

*A* PHILOSOPHY *of* RELIGION

*BRIGHTMAN*

# A PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

*By*

EDGAR SHEFFIELD BRIGHTMAN

*Borden Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy  
Boston University*

*New York : 1946*

PRENTICE-HALL, INC.

## PREFACE



**T**HIS book is a philosophy of religion. In other words, it is written for thoughtful readers who wish to examine religion in its relations to the whole life of man today. The keynote of the book is experience. My primary purpose is to interpret religious experience rather than to discuss systems of philosophy. I have a system of my own, but I am convinced that my views are not absolute truth. I present them as hypotheses to stimulate thought and as stepping stones to higher truth, rather than as the last word on any issue. The book, as I have said, is *a* philosophy of religion. Only God, or someone who confused himself with deity, could write *the* philosophy of religion.

The facts of experience are summarized in the sciences. As a philosophy of religion, this book is an interpretation of science, but is not itself science. The science of religion gives the facts of everyday religious experience as they appear to the historian, the psychologist, and the sociologist. Philosophy in all its branches relies upon science and has no organized subject matter apart from the facts set forth by science. It is the responsibility of the scientist to gather the facts for the philosopher to interpret. Some philosophers of religion deem it best to repeat the results of the sciences at length; I have chosen to condense these results into a single chapter (Chapter II), which serves the purpose of review or of orientation (depending on the reader's pre-

vious studies). This chapter is no substitute for a thorough study of the sciences themselves; likewise, the sciences of history, psychology, and sociology are no substitutes for philosophy. Yet they are essential to it. So essential are they that the ideal student will master them before undertaking philosophy and will continually go back to them for rootage in the soil of experience.

Certain aspects of religion are investigated by theology, but this book is not a theology. It is true that some modern theologians in England and America regard theology as substantially identical with philosophy of religion or as a branch of it. Yet theology, as distinguished from philosophy, starts with the faith of some particular religion—the Christian, the Jewish, or the Buddhist, for example—and expounds that faith, sometimes with philosophical objectivity, sometimes with complete acceptance of it as divine revelation. In contrast with theology, philosophy of religion treats all types of religion and religious faith as its domain, not presupposing the privileged position of any type, but seeking to discover what religious truths are implied by the history, psychology, and sociology of religion. Philosophy of religion does not include a treatment of the peculiar tenets of any faith, but seeks for the truth in all.

A book on philosophy of religion should prove helpful in practical living, but it is not a manual of devotion or of edification. Instead, it is an objective and rational interpretation of experience, perhaps more or less "cold-blooded," as emotionalists, shy of reason, sometimes say. Yet I accept Kant's principle of the primacy of the practical reason, and believe that theoretical knowledge is and should be sought primarily for the purpose of making better persons. They are needed. Knowledge should result in a deepening of the devotional life, if there is any value in devotion, and

should literally edify, that is, build up the spiritual life. But any devotion or edification that lacks a background of intelligent faith may easily be harmful to religion by creating the nervous idea that religion cannot survive honest investigation. True devotion must be a by-product of truth. Philosophy deepens and broadens life, gives it a principle of growth, disciplines its excesses, and points it toward the eternal. Men of deepest devotion—like Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Wesley, and, in our own day, Gandhi, Kagawa, and Rufus M. Jones—are men of profound thought. Religion without thought is like a boat without a rudder; it should be added that an excellent rudder without any boat also leaves its possessor in a predicament.

This book would have been impossible without the help of many former teachers, present colleagues, students, and other friends. Among those to whom I am chiefly indebted for valuable suggestions based on a laborious reading of my entire manuscript are Professor Arthur E. Murphy of the University of Illinois, editor of the series of which this volume is a part, Professor J. Seelye Bixler of Harvard University, Dean Emeritus Albert C. Knudson of Boston University, and Dr. Jannette E. Newhall of the Andover Harvard Theological Library. Professor Wayland F. Vaughan, of the department of psychology in Boston University, has rendered valued aid in connection with Chapter XI. Several of my students have given helpful suggestions. Without the criticisms of Mrs. M. G. Baily of Newton Center as well as of the experts associated with Prentice-Hall, Inc., the form of this book would be far less accurate, consistent, and artistic than it is. Should there be any error of form or of fact or any unfairness of argument in dealing with naturalistic and antitheistic thought, or with pragmatism, or with phenomenology or realism or theistic absolu-

tism or psychology, it is my own fault. I shall have sinned against the light so generously furnished by specialists in those fields. My sin be upon my own head, and not on theirs.

