

# **On Philosophy and Religion and Their Discontents: In Defense of Going over the Hill**

**Kai Nielsen**

## I

The history of ideas should not try to tell that Hinduism (in any of its varieties) nor Buddhism (in any of its varieties) nor Judaism (in any of its varieties) nor Christianity (in any of its varieties) nor Islam (in any of its varieties) nor any other religion has got it right, yielding a knowledge or understanding of the one true religion, nor that any one has the proper grip on it or that taken collectively that they have the proper grasp on the truth concerning religion. Religious Studies professors should also not maintain, argue or assume alternatively that agnosticism, atheism or nihilism has the truth or is the truth concerning religion. That also cannot be a part of their mandate. Nor should they set forth an overall skepticism here. They rather should clearly articulate what these things are, have been and how these religions and critiques differ from each other and from having purely secular attitudes that are neutral and perhaps even ignorant of matters, vis-à-vis religion as well as refrain from anti-religion or skepticism vis-à-vis religion.

This is exactly the attitude towards religion that should be taken in a culture of *laicity*. It limits, and this is also the task of religious studies, in the articulation of religious ideas to

making as clear an articulation as can be articulated of these matters. (I say and think a similar thing about the history of philosophy.)

This differs from critiques and assessments of religion or religions and from critiques of philosophy. We should distinguish this actively from distinctions between religion or philosophy and claims that these enterprises themselves are false or purely or even principally ideological. It is these methodological distinctions that just go with doing the history of religion or philosophy. This is stipulatively methodological but not something arbitrary as it sets out what it is to do the history of the subject.

There is no legitimate possibility of taking or making a theological or religious point in doing religious studies. There is, that is, no way of legitimately making in religious studies a religious claim or, for that matter, an anti-religious claim or a critical religious claim. A religious studies program, and rightly, *methodologically* shackles such matters. We can only, from that perspective, describe or interpret or explain what religion is, if indeed it has a core, or, if coreless, what religions are. Perhaps religion has only a coreless bunch of mere family resemblances. We cannot argue *in religious studies* for the legitimacy or for the illegitimacy of a religious point of view or of religion more generally. We cannot, Freud-like, Veblen-like or Marx-like, make an anti-religious claim. But we cannot argue that such claims are illegitimate either.

A religious studies department could be linked with it a department of theology or divinity, but we then would have two separate but related disciplines linked as the sometimes departments of philosophy and religion are linked or departments of anthropology and archaeology are linked. That is mostly a matter of *administrative* convenience with the linked departments still having different functions, tasks, mandates

and rationales. It is the task of religious studies to describe, interpret and explain, but not to defend or proscribe or critique, certain religious beliefs or religion, though admittedly it is often difficult to keep these matters separate. But it must always be aimed at. Religious studies is not doctrinal or, if you will, ideological as is a department or school of theology or divinity.

While a religious studies student, in administratively linked departments or not, could take a course in a theology department and vice versa along with theology students and theology students could take religious studies courses, it could not be legitimately required of religious studies students. These are *disciplinarily* different departments with different tasks and it violates the key neutrality of a religious studies program to make such a theology course a requirement. I don't know if this is always honored but it should be.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, an eminent Calvinist philosopher and theologian, understandably, though mistakenly, is unhappy with such a state of affairs. He wants students to get the unique truth of God without in effect being enculturated by our dreaded moral relativist modernist culture with its multiculturalism (Wolterstorff 1996). What Wolterstorff believes we need, indeed very much need, is what he calls *standard theism* as instantiated, exemplified and articulated by Calvinism, but not exclusively so. He rightly sees that the use of religious studies has a political and cultural cause in our largely secular liberal modernist culture. It doesn't want, he doesn't want and I don't want students to grow up as religiously ignorant pagans, as in that way untutored, but religious studies doesn't want and I do not want to indoctrinate them in any particular religious orientation that would violate liberal values with its famed neutrality over such matters. Religious studies as it has come to exist in colleges and universities and in similar forms in more elementary schools is the

answer where our public academies must be neutral among the competing religions and anti-religions while still teaching about them. Its task and mandate is to teach people *about* religion without the espousal of any particular religion or religion period or for that matter being anti-religious or arguing for a secular order. That would violate liberalism's vaunted neutrality.

Wolterstorff is exercised by this. But for many reasons and he is mistaken in his very structuring of it. First, for the very structuring of it. It would be a bad thing if there were as long as religions last no theology schools. No Christian divinity schools, no Yeshivas or Madras that stick to their espousal of religion espousing what they regard as a transcendent truth. Political indoctrination is another thing. But it is not just for a protection of classical liberalism that we need in special university departments, departments that do not *espouse* religion but simply teaches *about* it so that we will have a good understanding of different religions as well as the one, if any, we enculturated into. We should as well have an understanding of what atheism and agnosticism is and of the vast difference between religions, particularly that of the religions of salvation (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and religions of inner enlightenment (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism). And this is best taught in the way the religious studies departments are at least supposed to teach about religion. Rational and reasonable people need to know about what they are espousing before they espouse it and need to know about the different paths that could be taken religiously and for this to be done fairly and objectively it must be done in the neutral way that is the mandate of religious studies departments. They need also to know about ecumenism, agnosticism and atheism.

For us secularists it is also a good idea to understand what it is that we set aside. To not have that is to lack an important part of our cultural understanding and heritage. Moreover, for theology departments to best protect themselves from unwitting making ideological propaganda they would need the functional assistance of religious studies departments where neutrality and impartiality is or should be the rule. We must never forget that ethnocentrism for us all is as common as apple pie is in the United States or sugar pie is in Quebec. We also need to know that religion, all religion, in our modernizing cultures is widely thought to be ideological and inescapably so. We need to understand about that and to understand the extent of its cogency or lack of cogency.

