

Clarke, Steve, *The Justification of Religious Violence*, Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014, xii + 259, \$29.95 US (paperback).

Clarke is a skillful writer and incorporates work from multiple disciplines, fitting it together smoothly and enjoyably. I recommend the book to anyone interested in religion's role in the world.

Clarke's thesis is that there are rational justifications for some instances of religious violence that equal those available for some instances of secular violence. He specifies three premises for such: needing to defeat an enemy in a (cosmic) war, helping someone achieve a better afterlife, and protecting sacred values. Though these are often intertwined, each provides independent reason for violence.

Clarke discusses many religions and historical cases of religious violence. He also discusses different definitions of religion (offering his own) and theories about the evolution of religion (as infectious memplexes, evolutionary byproducts of cognitive development, and evolutionary adaptations). Throughout, he makes clear why religion is or can be dangerous—without condemning it.

The chapter on morality is not moral theory; it is an overview of contemporary thinking about the evolution of *moral codes*—that is, about evolutionary, neuroscientific, and sociological research about extant moral beliefs. Clarke's ability to clearly explain these disparate fields' work is impressive. In other chapters, he discusses anthropological and sociological takes on religion as well as the physiological and neurological; he does not privilege one over the other.

As Clarke shuns moral theory, he does not show—and this may make the book less exciting than it otherwise would have been—that the justifications discussed are morally defensible. He shows that given certain beliefs, violence may be rational, not that it is moral. One may, after all, be morally culpable for having one's beliefs. While it is unsurprising that if one takes a building to be sacred and in need of protection from Satan's army, one will rationally seek to defend it, perhaps with violence, this does not show that one is morally justified in doing so. Put simply, well-formed arguments for violence based on religious (or secular) assumptions are not necessarily *moral* justifications.

In his last two chapters, Clarke discusses toleration—both what it is and what it requires—and speculates about how we might influence those who would otherwise engage in religious violence (e.g., offering incentives and reframing sacred values). He is realistic about the prospects (better in some cases than others).

Perhaps because I would have liked discussion of moral justification—or lack thereof—for religious violence, by the end of the book I thought Clarke could have been briefer. Even so, given how nicely Clarke writes, his book is well worth reading.