Readers of this book are invited to write to the author (in care of the publisher) any suggestions for its improvement.

EDGAR SHEFFIELD BRIGHTMAN

NEWTON CENTER, MASSACHUSETTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ORIENTATION . . . . .	I
§1. Empirical method in philosophy of religion . . . . .	I
§2. Objections to empirical method by apriorists, logical positivists, and Barthians . . . . .	I
§3. The justification of empirical method . . . . .	6
§4. Experience: nonscientific and scientific . . . . .	8
§5. What is religion? . . . . .	13
§6. Science of religion . . . . .	18
§7. Philosophy . . . . .	20
§8. Philosophy of religion (and theology) . . . . .	22
§9. History of philosophy of religion . . . . .	26
II. RELIGION AS A FACT . . . . .	31
§1. Scientific and philosophical investigation of religion . . . . .	31
§2. Sciences of religion . . . . .	33
§3. History of religion: primitive . . . . .	36
§4. History of religion: tribal . . . . .	45
§5. History of religion: national (priestly) . . . . .	46
§6. History of religion: universal (prophetic) . . . . .	56
§7. History of religion: living religions . . . . .	63
§8. Psychology of religion: psychology of con- version . . . . .	67
§9. Psychology of religion: psychology of mys- ticism . . . . .	69
§10. Psychology of religion: psychology of prayer and worship . . . . .	70

CHAPTER	PAGE
II. RELIGION AS A FACT ( <i>Cont.</i> )	
§11. Psychology of religion: psychology of individual types . . . . .	72
§12. Psychology of religion and the subconscious	73
§13. Psychology of religion and social psychology	74
§14. Sociology of religion: religion and social groups and institutions . . . . .	76
§15. Sociology of religion: religion and economic forces . . . . .	78
§16. Sociology of religion: religion and social reforms . . . . .	79
§17. Chief religious beliefs . . . . .	81
III. RELIGIOUS VALUES . . . . .	85
§1. Religion as experience of value . . . . .	85
§2. Fundamental definitions . . . . .	88
§3. A table of values . . . . .	94
§4. The uniqueness and the coalescence of the intrinsic values . . . . .	100
§5. The uniqueness of religious values . . . . .	102
§6. The coalescence of religious values with other values . . . . .	104
§7. The relations of ideals to existence . . . . .	105
IV. RELIGION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM . . . . .	108
§1. If religious values were unique and autonomous, religion might be independent of philosophy . . . . .	108
§2. Even then it would be a problem for history, psychology, and sociology . . . . .	111
§3. Reasons for treating it as a philosophical problem . . . . .	112
§4. What is the philosophical problem of religion? . . . . .	116
§5. What is the method of philosophical interpretation? . . . . .	116



CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. RELIGION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM ( <i>Cont.</i> )	
§6. What is the criterion of religious truth? . . .	122
§7. The problem of religious certainty . . . . .	129
§8. The central beliefs of religion . . . . .	131
 V. CONCEPTIONS OF GOD . . . . .	 133
§1. Why begin with conceptions of God? . . .	133
§2. God as objective source and conserver of values . . . . .	 134
§3. God as personified particular value (poly- theism) . . . . .	 137
§4. God as personified national spirit (heno- theism) . . . . .	 138
§5. God as supreme personal creator (mono- theism) . . . . .	 140
§6. God as the whole of reality (pantheism) . .	141
§7. God as the unknowable source of all being (agnostic realism) . . . . .	 142
§8. God as human aspiration for ideal values (humanism) . . . . .	 143
§9. God as superhuman and supernatural revealer of values (deistic supernaturalism) .	 145
§10. God as the system of ideal values (imper- sonal idealism) . . . . .	 147
§11. God as the tendency of nature to support or produce values (religious naturalism) . . .	 148
§12. Conceptions of God as revolutionary or evolu- tionary . . . . .	 153
§13. An evolutionary conception: God as conscious mind, immanent both in nature and in values (theism) . . . . .	  157
 VI. WAYS OF KNOWING GOD . . . . .	 162
Introductory . . . . .	162
§1. Immediate experience of God . . . . .	168