I shall now turn to a mistake, a strange mistake, which Wolterstorff makes concerning religious studies. He ties it up with issues of classically modern philosophical foundationalism and interpretation-universalism and “unabashedly ungrounded perspectival particularism” post Locke and post Kant. But this philosophical turbulence, however it plays out, has nothing to do with the issue about the status and nature of religious studies. It’s a matter of what an objective and impartial study about what religion comes to: what such a factual study of the content of these various religions would come to and, secondarily, about what the political motivation would have been for the emergence of religious studies departments. Religious studies certainly would not fly in Saudi Arabia, Yemen or Afghanistan. But it does in the United States, the Netherlands and in Sweden. And it does not entail or structure the closing down of Fordham, the University of Notre Dame, Calvin College, St. Ambrose College or Augustana College.

What the very idea of religious studies consists in needs a sociological study. Perhaps we should start with what can be reasonably done as to start with what is likely to be some

model cases, Harvard and Berkeley, for example, and then extent our study to quite different universities and colleges. I would expect there would be some significant differences. Wolterstorff and I agree on what the very idea and ideal of religious studies is, except that he thinks that it is a bad thing while I think it is generally a good thing if it actually carries out its mandate. What such departments are actually generally like I do not know. I do not know if they stick to their mandates. That would take a sociological study of religious studies departments and we should have one. I do not know if one exists. My *guess* is that the ideal is seldom realized but I don't know that. Perhaps I am being too cynical and *parti pris* here. But it is indeed realizable if not realized.

## II

It is important, I believe, to distinguish between the more fundamentalist varieties of religion and the more non-fundamentalist ones of various ones, and between the religious studies departments at Harvard and Yale and at Calvin College and Notre Dame. I believe, though perhaps I am being *parti pris* here, it is important as well to make moral critiques particularly of the *many* fundamentalist religions and fundamentalist-orientated religions, particularly ones, strange as they are to us, that are nasty affairs while the non-fundamentalist ones and many fundamentalist ones are not so or at least much less so. The Amish are radically different in this respect from Wahabist ones. They are both primitive but in very different ways. It would be in the purview of the history of religious ideas to examine if there is enough in common between the various extant religious orientations so that we could coherently and truthfully claim that all of them have a common core or kernel such that living and reasoning in accordance with them constitutes no danger at all. Something that in old

fashioned terms was called, and as Alasdair MacIntyre turned Thomist still actually does call, the essence of religion. And, if there is, to go on to say whether that would be sufficient to significantly call attention to it. When we consider the differences between Theravada Buddhism, Sufism, Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism, it will be apparent that what it wants as their shared essence is very thin—if indeed there is any common core at all. Is there even a common core between dangerous fundamentalisms and benign ones? The Mennonites are not dangerous but the Wahhabis, Fundamentalist Jews and *some* Evangelical Protestant sects are. What is the common core between all religions, if any?

But, if claiming there is any common core across the board it involves making a value judgment that it is significant. A judgment, whether it is either reasonable or not, to do that would involve stepping outside the mandate of religious studies and its mandated neutrality. To make such normative claims is neither justifiable nor not justifiable *by religious studies*. I do not say it is not justifiable period, *tout court*. But it is simply not the mandate or the purview of religious studies. Religious studies doesn't try to ask such questions or make such judgments. Religious studies, where it is following its mandate, is neutral here. Its task, its vocation, is to describe, interpret and explain what can truly or warrantedly be empirically believed about religion. It will characterize its beliefs, dogmas and rites. It will not comment on their truth, value or credence. That is not its task.

It is not in religious studies' mandate to rank religions or to judge favorably or unfavorably religious beliefs, orientations or attitudes. Wolterstorff is right that even if Karl Barth (or, I would add, Søren Kierkegaard or Reinhold Niebuhr) were alive and kicking, they need not apply for a job in religious studies departments. I am, of course, not saying *here* that religion is not reasonable, possible or desirable. I have spent a good portion of my life

in doing that. But what I have done there is not in the province of religious studies. But there is cultural space for doing so. And we certainly do not want to blank out Kierkegaard, Niebuhr or Barth from our cultural life but they do not belong in religious studies departments, nor does Plantinga or Wolterstorff or Marx, Freud, Veblen or me.

There is a response that has sometimes gone against the methodological orientation that I am setting out for religious studies. It is made by Wolterstorff. He says of the methodological moves like those that I have just articulated arbitrarily treat religion by excluding all defenses of religion. But this is not so. But I exclude it from *religious studies* by *methodological fiat*. However, like Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Bakunin, I am all for the critique of religion as well as its defensive religious responses, though not for anyone here to be shouted down or excluded. It is a crucial part of our culture as is as well religious counter defenses. I say this while freely admitting that, like Rorty, I am bored by it. There are more exciting ways to spend one's intellectual life. I regret having done so. I thought like Marx and Feuerbach that with the humanly critical critique that goes with modernity and wealth religion would be withering away. Think of Scandinavia. Religion is indeed an ideology, or so I believe, but in many places, though not all, it is not dangerous. Pope Francis is even making Roman Catholicism less harmful. With Modernism, wealth and *if* democracy finally becomes something of a reality, religion in time may become something of a non-wistful historical memory.

Moreover, we need a critique by religious people themselves of certain aspects of religion. That is so, for an example, of a culturally normative comparing and contrasting of Roman Catholic theology with Calvinist theology, between types of Judaism, types of Islam, and types of Christianity, between various forms of Buddhism and between various forms of



Hinduism and between these religions. Suppose someone is caught between being a Jew or a Christian. There are things that could push a person either way. Judaism doesn't have the difficulty of the Trinity and makes useful work of relaxed predication, but Judaism is heavy with ritual and has the notion of a chosen people. But we should avoid letting such activities, such comparisons, between faiths engender animosities, to say nothing of religious hatreds, between rival faiths. We should be good multiculturalists here as elsewhere. Just as there should be *laicity* in our public affairs. This is very difficult where these various adherents go around claiming they have the one and only truth faith. This is particularly troublesome for 'true believers' who also want religion to be ecumenical. Think of poor, well-meaning Pope Francis. For such people it is like being on the tightrope of both believing in and not believing in being ecumenical at the same time. Well, didn't Kierkegaard, deeply Christianly religious that he was, say that faith, indeed the Christian faith, required the crucifixion of the intellect?

