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Patrick Quinn

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Series Editor's Preface

Theology and philosophy often ask the same questions, or at least questions that look similar. Both seek to understand highly theoretical issues and employ reason in coming to their solutions. Yet religion and philosophy are often pitted against each other, as though the traditional rivalry between Athens, representing philosophy, and Jerusalem, standing for religion, is a constant feature in our intellectual culture. Perhaps it is, and certainly it would be difficult to understand philosophy unless one took on board a whole range of religious issues as both important and intriguing. For much of their joint histories philosophy and religion have worked side by side, each illuminating and arguing with the other. Although a good deal of emphasis in religion is placed on what is higher than reason, or on the limits of reason, faith is itself, of course, a notion highly susceptible to philosophical analysis, and all the propositions of religion are capable of being put forward as rational beliefs to be argued for and possibly accepted. Religion is an area in which our personal and emotional lives are very much tied in with our beliefs. The role of philosophy has often been to try to establish some distance and clarity in what is otherwise a highly subjective issue. Patrick Quinn's book brings out the interwoven nature of the two disciplines and indeed the two forms of life, and will serve as a useful guide to how some of the key expressions in both religion and philosophy are to be understood.

Oliver Leaman

Introduction

The relationship between philosophy and religion is a long one and has been marked historically by varying degrees of closeness, compatibility, suspicion and even hostility. Philosophers try to analyse religion by asking questions about the kind of evidence that supports religious belief, notably in the existence of God or divinity, however understood. They also examine what constitutes authentic religious experience and how, if at all, this may be explained from a rational point of view. There is also the more general issue concerning the intrinsic capability of philosophy to deal objectively and adequately with the phenomenon of religion given the subjective perceptions that colour all our views, especially about religious faith and its effects, not least in the world of today. Our interpretation of the significance of religion is naturally shaped by the way in which we see our world and this determines the extent to which our attitudes towards religion may be positive, negative or, as far as possible, neutral.

Many people, including many philosophers, would argue that there should be some rational basis for religious faith, though others would have sympathy with the 'leap of faith' beyond reason approach so enthusiastically advocated by the philosopher, Kierkegaard. The relationship between faith and reason is considered and lived out in a variety of ways by human beings both on a personal and political level as history shows. For the believer, however, religious faith is not merely an interesting theoretical option nor primarily a subject for

philosophical investigation but rather signifies the disposition to believe in God or divinity, however understood, as well as, or alternatively, in a transcendent dimension to human life in the cosmos in which one lives. This is demonstrated in the efforts of believing communities to commit themselves to a life of faith and its requirements in the respective cultures of belief which ground their understanding of what is true. Those who, like philosophers of religion (some of whom themselves will be religious believers), try to rationally analyse the nature and expression of religious truth will inevitably be confronted by the transcendent character of religion as a phenomenon that claims to concern itself with what is believed to go beyond the limits of human thought and language. This is the challenge of religion for philosophy and philosophers and is what constitutes the philosophy of a religion as a most intriguing area for investigation and analysis by those curious and interested enough to explore its possibilities.

Preparatory Note Although many faiths are discussed in the pages that follow, the Christian calendar is used throughout the text for chronological purposes. This is for convenience only and should not be taken to signify that the Christian faith has priority over others in the context of this book.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank a number of people who helped me in various ways during my work on this project. First and foremost, I wish to thank Professor Oliver Leaman, the editor of the Philosophy A–Z series, who invited me to write this book on the philosophy of religion and who has been extremely helpful, as usual, all along the way with suggestions and advice, not to mention great patience. My thanks to the staff of the Edinburgh Press with whom I was in contact and especially to Jackie Jones, Head of Publishing and Deputy Chief Executive, who was most helpful and very patient, especially during the later stages of the work with deadlines to be met. My thanks to Felicity Marsh for her very careful editing and thorough scrutiny of the presentation of the text which made it all the more readable as a result. A special mention too to those many philosophy students over the years in the various colleges where I have taught and tutored on courses on the philosophy of religion, especially at University College Dublin and Oscail National Distance Learning Centre at Dublin City University and also at All Hallows College, Dublin. Their contributions to the subject during our discussions on religion have always been personally stimulating and helpful to me in straightening out my own ideas about how philosophy and religion interact. During my final revisions of the text in late February 2005, I received the sad news of the death of a very valued friend, Dr Paul Campbell-Tiech. It is only fitting that I pay tribute to him here by way of acknowledging his

contributions over the years to my own understanding of religion and of life generally. Whenever we met, our exchange of views on these and many other subjects was always stimulating, helped no doubt by the inevitable and welcome glass of good red wine. I shall greatly miss our conversations together and Paul's kind and generous presence.

My thanks to my son, Stephen, and to Maeve Doherty, and to my daughter Barbara for helping me with the technical difficulties that arose with the computerised version of the text, especially as regards the problems with e-mail attachments. Finally, and not least, my thanks to Marion, my wife, who, as always, was patiently supportive and encouraging of my efforts when more urgent household duties demanded attention, especially during the Christmas period.

I must also acknowledge the following texts which proved extremely useful and which are included in the bibliographical section: *A Dictionary of Philosophy* by Peter A. Angeles, the *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* by Stephen C. Evans and *Faith and Reason* edited by Paul Helm.

Finally, I should say that due to the demands of text size, not to mention time constraints, I had to be necessarily selective about the choice of entries. Some readers may object to omissions of topics and thinkers which they would have liked to have seen included but that can't be helped and all I can offer is the hope that the entries here are sufficiently representative of philosophers and topics generally associated with the philosophy of religion.

The book is aimed at a wide audience: at readers with a general interest in the area, at philosophy students at graduate and postgraduate levels, at students of theology and those who study anthropology and culture, as well as anyone interested in the psychology and sociology of religion. I would also hope that teachers of religion of senior students in their final years at secondary and high school level will find this book a useful reference guide to the subject.