

# **A History of Philosophy**

## **81 Philosophy Today and Tomorrow**

### **By Dr. Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College**

For this last class, I thought that rather than trying to add some more specifics as to things that are new, I'd finish with some rather general remarks. Obviously, the history of philosophy is not yet finished. It's an obvious statement, which may sound a little bit odd when we're finishing the history of philosophy, of course, that it's not yet finished, because history is going on.

So let me try to characterize some salient things about philosophy briefly as it is today, while at the same time looking towards the future, since those of you who have a continuing interest in philosophy will be most interested in it in the future. And while we can't predict the future, we can at least prepare ourselves in anticipation of what might be. The first general characteristic of philosophy today is what I think you're already familiar with, namely, the contrast between continental European thought and English-speaking philosophy, which is sometimes put as the contrast between phenomenology, a phenomenological tradition, and analytic philosophy.

The thing, however, is that just as empiricism has been broadened so that the narrow sense of empiricism that you get in Mill and Russell no longer applies, thanks to the broadening, loosening up that took place with ordinary language and other things, so the term analytic is now extremely loose, so that it no longer refers simply to Russell's logical analysis or alternatively to ordinary language analysis, but analytic philosophy is now simply virtually any philosophy that tries to analyze concepts and analyze arguments and, in that sense, to think in more detail. I remember doing a paper for a philosophy conference out at Northern Illinois a few years ago, and one of the men out there, Mason Myers, saying to me in the light of the paper, well, you are an analyst, and I never thought of myself as an analyst, but I was trying to think my way through some puzzling things, and I guess in his book that made me an analyst. So the terminology nowadays is much looser in that regard.

They are different philosophical styles. The phenomenologist, as you know, is inclined to describe rather than to construct arguments. He takes it that when you see what is being described, then you get the point.

The truth has shown itself, whereas the English-speaking philosopher is more inclined to want to amass arguments and reasons for and against in trying to draw conclusions. But these are differences of methodology, differences of intention. Now, this divide, which we've seen historically, continues, and I think you have to say with little mutual understanding and oftentimes little mutual respect.

The analytic types often speak with disparagement of the phenomenological, and the phenomenological often speak with disparagement of the analytic, a pathetic situation. In fact, in the eastern division of the American Philosophical Association, the eastern division being, or what should we say, Pennsylvania and the east, it's become quite politicized so that you have really a very split, divided profession. And this, despite the fact that there are some notable individuals who succeeded in keeping afoot in both camps.

One such is Richard Rorty, whom we've mentioned before. His very postmodern book, *Philosophy in the Mirror of Nature*, draws on people ranging from Wittgenstein to Gadamer to Foucault, very much in both camps. And at the other end of the country, Hubert Dreyfus, D-r-e-y-f-u-s, Hubert Dreyfus at Berkeley, likewise seems to succeed in keeping afoot in the two and being able to interact and work with people in both traditions.

But most philosophy departments in the United States are overwhelmingly analytic in some sense or another, in some broad sense, with perhaps one token phenomenologist. And there are some exceptions to that. There are a few departments that are overwhelmingly phenomenological, perhaps with a token analyst.

The overwhelmingly phenomenological come to mind immediately. One is Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Another one is the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

There are some who try to hold up both ends. Northwestern University, for instance, though they have, in effect, two different graduate programs as a result. Boston College, Catholic University in Washington, and so forth.

But the general picture is that philosophy in America is of the broadly empirical, broadly analytic sort. And that's the methodological characterization. It's in the light of that that I'm inclined to say to people wanting to go on in philosophy, don't unless you can stomach a certain amount of analytic stuff.

And if you can't work in that sort of detail and don't have a mind for it, don't go on in philosophy. If what enthuses you and turns you on is the history of ideas rather than working with issues and arguments and concepts and so forth, then maybe you should go on in the history of ideas rather than in philosophy as such, which tends to be much more minute in its attention. Though, frankly, I don't think the history of ideas is as history-shaping in the history of ideas as philosophy is in the history of ideas.

