The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction, Beverley Clack and Brian R. Clack, Polity, 2019 (ISBN 978-1-5095-1693-3), x + 278 pp., pb £19

This third edition of *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction* written by the Clack siblings, Beverley and Brain, provides an introduction to the discipline while seeking to link the questions raised by the philosophy of religion to the readers' contemporary concerns. The work begins by discussing the ever-slippery term 'religion.' It sets up 'philosophy of religion' as 'a critical discipline… that seeks to clarify and question religious beliefs' (p. 11). The authors then sketch the history of the development of the theistic conception of God in preparation for their deeper analysis. While the book is not exclusively concerned with theism, the force of the arguments are directed toward theistic expressions of religion, rather than other types of religious framework.

The next chapter surveys 'natural theology' by introducing the reader to the traditional rational arguments for the existence of God: ontological, cosmological, design, moral arguments, arguments from religious experience, and prudential arguments. Clack and Clack are conscientious of their readers' relative lack of familiarity with the topic. They consequently make a point of defining and providing historical overviews of each argument as well as making certain the reader is familiar with the important names related to the discussion. These elements (definitions and key names) are present throughout the book, but it is in this chapter that they shine. The extensive review of the arguments for the existence of God is followed by a discussion 'divine attributes' which delineates and discusses numerous incommunicable attributes of the divine according to theism and the problems that arise for these assertions. The book does not address, or even recognize, the concept of content of the communicable attributes theists often ascribe to God.

Chapter 3, 'Challenges to Theism,' focuses on three potential challenges: the presence of evil, the natural elements that gave rise to and form the history of religion, and the difficulty of using religious language or verifying religious positions. The problem of evil and subsequent attempts to reconcile it with the belief in 'the good God of theism' (ie, theodicy) has been presented throughout history (p. 92). Clack and Clack review the most common theodicies and then share critiques from D.Z. Phillips and Dorothee Soelle. These critiques introduce a different conception of God into the discussion. This reworking of 'God' becomes a key building block in the final analysis provided at the end of the chapter. In reviewing the 'natural histories of religion,' religion as a mistake and religion as projection/illusion/neuroses form the two legs of the Clacks' discussion. Again, they trace the development of each view historically and show how religion could just be an expression of human nature and longing rather than having an external cause. In discussing the final element of

this chapter, Clack and Clack present various arguments for the idea that religious language is inherently meaningless, arguments that are heavily dependent on positivism. They then present the three traditional responses to the above challenges by religious individuals: capitulation, accommodation, and repudiation.

Having established and discussed the traditional aspects of the philosophy of religion, Clack and Clack spend the remainder of their book discussing more recent or alternative ideas. In their review of 'alternative approached to the philosophy of religion,' they discuss revisionary theology, that is the post-Humean attempts to 'revis[e] religion in either a *moral* or an *aesthetic* direction' (pp. 152–153). They then turn to Don Cuppit who argues that 'God [is] a symbol for the religious and spiritual life' (p. 156). Clack and Clack devote significant attention to Wittgenstein's influence on the philosophy of religion, namely his views on language and idea that religion is fundamentally 'an expression of human values, needs, and desires' (p. 173). They conclude their overview of alternative approaches with a discussion of feminism and feminist critique of religion, referring the reader to Grace Jantzen and Pamela Sue Anderson for further exploration.

Chapter 5 focuses on the reinterpretation of the 'supernatural realities' traditionally held by theists: a belief in miracles and the concept of immortality. Clack and Clack present the traditional view(s) regarding both. They argue that Hume undermined the typical concept miracles, forcing later thinkers to wrestle significantly with the 'miraculous' elements of their religions. The first response to Hume's attacks on the traditional understanding of miracles are to argue that miracles are merely 'signs and coincidences' (as argued by Paul Tillich and R.F. Holland, respectively). The second is that most religious leaders' caution followers against overreliance on implausible miracles and thus they are aiming to focus on the human agency and altruism that these miracles aim to address (a view heavily dependent on Yujin Nagasawa). Regarding immortality, Clack and Clack present the three distinct traditional views: immortality of the soul, resurrection of the body, and reincarnation. They then explain Jantzen's questioning of the idea that immortality is ideologically necessary and Phillips' argument that the concept of 'eternal life' has been misunderstood and should be properly understood as referring to a new way of living in the current world. Another potential way of addressing immortality, according to this work, is found in Simone Weil's criticism that striving for immortality is at odds with the altruism traditionally promoted by religion. This minimizes of the centrality or benefit of affirming immortality which subsequently raises questions regarding transhumanism. The next alternative approach is the feminist critique of immortality which is rooted in ecological concepts and the idea that all contribute to the natural cycle of the world and thus achieve some version of immortality. Finally, Clack and Clack refer the reader to two thinkers;

Culpitt and Dennis Potter whose ideas remove much of the morbidity of mortality and thus eliminate some of the felt need for immortality. Dennis Potter, a playwright, makes a second appearance in the conclusion, where Clack and Clack turn to his work to suggest that religion might better serve as a means and motivation for engaging with existence *as it is*, rather than looking for religion to provide solutions or ways to augment normal contemporary life.

