> who thought so differently (and [who] were so much more intellectually accomplished than I). On the other hand, I thought to myself, what really is so great about these people? Why should I believe *them*? . . . [W]hat, precisely, is the *substance* of their objections to Christianity? Or to theism? Do these objections really *have* much by way of substance? And if, as I strongly suspected, *not*, why should their taking the views they did be relevant to what *I* thought? The doubts (in that form anyway) didn't last long, but something like the bravado, I suppose, has remained.[9]

One of the events that dispelled the doubts Plantinga experienced at Harvard was a moment in which he experienced what he was convinced was the presence of God, something which he describes as a rare but important event in his spiritual walk. The other crucial event in this regard took place during a trip home, when he had the opportunity to attend some classes at Calvin College. Here he encountered something that held an even stronger attraction for him than the stimulating environment at Harvard – William Harry Jellema's philosophy classes. Harry Jellema was, in Plantinga's own words, "by all odds . . . the most gifted teacher of philosophy I have ever encountered."[10] More than this, Jellema was "obviously in dead earnest about Christianity; he was also a magnificently thoughtful and reflective Christian."[11] Deeply affected by Jellema's teaching and his response to the modern philosophical critique of Christianity, Plantinga resolved after only two semesters at Harvard to return to Calvin, a decision he never regretted.

Under the direction of Jellema and Henry Stob, Plantinga and his classmates (who included Dewey Hoitenga and Nicholas Wolterstorff) spent much of their time on the history of philosophy, particularly Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. In order to read some of these philosophers' works in the original languages, Plantinga also spent a significant amount of time studying French, German and Greek (having already learned Latin from his father while in high school). Apart from philosophy, Plantinga also majored in psychology (taking six courses from his father) and English literature.

In January 1954 Plantinga left Calvin for the University of Michigan, where he commenced his graduate studies. There he studied under William Alston, Richard Cartwright and William K. Frankena. Plantinga enjoyed his studies at Michigan, and the connection made there with Alston was to be one of the more important friendships that grew out of his philosophical career (Plantinga dedicated *Warranted Christian Belief* to Alston, with the words "Mentor, Model, Friend"). Moving on to graduate studies was now the only threshold crossed during this period of Plantinga's life. It was

while at Calvin, in 1953, that Plantinga had met Kathleen De Boer, then a Calvin senior. Plantinga describes himself as having been "captivated by her generous spirit and mischievous, elfin sense of humor."[12] In 1955 they were married and in the intervening years have become proud parents to four children – Carl, Jane, William Harry and Ann. It was through Kathleen's relatives that Plantinga was introduced to the pleasures of rock climbing and mountaineering, which became an enduring passion.

Shortly after her marriage to Alvin, Kathleen Plantinga endured the first of what is to date almost twenty relocations – this time to Yale. Despite enjoying Michigan, and there developing a strong interest in the philosophical challenges mounted against theism, Plantinga had felt that philosophy there was "too piecemeal and too remote from the big questions."[13] Yale seemed to offer a solution, and so the newlywed Plantingas made the move to New Haven. Though he was impressed by teachers like Paul Weiss and Brand Blanshard, Yale turned out to be something of a disappointment for Plantinga. He found the high level of generality in the courses on offer to be perplexing and frustrating: "The problem at Yale was that no one seemed prepared to show a neophyte philosopher how to go about the subject – what to *do*, how to think about a problem to some effect."[14]

It was in the fall of 1957 that Plantinga had his first taste of teaching – focusing on the history of metaphysics and epistemology – which he describes as a harrowing experience, one familiar to many new academics:

> I spent most of the summer preparing for my classes in the fall; when September rolled around I had perhaps forty or fifty pages of notes. I met my first class with great trepidation, which wasn't eased by the preppy, sophisticated, almost world-weary attitude of these incoming freshmen. Fortified by my fifty pages of material, I launched or perhaps lunged into the course. At the end of the second day I discovered, to my horror, that I'd gone through half of my material; and by the end of the first week I'd squandered my entire summer's horde. The semester stretched before me, bleak, frightening, nearly interminable. That's when I discovered the value of the Socratic method of teaching.[15]

Plantinga's lack of teaching experience was not something that in any way dampened the enthusiastic advances of George Nakhnikian of Detroit's Wayne State University, who in that same year began tirelessly to pursue Plantinga for his department. Despite initial reservations Plantinga eventually gave in to Nakhnikian, and in the fall of 1958 the Philosophy Department at Wayne became Plantinga's first faculty home. Looking back, Plantinga considers the move to be "one of the best decisions I ever made."[16]

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# Contemporary Philosophy in the United States

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Philosophy as an academic discipline in America has considerably fewer practitioners than do several other subjects in the humanities and the social sciences, such as sociology, history, English, or economics; but it still shows enormous diversity. This variety is made manifest in the original research published by professional philosophers, whose differing points of view are expressed in the large number of books published each year, as well as in the many professional philosophy journals. There are over two thousand colleges and universities in the United States, of which nearly all have philosophy departments, and the number of professional philosophers is correspondingly large.

