Notes

1 Religion as human institutions

1. BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are used today instead of BC (before Christ) and AD (anno domini, the year of the Lord) to avoid the latter’s religiously imperialist connotation. There is, however, no ideal way of replacing BC and AD. The Common Era is common only to the limited extent that three major religious movements began around the same time – Christianity, rabbinic Judaism and Mahayana Buddhism. But nevertheless we use BCE and CE for want of anything better.
2. The most comprehensive and up-to-date treatment of the axial age is in Armstrong 2006.

2 Spirituality and mysticism


3 What is religious experience?

1. Many of them drawn from an unpublished collection made available to James by the psychologist E. D. Starbuck.
2. This centre, now housed at the University of Wales, Lampeter, continues the work of the Alister Hardy Research Centre, founded at Oxford in 1969 by the late Sir Alister Hardy, formerly Linacre Professor of Zoology at Oxford University. Several books (from some of which I shall be quoting) have been published containing some of the centre’s several thousand reports.
3. However, a similar research programme in China, conducted by Professor Xinzhong Yao, is expected to publish its findings in 2006. See also Boulter 1998, Braybrooke 1999, Yaran 2004 and Greaves 2001 (all published as Occasional Papers by the Religious Experience Research Unit in the University of Wales, Lampeter). These are all interesting but do not provide reports by individuals.


5. On these topics see, for example, Wolman (ed.) 1977; Badham 1997; Montefiore 2002.

6. *Sat* is usually translated as ‘being’, but in some contexts it is better translated as reality or the real, as for example in the famous prayer, ‘From the unreal (asat) lead me to the real (sat)’ (Brhad-aranayaka Upanishad, I.3.28). Likewise in ‘The Real (*sat*) is one, but sages name it differently’ (Rig-Veda, I, 164, 46). Again, in the Bhagavad Gita, 17, 23, *sat* is translated by Kees Bolle as Real (Bolle 1979, 193).

7. The usage here is that of some of the Sufis, as for example Jami, for whom God, ‘the unique Substance, viewed as absolute and void of all phenomena, all limitations and all multiplicity, is the Real (al Haqq)’ (Nicholson 1979, 81).

4 ‘By their fruits you will know them’


4. In one of the major sutras an occasion is described when the Buddha addressed 1250 monks and 500 nuns, laymen and laywomen, all of whom had attained to *nirvana* (Conze 1975, 38). The figures are not necessarily accurate, but attest to the tradition that large numbers of people became enlightened and attained liberation during the Buddha’s ministry.

5. As I write there is much discussion in the English media about a well-known football commentator who, at the end of a recent radio interview and when he thought the microphone had been switched off, called one of the black players ‘a fucking lazy thick nigger’. Was it the speech-act itself that was reprehensible, so that, if the microphone had been turned off and the millions of listeners had not heard the remark, it would not have mattered, or was the worst element the racist attitude of mind which his words revealed? Surely the latter. For without a racist frame of mind there would be no racist speech or, going beyond this particular incident, none of the racist taunts of black players that are still too often heard from elements in the crowds at English football matches.

6. These brief remarks barely hint at the significant differences between the New Testament writers, or to the wide range of conflicting points of view today among the scholars. For an up-to-date survey of this vast field see the comprehensive two-volume encyclopedia, *Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture*, ed. Houlden 2003.
5 The neurosciences’ challenge to religious experience

1. I use ‘faith’ here in its customary sense of firm belief exceeding its evidence or grounds, not in the sense that I have developed elsewhere (Hick 1967) of the subjective element within all conscious, including religious, experience.

2. Rita Carter describes the Tibetan monks with whom Newberg was experimenting as practising Zen meditation. In fact the Zen form of meditation is different, though both are ways to the same end.

6 Caveats and questions

1. For the international statistics for the 1970s and 80s see Hay 1990, Appendix on pp. 79–84.

2. Austin’s massive (over 800 pages) book is one of the most important, because most comprehensive, in the literature. His philosophical background is naturalistic: ‘The only assumption this book makes about mind is that it originates in the brain… most neuroscientists, including myself, are monists’ (1999, 293–4).