However, religious studies, while not denying the importance of these matters, again by methodological fiat, cannot take sides here. In this way religious studies departments are very different from political studies departments. Political studies departments, of course, also describe, interpret and explain political phenomena and politically relevant phenomena, but it also assesses political policies and governments. A political theorist might well claim and argue that Israel's stance toward Iran and the approach of the United States to Iran is for Israel and the United States as well as for others unwittingly self-destructive as well as stupid. Someone with an understanding of *realpolitik* would never take the present (2015) Israeli stance. They might even argue that it is better that both Israel and Iran have nuclear weapons than only one of them have it and at the same time argue that it would be still better

for the world to be utterly free of them. All of this is normative as can be, but remains within the mandate of political studies. Nothing like this obtains for religious studies.

Why shouldn't religious studies similarly extend its mandate? It is important to remember that in academia there are distinct departments of theology, divinity and philosophy that engage in matters that could not be just a matter of description, interpretation and empirical explanation but make claims among other things vis-à-vis religion concerning what is better or worse. That is normative claims. There should be space in our cultural universe about asking the question whether it is better to be a Calvinist than a Unitarian, a Jew rather than a Christian or a Moslem. This religious studies *qua* religious studies is something it cannot ask or answer. But this does not mean that they are questions that cannot or should not be asked, though we must be aware of the danger of being *parti pris* here. And for those who ask it, it is far better that they should have the accurate accounts of those religions. Something that religious studies can provide. But it is crucial to recognize that it cannot legitimately be asked within religious studies.

This is the kind of neutrality that religious studies should maintain and with good rational and reasonable reasons. This does not mean that religious studies must or should be manned by people who do not care about these matters, though it may. But they very well may very much care about them. They may be practitioners, and devoted ones, of one or another of these faiths. Indeed they may be very devotedly so. Or they may be committed secularists or just people with certain historical curiosities. They may be any of these things without being *parti pris*. But, if they are reasonably clearheaded and understand what they are about, they will not take this to be within the mandate of religious studies, though religious studies can supply raw materials that would be helpful in the different task of

making such assessments in a way that is not be religiously blind or we will not treat such beliefs as windowless monads. And in so reasoning they may very well welcome theology departments and divinity departments while recognizing the importance of keeping them distinct from religious studies. And crucially not let them rule the roost when it comes to religious studies. It is crucial that they respect each other's distinct roles but they must not blend them.

This is how in theory religious studies should go. Whether it always goes this way in practice or always can as a matter of fact go this way are different matters. But if it were not generally the case, religious studies would be badly damaged as a study of the history of religions.

To stipulate *au contraire* that the history of religion is to be done from a Thomistic point of view or a Calvinist point of view or an Islamic point of view or a Taoist point of view or a Judaic point of view would undermine the very idea of religious studies. If that is what you want—'the one true religion'—go to a seminary or a Yeshiva or a Madras but that would hardly count as giving us a genuinely historical account

### III

Yet we can understand and perhaps even resonate with Einstein's remark that there is a distinctly *non-scientistic*, naturalistic, Spinozaistic sense in which Einstein was devoutly religious. Even more so, though differently, than was Wittgenstein. Remember Wittgenstein's remark, "Though I am not a religious man I cannot but keep thinking in a religious way." That is quite different for and from the robust and even jocular atheism of Tariq Ali and Peter Gowan. In Wittgenstein's remark, when we reflect on his life and work,

we have something that cuts very deep religiously. It was clear that Wittgenstein was entangled in a religious attitude. Wittgenstein rightly and perceptively recognized and acknowledged that.

Such Wittgensteinian attitudes are often taken to be conceptually abhorrent in circles Ronald Dworkin moves in. I could have expected that from such metaphysically religious stances as those of Mortimer Adler, Charles Hartshorne, Jacques Maritain or Etienne Gibson, but not from Ronald Dworkin. But he goes full force, full Monty, in such a metaphysical manner as does Alasdair MacIntyre in his later work. However, with me is it the pot calling the kettle black? Perhaps it is old age setting in for Dworkin, MacIntyre and me. A Whig in youth, a Tory in old age. That is perhaps what we can expect from the aged. Think of the disasters of Hölderin and Wordsworth's writings when they became aged. But that was not true of Bertrand Russell or John Dewey as they came to old age. They never became soft-headed or muddled. I can only hope that I am not or will not become that while I am still writing.

Be that as it may, Dworkin, I shall contend. Is wrong about religion and for my purposes even more importantly wrong about philosophy as well (Dworkin 2013a; 2013b). I shall try to establish both. If I am on the mark or even near to it, we do not have with Dworkin something well taken concerning religion. Dworkin is quite clearly an important political philosopher and legal theorist. But he fails in his attempt to show us how we can take a religious turn without a belief in God and how we can engage in relevant intellectual activity in the way he articulates and that we should not be anti-philosophical and rejectionist, as Jacques Lacan was, about the ancient philosophical quest for wisdom and the right way of living our lives and about how society should be ordered. For all his analytical

training, Dworkin ends up hedgehogist in the old philosophical metaphysical camp with its inadequacies. Reading him here was for me a let-down.

However, I will principally stick with what he says about religion, though noting in passing that his traditionalist philosophical ideas get in his way here. Consider again his title "Religion without God". Well, of course, not all religions even have a concept of God. Indeed some of the great world religions are not religions of salvation with their God as is Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Some religions are not religions of salvation at all but religions of inner enlightenment. These include great historical religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Some of them have some little gods dangling about, but they do not have the role of the Creator, Sustainer, Ultimate Arbitrator, Orderer and Wisdom Provider of the Jewish, Christian or Islamic religions with their transcendent God. Their *Being as such*; the so-called ground of ultimate commitment.

In a way, Dworkin's account sounds very secular as well as ecumenical. Moreover, this is not in the way what he calls 'religious atheists' are. Many people in the West who reject belief in God and accept Dworkin's characterization of religion are not in the least religious. Think of Freud, Marx, Tariq Ali or Eric Hobsbawm, for example. People who are atheists are typically through and through secularists. Even George Santayana, who found certain ceremonial and ritual elements of the Roman Catholic religion attractive, was thoroughly materialist and secularist. He had what he called his 'animal faith' but that was 'a faith' in materialism. There was nothing religious about it at all. It was a kind of animal sensibility and awareness; something he thought was irrational to deny. He was not at all religious, any more than I am. I like Gregorian chant but this does not make me religious and I am not religious. Santayana was paradigmatic here.

