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Stenmark, RATIONALITY IN SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

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devils and angels, which satisfy his operational definition of a "god" as a "very powerful non-embodied rational agent."[9] Is polytheism viable under a more robust notion of deity as well? That depends on whether this notion involves any exclusive relations like *being the creator of the world*. Such a property could be multiply instantiated only if there is more than one world. This possibility, Mavrodes argues, is either metaphysically objectionable or religiously unsatisfactory; consequently exclusive relations set a limit on any viable polytheism.

It should be evident from these thumbnail sketches that this volume contains a diversity of riches, some in the form of analytic rigor, others in hermeneutical insight, and yet others in their sheer suggestiveness. Though some of these essays engaged my thinking more than others, this reflects more my own idiosyncratic interests than any unevenness in the collection. It is because the essays are of a uniformly high quality that I have avoided selecting a few for critical appraisal while neglecting the others. There is much to ponder here, especially for Christian philosophers interested in the epistemology of religious belief.

NOTES

1. Page 15.
2. Page 37.
3. This is one place where Alston's work is overlooked but might have been incorporated into the argument with some profit. I am thinking of his "Divine and Human Action," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 257-280.
4. "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
5. Page 194.
6. Page 219.
7. Page 258.
8. Page 278.
9. Page 264. Mavrodes borrows this definition from Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 53.

Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life, by **Mikael Stenmark**. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. Pp. xi, 392. $32.95(cloth).

THOMAS D. SULLIVAN, University of St. Thomas

This book is a wide ranging and well informed general inquiry into rationality. Though religious belief is just one of the areas investigated, it receives special attention.

As Stenmark sees it, a theory of rationality lays down principles for how we should conduct our cognitive affairs. Four models are consid-

ered, the way of (1) the formal evidentialist, (2) the social evidentialist, (3) the presumptionist, and (4) the contextualist. The formal evidentialist identifies rationality with following appropriate rules, largely determined *a priori*. The social evidentialist rejects the idea that all rationality is rule governed, seeing rationality instead as a process guided by the exercise of informed judgment exposed to peer evaluation. These two ways of specifying rationality share a commitment to evidentialism, the view that people are entitled to accept a belief only if there are good reasons for holding it. A presumptionist rejects evidentialism; we are rational in holding on to our beliefs until we have special reasons to abandon them. This is the model Stenmark favors, chiefly on the grounds that we have to make choices with only limited time and cognitive resources available to us, and there is more to life than checking out the truth of our beliefs. We cannot live a rational life by acting in accord with evidentialism.

However, against the presumptionist model Stenmark favors, as well as the evidentialist models he rejects, a proponent of a fourth model of rationality, the contextualist, will claim that there is no overarching standard of rationality by which we can measure radically different practices and beliefs within those practices. Stenmark carefully distinguishes claims made by contextualists of different stripes, examining in some detail ideas of Wittgenstein, D. Z. Phillips, Peter Winch, and Alasdaire McIntyre. Stenmark agrees with some of the weaker claims of contextualists, e.g., that rationality is always used in a practice of some sort or other, but he argues against the crucial claim that there are no standards of rationality applicable to all practices. Although the means we use to satisfy the universal demand for rationality vary with time and circumstance, "the nature of rationality is the same; rationality is a matter of doing (believing, acting, and evaluating) what we ought intellectually ought to do and can realistically manage to do, so that in our circumstances we choose appropriate ends and means to achieve these ends" (p. 358). So there is indeed a transcendent concept of rationality that can be applied to all agents, whatever their concerns at the moment.

Stenmark contends that much discussion of rationality in the philosophy of religion is "religiously irrelevant because it does not take into account the actual aim or function of religious practice or the actual situation in which it is pursued" (p. 358). We experience suffering, guilt, feelings of meaninglessness, and death. We properly value practices that make sense of all this and help us deal with the challenges. "This also means that ultimately the acceptance of religion (or some secular alternative) is an existential choice. What is at stake is not only whether some beliefs are true or what conclusion we should draw regarding certain arguments, but how we actually should live our lives" (p. 358). Religious belief can be rational because the religious believer may be doing what can reasonably be expected with respect to the regulation of an overarching view of life.

