

1973

# Readings in Philosophy

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## Recommended Citation

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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.

"Doubts about Self-Consciousness", by George Santayana  
Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Edited by William Barrett  
and Henry D. Aiken, p. p. 393-396. Reprinted from Scepticism  
and Animal Faith, G. Santayana.

"One's Knowledge of Other Minds", by A. J. Ayer. From Philosophical Essays, Ayer. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., New York, 1965. p.p. 191-214.

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."

FEAR AND TREMBLING, A Dialectical Lyric, by Soren Kierkegaard,  
Translated with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie.  
Princeton University Press, 1941. c. 205 pages.

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. . .?

WISDOM OF THE WEST, Bertrand Russell. Edited by Paul Foukes.  
Rathbone Books Ltd., London, 1959. Printed in Great Britain by  
L. T. A. Robinson, Ltd. London. In the U. S. A., Doubleday &  
Co., Inc., Garden City, New York. p.p. 5-313.

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.

"Pythagoras -- the Musician's Philosopher", by Paul Creston.  
From The Sinfonian, Newsletter published by Phi Mu Alpha  
Sinfonia Fraternity, Vol. XXII, No. 4, Feb. 1973, Evansville,  
Indiana, p.p. 8,9.

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.



"The Function of Philosophy", by A. J. Ayer. From Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Ed. by William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken, Vol. 3. c.p.p. 63-74. Reprinted from Language, Truth and Logic, Ayer.

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.

"Introduction to Metaphysics", by Henri Bergson. From Readings in Twentieth Century Philosophy, Edited by William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian. The Free Press of Glencoe (Division of Macmillan Co.), 1963. p.p. 47-84. This includes an introduction to the selection itself. "Introduction. . ." was reprinted from The Creative Mind, Bergson.

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 con- with 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.