
Author Steve Wilkens, professor of philosophy and ethics at Azusa Pacific University, has previously published Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics (1995) and Christianity and Western Thought, Vol. 2 (2000, with Alan G. Padgett). In this book he introduces several key philosophers and their thoughts for college students. He states that Christians can learn something from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, and Sartre.

Socrates was noted for his Socratic method. Wilkens praises Socrates for asking tough questions and states that we should discourage simple belief without asking questions. He thinks that Christian beliefs will be more valuable if we earn them through hard thinking rather than accepting them unquestioningly from parents or teachers. However, Wilkens is critical of Socrates for his total reliance on reason.

Plato, in The Republic, differentiated between the metaphysical (which is unchanging and perfect) and physical (which is becoming and imperfect). He developed the idea of the good with an analogy of the sun. Just as the sun enlightens physical vision, so the good helps us to know metaphysically. Those who know and see the intellectual light should be the political leaders. Wilkens sees a similarity between the concept of the good and the Christian God. However, he points out that the Bible views the physical realm more affirmatively than Plato, and salvation is a function of will rather than the intellect.

While Plato devalued the physical, Aristotle saw reality through our senses in the changing physical world. In Nicomachan Ethics he taught his son how to make the right decisions and to achieve a happy life. To be happy one has to function according to a higher purpose, to have virtues, and find a golden mean between excess and deficiency. Wilkens appreciates Aristotle’s balance between extremes and his emphasis on virtues.

Augustine was influenced by Neo-Platonism and understood evil as a deficiency of good. He differed from Neo-Platonists by viewing God as a personal and loving being who created the good world intentionally out of his love. Evil is a corruption of good creation and not a thing in itself. Human beings, created in the image of God, must seek true goodness in order to have true happiness. Augustine improved upon Aristotle in seeing the limitation of human reason and
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will. Wilkens praises Augustine for his use of non-Christian philosophy.

Aquinas viewed faith and reason as two modes of knowing truth. He did not see any possible contradiction between them, but insisted that Scripture is authoritative for the content of faith. He developed natural theology and provided five ways to demonstrate God's existence. Wilkens applauds Aquinas's respect for reason and his allowance of both reason and faith in his theological system.

Descartes differed from those Christian philosophers before him by accepting skepticism as the starting point of philosophy. The Scripture was not authoritative for him. He opened the door for eliminating God from human philosophy, and later thinkers followed and expanded on his lead. He depended totally upon human reason and so returned to the mindset of ancient Greek philosophers. Wilkens acknowledges that Descartes's famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am," introduced a paradigmatic shift for Western thought.

Kierkegaard criticized the Danish church of his time and refuted Hegel's influence on Christian theology. He emphasized that true faith, demonstrated by Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, is total obedience to God's will and is not necessarily logical in human eyes. Christianity should not be just a civil religion, and faith should be a passionate commitment of the whole person. Wilkens dislikes Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham and his emphasis on individualism.

Karl Marx tried to build his political theory and historiography upon economic concerns. He despised religion and considered it as a crutch hampering human progress. Wilkens appreciates Marx's idealism and agrees with his understanding that ideas are the product of culture. Wilkens warns that we should not confuse cultural views with Christian concepts.

Friedrich Nietzsche also reacted to the European situation by proposing a master morality instead of a slave morality. He faulted Christianity for promoting suffering as virtue. He argued that the moral demand was only a power imposition by the ruling class; therefore, there was no truth, only interpretation by various perspectives. Wilkens acknowledges the influence of Nietzsche on today's post-modernism, proposing that one should take a middle ground and not go to the other extreme in automatically rejecting everything new.

Jean-Paul Sartre treated existence as preceding essence, so one had freedom to define and transcend oneself. He objected to a Creator God because he would define and limit human being. He stated that
because God did not exist, one was free and responsible for himself. Wilkens recognizes Sartre's honesty about total subjectivity resulting from atheism, but criticizes him for espousing freedom without purpose.

Wilkens in his epilogue asks readers to make careful reflection about various questions of life and encourages them to explore ideas outside the boundaries of a Christian worldview. His book could serve as a reading supplement for an introductory course in philosophy.

For this reviewer, "faith seeks understanding" starts with a foundation in Christian faith. When a student is not knowledgeable about his Christian faith and has no firsthand experience of God, exposure to unbiblical philosophy often leads to doubts about his own faith. Baptist theologian A. H. Strong, after observing the loss of faith among the younger generation of theological faculties, pointed out the importance of foundational faith in his autobiography, *A Tour of the Missions: Observations and Conclusions* (1918). Therefore, the Christian philosopher and student should not let his questioning attitude turn into doubt or unbelief. Instead, he should strive for a deeper understanding of God's truth so that he may have true happiness.

Wilkens seems too eager to expose students to "good" ideas of philosophers. When a student is not grounded in methods of evaluating evidence, then he can be very easily persuaded by little evidence and simple argument. An analogy may be helpful here. In clinical medicine the final acceptance of a treatment depends not on a good physiological theory, but on the treatment results. A treatment is good only after observing its results. Philosophical thoughts also have consequences. Whether something is good should be judged by its impact on the Church and society. Learning the lesson from evidence-based clinical medicine will help a student to be more discriminating in accepting "good" ideas from questionable Christians or outright pagans.

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