So that if you're interested in being where the action is in terms of shaping history, it's philosophy. But if you like to live in the past, then the history of ideas. So that's the first broad characterization.

The second broad characterization is that in Western thought, and you know, it's sort of hard to define what you mean by Western now. A year or two ago, we meant west of the Iron Curtain. Yeah, let's still mean it that way.

Western Europe and Anglo-American philosophy. In terms of general position is largely scientific naturalism. What in pop terminology is secular humanism?

Now, when I say scientific naturalism, I mean, of course, orientation to scientific knowledge as the bona fide variety and philosophical naturalism. And a philosophical trend throughout the university world in the West. But with some qualifications.

Christian theism is the dominant philosophy in philosophy of religion, without question, dominating philosophy of religion in Anglo-American thought. That was not so 20, 30, 40 years ago. It was so at the turn of the last century.

In between, of course, the secularization process increased. But I remember in the 50s being at an American Philosophical Association convention in St. Louis where a young Catholic layman, chip-on-shoulder type from the University of Pennsylvania, whose name was James Ross, gave a paper called A Scottish Argument for the Existence of God. And everybody tried to take him to pieces and pick holes in the argument, and he resisted them all.

And as the audience was leaving the room, I heard one philosopher say to another, there must be something wrong with it. I can't see what it is, but it couldn't possibly be true. Now that was characteristic of the 50s.

In, I would say, 10, maybe 15 years after that, in the same hotel in St. Louis, another meeting of the American Philosophical Association, I was chairing a panel discussion of three individuals in the philosophy of religion. George Mavrodis, University of Michigan, evangelical. Dick Patil of West Washington State University, Catholic layman.

Stan Kane of Miami and Ohio, evangelical background. Here were four of us, confessed Christians, conducting a panel discussion on the problem of evil, and crowded out. That could not have been in the 50s.

Today, nobody would even remark about it. It's simply the thing and everybody knows it. The philosophy of religion is, the cutting edge of the discipline is being defined by Christian thinkers, Catholic, Protestant, including evangelicals.

And in the last, what, about seven, eight years, seven years, four of the presidents of the Central Division American Philosophical Association have been, have been, did I say evangelicals? Have been Christians. In some cases, evangelicals. Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Alan Donegan, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, a few weeks ago.

And this wouldn't have been heard of back in the 50s. So, this qualifies the thing. One hopes, and here's looking towards the future, one naturally hopes that this type of Christian presence in philosophy will extend as influentially in other areas of philosophy as it does in philosophy of religion.

Now, it's there in metaphysics and epistemology, because philosophy of religion gets you into metaphysics and epistemology. It's there in ethics, but in those other fields, it's simply not as dominant as it is in philosophy of religion. The dominance is still scientific naturalism.

The influence of people like Quine. Now, another qualification that has to be made to this generalization is related to the emergence of postmodernism in its various manifestations. The manifestation in, of anti-realism in philosophy of science.

Anti-realism in ethics. Anti-realism in epistemology, Richard Rorty and company. And anti-realism in religion, but much more in theology than in philosophy of religion.

That is to say, there's more anti-realism among professional theologians than there is among professional philosophers of religion. So that in a number of universities, Christian orthodoxy is much more in evidence in the philosophy department than the theology department. And you find some historians saying that there is more theology being done by philosophers these days than there is by theologians.

But postmodernism then, with its various manifestations, including the pluralism of religious thought, is certainly in evidence. Whether it will seriously challenge the dominance of scientific naturalism reign to be seen. I personally don't expect it to.

And I don't expect it to because postmodernism, pluralism, anti-realism, and relativism are simply old hat with new trim. At this, it's Easter resurrection. That is to say, we have a long, long history of skepticism and relativism in epistemology, going all the way back to the epistemological philosophical resources to the contra.

So I don't expect this postmodern relativism and anti-realism to become dominant. I do expect that it will be the key issue for the next decade, perhaps two decades. But I don't expect it to be a takeover in any sense.

