivism but also finds the objections sufficiently cogent that belief assessment is strongly indicated. Another chapter considers the issue of positive apologetics, whether exclusivists can legitimately try to convince others that their exclusivism is right. Basinger concludes that the arguments against such apologetics fail. However, there is no general epistemic principle favouring such apologetics, and such advocacy is tradition-dependent. It can be a positive obligation only for those in traditions whose background beliefs themselves require such activity. The book ends with a chapter defending the view that in the work of the classroom the philosophy teacher should be neutral in terms of the advocacy (or even the revelation) of her personal views on either philosophical or religious questions.

Basinger advances a sophisticated and interesting double argument. On the one hand, his book can legitimately be viewed as a defence of exclusivism, an attack on the 'fashionable position that exclusivism is no longer intellectually credible', as one commentator puts it. On the other hand, it can be rightly seen as an argument for the inadequacy of even an impressively warranted but unreformed exclusivism. Both prongs of this argument are embodied in Basinger's Rule.

By this rule, Basinger intends to put the onus on the exclusivist. The fact that knowledgeable and sincere people in various religions disagree with each other should obligate an exclusivist to interrogate the basis for his own claims. The burden of proof also falls on the exclusivist in another sense. Basinger insists that epistemic parity must be presumed unless an epistemological deficit can be demonstrated in the other tradition. In other words, Basinger sets the bar very high for the exclusivist.

Basinger's use of his own rule is subtle. Having formulated a very stiff test, he intends to show that exclusivists generally can meet it. In this respect, the study is a defence of exclusivism. But though the test does not invalidate exclusivism, he argues in essence that it should modify exclusivism in certain key respects.

On the one hand, he supports the epistemological validity of religious exclusivism. On the other hand, he maintains that religious diversity should impel the religiously committed to interrogate the beliefs that they hold to be supreme.

Put more simply, the religious believer is logically entitled to maintain the unique and superior truth of her perspective in the face of religious diversity, absent demonstrative defeating proof. Beyond such negative apologetics, the believer is under no absolute epistemic obligation to make awareness of others' warranted belief an occasion for questioning the coherence of her own. However, says Basinger, there are good reasons to undertake such assessment. We should do it not because we must, in obedience to rational rule, but because we may, in consonance with more practical evidentiary or pragmatic considerations.

Basinger's Rule is subject to several interpretations, and much of the book is devoted to distinguishing these. At its most rigorous, the rule demands that exclusivist faith be able to logically defeat defeaters of its position. Having done a belief assessment and having found no defeaters to his own faith, the religious person's continued exclusivism would be validated by Basinger's Rule. Prominent philosophers of religion such as Alvin Plantinga and Jerome Gellman recognize such a logical obligation, deploy convincing arguments to fulfill it, and consider the challenge met. Basinger finds this approach correct as far as it goes, but insists it does not go far enough.

In pressing the case further, he seems to acknowledge a scale of epistemic obligations. The necessity for the kind of justification or warrant just described

(the kind that Plantinga and Gellman provide) is the most urgent. The mere absence of defeaters raises a second-level question. Does the fact that belief assessment cannot positively resolve the religious differences require a change in the character of exclusivism? Should it, for instance, change the firmness with which an exclusivist view is held or the legitimacy of positive apologetics on its behalf? Is there an epistemic obligation to resolve this question? Basinger thinks so, but also seems to see it as a less absolute obligation than the first type. And beyond this, is there an obligation to resolve arguments over the relative plausibility of varying views? Again, Basinger thinks so, but regards this as yet less urgent.