CHAPTER		PAGE
VI.	WAYS OF KNOWING GOD ( <i>Cont.</i> )	
	§2. Revelation . . . . .	172
	§3. Faith . . . . .	178
	§4. A priori principles . . . . .	182
	§5. Action . . . . .	186
	§6. Coherence . . . . .	189
	§7. Knowing as certain or as heuristic . . . . .	194
VII.	THE PROBLEM OF BELIEF IN GOD . . . . .	196
	§1. Why is belief in God a problem? . . . . .	196
	§2. How could the problem be solved? . . . . .	200
	§3. Is there no God at all? . . . . .	202
	§4. Is God one or many? . . . . .	203
	§5. Is God human experience only? . . . . .	207
	§6. Is God a part of nature? . . . . .	209
	§7. Is nature a part of God? . . . . .	216
	§8. Is God all that there is? . . . . .	218
	§9. Is God wholly other than nature? . . . . .	220
	§10. Is God unconscious axiogenesis? . . . . .	223
	§11. Is God a person? . . . . .	224
	§12. Is God a superperson? . . . . .	236
	§13. Religion and theory . . . . .	237
VIII.	THE PROBLEM OF GOOD-AND-EVIL . . . . .	240
	§1. Belief in God raises the problem of good-and-evil . . . . .	240
	§2. Goods-and-evils as intrinsic and instrumental . . . . .	241
	§3. Intrinsic goods-and-evils . . . . .	243
	§4. Instrumental goods-and-evils . . . . .	246
	§5. The religious problem of good-and-evil . . . . .	248
	§6. The philosophical problem of good-and-evil . . . . .	250
	§7. The dialectic of desire . . . . .	251
	§8. Current solutions of the problem of evil examined . . . . .	259
	§9. The trilemma of religion . . . . .	272

CHAPTER	PAGE
<b>IX. THEISTIC ABSOLUTISM AND FINITISM . . . .</b>	<b>276</b>
§1. Summary of possible solutions of the problem of good-and-evil . . . . .	276
§2. The issues at stake . . . . .	277
§3. Theistic absolutism vs. theistic finitism . . . .	280
§4. Historical sketch of theistic absolutism . . . .	283
§5. Historical sketch of theistic finitism . . . .	286
§6. What theistic absolutists and theistic finitists have in common . . . . .	301
 <b>X. IS GOD FINITE? . . . . .</b>	 <b>305</b>
§1. Argument for theistic absolutism . . . . .	305
§2. Argument against theistic absolutism . . . . .	307
§3. Argument for theistic finitism . . . . .	313
§4. Argument against theistic finitism . . . . .	324
§5. Restatement of the hypothesis of a Finite- Infinite Controller of The Given . . . . .	336
§6. Perfection or perfectibility? . . . . .	340
 <b>XI. THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PERSONALITY . . . .</b>	 <b>342</b>
§1. The importance of man for religion . . . . .	342
§2. Why not then begin with man? . . . . .	342
§3. What is the problem of personality? . . . . .	344
§4. Definition of personality . . . . .	346
§5. The unity and identity of personality . . . . .	353
§6. Personality and its environment . . . . .	358
§7. The reality of the spiritual life . . . . .	361
§8. Personality human and divine: likenesses . . . .	362
§9. Personality human and divine: differences . . . .	364
 <b>XII. THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PURPOSE . . . . .</b>	 <b>371</b>
§1. Persons as purposers . . . . .	371
§2. Religion as concern about purpose . . . . .	372
§3. Teleology and mechanism: problem and defini- tion . . . . .	373

XII. THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PURPOSE (*Cont.*)

§4. Stages of thought about teleology and mechanism . . . . .	375
§5. The validity of mechanism . . . . .	376
§6. The limits of mechanism . . . . .	377
§7. The evidence for teleology . . . . .	379
§8. The problem of freedom . . . . .	381
§9. Relations between mechanism and teleology	382
§10. Purpose and community . . . . .	383
§11. Purpose and time . . . . .	384
§12. Purpose and eternity . . . . .	385

