

Henry Allison: Personal and Professional

Interview by Steven A. Gross

HENRY ALLISON WAS BORN IN 1937 IN NEW YORK, AND received his B.A. in 1959 from Yale, his M.A. in 1961 from Columbia (through a joint program in religion with the Union Theological Seminary), and his Ph.D. in 1964 from the New School for Social Research. After teaching at SUNY (Potsdam), Penn State, and the University of Florida, he joined the Faculty of the University of California, San Diego in 1973, where he currently holds the title of Research Professor of Philosophy. Next year, he will assume a Professorship of Philosophy at Boston University.

What follows is an edited transcript of a conversation that took place on November 29, 1995 while Professor Allison was the visiting John N. Findlay Professor of Philosophy at Boston University.

HRP: Perhaps we might begin historically — that is, biographically. What led you to become an historian of philosophy and to focus on the specific figures you have?

Allison: I have to begin with what led me to study philosophy in the first place. I initially went to Yale with the idea of becoming a poet or writer of some sort. Two things — one positive, one negative — changed my mind and led me into philosophy. The positive was taking a freshman course with Brand Blanshard, who was a wonderful lecturer, a marvel of clarity and precision. That was my first real exposure to philosophy, and I certainly became hooked on it. The negative occurred during my second year, when I enrolled in a notorious course called “Daily Themes.” The course required that one write a brief sketch or story of some sort five days a week; and after some very severe criticism by very distinguished faculty and a rather mediocre grade, I came to realize that I was not cut out to be a successful poet or novelist, so I shifted to philosophy. So that’s how I got interested in philosophy.

Now, moving to the history of philosophy, that’s more complicated. I think it was largely

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a collection of accidents — the nature of the orientation of some of the people I studied with and where I studied. Although I started with Blanshard, who was the last of the great rationalists, and who was wonderful because he would have 14 arguments against this and that and was very systematic, I soon became interested in messy things like existentialism. So Kierkegaard and Sartre were the first philosophers I studied in any depth. And there was another professor at Yale — this time a bright young assistant professor, Louis Mackey — with whom I began to work, who went on to write a very important book about Kierkegaard.¹ I got interested in some of these things largely through him, but he also gave a history of philosophy seminar. So I had some interest in the history of philosophy and, I suppose already then, in Immanuel Kant. Of course, he came across as a very forbidding and challenging figure. But perhaps the first philosophical issue that I really got interested in — and Kant played a large role in this — was the problem of freedom, how freedom could be reconciled with causal determinism. Somehow back as a sophomore I thought this was a deep problem, and I also thought that Kant had something very important to say about it. And 30 some odd years later, in 1990, I finally published a book in which I tried to say what that was.² But basically, my

initial interests were more or less what we would now call “Continental,” and Yale was sort of a mixed department at that stage. I suppose that I initially had a kind of negative attitude towards analytical philosophy — mainly because I was ignorant of what was

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going on. But I certainly didn’t have any sense of specializing in the history of philosophy. In fact, I was interested in the philosophy of religion and, I guess in a broad sense, German philosophy — mainly Kant and Hegel — because they seemed to me related to existentialism.

After graduating from Yale in 1959, I went to graduate school with the idea of concentrating on the philosophy of religion. I chose Columbia because it had a joint program in religion with Union Seminary. My thought was that just as a philosopher of physics should know some physics, a philosopher of religion should know some religion. So I learned a little bit about the Bible, studied some comparative religion and the like, and got an M.A., after which I shifted to the philosophy program at Columbia. By this time I developed some more historical interests. I became particularly interested in Greek philosophy — though I had some interest in that field from my undergraduate days, because I had studied Plato and Aristotle with Robert Brumbaugh. But I took a seminar on Aristotle with Randall, Kristeller, and Charles Kahn, and that was really very exciting. So at that stage I was torn between Greek and German philosophy. But I guess that what really clinched things for me was that while at Columbia I noticed and signed up for a

seminar on the first Critique that was given at the New School by Aron Gurwitsch. I had heard of Gurwitsch (mainly as a phenomenologist). But I went down to the New School while still at Columbia, because no one was doing much Kant there, and signed up for the seminar — it was a full year seminar which got through the Analytic — and this struck me as pretty good and important stuff. Although I didn't give up all my other interests for Kant, particularly not the philosophy of religion, I did decide to transfer to the New School and work with Gurwitsch. And, after studying Leibniz with him, I ended up writing a dissertation, not on Kant, but on Lessing and Lessing's philosophy of religion and its relation to Leibniz. Thus, although I retained my interest in Kant, I also developed a broader interest in the history of modern philosophy. In fact, I worked not only on Leibniz but also on Spinoza, the empiricists, and German idealism. It was a real classical, European kind of philosophical education that I was



lucky enough to get. And that is what finally pushed me in a strongly historical direction. It's not that I woke up one morning and said, "My God, I'm going to be an historian of philosophy"; it's rather that my training led me naturally in that direction.

