

Philosophy at King's College London– a History

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1. Early Religious Roots

King's College London was founded in 1831. In addition to its medical school, the college was originally comprised of several independent departments, the largest and most influential of which was its huge theological department. The institution's chief focus was religious training: the qualification of 'Associate of King's College' (AKC), offered by King's from its opening as an equivalent to a degree, was theologically focussed, and many students entered the priesthood on graduation. Courses in various disciplines (including Classical Literature, English Literature and Political Economy) were taken to contribute to a general honours degree. During its formative years, philosophy at King's was confined to a logic paper in the Department of English Literature and a course in the Department of Theology entitled 'Evidence of Natural and Revealed Religion' (for which the set texts were Paley and Butler).

Theology's early dominance at King's can be seen from the fact that the college found it necessary to publish a letter urging that 'excluding the Gospels from examination for the degree of BA by a regulation of the senate is not LEGAL; is not HONEST; is not JUST; is not LIBERAL and . . . has not even the solitary recommendation of being what is popularly termed EXPEDIENT'.¹ Some latent interest in (what we would now see as) philosophy is shown in the Chaplain John Allen's publication, in the College calendars, of edited excerpts from the Nachlass of Ralph Cudworth DD, the 'sometime master of Christ's College, Cambridge'. Cudworth's papers deal with free will and necessity and explicitly discuss themes from Hobbes. Allen says in his introduction that 'there are reasons for believing that a taste for metaphysical enquiries is beginning to flourish again in this country'. But King's would have to wait some time for metaphysical enquiry to be considered a legitimate subject of study in its own right; Philosophy was not established as a distinct degree course (rather than a paper within a broader syllabus) until after 1900.

The first explicitly philosophical post in the university was introduced in 1877, with the appointment of the Rev Henry Williams Watkins to the Chair of Logic and Moral Philosophy. Watkins, a churchman from St John's College Cambridge, was affiliated to the Department of Theology, which remained the centre of influence in King's, despite accounting for only 65 of the 412 registered students in that year. In 1880 Alfred Momerie was appointed to a Chair in Metaphysics and Logic.² Momerie took over logic provision from the Literature department, and set as his core texts William Jevon's 'Elementary Lessons on Logic' and Henry Mansell's 'Metaphysics'.

¹ King's College London Calendar 1836/7

² http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Religion_of_the_Future

Shortly after, Philosophy moved from the auspices of Theology into the general Department of Literature. This would begin an era of itinerancy for Philosophy at King's, which alternated between theology and literature frequently over the next thirty years, before the establishment of a dedicated department. Around this time King's Women's college also came into being – beginning as 'public lectures in Kensington' in 1878, and eventually set up as a college with statutory powers in 1885. The Women's college was to be significant in the formation of the philosophy department.

2. Secularisation 1891-1906

Continuing the southerly procession of St John's churchmen, Alfred Caldecott BD (later DD) joined King's in 1891; first as Chair of Logic and Mental Philosophy, then later as Chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy. Caldecott, who was an ordained minister and a founder of the Cambridge Moral Sciences club, developed a syllabus with a renewed emphasis on theological issues.

In 1895 King's was plunged into crisis by the intervention of the Conservative-Liberal coalition government. Until 1895, King's had, like all other universities in the UK, depended for its existence on a grant from the public purse. However, the government of the time decided to impose new conditions upon the awarding of such grants, which included the requirement that universities be open to everybody without reference to their faith. This requirement was inconsistent with King's charter which specifically promoted the dissemination of Christian values. As the College put it: 'Unhappily, in the present day, men of great intellectual eminence hold and avow no Christian principles; and however honourably they might abstain from explicitly introducing their views into lectures on scientific or historical or moral subjects, the tendency of such views could or but be felt, and their known opinions must, in proportion to their eminence, have an influence on the minds of young men'.³ For this reason, King's decided to refuse to accept the government's grant. This led to the near collapse of the university (which was saved only through donations from its supporters), and required a dramatic shrinking of the teaching staff; in 1896 King's employed only half the number as they had in the previous year.

