

Introduction

Most of the articles within this volume originated in a conference held to honour the work and person of Richard Swinburne as he entered his ninth decade of philosophizing. This was held in Oxford under the aegis of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion (BSPR). I am grateful to the BSPR in general; the organizer of that conference – Victoria Harrison – in particular; and to the editors of *Religious Studies* – Robin LePoidevin and Mark Wynn – for their role in making possible the volume you have before you. My role as guest editor has been extremely minimal and pleasant. Richard himself summarizes the articles in this volume and locates them by reference to his oeuvre in his ‘Reply to My Commentators’, which is the last article of the volume. So, by way of some introductory remarks, I shall simply give a brief biography of Richard.

Richard Swinburne was born on 26 December 1934. He spent most of his school days studying Latin and Greek, which led to him getting an Open scholarship to Exeter College, but in fact graduated (in 1957) with a first in PPE, following on with graduate degrees in Philosophy and then Theology, taking him into the 1960s, the ‘swinging sixties’ as they were to be known – though presumably not by him; Richard is not a follower of fashions or fads, social or philosophical; he only follows arguments. In the 1960s, Richard’s work – at St John’s, Oxford, then Leeds, and then Hull – was on the Philosophy of Science – *Space and Time* and *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory* being the most notable books to come out of that period. His move to Keele in 1972 coincided with his commencing the work on the Philosophy of Religion for which he is now most famous (though his book *The Concept of Miracle* pre-dated by a year his move to Keele). The next decade or so brought to the world his famous trilogy on the Philosophy of Religion: *The Coherence of Theism* (1977), *The Existence of God* (1979), and *Faith and Reason* (1981). The central work, *The Existence of God*, famously recast natural theology in a Bayesian framework and it is, I think, arguments in this vein that are one of his most abiding legacies. In 1985, Richard succeeded Basil Mitchell as Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford. And for the next eighteen years he shifted his attention to the meaning and justification of the doctrines peculiar to Christianity (rather than Theism more generally). Thus, the famous tetralogy – *Responsibility and Atonement*, (1989), *Revelation* (1992), *The Christian God* (1994), and *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998). During this time, he was elected Fellow of the British

Academy (1993). And then finally – though it came some time later and falls outside the ‘tetralogy’ – mention should be made, in the context of his work on the philosophy of Christianity, of his book *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (2003). Relatively early on in this period, J. L. Mackie, when seeking an opponent worthy of engagement for his book *The Miracle of Theism*, selected Swinburne time and time again. By way of another example, and to bring matters more up to date, it is similarly indicative I think that Herman Philipse, in his work *God in the Age of Science?*, decided that in pressing his case for atheism, the person with whose work he really needed to grapple was Swinburne. I could list many more examples to illustrate the fact that the joint verdict of philosophers – both those who agree and those who disagree with his conclusions – is that it is Swinburne’s arguments that are amongst the ones most worthy of engagement.

(I’ve told slightly too streamlined an intellectual biography for completeness. So, for completeness sake, in parallel with the story that I have told of a shift from the Philosophy of Science, to the Philosophy of Religion, to the Philosophy of Christianity, I should round out the picture a little bit by mentioning Richard’s work in the early 1980s on the relation of mind and body, work which was most fully developed in his *The Evolution of the Soul* (1986), and I should also mention his work on what it is that makes the difference between true belief and knowledge, resulting in his *Epistemic Justification* (2001).)

Richard retired from the Nolloth Chair in 2002, and, since then, whilst much of his work has been devoted to producing updated editions of these seminal works, he has also considered the issue of whether or not humans have free will – his book on this, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, being published in 2013. As he enters his ninth decade, he remains prolific in writing and lecturing, and of course he responds to the articles that we have collected together here.

Before I finish, let me convey just one anecdote which I think adds a bit of colour to this rather unadorned story, by illustrating the high standards that Richard has always set and continues to set – for himself and for others.

I remember being at a BSPR conference about fifteen years ago when Richard gave his presidential report to the biennial general meeting. In giving his presidential report, he talked about the last meeting of the BSPR committee and he went through a list of committee members who had been absent from that meeting. And it was obvious from his tone that he did not regard absenteeism in morally neutral terms.

‘Professor X did not attend’, Richard reported, with some obvious distaste. ‘There was a conference in the States at which his speaking was more important . . . to him.’ Gosh, it was obvious that that didn’t count as a good excuse in Richard’s book. (I doubt Richard actually has a book of things he counts as good excuses; he possibly has a pamphlet.)

In any case, Richard went on. ‘And Professor Y was also absent . . . Oh, [change of tone] he *did* have a good excuse.’ We in the audience all leaned forward, eager to

learn what it is that Richard Swinburne accepts as a good excuse for one's not doing one's duty. Richard continued, 'He was dead.'

I'm pleased to say that none of our invited contributors has had to send in any excuses for an absent manuscript or what have you; all are present. Whether or not all are present and correct is an issue that Richard's responses to their articles and your own judgement will help you decide.

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