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## Penelhum, BUTLER

David E. White

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## NOTES

1. "Obligation and Virtue Once More," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 3/1 (1975), pp. 27-44.
2. *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981; p. 169).
3. Alan Donagan, "Teleology and Consistency in Theories of Morality as Natural Law" in Rocco Porreco, ed., *The Georgetown Symposium on Ethics* (Boston: University of America Press, 1984; p. 91).
4. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981; p. 897).

*Butler* (The Arguments of the Philosophers Series), by **Terrence Penelhum**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. pp. x + 221. Cloth \$39.95.

Reviewed by DAVID E. WHITE, St. John Fisher College.

This book is in two parts with the larger devoted to the rehabilitation of Butler's philosophy of religion, which Penelhum ranks second in English only to Hume's (p. vii). A rehabilitation is needed to resist what might be called the received view of Butler's philosophical theology: the *Analogy* is directed to the stance of the deists, but there are no deists now; hence, neglect of Butler's work is justified (p. 6). Penelhum rejects the second premise with two references, but is mainly concerned to argue against the validity of this argument, not just against its soundness.

Philosophers often write as if their work had universal significance, only to have critics find their endeavors parochial. With Butler the reverse seems to have been the case. His stated aims are modest, but commentators have found in him the very archetype of a fully sufficient philosophy of religion.

So Penelhum's central question is important both for intellectual history and for what is Penelhum's main interest, contemporary philosophy of religion. Penelhum's work is excellent; he puts just the right emphasis on just the right points and, at least with regard to the *Analogy*, much of his analysis is groundbreaking. My complaints concern matters of detail on the one hand and omission on the other. The principal shortcoming is that just when things get really interesting, Penelhum calls an abrupt halt to the inquiry.

Very early on (p. 4) Penelhum makes the key point, which he never tires of repeating: "although a theorist of the highest quality," Butler is "not interested in theory for itself"; rather his "purpose is always a practical one." It is commonly acknowledged that in matters of practice, when we are forced to decide, we must settle for a far lesser degree of evidence than would compel full intellectual assent. So, since religion is a practical matter, no more can be demanded of the "proof" of religion than would be demanded of a secular choice of comparable

importance. This is the parity argument as Butler employs it. For his final assessment of this argument, Penelhum refers us (p. 198) to his section on pragmatics. ("Pragmatics" is never again mentioned, but presumably what Penelhum means is his discussion of the appeal to prudence.) After some discussion, Penelhum dismisses the "analogical" argument as obsolete (p. 200), but finds a salvageable core in the notion of a cumulative case; indeed he points out that Butler was aware that his argument must be judged as a whole if it is to have any hope of success. Then Penelhum tells us that the cumulative case still ends in a "deadlock" that can be broken only by the appeal to prudence (p. 201). After a brief argument to show that Butler's "view of what it is to act on the claims of Christianity requires, in the end, that one believe those claims," Penelhum states: "If this is a correct understanding of where Butler's practical apologetics leads, an adequate assessment of it requires examination of the nature of belief and the ethics of it. Such an examination is out of the question here" (p. 205). Two pages later, the book ends.

In my judgment, Penelhum's understanding of where Butler's practical apologetic leads is correct, and therefore it is especially disappointing that the discussion ends where it does. Penelhum is careful to emphasize the many aspects and implications of Butler's argument; he specifies the kind of parity argument Butler uses, (that Butler's is a "wholistic" cumulative case), and he delineates how and why the appeal to prudence is vital. It would be especially interesting to see how an analysis so well begun would eventually end. Penelhum decided to leave aside the topic of freedom since Butler's comments are, as Butler himself notes, a digression (p. vii). But considering that Penelhum stops just when the relationship of belief and practice becomes crucial, a natural continuation of the argument in *Butler* might be found in "Of the Opinion of Necessity, considered as influencing Practice," (*Analogy*, I vi), which is at least as useful as the remarks on "naturally virtuous conduct" (*Analogy*, I v), which Penelhum does discuss. If the topic of necessity or freedom is off Penelhum's subject, the topic of opinion and practice is very much on it.

My only other major regret is that Penelhum gives so little attention to the burden of proof. He assigns the "onus" to those who demand more of religion than of secular claims (p. 198), but he never makes the association of Butler's generally forensic style of argument with the prudential rather than evidential considerations that usually lead us to assign the burden of proof to one side or the other. Nor does he explicitly mention that failure to discharge the burden of proof is decisive only as far as practice is concerned and not in matters of speculation where an indefinite suspension of judgment is possible. In these terms, the salvageable core of Butler's reasoning might be as follows: There are good prudential considerations in favor of religion, but prudential considerations are sufficient only to establish a practical presumption and not to settle a matter

of fact. But then religion simply is a practical matter, so prudential considerations could be decisive as long as the opponents of religion have not proved religion false. Philosophers of religion who accept this outline of an apologetic strategy may or may not want to follow Butler in detail.

There are a few annoying slips. Penelhum says that the *Analogy* is out of print, yet he never mentions the Italian edition of Butler's complete works. Penelhum leaves it an open question whether Butler was offered the See of Canterbury, yet he does not mention Sykes' articles (*Theology*, 1936 and 1957) that seem to prove the negative. Butler himself is very seriously misquoted on p. 203. There are also some traps for less sophisticated readers who might conclude from what Penelhum says that Butler quoted Hume (p. 198), or that Pascal mentions punishment in his wager (p. 203). But these are minor flaws compared with the thoroughly admirable job Penelhum does of setting out and evaluating the main lines of Butler's argument.

The section on Butler's ethics is somewhat less original, but could serve as an introduction to a serious study of the *Sermons*. Penelhum has a knack for stating with clarity and precision what many readers will already know in a vague and general way, (e.g., the second paragraph on p. 43.) This section also contains an appropriate discussion of Sturgeon's important article on the role of conscience.

I hope this book will be widely read. It is especially suited to philosophers of religion who have neglected Butler but would listen to someone who had "forty good reasons" why they should take up the *Analogy*.

One of the more significant references to C. D. Broad is omitted from the index.

*Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*, by **Robert C. Roberts**. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986, 145 pp. + vi. \$22.50.

Reviewed by C. STEPHEN EVANS, St. Olaf College.

Robert Roberts' *Faith, Reason, and History* brings what might be termed the analytic approach (using the term in a broad sense) to the study of Kierkegaard to a new standard. I know of no other book dealing with the Johannes Climacus pseudonym section of the Kierkegaardian authorship which does so much to bring Kierkegaard into a living relationship with contemporary debates in epistemology, philosophy of religion, and theology. The gracefulness of the writing, the clarity and precision of the arguments, and the pointed application to signif-