However, it is evident that Wittgenstein is very different in life attunement than Russell, A. J. Ayer, Isaiah Berlin, Lenin or J. L. Austin, all of whom had no such religious attitudes. Something that is clearly evident. Having strong commitments about how to order our lives, about how life is ordered or how society is to be ordered does not make your convictions religious even in the broad sense that Wittgenstein's had. Wittgenstein and Russell were very different persons. Russell was secular through and through. Wittgenstein certainly was not. That is exemplified in their different attitudes towards *scientism*. I am much closer to Wittgenstein than to Russell philosophically, but as for secularism I am firmly with Russell.

It is not enough, except very arbitrarily and misleadingly, to say—to label—as Dworkin does that at the core of religion is for the religious “an inescapable responsibility to live their lives well with due respect for the lives of others [and to take] pride in a life well lived and suffer sometimes inconsolable regret at life they think wasted” (Dworkin 2013a, 67). That is admirable, but it has nothing at all to do with religion or anti-religion. It does not make a person either. This does not evidence any religious or a secular attitude at all.

But it is right to in a sense acknowledge, as Dworkin does, that there are religiously attuned atheists, though there is not a religion of atheism with a cluster of doctrinal beliefs, rites or practices. Spinoza was such a religious atheist and Einstein was another. Wittgenstein, though not an atheist and not a believer in God or any religion, was religiously attuned. But there is no Spinozist religion, Einsteinian religion or Wittgensteinian religion with doctrines, rites or practices. That would be an oxymoron.

## IV

What goes for the *history* of religious ideas goes as well for the history of philosophical ideas. The history of religious ideas *qua* history or for a historian of such ideas *qua* historian does not, indeed legitimately cannot, take sides religiously. So too the historian of philosophical ideas cannot *qua* historian of philosophy take philosophical sides. They cannot even say as historians that Quine was an advance over Plotinus. Something we think, if obviously, an advance philosophically but it is not up to the historian of philosophy to pronounce it.

That is not to say that a philosopher cannot do both philosophy and the history of philosophy. But they are not the same thing and the same goes for a theologian or another protagonist or analogist of some religion, or religion period, and a historian of religion. They all can argue about soundness of religious beliefs or the desirability of being religious but they should not mix that up with their historical accounts. They can do both but they are not the same thing. What a person does as a historian of religion and their ideas and what he does as a proponent and advocate or defender or critic of some specific religion or religion full stop is another thing.

This useful in effect positivist age distinction that I have been just applying and have applied in the last section has its difficulties; difficulties that apply in both the religious and the philosophical cases. They arise strikingly out of an understanding of what Hilary Putnam characterizes as thick descriptions (Putnam 2005). Suppose we have two reports both by reporters embedded with a liberating army entering a Nazi concentration camp at the end of the Second World War. They report on what they saw. One reports that there had been

extensive killings there and the surviving prisoners were gaunt and ill clothed. The other reports that there had been extensive brutal murders there and the remaining prisoners were in the process of being starved and lived in squalid filthy inhumane conditions. Both descriptions were true. But the second was the more adequate. Indeed, it is clearly a more adequate and accurate telling it like it was. Moreover, the latter, without losing in adequacy at all but gaining adequacy, had a strong moral impact that the former did not. Many descriptions more generally have a different moral or otherwise normative import, though with the same denotation. They are what Putnam aptly calls thick descriptions. Which are the more adequate ones is often determined in part normatively. The search for the most neutral account cannot, and often does not, yield the greater adequacy. But, as we have just seen from the concentration camp example, not always. To describe religious fundamentalism as being less nuanced and less subtle than many non-fundamentalist accounts is true and in its very saying is still made within the limits of a history of religious ideas account. But these very descriptive accounts have a normative impact concerning religion as it does if we say, and indeed should say even as a historian of religion, that Calvinism is more rigid than Lutheranism and Wahhabism is more rigid than Sufi mysticism. Similar things obtain for philosophy. Someone doing the history of philosophy could appropriately say that Austin's account of sense-data was more accurate and adequate than Price's or Ayer's, or that Rawls's account of morality was more nuanced and adequate than Bentham's. But these very descriptions are also normative. But they are also thick descriptions. And the normative cannot be washed out or extricated without changing the description. Thick descriptions are inextricably both descriptive and normative and the



normative part is inextricable in those descriptions. The normative part and the factual part cannot be untangled or isolated in those descriptions.

Historians of religion or philosophy and historians more generally cannot adequately do their jobs by avoiding thick descriptions and thick descriptions are always in part normative and there is, as I have said, no untangling them and giving a re-description which is normatively neutralized. We would then have a different description with a different truth-content. In that way neither religious studies nor the history of philosophy can be normatively neutral and still be adequate.

Yet the old positivist account continues to have a point. A historian of religion should avoid religious advocacy and a historian of philosophy should not be a partisan or an advocate of a philosophical position. They should not push their own philosophical stances if they have any. They should not, but they must have some understanding of philosophy, including philosophical stances. But philosophical advocacy is not their task.

## V

I want to return to what I said about taking philosophy as a humanistic discipline and place it in relation to Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy directed at liberating us from the nonsensicalness. From being philosophically perplexed by what is in reality disguised nonsense, we will come to recognize and take to heart that it is genuine first class nonsense; something that should no longer perplex us. What we took to be deep compelling problems, if Wittgenstein's account is on the mark, is just that, namely plain nonsense. Something, of course, that it is ridiculous to get exercised about. With this, as Wittgenstein has it along with John Wisdom more crudely, we will be freed from philosophical perplexities. Freeing

ourselves from the illusion by the dissolution of these so-called philosophical perplexities. With this disillusionment we gain a better cognitive grip on the world. We will free ourselves from philosophical perplexities and obsessions. We will free ourselves from philosophy.

