

Clear Thinking in a Fuzzy World: How Every Christian Scholar Can Learn to Think Philosophically

Philosophy involves hard thinking about important matters and, given its all-encompassing embrace, thus is unavoidable for any person. Virtually any academic discipline will have a “philosophy of” that particular field. And even theologians recognize that major Christian doctrines—though flowing from Scripture—are shaped by philosophical terms and categories like “essence,” “nature,” “relation,” “person,” and the like. Whatever our discipline may be, philosophical assumptions about reality (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), and right and wrong (ethics) will be inescapable. So Christian academics would be wise to understand and accept this, which in turn will enable them to think more Christianly and engage with others more effectively about their own and other disciplines.

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Introduction: Abraham Kuyper; various Christian attitudes toward philosophy (*philosophilic, philosophobic*).

I. Thinking philosophically is an inescapably human task.

II. Thinking philosophically has biblical precedent.

- A. Job

- B. Ecclesiastes

- C. Jesus

- D. Paul

- E. Miscellaneous biblical texts

III. Thinking philosophically can strengthen our theology.

- A. *Philosophy*: Alvin Plantinga: Philosophical reflection is “not much different from just thinking hard.”

B. *Theology*: Hard/philosophizing about God (Alister McGrath: *discourse about God*).

C. *Philosophy of religion*

D. *Theology expressed in philosophical terms*: Diogenes Allen: “Everyone needs to know some philosophy in order to understand the major doctrines of Christianity or to read a great theologian intelligently.”

IV. Thinking philosophically better enables us to examine others’ assumptions—as well as our own.

A. *Stephen Hawking*: “philosophy is dead”/Richard Lewontin—assuming materialism

B. *transhumanism*

V. Thinking philosophically means we keep the big questions of life and meaning in mind.

A. Metaphysics

B. Realism/Anti-realism

C. Anthropology

D. Epistemology (Knowledge)

E. Ethics/Morality

F. History

G. Eschatology

- VI. Thinking philosophically enables the Christian to offer a coherent explanation of the universe and human experience.**
- VII. Thinking philosophically (and Christianly) helps bring unity and clarity to the academic disciplines.**
- A. Philosophy as a tool within our particular discipline:

 - B. First-order/second-order disciplines:
- VIII. Thinking philosophically means we take our discipline and make it better.**

Further Reading:

Copan, Paul. *A Little Book for New Philosophers: Why and How To Study Philosophy*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

Moreland, J.P. and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.