

# Teaching Philosophy

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## Special Problems in Teaching the Moderns

HOLLIBERT PHILLIPS

## Learning Anew from Old Arguments

JOSEPH BIEL

## Modern Issues as an Intro Course

NICHOLAS DIXON

## Philosophy and Modern Science

WESLEY SALMON

## The Moderns in An Analytic Course

GEORGES DICKER

## A Comprehensible Survey

ANTHONY PEROVICH

## Gender Issues

J. IMMERWAHR

## Computer Alternatives

TESCHNER & McCLUSKY



from Archibald; religious commentary in the form of papal encyclicals; contemporary analytic accounts from Finnis and Nielsen; a defense of the "just war" theory from Ramsey; twentieth century scholastic writings from Maritain and Bourke; and other selections bound to grab the attention of the reader interested in Aquinas' place in historical and contemporary moral and political studies. In particular I found Julio Silva Solar's analysis of Aquinas on property as related to contemporary Latin America fascinating. The Mortimer Adler and Bill Moyers PBS "Dialogue on the Nature of Goodness" is useful reading for the beginning undergraduate.

Sigmund has written a ten page introduction placing Aquinas in the stream of ethical and political naturalism. While useful, this introduction does not compare with the analytic elucidations contained in Martin's collection. Nonetheless, Sigmund's introduction does help the reader understand the wide appeal Aquinas' texts have had in the general discussions of western moral and political theory.

Both books contain short lists of additional materials by or about Aquinas. A much more complete listing of bibliographical references useful to the fledgling student of Aquinas can be found in Ralph McInerny's recently published *A First Glance at St. Thomas Aquinas* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

Pedagogically, Sigmund's collection is appropriate for beginning through upper level students. (I have used it quite successfully in an intermediate level Philosophy of Law course.) Martin's book would be more useful for upper level undergraduate seminars and graduate courses—and particularly useful for seminars in contemporary analytic philosophy where structural connections from the Aristotelian tradition are sought. Both new books should become part of college library philosophy collections.

Instructors seeking texts by Aquinas together with substantial commentary can both learn from and teach well with these new collections. Highly recommended.

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**Varieties of Unbelief: From Epicurus to Sartre**, J. C. A. Gaskin, ed.  
Series: *Philosophical Topics*, Paul Edwards, ed.

Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989, 240 pp. \$11 pbk.

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ROBERT S. CORRINGTON

In this textbook, Gaskin presents a historical survey of the most influential arguments developed in the Western tradition against the perennial cognitive affirmations of religion. In particular, Gaskin is concerned with showing how a variety of philosophers and poets have assaulted belief in supernatural agents, be they gods, demons, or the God of monotheism, belief in miracles, and belief in a future state for the self after death. The focus of the book is on the first class of beliefs, i.e., those pertaining to

powers held to be outside of the orders of nature, although certain selections, most notably those of Hume, deal with the cognitive status of belief in miracles and a future state after death.

Gaskin uses the term "unbelief" rather than the term "atheism" to signal the breadth of his concern. The concept of atheism is limited to the first form of unbelief, again, that pertaining to belief in gods, demons, or God, and does not explicitly refer to the varieties of skepticism, materialism, or naturalism that can support unbelief. Gaskin takes pains to show that unbelief itself emerges from larger metaphysical and epistemological concerns and is not limited to refined attacks on the cosmological or ontological arguments. The selections in this textbook show the extent and richness of the various forms of unbelief available to a contemporary skeptic. Political, psychological, and social dimensions of unbelief are given the same standing as metaphysical frameworks that undercut belief in divine agents through an unrelenting materialism.

Gaskin deals with classical materialism by focusing on the atomism of Epicurus and Lucretius. Brief passages from *De Rerum Natura* sketch a cosmology that attempts to explain the innumerable orders of the world without reference to a non-natural agency. Gaskin masterfully contrasts these passages with a much earlier letter written by Epicurus to Herodotus that deals with matter and the void. By anchoring his account of unbelief in these Greco-Roman sources, Gaskin shows that there were strong metaphysical motivations behind early skepticism. Selections from Cicero (*De Natura Deorum*) and Sextus Empiricus round out classical materialism and show its surprising historical continuity.

Of particular interest is the inclusion of selections from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that show how Christian interpretations of the history of martyrdom are greatly exaggerated. Today many scholars believe that as few as 500 Christians were actually martyred by Rome in the first to fourth centuries. When this figure is contrasted with the number of people killed by the established church in subsequent centuries, the picture of martyrdom changes dramatically. Gaskin argues that the social history of belief, as detailed by someone like Gibbon, is an important subject matter for philosophers.

The modern period is dealt with through selections from Hobbes, Collins, Voltaire, Hume, and Paine among others. Gaskin places Hume at the conceptual center of his text and argues that Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* stands as one of the most important documents in the history of unbelief. Of particular note is his inclusion of two short essays by Hume that were suppressed during his lifetime, namely, "On Suicide," and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," presented in this text for the first time in their complete and final forms. The brief essay on suicide presents a humanistic defense of the possibility of suicide against the view that such an act is itself a violation of special divine laws. Hume states, "The lives of men depend upon the same laws as the lives of all other animals; and these are subjected to the general laws of matter and motion.... But the life of man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster" (76 & 77). Since we cannot assume any extra-natural violation of these

laws, there can be no divine sanction against a person in extreme pain taking his or her own life.