But perhaps this is not the whole of the story concerning philosophy? When Wittgenstein thought of philosophy it was of logic, metaphysics and epistemology that he usually had in mind. These matters are what he thought was the crucial core of philosophy. Without that there would be no philosophy. Moreover, by now this has become a common view. Not a few think that that is where the core of philosophy lies. That is radically different than it was for the Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers (Hadot 1995). Wittgenstein wanted to cure logic of its philosophical encumbrances and to therapize away metaphysics and epistemology. Logical positivist he was not, but he was as dismissive of metaphysics and epistemology as they were.

However, philosophy looked at historically and cross-culturally was not just that and still is not. And often by traditionalism it was not even taken to be the core of philosophy or at least not the whole of it. In the Middle Ages and finally petering out in contemporary times in what some modern lingering proponents of such a tradition call perennial philosophy we had something different. In the Middle Ages and even before in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic world, philosophical thought became very metaphysical. God, so fortified, was at the center of philosophical activity. During the scholastic era proper, metaphysics was God-laden. Perhaps God-encumbered would be a better way of putting it because there was no other than a metaphysical understanding of God. For example, the examinations of what is God's nature, his relations to the world as well as accounts of the proof of his existence. God was conceived of as necessary Being, as Being itself. To have a proper understanding of God

is to have an understanding of Being as such. Philosophy is walled in by metaphysics. Establishing the nature of God, the proof of his existence, was the center of philosophy.

There were in various times other accounts deemed philosophical as well, sometimes running alongside the scholastic account; Pascal's and Montaigne's accounts, for example. Catholics they were but not scholastics. There were cultural accounts, though for many philosophers, though not all, God was not at the center of their attention. I refer centrally to philosophy conceived as *a way of life*. It had its origins with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Ancient Greece. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century it had an extraordinary articulation in France by Montaigne with a relevance such that today it is still alive. He became a hero for the French revolutionaries. I think if he were living now and writing and researching as he did then he would have been better called a cultural anthropologist. He in many respects reasoned that way. He was also a public intellectual. But that was long before there was any such thing as an anthropologist. This public intellectual was a mayor of Bordeaux, a counselor of kings, as well as a scholar who thought of himself as a philosopher and was so rightly regarded. He deeply influenced but did not convince Pascal. It would not be untoward to say of these two great philosophers—great public intellectuals—that Montaigne had the best grip on the world. But *perhaps* here I am being *parti pris*? I admire them both, have learned from them both and both are major figures in the history of thought. If they were alive today they would both be regarded as public intellectuals such as Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre were and as Noam Chomsky is and Edward Said was.

The tradition of the Stoics, the Epicureans and Montaigne lives on. This way of doing philosophy, as Hilary Putnam, a major analytical philosopher, surprisingly defends, is a *lebensphilosophie*. In his writing concerning that, Putnam put us on to Pierre Hadot, a

distinguished philosopher at the College de France and the author of (among other things) *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Something Putnam, running against his times, also thought was crucial though he did not develop it in the powerful way that Hadot did (Putnam 2008).

Hadot is an important scholar on ancient philosophy: Greek and Roman. But he has also written on Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Foucault. I think his philosophical work—I do not mean *just* as historical work in the history of philosophy but also as philosophical endeavor in its own right—is a considerable achievement. But the very idea of its being so would be difficult for someone taking an anti-philosophical orientation. But this would also not be so for Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, Bernard Williams and with *some* of Raymond Geuss. Their work, which conflicts with Wittgensteinian therapizing, is characterized by Williams as *philosophy as a humanistic discipline*.

My account of anti-philosophy *tout court* clashes with such accounts of philosophy and with accounts of philosophy such as Hadot's as a way of life. I want to closely examine these thinkers if I am lucky enough to have the time. I find myself now ambivalently attracted to the very idea of philosophy as a way of life. However, this has not been the way philosophy has gone as it has professionalized itself and university-ized itself. And where it has come to be caught with problems, obscurities and sometimes with pretentiousness. I can understand why on the one hand a Wittgenstein or Austin or on the other hand a Carnap, Quine, C. I. Lewis or David Lewis would have scorned such a Hadotian or Williamsian conception away. I am myself ambivalently attuned to such reactions. And yet what they scorned is something that attracted me and still attracts me and many others to philosophy in the first place. Yet, in spite of its obscurity, its hostages to fortune, its sometimes being tainted by pretentiousness, it continues to attract me. I hope to at some point have a go at it

clearheadedly, non-evasively and informedly. But for starters we should realize it is not the property only of what we now regard as philosophers. Isn't it a matter of reflective human concern, not all of which is philosophical, unless we make it so by arbitrary stipulative redefinition? Moreover, it is often, going on the wrong track, destructively ideological. But not always or necessarily so. But I am not sure that we have anything here that counts as a discipline, humanistic or otherwise. But it surely is not just a matter of farting around. A matter of sloppy talk though it sometimes is.

I have become convinced, perhaps belatedly, that Wittgenstein was mistaken in regarding philosophy as nonsense, full stop, through and through. Something to be therapized away if we can, though I am convinced that metaphysics and epistemology is nonsense and needs to be therapized away. Whether a grand full scale normative ethics or meta-ethics is also nonsense is more problematical though still in other ways it may rest on a mistake. I am suspicious of Parfit's project.

I shall in what follows only briefly and *tentatively* consider what we should think and say concerning such things as taking philosophy as being construed as a way of life and/or a humanistic discipline. I hope and intend, as I have remarked, to at some time in the not too distant future pursue such matters carefully and extensively. Now I will have to be content with a brief and tentative excursion.

What I shall be concerned with here is whether it would be better for us as aspiring public intellectuals or helpers in their endeavors to abandon, to turn away from, philosophy and instead to practice what we take to be our emancipatory and humanizing endeavors elsewhere. I shall ask whether there can be for us in our horrible times be a reasonable and rational resolute non-evasive humanizing of our world. A world in which repeatedly one

horror follow after another. I think we philosophers inescapably as we are in such a world should migrate, if we can, to one or another of the social sciences or to literature either as writers ourselves or emancipatorily-oriented scholars of literature or to being investigative journalists or serious cinamatists, including fundamentally documentary ones or, if we can, make certain kinds of music. Our world desperately needs responding to. It needs a certain kind of haircut but not the kind Israel dishes out to Palestinians. Not the kind the Saudis regularly dish out. We need in some ways to be revolutionaries and non-evasively so. That is the kind of haircut the world needs.

