

Introductory Lecture

WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

[1] God *commands* us to love him with our mind. Since faith entails obedience, to affirm faith is give ourselves to rigorous thinking. Our intellect should be sharpened by any tool available, philosophy included. While it is no sin to be ignorant, it *is* sin to be more ignorant than we have to be.

[2] Philosophy helps illuminate problems in theology.

E.g. (a) Athanasius and Arius on the *homo(homoi)ousion* controversy at Nicaea

(b) Aristotle's multiform understanding of *causa* in the work of Aquinas and the Puritans
(Wesley)

(c) the role of co-planar causality in elucidating problems with the doctrine of providence

(d) the use of "affection" in Jonathan Edwards (An "affection" is a felt response to an object elicited by an understanding of the nature of that object.)

[3] Philosophy is a discipline (along with psychology, sociology, anthropology, literature) that reflects humankind's self-understanding. Herein it provides a description of that "world" which the church engages in its mission. If we disdain such a self-understanding and description, can we be said to take people seriously? Can we be said to love that world which God most certainly loves? How can we address the world if we don't know how it thinks? We always address the gospel to *persons*, one aspect of which is their head.

While theological articulation must not *adopt* the world's self-understanding (lest it de-nature the gospel), it must always *adapt* itself to that self-understanding (lest it fail to communicate.)

[4] Philosophy helps to keep Christians honest. Herein it functions as that "friend" (see the comments of Ellul and Sangster) who doesn't share our convictions AND JUST FOR THAT REASON often acquaints us with what we can't see or don't want to see.

Philosophy keeps reminding us of problem areas that we get over too quickly.

[5] Philosophy reacquaints us with the fact that all theology occurs in a cultural context. Therefore theology tends to be more philosophically acculturated than it wants to admit or is even aware of. A knowledge of philosophy helps us identify aspects of theology's acculturation. (E.g., Heidegger and Bultmann, Plato and Patristics)

[6] "Philosophy" is "love of wisdom. While there is a wisdom that alone "comes from above" and is something humankind can never uncover for itself, there's also a creaturely wisdom that is genuinely wise, that we neglect at our peril, and that can be found anywhere.

We must learn, according to John Wesley, to "plunder the Egyptians." (Exodus 3:22, AV)

The leaders of the Reformation (with one exception, Luther) and the leaders of the Reformation church were thoroughly schooled in humanism. (Those clergy who lacked a humanistic training provided no leadership for the church at all.)

[7] Philosophy enables us to recognise declensions from and distortions of Christian truth we otherwise might overlook. E.g., how much of the "New Age" mentality is really pantheism or panentheism, albeit in modern disguise?

[8] Philosophy helps us to avoid an unrealistic "simplicity." While there's a profound simplicity on the "far side" of complexity, any simplicity on "this side" of complexity is premature, shallow and false. E.g., consider the most recent philosophical discussions of age-old issues such as freedom and necessity, mind and body.

Reverend V. Shepherd