Of those teaching philosophy, only Caldecott remained; he divided his time between the Departments of Theology and Literature. Jevon's Logic was still a set text, but Caldecott's interests had broadened by this point. Both Ryland's 'A Student's Handbook of Psychology and Ethics' (written specifically for the University of London BA) and William James' 'Textbook of Psychology' became prescribed reading. By 1904, Caldecott had renamed his course 'Moral and Mental Philosophy', and for the first time, ethics became a sub-discipline of the philosophy syllabus in its own right. The combination of Aristotelian ethics and philosophical psychology is reflected in the exam papers from this time period. The stated aim of the new undergraduate course was to 'provide an amount of philosophy as would generally be expected of any educated man'.⁴

3. Department of Philosophy and Psychology (1906-12)

Capitalising on the steady success of Caldecott's course, a separate Department of Philosophy and Psychology was explicitly established in 1906. The Department of Theology had its own distinct 'Philosophy of Religion' course, teaching the religious views of Aquinas, Spinoza and Leibniz, amongst others.

³ King's College London Calendar 1895/6

⁴ King's College London Calendar 1904/5

In 1910 King's solved the problem of reconciling its Charter with the requirement that public universities be secular: the secular Departments became one college in the University of London, and the Theological Department another, with its own independent administrative section. The fledgling Philosophy Department was housed within the new, secular college.

In 1907 the College had appointed two new members of the department; Hilda Diana Oakeley and Kenneth Jay Spalding. Both came to King's from its Women's college; Oakeley having been its vice Principal, and Spalding a lecturer there.

Oakeley's arrival marked a shift away from the Christian theological emphasis in the philosophy syllabus. Hume's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* became a standard text on the syllabus for the first time and a general modern course was established covering 'Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Kant'. Oakeley herself taught courses on Aristotle and Hume, as well as courses on moral philosophy and the relationship between literature and philosophy. Her publications over this period span a range of interests, from Ancient Philosophy to politics. Caldecott and Matthews were also publishing frequently at this time, predominantly in journals such as *Church Quarterly*. Although their primary interest was in theological issues, they also frequently engaged with idealists of the time.

During this period Philosophy's student numbers waxed and waned; the nadir coming in 1912 when the department had only four students. In that year, Philosophy and Psychology split into separate departments.

4. Psychological Philosophy on the Rise (1912-30)

Despite the split from Psychology, the following years saw a general drift in the Philosophy Department's research towards psychological philosophy. The two Departments retained close links. Herbert Wilson Carr from the Psychology Department had been publishing articles in *Mind* and the *Philosophical Review* and was active in the Aristotelian Society. When Caldecott retired in 1918, Carr transferred from Psychology to take up the responsibilities of Head of Department.

Carr brought with him an interest in Bergson and Croce; he had translated both of their works into English and wrote papers heavily influenced by their views. Bergson himself had come to deliver public lectures at King's in 1912. Carr also helped establish an awareness of, and interest in, developments in the natural sciences at the King's Department. In particular, he published and taught on Einstein's principle of relativity and its metaphysical significance. During this period Carr helped establish the inaugural Joint Session of the Mind and Aristotelian Societies, still going strong today.

Carr and Oakeley formed a close friendship, and under their joint stewardship the Philosophy Department grew steadily during this period. A notable breakthrough occurred in 1923, with the appearance of the department's very first postgraduate students. In the same year, both Carr and Oakeley presented to the Societe Francaise de Philosophie at the Sorbonne. The PhD programme began in 1925, and an MSc in the History and Methods of Science was introduced in 1926. In the same year Oakeley became acting Head. The Philosophy Society was formed, for the first time, in 1930.

5. Decline of the Department and World War II

Carr retired to America in 1925, and died suddenly in 1931. Oakeley herself retired from the department in 1932. Their departure marked the start of a period of decline for the Department.

The King's Department was merged with those in Bedford and University Colleges in 1934, even though the Department of Theology retained its separate identity. And in 1935 the Department was relocated, along with much of King's, to Bristol. By 1936 what remained of the Department was concerned at a worrying lack of support for philosophical education, with one of its members writing in protest to the University that 'the increasing emphasis on specialised study of professional interests in the university curriculum is naturally resulting in the neglect of the philosophical studies that have long been recognised as central in a liberal education'.