4. Since the 1960s Thich Nhat Hanh, who has been ‘one of the leading spokesmen of the Vietnamese Buddhist peace movement, has taken himself into the market place, into the twentieth-century hell of war-ravaged Vietnam, and has brought an “engaged” Buddhism into the mainstream of life of the Vietnamese masses. In face of threats of persecution, imprisonment, and even death, he has repeatedly spoken out, urging his countrymen to avoid hatred and acrimony, and insisting that the real enemy is not man but the grenades of greed, anger, and delusion in the human heart’ (Kapleau 1974, 1).

5. See Tutu 1999.

6. For the statistical evidence, see Hay 1982.


9. For a full account of the prophet Muhammad’s revelatory experiences see Wensinck and Rippin 2002.


11. For an accessible account of the relation between the Prophet’s revelations and particular events and problems arising in his leadership of the early Muslim community, see Armstrong 2001.

12. See, for example, Blue 2000 and Armstrong 2005.

13. See Huxley 1977. I should add at this point that, without the use of drugs, some negative ‘spiritual experiences’ are reported. See Jakobsen 1999.

14. In the Society’s first experiment in the 1880s their collection was closed, for the sake of manageability, after recording 17,000 reports. This was then refined down to 702 cases by imposing rigorous standards of evidence. Since then several other collections have been made. In 1942 there was a careful examination of 61 ‘collected, checked, and validated’ cases; another study of another collection was made in 1942, with yet others in 1955 and 1970, with analysis continuing since. For an account of all this see Rhine 1977.
7 Mind/brain identity?

1. Someone has argued, as an attempt at possible falsification, that it could conceivably be discovered that the skull is full of air and that there are no brains, in which case would not the consciousness/brain identity theory be thereby falsified? But that is not a sense of falsification that counts for scientific purposes. It would be on a par with saying that the theory that cancer is caused by a malicious invading evil spirit is a scientific hypothesis because although it cannot be verified it would nevertheless be falsified by discovering that there is no such thing as cancer! But that is an irrelevance. Hypotheses concerning the cause of cancer proceed within the parameters of the fact that cancer does observably exist. And hypotheses in neuroscience proceed within the parameters of the fact that there observably are brains.

2. For the implications of ESP (telepathy) for materialism see Price 1995, ch. 3.

8 Current naturalistic theories


2. See, e.g., Bonebeau and Theraulaz March 2000, 73f.

9 The alternative possibility


10 Free will?

1. Dennett himself advocates compatibilist freedom.

2. Like each of the books by major thinkers to which I have referred in these chapters, Dennett’s would justify an almost equally long response – in which case my own present book would be many volumes in length. But this is not its purpose.

3. Aphorism 40 in the Vatican Collection.

4. Alan Torrance (Torrance 2004) makes essentially the same point, in the context of the truth-seeking freedom presupposed in the research work of the academic world.

11 The epistemological problem

1. The term ‘the critical trust approach’ has been introduced by Kai-man Kwan (2003, 152–69), and I use it in preference to the earlier ‘principle of credulity’, first used by Thomas Reid in 1764, and recently by Richard Swinburne (Swinburne 1979, 254–71), and my own ‘principle of rational credulity’ (Hick 2001, 20). Swinburne’s use has been criticised in Martin 1986, but Swinburne uses the principle as part of his probability argument for Christianity as the
uniquely true religion, which makes him vulnerable, in a way in which my own use of it is not, to the problem that the same principle applies to religious experience within other faiths.

2. This medieval situation is described more fully in Nineham 1993.

12 The epistemological solution

2. For another angle on this see Schellenberg 1993.

13 Any particular religion?

1. For a list see Hick 1989, ch. 17, section 5.
2. One historian of religion, Robert Ellwood, has traced the life cycle of religions in a fascinating and thought-provoking book (Ellwood 1988).
3. One philosopher, Kelly James Clark (1997, 316), argues that we can never know whether the visible ‘fruits’ of faith come from genuinely good motives, or are a deception, because we can never see into the inner self and so ‘cannot judge whether their . . . actions are of genuinely moral worth or not’. This seems to be the kind of absurdity of which only (some) philosophers are capable! If it is never possible to discern moral goodness, and spiritual transformation, when we meet it, the terms cease to have any meaning. Apart from psychopaths, who are fortunately very few, humans are ethical beings, able to distinguish between good and evil people, and between saints and grossly selfish individuals.