There are some other recent developments that are likely to remain and grow. The interest in metaphysics, which I was talking about last time, has grown out of developments in philosophy of language. I'm inclined to think that the developments

in metaphysics will be self-sustaining rather than being sustained by philosophy of language.

Philosophy of language is the sort of thing you need to get going after people have been telling you that metaphysics is meaningless. But once you get going, it becomes self-sustaining. You don't need a lot of work in philosophy of language to keep sustained.

So I expect that metaphysical development to keep going with particular emphasis on mind-body relationships. The mind-body problem is where a lot of work has been going on. And where mind-body dualism has some very articulate philosophical defenders like Richard Swinburne, who was here on campus just a couple of years ago.

Changes in ethics, as well, are likely to continue. One of the very significant changes as a result of the activism of the 1960s was a return to applied ethics. Why a return? Ethics was discussed in applied terms through the course of history and certainly by people like Bentham and Mill.

Well, what has intervened is the meta-ethics discussion. The sort of thing represented by G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, where he started asking what the meaning of the good is and developed his intuitionist position. The meaning of ethical terms.

And then, of course, that was just reinforced by A.J. Ayer's declaration that such terms have no empirical reference. So that if they have no empirical reference, then moral judgments have no factual significance. And in overcoming that, essential again to give attention to meta-ethical concerns.

What is the meaning of our ethical terms if indeed they have meaning? Now, what that amounts to is the fact that perhaps for 40 or 50 years at the beginning of the century, the overwhelming attention of philosophical ethics was to meta-ethical concerns, to the virtual eclipse of applied ethical concerns. But partly because that hurdle was overcome and partly because of the activism of the 60s, applied ethics became a vigorous field in its own right. Now, you can see this just by looking at the curriculum in a place like Wheaton.

Back in the 50s, there wasn't an applied ethics course in the college, to our shame. The 60s hit us, I suppose, as a result of that, like a ton of bricks. And it seems to me that the first thing that was done curriculum-wise was in the 60s when the Vietnam draft was on the minds of men students and many of them agonizing over the question.

I started teaching a course called War and Christian Ethics, out of which came an anthology that you may have noticed in the bookstore, which went out of print but, over the Gulf War, came back into print again. The publisher was on his toes. But as the war, the Vietnam War, died down, that course was enlarged into a course we called Social Ethics, which is now Ethics, Law, and Society.

But that, in effect, was the first applied ethics course that had been done for quite a while here at Wheaton. Well, now you know what you got. Business ethics, bioethics, media ethics, ethics and international affairs, etc., etc., etc., and so forth.

But this is true in the country across. And it's the biggest philosophical industry in the country, applied ethics. There are always jobs in applied ethics.

So that's going to continue, I'm convinced, simply because it's getting back to what philosophers have done historically. There are, however, issues to be addressed there. One, for Christians in philosophy, is the relationship between philosophical and theological ethics.

The relationship between philosophical and theological ethics. And I think for a number of years, they have been somewhat separate in this regard. That by and large, theological ethicists have been addressing the dynamics of the ethical life.

That is to say, bringing to bear concepts like sin and grace. Whereas philosophical ethics has been addressing matters of ethical decision-making, bringing principles to bear in decision-making. And because, therefore, the agendas of the two have been different, a different agenda for theological ethics than for philosophical ethics, there's been relatively little integration of the theology with the philosophy.

Except at certain obvious points, like divine command theories, or natural law ethics, things of that sort. However, the development of virtue ethics is making a difference. Virtue ethics, which you recall, was precipitated in measure by Alasdair MacIntyre.

I was on the phone with him this morning trying to get him to come to our conference here in 93, and he declined. So we keep trying. I think that's the third time we've tried.

But precipitated by MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*, where he sort of hung all of the ignoble things of the Enlightenment onto the ethics of principle and decision-making, and essentially called for a return to the Aristotelian tradition with virtue ethics, that development is obviously having and is bound to have some effect on the interrelationship of philosophical to theological ethics. Because if you're talking of the development of virtues, you're talking of the dynamics of the moral life, and matters where sin and grace are involved, you see. And illustrative of that, I think, is

the work of our own Bob Roberts, who, incidentally, is at the cutting edge of what's going on in virtue ethics.

