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Preface

Some of us who come to a study of philosophy of religion are already acquainted with one religious tradition or another. However, not all of us have religious backgrounds, and not all of us who are religious have a background in the same religious tradition. This introductory text takes this lack of shared background into account. The first chapter provides at least a basic overview of several religious traditions. It is a background chapter on those religions considered world religions, with sections on the history, belief, and practice of the five major world religions. One of the issues treated by this book is that of religious plurality or diversity: How should we understand the relationship between the various religions of the world? Chapter 1 provides a useful background for a discussion of this issue. Moreover, it helps students understand aspects of other issues. For instance, a familiarity with the theistic religions helps students assess the role of arguments for the existence of God in those religions, and an acquaintance with the range of theistic and non-theistic religions is pertinent to understanding the scope or applicability of the traditional problem of evil to religion.

The chapters of this introductory text cover several traditional issues in the philosophy of religion; however, some are devoted to topics that are not usually covered in introductions to philosophy of religion. Whereas one chapter covers the logic of the familiar arguments for the existence of God, another chapter brings forward and discusses views on the relevance of these arguments for religious faith. One chapter focuses on the concern with the reasonableness of religious belief by examining such well-recognized approaches as William James’ argument for the right to believe, Alvin Plantinga’s theory of proper basic beliefs, and William Alston’s reliabilism; another chapter examines the possibility of a religious discovery of God. The one chapter examines the attempt to show that religion is reasonable in the light of epistemological theories that can be applied to religion. The other chapter examines the credentials of an epistemological model implicit in a strain of religious sensibility. There is a chapter on the issue of religious realism—that is, whether all that is essential to religion, or theistic religion, is retained in the absence of belief in a transcendent “metaphysical” God. And the text ends with two chapters on the contemporary issue of religious plurality.

Though the main focus of the text is on philosophical discussions of the issues, various religious sensibilities are consulted to help frame several of the issues discussed. This is true of the chapter on the relevance for faith of the arguments for the existence of God, in which we find that competing religious sensibilities diverge. And it is true of the chapter on religious discovery. Religious sensibilities are also consulted in the discussion of more traditional issues in philosophy of religion. In its treatment of the problem of evil, the text does not focus exclusively on
arguments relating to the adequacy of proposed theodicies, but also on the way that religious sensibilities explain why there is a problem and how those sensibilities relate to proposed solutions. In the same way, in its discussion of miracles, the text not only considers the problems Hume raised about violations of the laws of nature and the occurrence of intervention miracles, but it brings into consideration two other conceptions of miracle that are recognizable in strains of religious sensibility.

In addition to utilizing a variety of religious sensibilities to frame different issues, the text also incorporates a range of philosophical and religious perspectives into its discussion, including the theological perspectives of St. Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Karl Rahner; the analytic perspectives of Alvin Plantinga and William Alston; the modern perspectives of Blaise Pascal, William James, and W. K. Clifford; the contemporary perspectives of John Hick and Don Cupitt; the continental perspectives of Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche; and the feminist/theological perspectives of Sally McFague and Rosemary Reuther.

This text includes a glossary of terms that may be unfamiliar to students; glossary terms are in bold in the various chapters. At the end of each issue chapter there are factual questions and interpretive and evaluative questions. This book can be used with Introduction to Philosophy of Religion: Readings, edited by the author. Chapters in that collection are coordinated with the chapters of this text. The two books, however, can be used independently.


Among the people at Prentice Hall who helped in the production of this book I am particularly indebted to Mical Moser and Carla Worner. Carla Worner’s unflagging support over the years in which this book was written is especially appreciated. I wish to thank the reviewers of this book Edward Wierenga, University of Rochester; Laress L. Wilkins, Regis College; Laur Duhan Kaplan, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I also wish to thank Karpagam Jagadeesan for her careful copyediting of this book.

J. Kellenberger
About the Author

James Kellenberger is the author of several books in philosophy of religion and philosophy of ethics. He is Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Northridge, and has taught courses in philosophy of religion for many years.