14 Responses to religious diversity

1. The term ‘polycentric pluralism’ comes from Schmidt-Leukel 2005.
2. For the multiverse theory see, e.g., Rees 2001.

15 A philosophy of religious pluralism

2. ‘In quantum physics, observational conditions and results are such that we cannot presume a categorical distinction between the observer and the observing apparatus, or between the mind of the physicist and the results of physical experiments. The measuring apparatus and the existence of an observer are essential aspects of the act of observation.’ (Nadeau and Kaftos 1999, 41).
3. Summa Theologica, II/II, Q.1, art 2. Pegis 1945, 1057. The Latin is ‘cognita sunt’, plural, but this is often translated as singular, meaning ‘anything’.
12. The Mystical Theology, ch. 5. Lubheid 1987, 141.
15. The Divine Names 2, 7. Lubheid 1987, 64.
25. The world faiths are totally eviscerated if deprived of their belief in a transcendent reality, of limitless importance to us, which is not identical with the physical universe, although immanent within as well as transcending it. We thus have to reject non-realist or anti-realist understandings of religion according to which such ideas as God, Brahman, the Dharmakaya, etc. do not refer, in however inadequately human terms, to any reality beyond the physical universe (including the human brain) but are ways of expressing our own ideals or hopes or fears. Non-realist theories of religion are popular today, going back to Ludwig Feuerbach in the early nineteenth century and eloquently advocated today by such writers as Don Cupitt, particularly in some of his earlier books, such as Cupitt 1980.

16 Pluralism and the religions

1. Rig-Veda, I, 164, 46.
3. Justin’s Apology I, 46.
7. For a general introduction, see Kalupahana 1976.
8. Its most accessible form in the West is in the work of the Kyoto school in Japan, e.g., Hajime 1986; Nishitani (whom I met in Kyoto in his old age) 1982; Nishida 1990; and the many works of Masao Abe (a colleague at one time at the Claremont Graduate University), such as Abe 1985.
10. For the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Islamic reformers, see Moadel and Talatoff 2000, plus a major figure whom they do not include, Mohamed Taha in the Sudan. Contemporary reforming thinkers include Abdolkarim Soroush (Iran), Mohamed Arkoun (Algeria/France), Ali Ashgar Engineer (India), Riffat Hasan (Pakistan/USA), Shabar Akhtar (Pakistan/England), Abdullah Ahmed An-Na’im (Sudan/USA), Mohamed Talbi (Tunisia), Mahmut Aydin (Turkey), Nasr Hamed Abu-zayd (Egypt/Netherlands), Fatima Mermissa (Morocco), Amina Wahdud-Muhsin (USA), Leila Ahmed (Egypt/USA), Farid Esack (South Africa) and Omid Safi (USA). Several of these are among the new feminist voices within Islam.

11. For the argument for this, see, e.g. Hick 2005a.

17 Spirituality for today

1. *Dukha* is variously translated as unsatisfactoriness, undesirable, sorrow, its universality being the first of the four basic truths, quoted here from the *Samyutta Nikaya*. 5.
2. Nine times at different points in her *Showings* (the Long Text).
5. For a good introduction to this area of research and reports see, e.g., Wolman (ed.) 1977.
6. For clinical evidence see the neuro-physiologist Austin 1999.

18 After death?

1. Quoted by Tyler 1871, vol. 2, 80.
2. There are exceptions both in ancient Egypt, as early as the third millennium BCE, when inscriptions show that both the pharaohs and high noblemen were believed to face a divine judgement after death, and in some of the early Vedic texts of India. For a much fuller account of all these developments, see Hick 1976, ch. 3.
3. For a full account of the biblical material see Simon 1958.
4. For a sympathetic survey of the whole subject see Cranston and Williams, 1984.
5. This is described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Freeman 1975). For a much fuller discussion of both Hindu and Buddhist understandings of reincarnation/rebirth see Hick 1976, chs 17–18.

Concluding summary

1. Within contemporary analytic philosophy this was first argued by myself in Hick 1967 and 2001, but much more fully by William Alston in Alston 1991, and earlier articles.
2. In response to this problem of religious diversity, Alston and I part company. See our discussion, reprinted in Hick 2001.
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