We should, if we can, contribute to that. These are the roads to be taken if we can to being publicly orientated emancipatory intellectuals without being ostentatious or phony; something that is not uncommon. After all, there is something ridiculous about asserting it either to oneself or publicly, 'I am a public intellectual'. That is only something that a few of us can come to be and certainly not by just asserting it. But to have emancipatory public intellectuals is extremely important. More Noam Chomskys are needed. But it is something that we cannot just settle into but it is something that we might attain but not just by our will. It will come to us, if it does, by our work and perhaps with a bit of truth.

Taking leave of philosophy there are, of the many things that I have just mentioned, roads we can take that would be desirable. They are ways of engaging in the kind of emancipatory activity that I have in mind. There are ways that could contribute to the task of making the world a better place, if only just a little. And not phony it up as the Clintons do or as Blair did and Cameron does. We need a few Bernie Sanders. It is understandable that we may think this is love's labor lost, but we must not as a result of this skepticism become *quietists* and abandon this struggle or put such emancipatory endeavors on the back burner.

History, one of the things to do, is something to be done somewhat on the model of Eric Hobsbawm, Perry Anderson, Tony Judt or Tariq Ali. There are also such sociologists or social anthropologists or geographers like David Harvey. Or to become public intellectuals in a critical mode like Noam Chomsky or Edward Said.

In my later years of teaching I taught classes or gave seminars on cosmopolitanism and nationalism or globalization and imperialism as well as seminars (one with Matthias Fritsch) on Habermas and Rorty, setting them in opposition to each other and how that played out, and seminars on pragmatism and on Donald Davidson. I was pleased then when students of mine after their MAs or late undergraduate days switched from philosophy to political studies, political economy, history, sociology or anthropology, thereby putting themselves into becoming more effective in understanding our world as well as being more effective in the struggle to change it. I was also pleased when students of mine, though they remained in philosophy and went on to do their PhDs and became philosophy professors themselves, were committed to doing substantive critical work as distinct from doing things as they usually are done in philosophy, including just solving or trying to resolve some conceptual puzzles. They concerned themselves in their work with matters they hoped would in some way be humanly emancipatory. This brought joy to my heart. They were committed to become *such* intellectuals in a world which very much stands in need of changing rather than being *quietists* going with the flow, doing the thing done. (I do not say all *quietists* go with the flow. Rorty late in life described himself as a *quietist*. But he certainly, *pace* what Thomas Nagel said of Rorty, *philosophically* was not a quietist who just went with the flow. He certainly did not go with the flow philosophically. But more generally he was a

self-acknowledged quietist. Yet his meta-skepticism cut too deep for that (Rorty 2006). After Rorty we can usefully come to see the world differently.

I recognize, as Rorty did, the need for young professors to be cautious until they have gained tenure and secure a place in academia. Many professors, department heads and deans do not look favorably on what they regard as shit disturbers. These young philosophers need to gain and sustain a secure place in academia. They need to gain tenure in order to not be caught, as things frequently now go, in eternal adjunct-hood. Some may be caught in it anyway as more and more universities are going in for teaching on the cheap and exploiting away teachers with fewer and fewer teachers on a tenure track, aping the way that capitalism generally drives its work force to the wall except for the few highly paid ones and privileged ones. Universities are becoming, to my disquietude, more and more like businesses.

Still, when I see my former students turning to becoming emancipatory oriented scholars and intellectuals, I am indeed happy. But this does not deaden me to the bitter recognition of the depth of the exploitation going on in academia in sync with how it goes on elsewhere, all to the glory not of God but of capitalism: capitalism with an inhuman face as if it could have any other kind of face. I have been very lucky to have avoided that. But philosophy, as it morphs in the direction of the social sciences (including, of course, history), becomes more and more entangled with empirical studies, something both traditional philosophy and conceptual analysis has shunned. As philosophy also gets more and more entangled with literary studies—something that is not just literary studies but sometimes literature itself—it gets more entangled with empirical matters, including historical ones.



Less and less do we get something that is distinctively philosophical or even sometimes something that is recognizably philosophical.

Philosophers who write about global justice, equality, inequality, immigration, migration, globalization, nationalism, education, civil society, the state and democracy have more and more difficulty—and rightly so—in keeping their philosophical activities purely or distinctively philosophical. Second ordered-ness is becoming more and more gone with the wind. I have no trouble with that. I think it is something to be welcomed. But I think it poses a problem of ‘What is philosophy?’ and the doing of it and of what an education in philosophy should consist in. Should someone who is a philosopher and will move in their lives to any one or more of the above topics study logic particularly as it is now taught? Why should they—or should they?—read Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley, Reid, G. E. Moore, Austin, Casimir Lewy, Alonzo Church, David Lewis, Spinoza, Hume, C. I. Lewis or Georg von Wright? Should the study of Thrasymachus, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Gibbon, Condorcet, Hobbes, Marx, Freud, Weber, Veblen, Durkheim, Lenin and Gramsci not be of a greater value? But that is not how philosophers even with political or sociological interests routinely get educated and usually think they should get educated. Moreover, much of this takes us some distance from how philosophy is usually conceived or practiced. But this would be—to put it mildly—a good thing for philosophers oriented to the topics mentioned above. But wouldn’t this in effect turn them into social scientists?

## VI

I think we who work to understand and in the light of that understanding to view ourselves as a community of activist scholars should, at least in our own circumstances and

in our life world, set aside philosophy and avoid doing it, no matter how much we like doing it as I do like doing some of it. If decency and human and social flourishing become embedded in our world across the board, we could allow ourselves the leisure of doing philosophy but not in our hellish world. But for now there are more crucial things—much more crucial things—for us to do.

