

# Introduction

In public debate the topic of religion has figured far more prominently in the past few years than anyone would have imagined likely beforehand. It cannot, however, be said that the debate has been conducted particularly constructively, or, at times, even in a civil fashion.

In order to attempt to throw light on the topic, rather than pouring yet more oil on turgid waters, for its 2008–9 annual London lecture series, the Royal Institute of Philosophy took Religion as its topic. The essays in this book are the result.

In the first four, Richard Swinburne, Tim Mawson, Gerald Hughes and Brian Leftow write very much within the great tradition of natural theology, and they are followed by Richard Norman, Peter Cave and Peter Millican who are robustly critical of religious claims. Mary Midgley then continues her long campaign against the excesses of the neo-Darwinists, arguing for what might be seen as a non-religious sense of meaning. Mario von der Ruhr, Michael McGhee and Clare Carlisle look directly at the notion of spirituality from differing perspectives. Douglas Hedley then considers the notions of sacrifice and the sacred and Robin Le Poidevin that of Incarnation and the collection closes, appropriately enough, with a careful examination of religion, pluralism and tolerance from Peter Byrne.

On behalf of the Royal Institute of Philosophy I would like to thank all those who contributed to the series and to this book, and also to Adam Ferner for his editorial and indexing efforts.