HRP: Given this sort of education, would it have occurred to you — did it occur to you — to pose the question to yourself, "Do I want to be an historian of philosophy, a scholar in that sense, or ought I to be approaching the questions of philosophical interest to me in some other way?" Or would that way of posing the question just not have come up, given this sort of education?

Allison: Well, I think it's something like the latter. I don't believe that I ever felt that kind of sharp dichotomy, which I guess one would feel if one began with a more traditional, problems-oriented kind of education, where you're reading the latest publications in the *JP*³ and then you might decide, "Well, maybe there's something historically interesting about the background of this topic." Thus, again, because of my training and experience, that kind of dichotomy or dilemma never arose for me.

HRP: This might provide a nice segue, then, to talking about the status of the history of philosophy in the English-speaking philosophy world in general. Many of the historians of philosophy in the contemporary English-speaking philosophy world did not receive this sort of philosophical education, but perhaps came from departments where there was more of a sense of a dichotomy.

And this is still the case in many major departments, though perhaps to a lesser degree. The history of philosophy — the discipline, that is — has changed greatly over the course of your career, both in and of itself and in its relation, or relations, to the rest of philosophy. So, remaining in this historical mode, I'd be interested to hear what to your mind have been some of the most significant of these changes and to what you attribute them.

Allison: Well, I think you're right about that — I mean, you're certainly right about the training. In both cases you're right: you're right about the training that most Anglo-American historians of philosophy have received, that it was different from mine — although many in recent years have spent time studying in Germany — the Humboldts and things like that have made for quite a rich interchange; particularly, I think, for younger scholars like Fred Neuhouser, for whom it's typical to spend one or more years studying in Germany, which I actually never had the opportunity to do. I wish I had.

Now, I guess the other part of your question concerns the changes within the approach to the history of philosophy. Well, certainly it's gotten much more respectable. I think that a thoroughly dismissive attitude towards the history of philosophy is in most cases and in most departments, though not in all by any means, pretty much a thing of the past. And I think that's because there's been a gradual deeper realization of the interconnection between philosophical problems and concerns of the present day and past philosophy and, really, the inseparability of doing good philosophical work from some understanding of its history. Now, within the history of philosophy itself, I think there has been a very healthy development, in the sense that there's much more concern and greater respect for the scholarly dimensions of work in the history of philosophy. Now, in most cases, if one's planning to work on Kant for example, one's expected to know some German — which I think is a good thing — and to know something about people like Wolff and Baumgarten. So this has become more part of the mainstream. Current work in the history of philosophy is much more historically informed, whereas if you think of what was going on back in the 60's, things like Jonathan Bennett's books on Kant (one in the 60's, one in the 70's), a series of potshots, some very brilliant, insightful, others just completely missing the mark.⁴ I don't think we see too much of that anymore.

HRP: I'd like to pick up on several aspects of your answer. First, perhaps I can play the role of devil's advocate and ask you to respond to the dismissive professor. There do remain those who view immersion in, or even fair familiarity with, the history of philosophy as at best unnecessary for, at worst a hindrance to, the doing of philosophy proper in some sense. Clearly, this isn't the line you'd take. What would you say, at a faculty meeting, for example, if you encountered such a person. This naturally has practical consequences for who gets hired, for graduate student requirements, and the like.

Allison: Well, I'm not sure that putting it in those practical terms is the best way, or the way I'd want, to address it. Obviously, implicit in such an attitude is a certain conception of what doing philosophy is, which I suppose is based on adopting a model taken over from the sciences. Now, if you're going to be a biologist, knowing something about the history of biology may be very nice, but it's not really

essential to doing one's work as a practicing scientist. These are two quite distinct disciplines. I think there is a kind of, for want of a better expression, "scientific" prejudice in at least many of those who take this kind of attitude. And so I guess I'd have to challenge their conception of what philosophy is really all about. If philosophy is thought of as resolving a set of discrete, well-defined, and manageable problems in their own terms — if that's what you think philosophy is — then I suppose there is no essential reason to study the history of philosophy, although there is still a general intellectual reason, which is still recognized as important, even necessary, among departments, to teach, at least undergraduates, something about the history of philosophy. I suppose that conception of philosophy came about historically — or one strand of it, certainly the main strand — through logical positivism and what came of that. So, this attitude towards philosophy itself evolved historically.

HRP: The attitude certainly has survived the demise of logical positivism and so I suppose someone might reply — as I continue in my role as devil's advocate — that the attitude could express a truth even if it's historically conditioned itself. Now, you say it's a claim you would challenge as expressing merely a prejudice: how would you challenge it?