Stenmark builds a powerful case for presumptionism in general and for the rationality of religious belief. But even those inclined to assent may be left with an uneasy feeling that something is out of focus. For

one thing, Stenmark at times seems too eager to marginalize the role of evidence and argument. For example, in the course of summarizing his argument at the end of the book, Stenmark writes:

> But is it then rational for people to have — in their predicament — religious beliefs? Since all human beings have to deal with existential experiences of resistance, the issue is not "Shall we have a view of life?" but "Which view should we choose?" because we have to make a choice. If we do not vote with our head we vote with our feet. So the question is neither whether religious beliefs are scientifically acceptable nor whether religious beliefs can be supported by sufficient evidence, but whether one should be a religious or secular believer of one kind or another (p. 359).

Well, yes, *the* question is not about evidential support, but then neither is *the* question about whether one should be religious or secular. There is more than one important question, and these important questions are interconnected. One may as well say the question is not whether evidence warrants belief that the food is safe to eat, but whether we are going to eat it or not. Presumably if it turns out that the evidence quite clearly shows that religious beliefs are all rotten at the core, then we should not choose a religious mode of life. We certainly cannot just shrug and say that *the* question is not about argument and evidence. Stenmark surely does not think that religious believers have a right to refuse to consider counter-evidence to their position — he says as much even while insisting that the question is not about evidence (p. 359) — but his language about the role of evidence and argument is sometimes misleading at best.

Another source of unease is the claim that "because a view of life is better than none" a religious believer such as a Muslim living in a small village in Iraq should hold on to his beliefs even in the teeth of adequate counter-evidence against Islam, provided there is no other life option for him or her (p. 276). On this view, a prophet who keeps prematurely dating the end of the world should be believed anyway if followers cannot figure out a better world view than what the prophet has offered. This is hard to swallow. And it is even harder to accept the idea that it is reasonable for someone to hold on to a vicious secular creed like Nazism when the individual believes there is adequate evidence against it. But that it could be reasonable appears to be the clear implication of the general claim that "even if there exists adequate counter-evidence that makes it unlikely the belief is true, we should not abandon it *until* we have something better, a rival belief to put in its place, given of course that we cannot withhold judgment" (p. 276; emphasis in the text). Really? I am caught in a burning building and the door gives every appearance of being locked. I have to make a choice. But why must I continue to try to tell myself the door offers a way out when it is pretty clear that it doesn't? The first step toward finding a way out might well require letting go of the handle that turns without effect.

A third reservation even a presumptionist might have concerns

Stenmark's reluctance to allow "the primary scientific standard of predictability" to be applied at any point to religious belief (p. 309). Of course we cannot routinely test religious claims by putting them to a test in the lab, but it seems far from clear that applying the principle of predictability is always inappropriate. Jesus says to a paralytic, "That you may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins on earth, I say to you arise, take up your pallet and go to your house" (*Luke* 5: 24). Wouldn't the paralytic or a bystander be justified in assessing the hypothesis *This person has the power to forgive sins* in light of the prediction *The paralytic will rise*, especially given that Jesus says "That you may know..."? It is reported in the *Acts of the Apostles* (c. 5) that Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedren, argued that if the work of the followers of Jesus was of men it would not succeed, but if of God, it could not be crushed. It is hard to see what is wrong with Gamaliel's way of reasoning or how this way of reasoning is not tantamount to proposing a testable hypothesis. And why couldn't one rightly reason that if participation in a church's life only seems to make people worse, then it probably is not of God? It might be objected that this is to treat religious beliefs as hypotheses; and whatever they are they clearly are not that. But as Stenmark himself observes when commenting on the refusal of D. Z. Phillips, Alvin Plantinga, and others to accept religious language as expressing hypotheses, even if there is something wrong about calling a settled conviction of a believer a "hypothesis," the proposition at issue can certainly be treated as one by a person only looking into the matter (p. 325).

Here and there, then, Stenmark burdens the main argument of his book with misleading statements and dubious contentions inessential to the case. Nonetheless, *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life* is an impressive work, widely informed, penetrating, and on the main point quite convincing.

God, Knowledge & Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology, by **Peter van Inwagen.** Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995. Pp. 284. $17.95.

FRANCES & DANIEL HOWARD-SNYDER, Western Washington University & Seattle Pacific University

This volume collects nine essays published by Peter van Inwagen between 1977 and 1995. Part I features, among other things, modal skepticism with respect to ontological arguments and arguments from evil. Part II addresses certain tensions Christians may feel between modern biology, critical studies of the New Testament, and the comparative study of religions, on the one hand, and Christian orthodoxy, on the other. Part III deploys a formal logic of relative identity to model the internal consistency of the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. In what follows, we summarize and reflect on five essays.[1]

"Ontological Arguments" focuses on valid arguments by that name