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Religion, Interpretation, and Diversity of Belief: The Framework Model from Kant to Durkheim to Davidson (Book Review)

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GODLOVE, TERRY F., JR. *Religion, Interpretation and Diversity of Belief: The Framework Model from Kant to Durkheim to Davidson*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. xii+207 pp.

While many in the “analytic” tradition in philosophy of religion continue to pursue issues inherited from natural theology, a set of questions of interest primarily to proponents of the theistic theological traditions and their adversaries, a loose countertradition exists that draws on the analytic tradition in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language but brings that work to bear on broadly

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methodological questions. Instead of the classical debates on God's existence and the logic of the divine properties, it tends to focus on relativism and rationality, explanation and understanding, and hermeneutical issues in the interpretation of religion. Terry Godlove belongs in this second group. He moves skillfully from Kant to Durkheim to Donald Davidson in attempting to show that, when "Kant's a priori, *selbstgedachte* categories became components of human conceptual frameworks, open to empirical investigation" (p. 63), Durkheim fathered, despite himself, the idea of religion as a conceptual scheme imposed somehow on a neutral experiential base, thereby generating the contemporary debate over relativism. Davidson's assault on conceptual schemes recaptures the genuinely Kantian insight that our first-person claims are transcendently constrained by a world of space and time we share with others. Religions embody narratives that provide an interpretive base for individual and corporate self-understanding. As such they are highly theoretical and likely to generate controversy when confronted by competitors from other intellectual or cultural traditions.

Students of Kant may worry that Godlove's identification with Davidson is a bit too facile, while social scientists may suspect him of preempting any critical interpretation of religion. If E. Durkheim, C. Geertz, M. Eliade, and Robin Horton all employ the "framework model," perhaps it is just too vague to worry about. But the book has its principal impact on the debate between "pragmatists," here represented by Jeffrey Stout (p. 153), and those who maintain that religious "narratives depend for their meaningfulness and objectivity on a transcendental counterpart" (p. 150). Pragmatists, be they believers or nonbelievers, tend to think that if beliefs are true they need no further analysis, and if they are in doubt we should defer to the best available history, sociology, and anthropology. What work does Godlove's "transcendental counterpart" perform? The truth of "I have offended God by my vile acts" depends on no transcendental argument or metanarrative but on my having offended God by my vile acts. Why should explicating religion require invoking anything more than beliefs, practices, and institutions? If the "only interpretive limit on the possible scope of religious belief is the requirement that all religious belief systems have enough in common that all are identifiably religious" (p. 145), Godlove excludes nothing that satisfies Davidson's constraints on learnable languages. Stout may be persuaded that Kant is not the founder of relativism without finding any purpose to being Kantian.

Nonetheless, Godlove clarifies the argument between methodological pragmatists and those transcendentalists who fear that historical or social scientific accounts of religion risk reducing it to something it is not. Godlove's is a challenging and important contribution.

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