Because of this diversity, any generalizations about the discipline as a whole, which I am about to make, are bound to be misleading. The subject is too vast and complex to be describable in a single essay. Furthermore, anyone who is an active participant in the current controversies, as I am, necessarily has a perspective conditioned by his or her own interests, commitments and convictions. It would be impossible for me to give an 'objective' account. I am not therefore in what follows trying to give a neutral or disinterested account of the contemporary philosophical scene; rather I am trying to say what in the current developments seems to me important.

In spite of its enormous variety, there are certain central themes in contemporary American philosophy. The dominant mode of philosophizing in the United States is called 'analytic philosophy'. Without exception, the best philosophy departments in the United States are dominated by analytic philosophy, and among the leading philosophers in the United States, all but a tiny handful would be classified as analytic philosophers. Practitioners of types of philosophizing that are not in the analytic tradition – such as phenomenology, classical pragmatism, existentialism, or Marxism – feel it necessary to define their position in relation to analytic philosophy. Indeed, analytic philosophy is the dominant mode of philosophizing not only in the United States, but throughout the entire English-speaking world, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is also the dominant mode of philosophizing in Scandinavia, and it is also becoming more widespread in Germany, France, Italy, and throughout Latin America. I personally have found that I can go to all of these parts of the world and lecture on subjects in contemporary analytic philosophy before audiences who are both knowledgeable and well trained in the techniques of the discipline.

# 1 Analytic Philosophy

What, then, is analytic philosophy? The simplest way to describe it is to say that it is primarily concerned with the analysis of meaning. In order to explain this enterprise and its significance, we need first to say a little bit about its history. Though the United States now leads the world in analytic philosophy, the origins of this mode of philosophizing lie in Europe. Specifically, analytic philosophy is based on the work of Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, as well as the work done by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s. Going further back in history, one can also see analytic philosophy as a natural descendant of the empiricism of the great British philosophers Locke, Berkeley and Hume, and of the transcendental philosophy of Kant. In the works of philosophers as far back as Plato and Aristotle, one can see many of the themes and presuppositions of the methods of analytic philosophy. We can best summarize the origins of modern analytic philosophy by saying that it arose when the empiricist tradition in epistemology, together with the foundationalist enterprise of Kant, were tied to the methods of logical analysis and the philosophical theories invented by Gottlob Frege in the late nineteenth century. In the course of his work on the foundations of mathematics, Frege invented symbolic logic in its modern form and developed a comprehensive and profound philosophy of language. Though many of the details of his views on language and mathematics have been superseded, Frege's work is crucial for at least two reasons. Firstly, by inventing modern logic, specifically the predicate calculus, he gave us a primary tool of philosophical analysis; and, secondly, he made the philosophy of language central to the entire philosophical enterprise. From the point of view of analytic philosophy, Frege's work is the greatest single philosophical achievement of the nineteenth century. Fregean techniques of logical analysis were later augmented by the ordinary language analysis inspired by the work of Moore and Wittgenstein and are best exemplified by the school of linguistic philosophy that flourished in Oxford in the 1950s. In short, analytic philosophy attempts to combine certain traditional philosophical themes with modern techniques.

Analytic philosophy has never been fixed or stable, because it is intrinsically self-critical and its practitioners are always challenging their own presuppositions and conclusions. However, it is possible to locate a central period in analytic philosophy – the period comprising, roughly speaking, the logical positivist phase immediately prior to the 1939–45 war and the postwar phase of linguistic analysis. Both the prehistory and the subsequent history of analytic philosophy can be defined by the main doctrines of that central period.

In the central period, analytic philosophy was defined by a belief in two linguistic distinctions, combined with a research programme. The two distinctions are, firstly, that between analytic and synthetic propositions, and, secondly, that between descriptive and evaluative utterances. The research programme is the traditional philosophical research programme of attempting to find foundations for such philosophically problematic phenomena as language, knowledge, meaning, truth, mathematics and so on.