The outbreak of war effectively closed the department – King's philosophy had no students at all between 1939 and 1945. (The Psychology Department fared worse, and disappeared completely in the move to Bristol, never to reopen.) However the Spinoza scholar Harold Foster Hallett, who had joined the Department before the war, remained active during this time, publishing in *Mind* and presenting to the Aristotelian Society. By the end of the 1940s the Department began to regroup and by 1950 there were 16 King's students.

6. Post-War Renaissance

Hallett retired in 1951 and John Niemeyer Findlay joined the department in his stead, quickly followed by Godfrey Vesey in 1952. Findlay worked to restore the Department to a respectable size. Findlay's interests were broad, ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Wittgenstein. Vesey would later act as Director of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, and in time became the founding Professor of Philosophy at the Open University. Vesey and Findlay were joined in due course by David Pole, Ron Ashby and Peter Winch.

When Findlay retired from King's College in 1966, Peter Winch took over as Head of Department. Richard Sorabji joined the Department in 1970, and Jim Hopkins and Rai Gaita followed soon after. These two, together with Winch, made the Department a world leader in the philosophy of Wittgenstein. The Department's strength in this area was substantially boosted by its association with Norman Malcolm from Cornell, who ran a seminar on the Philosophical Investigations for a number of years.

7. Expansion – Bedford and Chelsea Mergers

Bedford College was a long-standing member of the University of London which had been housed in Regent's Park since the beginning of the 20th century. Its Philosophy Department was particularly strong, having been headed by Bernard Williams in 1964-7 and then by David Wiggins in 1967-80.

The austerity of the 1980s led to plans to move Bedford College to Egham, Surrey and merge it with Royal Holloway College. However, there was widespread resistance to the idea of so separating the Bedford philosophers from the rest of the University of London philosophers. Under the leadership of Richard Sorabji from King's and Mark Sainsbury from Bedford, with the active support of Ronald Dworkin and Richard Wollheim from University College London, a merger of the Bedford

and King's Department was engineered, and Mark Sainsbury, Anthony Savile, Alan Lacey, Brian O'Shaughnessy and David Lloyd Thomas came to join the King's philosophers on the Strand.

To mark the merger, a new Chair of Philosophy was endowed in the joint Department, and named in memory of Susan Stebbing, who had been a highly influential member of the Bedford Department in the inter-war years. Christopher Peacocke was appointed the inaugural Susan Stebbing Professor of Philosophy in 1985.

Soon afterwards Chelsea College of Science and Technology was merged with King's College. Chelsea College contained a small but active Department of History and Philosophy of Science, and this was also merged into the King's Philosophy Department in the early 1990s. The result was that Donald Gillies, Moshe Machover, John Milton and David Papineau joined the Philosophy Department in 1993.

8. The 1990s to the Present

In 1989 Mark Sainsbury succeeded Peacocke as the Susan Stebbing Professor. Under Sainsbury's stewardship, the department enjoyed a sustained period of consolidation and growth, continued under the subsequent Headships of David Papineau, MM McCabe and Gabriel Segal.

Mark Sainsbury himself remained at King's until 2008, when he left to take up a position at the University of Texas in Austin. There is now an annual Mark Sainsbury lecture in honour of the extremely important role that Sainsbury played in guiding the department through a difficult and formative period of its history.

The Department is now one of the largest and most distinguished in the UK. In the last government Research Assessment Exercise its research quality was ranked third in the country. It teaches an extremely wide range of courses. It is probably the only philosophy department in the world which can claim to cover the entire history of philosophy 'without any gaps', from the presocratics and eastern philosophy through to the foundations of twentieth century analytic philosophy and beyond. We are also very strong in metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, logic, philosophy of language and linguistics, philosophy of mind and psychology and philosophy of science.

Under the current leadership of Maria Rosa Antognazza, the Department made six new appointments at the beginning of 2012, including Bill Brewer as the new Susan Stebbing Professor. This means that the Department currently houses twenty-six permanent teaching staff, together with nine postdoctoral fellows.