

*Teaching New Histories
of Philosophy*

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The history of philosophy is conducted by people in a number of disciplines: in political science, in comparative literature, in religion, in theology, in history, and in English.

I think it's most unfortunate that we allow the concentrations or the fixations of a particular deformation of the discipline of philosophy in the United States at this point to prevent us from thinking about the things that you might do if all of these disciplines worked together rather than all the other disciplines working round those analytic philosophers whose conception that only they are in command of some particularly sacred approach to things. It actually interferes seriously with the doing of responsible history and philosophical inquiry.

John Cooper: I wanted to respond or add some thoughts in relation to what Dan was saying in response to Peter's question. But I hope I'll be permitted to say much more than that, if that's OK, because I want also to bring into it some reference to what Tony said just before I came in the room. He was using some kind of stalking horse, but I'm not quite sure.

But, at any rate, it seems to me that however much it's true and however much we might welcome the expansion of the study of philosophy and its history in all kinds of other departments, including religion departments, it's also true, without claiming some sacred authority of any kind at all, it's also true that a philosophical study of the history of philosophy is different from a historical one, a religious one, and other very important points of view, for example, whatever goes on in English departments and whatever goes on in politics departments. And this is not because, at least according to my understanding, we are imposing some conception of philosophical work drawn from analytic philosophy of the 20th century at all.

My understanding of philosophy is an ancient one. That is, my understanding of philosophy is really the understanding you get from Socrates, which is that it's a devotion to a certain use of reason understood in a certain way—namely, a philosophical way.

I could say a lot more about what that is, and maybe I would succeed, maybe I wouldn't succeed, in getting someone who wasn't already into philosophy to understand what I was talking about, but every philosopher knows what I mean. Every member of a philosophy

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department knows what I mean. And that's why I disagree with Dan in thinking that what we do when we teach the history of philosophy in a philosophy department is to prepare students for something else.

What I'm doing when I teach the history of philosophy to my students is teaching them philosophy and teaching them how to think philosophically and how to live philosophically. And what they then go on to do with it, well, that's up to them. If they then go on to study Gil Harman's epistemology or somebody else's ethics, metaethics, stuff about which I might have no interest at all, that's fine by me.

What I'm interested in is reading these philosophical texts in a philosophical way where my conception of that is responsibility to the basic conception of philosophy laid down by Socrates and the Greeks, which is both a certain kind of thinking, a certain kind of responsibility, not just argument, but arguments included in it. It's an approach to how to think and live.

And that's why I do philosophy. And the reason I do the history of philosophy is that I find not just for Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and maybe Kant, if those are the ones you thought I had in mind, that's four, but equally Chrysippus is at least as great a philosopher as any modern philosopher, and Carneades as well, and not to mention Epicurus, not to mention Plotinus. These are all people who had the same conception that derived from Socrates of what philosophy is, and there's a tremendous amount to learn.

Of course, my field, as you know, is ancient philosophy. But what I'm saying I would apply to lots and lots of medieval philosophy, lots and lots of early modern philosophy, and lots and lots of 19th-century philosophy.

Wherever you can find for teaching purposes materials of a philosophical kind understood that way, then you should teach them, or you're invited to teach them. And if you can find in Pico, which I can't, but if you can find in Pico philosophical things to do, understood in this way, then I think we ought to encourage people to do more of that.

Anthony Grafton: Well, I think, John, that's exactly what I meant when I said I thought there were really quite different notions here of why one does the history of philosophy. And I really did mean that I thought you represented exactly that, a very firm statement about

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