His work is cited in journal articles all the time, where you get his sort of clear incorporation of Christian understanding of human nature, sin, grace, while at the same time, that sort of Wittgensteinian analysis of value concepts, virtue concepts, relentlessly trying to get clear about the virtue and how it functions and its relationship to appropriate emotions and so forth. So, I think here you have something that's going to be an ongoing development. Now, in these characterizations and anticipations, you see my concern for a Christian presence in philosophy.

And I hope you see that concern. I hope you have seen that concern running through the whole history of philosophy. In effect, this is the story.

Familiar? What we're talking about is a variety of historical traditions, you see. And in the tradition of theistic philosophy, philosophy done in a theistic perspective, there are a variety of types of that—Jewish, Islamic, Christian, naming three major theistic religions, obviously. And within the Christian theistic tradition, you find variety likewise.

So, when I talk of Christian philosophy in the past and in the present and in the future, I want to characterize it in four ways. One as a perspectival tradition. Maybe that's two ways right in itself.

Tradition in the sense that there's an ongoing history of Christian thought in philosophy. And I use that word intentionally. Sometimes, Christian philosophers have given the impression that you do philosophy by bracketing your theological beliefs, bracketing your own attitudes and values and concerns.

I think that's not only inhuman. I think it's impossible for humans. Bracketing that phenomenological device, remember? Bracketing, suspending judgment, something that Descartes attempted, is just never completely possible.

It wasn't for Descartes. It wasn't for Husserl. To take a completely neutral position, to be completely neutral when in your heart of hearts you're not, is self-deception.

And so, it seems to me that the path of intellectual honesty is to fess up. That is to say, to be quite straightforward about where you are coming from. To admit it.

To see where that does influence your thinking. To see where other people's positions influence their thinking. Make allowances accordingly.

When the two coincide, well and good. You have an agreement. But it's possible for two people to believe the same thing for different reasons.

So, I'm talking then not of working on a neutral basis. Some people use the term presupposition. Now, to me, the term presupposition connotes premises for deductive arguments.

A presupposition is sort of a foundationalist premise. Except that if it's a presupposition, it's not an indubitable foundation, you see. Well, insofar as that foundationalist model of deductive systems is connoted, at least, perhaps denoted, but at least connoted by the term presupposition, I don't want to speak of Christian philosophy as working with Christian presuppositions.

I would rather say perspective. The term perspective allows me to say that there are not only articulated propositions, which I believe to be true, but there are certain values and concerns that motivate and guide the selective process, as well as the thinking process. Perspective made up of beliefs, attitudes, values, you see.

So, a post-spectival tradition. Second, I want to say that Christian philosophy is exploratory. That is to say, it's a process, not a finished product.

It's a process, not a finished product. The idea of wrapping up the job once and for all belies the ongoing nature of philosophical inquiry, where there are new issues and new problems constantly arising. Philosophy is like a historical dialogue between people of similar and different convictions.

And the dialogue, like Plato's, is never finished. Keeps going. So, I say the history of philosophy is not finished.

It's the bull session that never finishes. Third, in addition to those two things, I want to say that it's a pluralistic undertaking. I try to use the term Christian philosophy without the definite article.

The Christian philosophy. It's a tradition that has a lot of diversity with it. Diversity due to different philosophical methods, perhaps different philosophical views, certainly due to different theological traditions, which are going to make a difference on certain key matters, you see.

The whole variety of things that give us intellectual differences. And I regard that pluralism as healthy. If you value the kind of built-in critical process that keeps you thinking, growing, in a self-corrective way, then what you need is people who disagree with you.

And it seems to me that in, not in all regards, but in some regards at least, the diversity within Christian tradition and Christian church is healthy. It should keep us self-critical, keep us modest, keep us from getting lopsided, as humans tend to. We're just wonderful bunglers.

