Readings in Philosophy

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HONORS SPECIAL STUDY

Readings in Philosophy

RLPH H483

Presented to Dr. Jim Berryman

by

Linda Ann Sandford Wells

April 30, 1973
This report is not intended to be a term paper, merely a synopsis of what I feel I have accomplished in my Honors Special Study this semester. The bulk of the project lies in the actual reading which I did rather than in a formal report of that reading.

The main work which I completed this semester was Bertrand Russell's *Wisdom of the West*. It was lengthy and extremely time-consuming. In my judgment, it helped to fulfill one of the objectives which I have for myself. That aim is to overcome a deficiency I feel concerning my own knowledge of the history of philosophical thought. Russell's book covered numerous thinkers from the Ancient era to Contemporary thought. In studying it, I gained confidence in my knowledge. Of course, to complete the work itself was gratifying, since it was so encompassing and difficult.

Although reading a general history is important, I feel that there is no substitute for reading primary sources. This I also attempted for this project. The longest of these was Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Having taken a course in Existentialism in which I read excerpts from his works (including the above-mentioned), and having studied and written on his stand concerning Christendom, I was interested in him, and pursued this interest further. *Fear and Trembling* is also a short book, but as I soon discovered, a rather difficult one.

I have also read some shorter works by philosophers, and one advantage to this exercise was that it gave me practice reading and attempting to understand philosophical thought as it is written. Since I plan to continue the study of philosophy in graduate school, such reading was invaluable.

The article by the composer Paul Creston concerning his use of Pythagorean ideas in his profession and life gave me more hope that philosophy has some practical applications in terms of vocations.
This article attracted my attention in part because of my interest in the area of psychical phenomena. Ayer seems to believe in the faculty of mental telepathy, but he states, "... to be informed of another's feeling telepathically is not to share it. ..." Even though we may actually know what is actually in another's mind, that is not the same as actually thinking the actual thought. As he says "... nothing is ever going to count as one person's having the experiences of another."
This work revolves around the story of Abraham's belief and action upon the belief that God had commanded him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. S. K. characterizes what he terms "the Knight of Infinite Resignation" and the "Knight of Faith." To him, I believe that Abraham represented the latter. He also discusses three questions in view of the Abraham story: 1) Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical? 2) Is there such a thing as an absolute duty toward God? and 3) Was Abraham ethically defensible in keeping silent about his purpose...?
This history of philosophy covers the various major thinkers in the span between 6th century B.C. and 20th century A.D. It provides a good account of the interrelationship of several disciplines of thought such as philosophy, history, sociology, political science and music. The book is profusely illustrated which makes it easier to get through. It can be valuable when read as a whole to get a general background of philosophical thought or used as a reference work.

This article provides a good example of the practical application of philosophy. In it, Creston, a contemporary American composer, "purport(s) to show that in Pythagorean wisdom the musician will find the key to the principles that should govern his musical and personal life." It is not only the discoveries of Pythagoras concerning musical intervals which interest Creston, but his ideas concerning the use of music as an element involved in the healing process which he finds challenging.

Ayer is saying, I believe, in this essay that it is not the philosopher's duty to extract, deductively, a system of thought. Nor is his job to say what is rational. The functions of philosophy, are, instead, to clarify, to criticize, and to analyze.

This was certainly one of the most interesting selections I read. I would classify it as a defense of metaphysics. The introduction to this selection speculates that Bergson "... seems to suggest that metaphysics will consist solely of an intuitive apprehension of reality." Bergson is con­­with intuition in this essay, and goes so far as to say that intuition is the only way in which we can discover an absolute. He believes that we must enter into an experience and from that experience deduce thoughts, rather than obtain ideas in the reverse order.