The post-Enlightenment period is well represented by selections from Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Marx, Lenin, and Nietzsche. Gaskin emphasizes the continuing import of Hume on more recent forms of unbelief, especially that of Schopenhauer. His selections, while brief, give a fairly rounded account of this important period. Feuerbach's reduction of theology to anthropology prepares the way for the social and economic analyses of Marx and Lenin. The selections from Nietzsche give a reasonably clear impression of his views but cannot convey the subtlety of his analyses of Judaism and Christianity. It would, of course, take much more space to detail his views on St. Paul, Martin Luther, Jesus, ascetic practices, the relation between Christianity and Platonism, and the evolution of religious values out of the spirit of resentment (*ressentiment*). The translations used are, unfortunately, not the most accurate or current.

The contemporary period is represented by selections from Freud, Russell, Ayer, and Sartre. A very brief section from Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* is used to sketch the projection theory of theistic beliefs. In his brief introduction, Gaskin could have said something about Freud's understanding of the origins of monotheism in totem practices within the primal hoard. The anthropological (some would say pseudo-anthropological) elements of Freud's views should have been mentioned. The selections from Russell and Ayer are more self-contained. The very brief selection from Sartre's recently published *War Diaries* well conveys the flavor of his interior dialogue on the bourgeois equation of conventional morality with religious sanctions.

The text concludes with an epilogue on the concept of immortality and presents the arguments of Lucretius and Hume against the belief in a future state of the soul, whether personal or impersonal. Gaskin, in keeping with his broadened conception of unbelief, insists that the discussion about immortality is at least logically separable from any discussion about supernatural agency and therefore can receive separate analytic treatment.

The array of figures and texts in this anthology is impressive. Gaskin has taken pains to find material that conveys the seriousness and sharpness of recurrent critiques of forms of religious belief. Each section begins with a brief biographical and philosophical analysis of the figure to be read. On occasion these introductions have a polemical force that blunts the subtlety of the arguments themselves. I wish that these introductions had been more nuanced and more open to the tensions within the writers concerned. The general introduction to the text, while clearly and directly written, seems to ignore some of the conceptual moves actually used within the tradition of belief itself. As one example, Gaskin links Tillich's evocative analysis of the "ground of our Being" directly with traditional theistic beliefs in supernatural agents (p. 2). Needless to say, Tillich took very great pains to free his own conception of God from any such non-naturalistic associations. Within Christian theology one can find a surprisingly rich mixture of forms of belief and unbelief that are responsive to many of the arguments put forward by the authors in this text. The continuing dialogue between

depth-psychology and theology is a case in point. Gaskin's analysis of the logical and existential moves available to the believer is therefore somewhat limited.

However, these reservations do not dampen my appreciation of the text itself. There has long been a need for an anthology of such scope, that is, one that brings together the philosophical, psychological, social, and historical aspects of unbelief. Gaskin's selections enrich our understanding of the vital history of unbelief in the West. I see this text as serving well in two capacities. In the first case, it would be useful in an undergraduate course in the Philosophy of Religion as a counter-foil to such thinkers as Augustine, Anselm, Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hartshorne. Students would have the chance to explore some of the most important documents within an alternative tradition. In the second case, this text would be of special value in a first year course for seminary students who would be compelled to confront the most serious challenges to their perspectives and thereby become sensitive to the historical force of the various forms of unbelief. Gaskin's textbook would be of great service in both situations by showing the continuing vitality and force of the counter-tradition.

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**The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture**, James A. Montmarquet

University of Idaho Press, Moscow, Idaho, 1989, 266 pp., \$17.95 pbk., ISBN 0-89301-130-4.

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**MICHAEL ELDRIDGE**

The title of this very informative book is misleading, for the author argues that there is neither a unified concept of agrarianism nor a continuing history. Rather there is a set of activities—agriculture—and there are a variety of writings—agrarian—which value these on-going activities. Agrarianism, as Montmarquet conceives it, is the notion that agriculture is a very important element of society. Indeed, "it carries at least the strong suggestion that agriculture is more valuable than most other activities—in particular, that it is more valuable than ordinary commercial and legal ones" (viii-ix). But the value that various writers have placed on agriculture and, more particularly, the role they assign it is quite varied.

Some classical writers, such as Hesiod, Virgil, Cato, Cicero and Xenophon, thought that "agriculture is a way of life which promotes certain distinctive human virtues: justice, honesty, independence, courage and a capacity for hard work" (26). Some eighteenth century agrarians were aristocratic (John Taylor); some democratic (Jefferson). Some agrarians have been politically conservative, even reactionary (William Cobbett); others radical (Gerrard Winstanley). Some have valued agriculture for its economic contribution (François Quesnay); others for its political one (Jefferson).