So pluralistic. And then I want to add holistic. Of all people, it seems to me, Christians in philosophy should be thinking with the whole picture in mind, rather than with tunnel vision, blinkers on, working in some subdivision of some subsection of one of the sub-disciplines of philosophy.

No, no matter what specifics a person is working with, the Christian surely needs to have the whole picture and look at things as a whole in terms of the Christian worldview and focus accordingly. That, it seems to me, has a number of values, not the least of which is the way in which it is likely to guide the selection of what you work on, what a philosopher works on. Let me draw the analogy to your decision as to what you're going to do after commencement.

And the question some of us nag you with from the moment you declare a major. That's basically a question you have to address within the context of the Christian worldview, the stewardship of your life and gifts in terms of what could be strategic, so forth. And I remember a panel discussion I was on in the Society of Christian Philosophers a few years ago at a meeting in D.C. Alvin Plantinga was on the panel, and we were each asked to talk about how Christianity influences our philosophy.

And Plantinga got up and said, well, I think its influence is first and foremost in what I select to work on. What is the problem I'm going to address? The strategic problem is in terms of the overall nature of a Christian worldview. And I think that's likely the case.

Now, that does have some unfortunate consequences if that's the only consideration. Namely, if you advertise a position in philosophy, as we've done so recently, and begin to amass these piles and piles of letters of inquiry and vitae and all the rest of it, you find that 90% of them are in philosophy of religion, which is what we don't need help in at this juncture. So that it seems to me the stewardship question has to be not only in terms of what is strategic for Christian thought, but what is strategic for Christian thought in the whole enterprise of Christian philosophy at this juncture of history.

You see the much larger picture. And so I'd urge some of you to think of moving into metaphysics, philosophy of science. And what is the, I think, the most neglected of all the philosophical fields? Aesthetic theory.

Aesthetic theory. Yeah. Let's see.

Well, simply by way of illustration, the thing that I'm working on now, I may have mentioned this before, has been for two or three years, will be for another couple, is essentially the objective basis for moral judgments. What is the basis in objective reality? For ethics, you see. And you've been getting some of that stuff that I've been finding along the way through the year, because it's historical stuff.

I would like to think that I'll, the last time I teach this course, probably a couple of years from now, I'll be able to incorporate all that I found in it, but probably not. So, you'll have to stay tuned on that one. This course will be different before I'm through than it is now, simply because of the things that have to be done.

Well, the future, then, of philosophy is indeterminate. It's still in the making. And I think the last thing I want to say before we take, if you wish, the 15 minutes for discussion, is that what the future of philosophy holds depends in part on people like you.

And I'm serious about that. Over the decades that I've taught part or all of this history of philosophy course, the you in the class have gone on to do all sorts of things. There are college presidents.

There are seminary professors. There are people who've been publishing philosophy for 20 or 30 years. There are people outside of philosophy, like Mark Noll and Roger Lundin.

People who, through their work, are shaping the history of Christian thought and, in some aspects, the history of broader thought. That's what history is made of. History is made by people like you.

You'll see. It's ordinary people like us who, with the stewardship of the gifts that we have, contribute in some measure to making the history of philosophy and making the history of our days. So I don't know how else to finish a course like this, but with comments like that on philosophy today, dot, dot, dot, and tomorrow, dot, dot, dot, leave you to fill in the dots.

Dottie, people that we are. Okay, 15 minutes, questions, discussion. Yeah.

Yeah. New versions of old things. Yeah.

Yeah, you see, what's old is the given of the various traditions. What's new is what comes in along the way. Yeah.

Yeah. If one of these traditions is theistic tradition and another one, cut the crepe cake differently today, is a relativist tradition, okay, to get the postmodernism into it, is a relativist tradition, what's new? Well, the relativism of the sophists differs

somewhat from the sophists and the Greek and Roman skeptics, the sophists and the Greek skeptics, okay, differs significantly from the skepticism of David Hume, and differs significantly from postmodernism. Now, why does it differ and how? Well, get the comparison in these two, first of all.