So, although Basinger's Rule does state a presumed obligation, Basinger argues for its limitation. For one thing, the rule is conditional. Maximizing truth and avoiding error need not be the supreme epistemological priority. Second, although epistemic parity is to be methodologically presumed in cases where one encounters a possible disqualifying argument directed at one's own tradition, this assumption is somewhat relaxed when one moves beyond the realm of negative apologetics. As he applies it, the rule certainly does set a high standard for exclusivism, but the highest standard is at one end of a graduated scale. If we look at Basinger's work not only as a defence of exclusivism but as a challenge and program for its defenders, we can see this gradation as an argument that those defenders cannot be epistemically content to stay simply within the inner fastness of warranted or justified belief. Exclusivism must engage a wider range of objections. In Basinger's view it will emerge from that engagement intact, but also probably 'thinner', that is, having pared down the number of elements about which it makes exclusive claims. He provides this interesting summary:

To the extent that exclusivists heed Basinger's Rule, their awareness of religious diversity will lead to belief assessment, and such assessment, I have argued, can lead to thinner theologies – theologies that are less incompatible with competing theologies than before. And the thinner the theology of an exclusivist, the fewer individuals there may be to convert and the less there may be to convert them to. (109)

This is a defence of exclusivism, but one that some exclusivists may find rather ironic.

The value of this book lies in the success with which Basinger manages to isolate a thread in the discussion of religious diversity and to tenaciously follow its twists and turns. The thread in question has to do with epistemic burden. What is the obligation a philosophically responsible exclusivist must meet? In pursuing this formal question with such rigor, he contributes a significant amount of clarity and insight to the wider discussion of religious diversity. The major feature, in this regard, is the book's indication that exclusivist religious positions may themselves necessarily be changed in the course of successfully meeting the philosophical tests posed by pluralism. This point is made convincingly in a

formal way, but there is very little in terms of concrete illustration. What would be an example of a 'thinner' exclusivist theology?

An even more substantive concern is that the 'belief assessment' that figures so centrally in Basinger's rule is nowhere in this book given any extensive definition. If it is an obligation to carry out this assessment, just what is involved in doing so and how would you know that you had done it adequately? It is somewhat surprising to this reader that a book that focuses so much on the inability to conclusively resolve epistemic conflicts in philosophy and religion does not engage the work of Nicholas Rescher, who has done so much precisely on this topic.

Since the value of the book is rooted in a certain narrow focus it is not really in order to object that there are many issues left untreated, save to note that the book should not be mistaken for an introduction to the field. It engages with a range of important figures, but it touches them each at only limited points. The theme of the book is set by Basinger's Rule, an axiom around which the argument is developed. Even if one does not find the axiom fully compelling, the book can be seen as a helpful thought experiment, working out the implications of the axiom. And Basinger himself notes many of its limitations.

However, I do not believe that the case for Basinger's Rule is as strong as he makes out. To focus only on one point that he addresses at some length, I do not think his reading of 'epistemic peer conflict' is a convincing one. It is a very common principle in religious traditions to hold that only devoted and extended practice on the distinctive path constituted by a tradition can place one in a position to make knowledgeable interpretations or evaluation of many of its key elements. Given such convictions, which seem quite reasonable, however inconvenient for religious comparison, it is not clear that 'epistemic peer conflict' is as common a condition as Basinger assumes. He notes the objection that one need not accept those who differ religiously as actually on the same epistemic footing. His response is to point to conflict within a given religious tradition (disagreements among Christians over 'open theism' for instance). Do exclusivists really want to say, he asks, that disputants in such an intra-Christian argument really don't have to attempt to understand why their opponents hold the views they do, or reconsider their own beliefs in search of a solution, but need only appeal to the possibility that those who differ are epistemically disadvantaged? And if this is not acceptable within one tradition, why should it be among several?

This is hardly as conclusive as he supposes. First, one can suppose that disputants are not on equal epistemic footing, and still think that discussion and argument are worthwhile (given some common ground). Second, it is certainly possible that those in an intra-tradition disagreement could believe that differing practices within that tradition have put them in differing epistemic conditions. Third, it would also be possible for those in such a dispute to believe

that if they continue to persevere in the shared elements of that tradition's practice, both sides would eventually come to fuller agreement over issues that now divide them. This third element would not necessarily hold between those of different religious traditions and would undercut Basinger's attempt to blur the two cases.

For those with significant familiarity with the philosophical issues of religious diversity, this book is a welcome and careful contribution. It takes the treatment of exclusivism in a new direction. It is major praise to say that this defence of exclusivism leaves neither its critics nor exclusivism itself in quite the same condition that it found them.

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