The final chapter, reworked for the new edition, explores how philosophy of religion impacts and is impacted by the current climate of the world, namely 'an age of terror' (p. 242). Clack and Clack review the connection between religion, 9/11 and terrorism, as well as current politico-religious interactions, particularly in the United States. Both serve to demonstrate the ways in which 'one's beliefs are not held in isolation from the way in which one behaves, but affect each other' (p. 248). They suggest that belief should ultimately be subservient to 'basic moral principles' (p. 255). They emphasize the alternative or revised accounts of religion as the way forward. In Freud's idea that 'religion is grounded within the general human experiences of not feeling at home in this world, and it is this experience that motivates all kinds of human activities, not just religious ones' Clack and Clack find insight into how religion can be understood and retained in today's world (p. 262). Ultimately, this is expressed as 'transience,' an acceptance of fragility and mortality that should motivate appreciation and serves as a 'this-worldly form of religion' as exemplified in the works of Potter (p. 265).

Clack and Clack's revised book *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction* provides a thorough undergraduate-level introduction to the discipline, presenting the relevant definitions and thinkers to the reader. It reviews historically held positions, traces the transformation of thought throughout time, and suggests how this relates to contemporary realities and concerns. Yet there are several elements of this book that undermine its strengths. First, Clack and Clack attempt to further the readers' engagement through the periodic use of sidebar quotes and reflection questions. However, the majority of these are straw men that reinforce the confirmation bias of the 'critical/skeptical' position rather than fostering true intellectual consideration and growth. Second, though the work is a 'critical' introduction, the authors are not equal-opportunity critics. They have a clear agenda which problematizes traditional religion and suggests that 'religion' should be redefined by Freudian concepts of transience and basic moral principles. They do not apply the same rigorous philosophical critique to either transience or basic moral principles or demonstrate why these are superior or less problematic than the religious concepts with which they take issue. Finally, the book is heavily weighted towards consideration of theistic religions, primarily (though not explicitly) Christianity. It is focused on thinkers connected to the Western tradition, though these thinkers do hold to a variety of religious positions. This

gives the view that 'religion' is monolithic, and it would be beneficial if the authors acknowledged their bias consistently to prevent assumptions regarding the way more diverse world religions would approach the same questions. Though the book comes across as polemical, Clack and Clack do cover the essential elements of philosophy of religion and provide a helpful and accessible introduction for the uninitiated.

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Disorderly Women and the Order of God: An Australian Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Mark, Michele A. Connolly, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020 (ISBN 978-0-567-69253-5), xii + 208 pp., pb £28.99

How might the Gospel of Mark, a text conceived in the milieu of first-century Roman imperial oversight and whose narrative, plot, and characterization reflect the gendered and colonial implications of those origins, be heard and read by an Australian woman, whose national myth/history likewise manifests the colonial marginalization of women's contributions? Such is the presenting scenario of Michelle Connolly's new volume. It offers an avowedly 'Australian Feminist' reading of the Markan account, grappling with its depiction of women as marginalized figures and as those responsible (in Mark's retelling) as agents of disorder. The volume is a revision of Connolly's doctoral thesis and is presented in that form/tone, but its content nonetheless remains accessible (and illuminating) for the lay reader willing to engage with Connolly and the contextual position for which she advocates. After a short introduction, the book splits into two halves. In the first part, over three constituent chapters, Connolly maps the context and methodology that will frame and shape her reading of Mark. In the second half, this interpretative lens is then applied to Mark's gospel, partly in terms of consideration of the gospel's plot and key features and (more extensively) in a focused analysis of the women characters whom Mark assembles.

As the title suggests, Connolly's methodology and hermeneutical lens is central to her reading of Mark, and this necessitates the extensive framing of it that she undertakes. For a volume in a prestigious biblical studies series, it is thus some time before she actually gets to what one might think of 'biblical' analysis, but the preceding methodological and historical discourse is a necessary prerequisite and articulation for the Markan exegesis she subsequently undertakes. Connolly's approach is multi-