I remember reading a book written in the 18th century called *Evenings with the Sceptics*. It sounded like a cozy sort of volume before the days of television. But it was filled with references to Pyrrho, Avelis, and Carneades and all that much.

But the interesting thing is, while it was filled with references to that, it was obviously working under the influence of Newtonian science and engaged in a criticism of Newtonian science. There were certain key matters which become the focus of attention in the Hume-type skepticism. The idea of necessary connection, the problem of induction, can reason determine what is morally right, things of that sort, you see.

Now, you come on here. What was at work in this was the Newtonian science. What's worked here is a much more relational, organic model where we recognize the interdependence of every aspect of life and culture on other things, so that your philosophy is going to be determined, is what is implied, in many regards determined, by your race, your sex, your socioeconomic class, you see, simply because of the interrelatedness of things in this organic model.

Can you see another model emerging? Yeah. I don't know. A few years ago, I used to think that there was a fourth one emerging that I called a personalistic model.

I was thinking of the Scottish philosopher John McMurray, who is now virtually unheard of, so I don't talk so much about it. Wishful thinking. But John McMurray wrote a book called *The Self as Agent*, and another one called *Persons in Relation*.

A number of other things. That was, or to try and relate it to things you're familiar with, that was definitely post-Kantian. Kant's conception of the person, the dignity of the person, was not unlike some of the more personalistic existentialists in that they wanted to lay emphasis on thou rather than it.

The distinctiveness of an I-thou relationship rather than an I-it relationship. But in any case, his emphasis on that was picked up by a number of writers, philosophers, theologians, ethicists, and so forth, so that they were making what you might call a categorical distinction, a distinction of categories, between persons and other things. Now, naturalism is a reductionist position, and one of the problems with Whitehead's metaphysics is that he, in effect, reduces persons to simply complex events without any categorical distinctiveness.

McMurray was making a categorical distinction, and I think that was very helpful. Writers influenced by him, there was a theologian, a New Zealander, Robert Blakey, who wrote a book called, what was it? *Secular Religion and the God Who Acts*, something of that sort. Helmut Thielicke, not necessarily influenced by him, developed somewhat similar positions in his theology.

But it seems to me that that's a position which needs developing, as I say, which needs developing. If key concepts for Christian belief include not only the transcendence of the personal God, but also the qualitative distinctiveness of human persons as distinct from other things, then that needs to be incorporated in something more than just playing around with mind-body problems. So I'd like to think that one of the outcomes of some of the trends of the day might be that.

And it is interesting that in applied ethics, and I mentioned this when we were talking about ethics since positivism, that in applied ethics, the Kantian principle of respect for persons is being reiterated, renewed, you see. It's perhaps more pervasive in applied ethics these days than some of the old utilitarianisms. The three main principles or approaches seem to be either utilitarianism, respect for persons, or some contractarian basis.

So I think in order to ground a contract and respect for persons, and if you like to have a utilitarianism that's not going to say simply maximizing the good for everything, cabbages as well as kings, you need some categorical distinction. Karl? In terms of a priori knowledge, to that extent, I think I have to say no. I think I have to say no.

That is to say, innate ideas just aren't in. The a priori that's discussed these days is the a priori nature of logical truths of the form  $A \text{ equals } A \text{ equals non-}A$ . Possibly a priori structures of some other sorts, but even Kantian categories know they are pretty well relativized, in the neo-Kantian direction.

So no, I think the general temper remains loosely empirical in that regard, and I think that's true in European thought as well, at least as far as a priori structures of thought are concerned. Yes. Husserl's emphasis on intentionality is not so much a structure of thought but a structured way of relating to the other, you see.

So I'm inclined to regard phenomenology as a different kind of empiricism of a broad sort that focuses more on the inner sense than the outer sense. Yeah, so no, I don't think that that rationalist direction has been continued. Some would say it's continued in Hegel, but then pure red-blooded Hegelians are a pretty rare species these days.

Yeah. Okay, anything else? Well, let's call it a day, and we'll get your examinations by Wednesday. Did anybody not receive an examination? Come up to the office with me, I have some up there.