This holds even if we go more Rortyan and pragmatist than Wittgensteinian or Quinian or Parfitian. Even philosophers who do political and social philosophy in able and insightful ways should not be studied to the extent that some figures are. Nothing very crucial would be lost in coming to grips with the great problems of human life if they were not studied at all though they do say some important things and throughout my life I have learned from them. Indeed I have spent most of my life studying them and the problems they raise. I have learned much from such able moral and political philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, John Rawls, G. E. Moore, Georg von Wright, Ronald Dworkin, David Gauthier, Stuart Hampshire and Raymond Geuss. But able and insightful and careful as they are, that will not be of much value in helping us to understand, cure, resolve or ameliorate our human problems in the world we live in concerning what is to be done or can be done to make our lives collectively and individually a little more decent and significant. I do not mean at a highly abstract level. Some philosophers can tell us something about what a good life is, what justice is, what it is to have rights including human rights and what human flourishing would be. But we can and often do have a rather abundant sense of those things without philosophy. But how to render our world decent, let alone how to render it just or reasonably so, how to make and secure that our lives will be secured at least to the extent such that there is not so much misery in the world, in effect not having perpetual war, killing,

racial and ethnic and religious hatreds around. How to keep our world from being beastly. Something that it surely is. Philosophers give us little in the way of cognitive grip on what is to be done here or what can be done. Until we get some such cognitive grip on this and some achievement of a secure road to a world order of kindness, reciprocalness, equality with the freedom that goes with it and human flourishing we should put philosophy on the back burner no matter how much we philosophers like doing it. For philosophizing can do little to achieve such things; matters that urgently need achieving, wounds that need suturing. It is not an abstract generalized understanding that will very much help us here but specific concrete contextualized knowledge. Just the sort of thing that philosophy will not give us.

John Dewey famously said that philosophy will reconstitute itself when the problems of philosophy become the problems of men by which he meant the problems of human beings. (He and people of my generation until relatively recently unwittingly used this old sexist language, sometimes unknowledgeably and unrecognized by us as sexist ideologically tainted. Something that for centuries has marched down roads of history.) What are some of these problems that we should turn to with the utmost urgency and vigor and that I, with apologies to Dewey, do not regard as philosophical but as far more important than any problems, at least in our situations, we philosophers can trot out as philosophical?

Climate change (more extremes in weather, more heat and more cold, more rain and more drought) principally human made, with the consequences that may become so severe if nothing is quickly and extensively done, and resolutely, that we may succeed in putting we human beings along with a lot of other life out of business. That problem is the most crucial one. Without it being properly tackled the rest of the crucial problems I shall mention have no chance of resolution.

However, for some of the others as well. Remember Kant's dream of perpetual peace. We have instead perpetual wars though often strange wars, typically undeclared wars against non-state actors or against *ersatz* states (e.g., ISIS, the blessed caliphate). These wars in turn produce more terrorism and things get worse and worse and as 'terrorism', real or imagined, runs high where fear and the desire for revenge rules more and more. With this we have vast expenditures on the military, particularly in the United States and China, but as well in Russia, Israel and North Korea. Money that otherwise could very well be used for different and very much needed humanly desirable purposes. How can we reasonably cut this insane and cruel militarization of the world without making things even worse? I think we easily could. But dear Obama, Putin or the leaders of the People's Republic of China will make things worse rather than make things even a little better. Harper playing second fiddle is of no help.

Then there are the vast and growing inequalities in the world. Where now 1% of the world's population owns 48% of the world's wealth and, if business goes on as usual, in another year or so the 1% will own 50% of the world's wealth. Is this giving the people a fair shake? Not at all. Admittedly, it is better in some parts of the world than others. It is better in Norway and in Iceland than in the United States and China. But nowhere is it something to write home about. In Stockholm ask who cleans the welfare state and under what conditions (Gavanas 2010). We need an analysis of what equality means or a study of the diversity of equalities and inequalities and the places where equality is desirable and where, if ever, it is not (Geuss ). And we need to know how we can significantly reduce inequality. We need to clearly recognize and acknowledge the state of inequality in our world both *within* countries (even rich ones) and *between* countries. And we need also to vividly

recognize that our world order blesses us with unnecessary misery for great swaths of people in the world. In a few places there is more intelligently structured equality in some themselves differently structured societies (Sweden and Uruguay) than there is in many of our extant societies (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, for example). It is evident that we could be in a much better world. We don't need philosophy to know that and any philosophy that denied that this horror obtains would be plainly mistaken. There are plenty of idiocies around. Think, for example, of Stephen Harper's remark that Canada is the best country in the world, the best place to live.

There is also the related problem of how to run an economy or of how an economy should run. It is not only the Stalinists and the Maoists and Hoover and G. W. Bush that have made a mess of it but what neo-liberalism as the somewhat new anchor of capitalism has made of it and that its austerity programs added to it. It has made things still worse. The welfare state in the U.K. in the years after the Second World War was better than in the U.K. now. When an individual needs to tighten his or her belt that is not when a state needs to tighten its belt? It is not only the Nobel Laureate economists Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugerman who say this, but economists generally, though not exclusively. There are still a few economists who are deniers of this. They are not too dissimilar from the few climate scientists who are human made climate change deniers. It is not unreasonable to wonder if they are being paid. Such dwindling minorities *might* turn out to be right. But don't bet your ranch on it. But still neo-liberalism is politically widespread. It even has its nasty tentacles in Scandinavia. The crucial issue is not in micro-economics concerning how to run an economy. Political economy must come back on stage. At least that is another crucial problem that needs our attention. Thomas Piketty can be of help here in the way that no

philosopher can. And to go back in time to another orientation, so can Thorstein Veblen whose MA and PhD was in philosophy but whose actual practices were that of political economy and sociology. We need to learn how an economy, including a world economy, can be run in a humanizing way. We should not Merkel-lize Greece, and along with it the rest of the southern cone of Europe. To learn (*pace* Mitt Romney) how to run a business is more of a hindrance than a help where human beings count.