## XIII. THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN IMMORTALITY . . . . . 387

§1. Religious belief in immortality . . . . .	387
§2. Belief in immortality as extension of experience of purpose . . . . .	388
§3. Weak arguments . . . . .	389
§4. Crucial argument against immortality: physiological psychology . . . . .	395
§5. Crucial argument for immortality: the goodness of God . . . . .	400
§6. Immortality and the problem of good-and-evil	404
§7. Conditional immortality . . . . .	406
§8. The religious value of belief in immortality	409

## XIV. THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE . . . . . 411

§1. Religion as experience . . . . .	411
§2. The meaning of experience . . . . .	412
§3. The meaning of religious experience . . . . .	415
§4. Foundations of religious experience . . . . .	417
§5. Development of religious experience . . . . .	423
§6. The validity of religious experience . . . . .	436

## XV. INTERNAL CRITICISMS OF RELIGION . . . . . 438

§1. Philosophy of religion as critical interpretation of religion . . . . .	438
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER	PAGE
<b>XV. INTERNAL CRITICISMS OF RELIGION (<i>Cont.</i>)</b>	
§2. Internal and external criticism . . . . .	439
§3. History of religion as a process of internal criticism . . . . .	440
§4. Religious criticism of the present as disloyal to the past . . . . .	443
§5. Religious criticism of the present and past as disloyal to the ideal . . . . .	444
§6. Religious criticism of the present as disloyal to spiritual growth . . . . .	450
§7. Religious criticism of the tendency of religion to extremes . . . . .	452
<b>XVI. EXTERNAL CRITICISMS OF RELIGION . . . . .</b>	<b>459</b>
§1. The meaning and value of external criticism	459
§2. Religion as outgrowth of fear . . . . .	461
§3. Religion as a rationalization of desire . . . . .	464
§4. Religion as a device in the class struggle . . . . .	472
§5. Origin as determining meaning and value . . . . .	476
§6. Religion as free play of imagination . . . . .	477
§7. Religion as inconsistent with science . . . . .	480
§8. Religious beliefs as unverifiable . . . . .	485
§9. Religion as providing no positive value . . . . .	487
<b>HISTORICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .</b>	<b>490</b>
<b>GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .</b>	<b>495</b>
<b>INDEX AND LEXICON . . . . .</b>	<b>523</b>

# ONE

  

## ORIENTATION

### § 1. EMPIRICAL METHOD IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION



UR experience consists of our entire conscious life. Religion is one phase of experience. Philosophy of religion is the experience of interpreting those experiences which we call religious and of relating them to other experiences, as well as to our conception of experience as a whole. All the problems of philosophy of religion concerning faith, worship, tradition, God, revelation, immortality, doubt, skepticism, or secularism are stresses and strains within experience. Any solution of these problems must always be a reinterpretation of experience, for all human knowledge begins, continues, and ends in experience. Science is one stage of reinterpretation of experience, philosophy another. Both science and philosophy are movements of experience from a state of confusion and contradiction toward a state of order and coherence. Science is such a movement within a limited field; philosophy aims to include and interpret all experience in a comprehensive unity.

### § 2. OBJECTIONS TO EMPIRICAL METHOD BY APRIORISTS, LOGICAL POSITIVISTS, AND BARTHIANS

The foregoing statements about experience, which are either fundamental truths or dangerous errors, may be regarded in the latter light by at least three groups of thinkers: (1) the apriorists; (2) the logical positivists, and (3) the

Barthians. At the very outset, therefore, it is necessary to present these three objections to the proposition that religious knowledge arises in and is tested by experience.

