

Introduction

How to Use this Book

One of the more notable features of the current philosophical climate is the remarkable renaissance in the philosophy of religion. Not only has there been a resurgence in the number of students studying this area at both school and university level, but there has also been an equally impressive extension of the range of issues now available in the curriculum, most particularly, of course, is the increasing interest shown in the great world religions of Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. However, in this country at least, the main focus of study remains the Western Christian tradition; but even here there has been a significant reassessment of many familiar areas of study, with contemporary philosophers such as Plantinga, Hick and Swinburne providing fresh insights into issues long since thought either irrelevant or dead.

For the student, impecunious as ever, this has proved something of a strain on time and pocket, and in consequence the Anthology, both as resource and teaching aid, has also undergone something of a revival. More often than not, however, the method adopted has been of the ‘bleeding chunk’ variety, with little attention being paid to the needs of either the harassed teacher or perplexed student. In order to offset this unfortunate trend, the present volumes adopt an altogether more user-friendly and digestible approach, coupling the texts selected with practical aids to study. In this regard, I should like to draw particular attention to the following:-

1. In order to set the texts in some kind of historical context, short biographies are given of major philosophers. Who of course counts as a major philosopher is a moot point, and I can only hope that my selection is not too contentious. Some of these biographies I have unashamedly borrowed from my *The Question of God* (2001), and I am grateful to the publisher, Routledge, for permission to do this.
2. Each chapter begins with a short general Introduction to the topic at hand. These are intended to provide an easy-to-use overview of the issue to be discussed, more aide-mémoire than detailed analysis, which I hope will prove helpful to both student and instructor. Inevitably these summaries, being brief, cannot cover the material, whether philosophical or historical, in any degree of depth; but then, to repeat, they are not designed to do so. However, I hope I have offset this problem somewhat by in all cases making

readers fully aware of the primary and secondary material available to them. In addition to these general surveys, I have also provided introductions and separate bibliographical information for each of the individual extracts, thereby providing a kind of narrative format to the arguments being presented.

3. Throughout the book I have provided extensive reference to the current literature. This takes the form not only of Key Texts and Guides to Further Reading but also, as I have just mentioned, of bibliographies within the summaries. The last-named are, I hope, self-explanatory in their layout: brief citations are given by author and year, with more detailed information being available at the end of each chapter. I realize that long lists of books and articles will be less important at school level and that their main use will be for university students engaged in more detailed study and research.
4. Study Questions are also provided at the end of each chapter, many of which are drawn from current examinations papers.

All anthologies face the problem of selection. Some essays and articles choose themselves: Augustine on Evil, Hume on Miracles, James on Belief, and so on. However, I have also included many readings from contemporary philosophers (e.g., Flew, Nielsen, Drange, Rowe) in the belief that these advance the argument in unusual and stimulating ways. Reluctantly I have had to exclude others on the grounds that their importance is outweighed by their difficulty, the exception in this case being Plantinga on Free Will, whose argument is so significant that it cannot be excluded. Swinburne's influential essay on Miracles (1970) is also technically difficult, but here I have taken the somewhat unusual step of coupling it with his less demanding essay of 1996.

Some of the extracts used in this book come from the Internet, which now must count as the single most valuable resource for students at all levels. By typing in 'Aquinas' at a dedicated search engine, such as Yahoo or Google, one is immediately faced with an almost limitless supply of information, with direct access to specialist web-sites, encyclopedias, journals, bibliographies, reviews and recorded lectures; but the most important and more recent development is the availability of complete texts online, with sites like Gutenberg, for example, making the complete text of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* freely available and, more happily, without infringing copyright.

This is the fourth occasion on which I have published with The Lutterworth Press, and therefore special thanks are due to its Managing Director, my friend Adrian Brink, whose advice, encouragement and support have been unstinting.

Dr Michael Palmer
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