Beyond that, we need to know how to articulate and achieve as something more than a Platonic blueprint of a world order which would be a genuinely humanistic order. We need something that people could and would generally come to see as a realizable world order where they as citizens of that world order would stand in positions of equality and decency. This is compatible with there also being a national and cultural identification. But they would as well as being people with particular national and cultural identities be internationalists and cosmopolitans. Where there is an unresolvable conflict with that and their particular identities, their internationalism would and should be overriding. There would be no 'My country, right or wrong but still my country'. We would rather be cosmopolitan pluralists. But not ethnocentric and nationalist pluralists who would stand against democratically internationally sanctioned rules of regulation as something voted on by the General Assembly. We are neither windowless monads nor people without particular affinities and attunements. We must, however, live with a world as we live with a family without always getting what we want. But that does not mean that a proper world order would not make for human flourishing, equality and liberty. These matters could be philosophically nuanced and otherwise intellectually nuanced but we know enough to know that most of us live in a world that is horrible and certainly not any place with extensive

humankindliness, reciprocal concern and human flourishing. We know, if we take any hardnosed attention, that is not the world we live in. And all of this we can know without an ounce of philosophy. Moreover, it will not be philosophy that will tell us how to right it or even of much help here. To the extent that our philosophy is ideologically entangled we may hinder it a bit. But most of the time it will be just irrelevant.

A little historical, anthropological and sociological knowledge would assure us that this would not be falsified by any philosophical knowledge or understanding and that philosophy is not and could not be of much help in ascertaining whether it also and will always be the case. Some kinds of philosophy can articulate a utopia but it will not give us a cognitive grip on the world that will tell us how we can go one step further toward achieving it or approximating it or whether it is achievable. The problems of life are something that philosophy cannot answer to, though the hope that it could may well be something that initially drew us to philosophy. That is the way it once worked for me.

In our time some of the great literary figures have made some movements in the direction of answering *to* the problems of life. (It is one thing to say that and another to say they had *answered* the problems of life.) Among social scientists E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Perry Anderson among historians, David Harvey among geographers, Sigmund Freud and Eric Fromm among psychologists, and Evans-Pritchard and Weston La Barre among anthropologists have done so as well. But among all of these varied people, to make such movements they recognized it requires extensive empirical knowledge and an understanding of some kind that is not a kind that philosophy can yield. When philosophers occasionally do so it is not philosophy that yields the day. Think here of Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen. It is to such academics as I have mentioned that we must turn to as well

as to some investigative journalists, sometimes to some musicians and artists, to reflective, determined activists and to the masses of people feeling the brunt of their alienation, inequality, often destitution and societal disregard and resisting this that we must turn. With our standard elites we will get different versions of a defense of what will result in the desolation. For a current example, look at the treatment by EU officials of the leftwing Greek government. The treatment by such elites is often increasingly bad and sometimes, though infrequently, a little better than what immediately came before. But nothing that constitutes anything like the articulation of an order of kindness, human concern, reciprocity or an order of human flourishing is on the table.

## VII

I have here for our circumstances been trying to justify our taking leave of philosophy. And here and recently elsewhere I have been trying to take my own leave of philosophy while retaining some of the motivations that first led me to engaging in it. I want and wanted to make some sense of life both collectively and individually. I wanted and still want to know what would be, if not *the* good life, *a* good life for us human beings where each counts for one and no one counts for more than one; where we can flourish under conditions of collective flourishing and of human kindness. And I want very much to understand what has to be done for our successfully going down that path. We need to have a clear understanding both of our goals and of our strategies of how to achieve them. But—and here we have something that is tricky—we must not let our strategies and a concern to make them realistic undermine or dull our fundamental goals. But that is easier said than done. But that does not mean that it can't be done.



My argument in this article for taking leave of philosophy is *instrumental*. That is to say, I argue that philosophy doesn't and cannot deliver the goods or help significantly in articulating them and showing how they reasonably might be achieved. Moreover, philosophy does not make sense of life. It does not tell us (if indeed anything could) the meaning *of* life or the meaning that is *in* life. It does not show what *a* good and just life would be for we human animals collectively and individually or how it could be attained, to say nothing of what *the* good life would be.

That is not *just* saying that philosophy is not useful. It is useful in some ways. It can not only be good for some people but can also, fun or not, provide good intellectual exercise and sometimes resolve certain confusions. But it is principally useful in providing good fun for those who like to try to solve some conceptual puzzles. It can also be useful in many trivial ways and *perhaps* in a few non-trivial ways as well. But it is not useful in the deep ways that originally inspired philosophers and in the ways I have articulated above that drives or drove initially some people to philosophize. Feuerbach, and initially Marx (the 1844 Marx), for examples.

Philosophy not infrequently, though usually unwittingly, actually sets up roadblocks to achieving the normative goals I have mentioned or indeed any ethical ideals. But blockage or not, it does not yield a grip, cognitive or otherwise, on what John Dewey called 'the problems of men' (the problems of human beings). Moreover, philosophy for a long time did not even try to answer to the underlying concerns that I have briefly mentioned above and that once were not infrequently centrally a part of its concerns.

In this article, unlike in my book *Why Philosophize?* or in my recent articles "On Anti-Philosophy", "Anti-philosophy Philosophy or Just Anti-philosophy? Something in the Spirit

but not in Accordance with the Text of Logical Positivism”, “Rorty on the Priority of Democracy to Philosophy” and “Pragmatism without Method”, I, for the most part, take a purely *instrumental* path in my argument for taking leave of philosophy. In this article, I do not argue there is something badly askew about the very idea of philosophy. Even if my own anti-philosophy is itself badly, or even not so badly, askew or in some way askew, my *instrumental* argument *here* stands. It doesn’t depend on my meta-philosophical views. We never escape and cannot escape what some philosophers call fallibilism or what is more generally realized to be contingency. That holds in any case. But here I argue just *instrumentally* that we intellectuals, if we care at all about the human condition, should use in our situation our intellects and capacities not at philosophy but at matters that perhaps can contribute to making our world less hellish than it actually is. Our world is not a place that can make us happy or content or even *quietistically* accepting of things. We must—morally must—struggle against the grain even when we realize the cards are stacked against us.

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