According to the apriorists,<sup>1</sup> it is necessary to distinguish between experience and reason. Experience for them consists of given data, especially those of sensation, of morality, and of religious life. Reason consists of eternal principles of validity which are not derived from experience as defined. Four apples are inferred from sense data, but the truth that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is an eternal, universal, and necessary truth which is derived not from observing apples, but either from the nature of the mind or from pure logic. The religious apriorists hold that faith in God is not like the belief in four apples; it is like the truth of  $2 + 2 = 4$ , or, rather, like the axioms and postulates from which that truth is derived and which render it certain. Those postulates are true, and hence  $2 + 2 = 4$ , no matter how many apples may be visible—in short, they are true, independent of experience. The apriorist discovers numerous a priori truths in logic, in mathematics, in ethics, and in religion. He thus seems to endow religious faith with an absolute and unshakable certainty.<sup>2</sup>

Now, one who holds the standpoint of the first paragraph in this chapter is called an empiricist. An empiricist would reply to an apriorist somewhat as follows: It is misleading, he would say, to declare that there is anything independent

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of their views, see A. C. Knudson, in Wilm, SPT, 93-127, and Knudson's VRE. (As a rule, references to sources are indicated in this volume by abbreviations which are explained in the Bibliography at the back of the book. The author's name should be consulted.)

<sup>2</sup> There are, it is true, wide differences among those who call themselves religious apriorists. The view stated in the text is that of Jakob Friedrich Fries, the Kantian, and was held by Rudolf Otto when he wrote his *Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries* (London: Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1931). Otto says explicitly that every a priori principle rests on judgments "independent of experience," the "a priori religious" among them (18). Fries and Otto thus ac-

of experience. The case of the apriorist derives its force from the indubitable fact that there is a difference in importance between four apples and  $2 + 2 = 4$ . The empiricist insists, however, that the process of thinking that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is as truly a conscious experience as is the process of observing four McIntosh Reds. The same is true of our thought regarding any axiom or postulate. The assertion that one part of experience is independent of another part of experience may be true. But the assertion that one part of experience is independent of all experience is logically contradictory. The trouble arises from using the word *experience* in a restricted meaning (as confined to sensations or like content) and then forgetting the restriction. It is better to be a thoroughgoing empiricist and define *experience* as meaning all that is at any time present in consciousness. Thus the misunderstandings to which apriorism gives rise are largely a matter of definition of terms and illustrate the harm done by inadequate definition. The quality of being independent of experience appertains to no truth, if experience be defined inclusively. No truth can be said to be unqualifiedly a priori unless it is necessarily related to all experience in such a way that it is always valid, no matter what happens. No truth about religion can be called a priori unless it has a necessary relation to all religious experience. It is possible that some truths are universal and necessary; but this fact cannot be known prior

---

cepted Kant's logical conception of the a priori and differed from him only in asserting the metaphysical objectivity of a priori knowledge. Other apriorists, like Troeltsch and Knudson, mean by the religious a priori a native capacity of the soul for religious experience; thus they conceive it psychologically and, in a sense, empirically, rather than logically. But these writers are often led into so great an emphasis on their faith in the ideal that they sometimes may underestimate the weight of contrary empirical evidence when it raises difficulties for faith. The apriorism discussed in the text, however, is closer to historical rationalism as expressed in the ontological argument than it is to the psychological a priori.



to experiences of thinking and observing. Hence the objection of the apriorist to empiricism can be raised or tested only by means of experience.<sup>3</sup>

The logical positivists comprise another group which would regard the empirical method as dangerous in the philosophy of religion. But their reasons are quite different from those of the apriorists. The logical positivists agree with the apriorists in distinguishing between experience and reason, although they do not like to speak of reason, a term which seems to them too psychological. They would prefer to describe the distinction as one between logical propositions and factual propositions. Logical propositions are purely formal truths regarding the principles of logical implication. They entail nothing regarding the real world and do not even assume that there is one, as Bertrand Russell pointed out in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (203). Hence, no purely logical a priori principle can define either religion or anything else in the real world. For all information about real experience we must consult experience itself. Thus the logical positivist seems to be asserting substantially what was asserted in the first paragraph of this chapter. He really is saying something very different, however. By experience he means exclusively the area of what we commonly call sense experiences. The logical positivist will accept as true what can be verified in sense experience. As a matter of fact, religious experience, as it actually occurs, always includes not only certain sense experiences but also other experiences which are often called religious values. The exaltation of the spirit in worship and the experience of moral obligation are characteristic of religion; they both contain factors which are not verifiable in sense perception. You certainly

<sup>3</sup> This view will be considered more fully in Chap. VI, § 4.