Allison: I don't think I necessarily want to put it terms of truth or falsity. It's a sense of philosophy I don't share. And I would say that if that's all philosophy is, then I'm not deeply interested in it, and would not want to devote my

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career to it, which is not to say that there's not good, valuable, intellectual work being done by bright people on solving specific problems. My claim, I guess, is that the view that this is all there is to philosophy is a prejudice, which, as I was trying to suggest, probably does have its start in — though you're quite right, it has more life than — good old logical positivism. But so much of contemporary analytic philosophy is a direct off-shoot of logical positivism. Indeed, if I may be allowed some Hegelian jargon, a lot of it could be viewed as the abstract negation of logical positivism, which is still haunted by the shadows of what it had supposedly gotten rid of.

But you used the notion of truth. What truth do you have in mind?

HRP: That the majority — or perhaps all — of the central problems in phi-

losophy are such that they needn't be approached historically. There might be practical benefits to approaching them historically, I suppose this view would have it — in exposing oneself to the past, one gets exposed to many different views and arguments — but it's not necessary to approach them historically. So, the negative way of putting this would be that there are no, or very few, central problems in philosophy that must intrinsically be approached historically. Again, I'm acting as devil's advocate in putting the question this way. Now, it might be one answer to such a person to say there's more to philosophy than just these central problems, but there might be a stronger position that held that even these problems, or some of them, can't but be approached historically. So, would you subscribe to something like this stronger claim, and if so, how would you argue for it?

Allison: To begin with, I would certainly subscribe to the weaker claim. But I think there are at least two versions of this idea that there's more to philosophy than these major problems. (Obviously, there are the less-than-major problems. But that's not the issue.) But what is also missing in this approach to philosophy, and therefore from the weaker view as you presented it, is, I think, the sense of the

interrelation of these problems. And this is what leads one inevitably to some sort of synoptic or systematic view, which is what is generally rejected. As soon as you see the task of philosophy as involving essentially some

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kind of synoptic view, which is, of course, traditionally what philosophy has always been concerned with, then I think you're led almost immediately into the history of philosophy. It's one of the interesting things about 20th century Anglo-American philosophy that there just are not many systematic philosophers around. (Although, interestingly enough, at this late date in the 20th century, a number of the main analytical philosophers now seem interested in tackling the "big questions." But when they do it, it's often in a casual essayist style, as if they're almost embarrassed by it.) This attitude towards philosophy, then, or part of it anyway, ignores what I've always taken to be something that's certainly part of philosophy — perhaps even essential to it — namely, this synoptic vision, which involves the interrelation between the major problems. Because I think that if philosophy gets completely compartmentalized, ultimately it falls in danger of becoming a completely sterile exercise. And I think that a number of people have pointed out the analogy between some of the developments of analytical philosophy in the middle of this century and some of the things that were going on in the 14th century, when narrow scholasticism had lost sight of what was really at stake.

Now, the other view, I guess what you presented as the strong view — namely, that one can't understand these problems apart from history — yes, I suppose I would be committed to that view also. But I think that here you obviously have to

distinguish between different senses of understanding. Clearly, there's a sense in which one can abstract from the history of a problem and deal with (I'm trying to think of some example) — well, just as an example, there's knowledge and the Gettier problem, to which people have made interesting and sophisticated responses. But yet what have we ended up with? An analysis of what we might mean by "knowledge," or what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for saying that X knows that Y, or something like that. But is that really all we'd like to know about knowledge? Why should that very problem be a problem? In order to understand why a problem is a problem, it seems to me, you're driven to some kind of historical perspective.

And then there's also the issue of continually reinventing the wheel. One of the things that I found that was fascinating to me when I was doing some work on Kant's critique of Eberhard, who was a Wolffian critic of Kant during his lifetime, was that all of those interesting issues about the analytic/synthetic distinction were brought up and criticisms of Kant's formulation were made that are in



essence equivalent to a large number of contemporary classical, or well-known, criticisms. So I think simply having knowledge of what was going on — what Kant actually said, what the real responses to these criticisms were — itself enlightens the contemporary discussion of the analytic/synthetic distinction. So a lot of contemporary analytic philosophy I think does consist in a kind of reinventing the wheel, in the sense of offering solutions or criticisms that had been presented in the past. So in that sense, again, it's dangerous not to know the history of the discipline.

HRP: This leads back perhaps to a practical conundrum which ties into something you were saying earlier about the changes in the history of philosophy as a discipline. Arguably, this tremendous increase in scholarly activity has led to two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, as you've been arguing, there's a greater awareness of the relevance of the history of philosophy to philosophy generally. On the other hand, there's the tremendous increase in scholarly expectations. What is required, to seriously pursue the history of philosophy, is arguably such that it leaves no time, given that we are finite beings, to gain the knowledge and to engage in the activities that could seriously bring to bear considerations from the history of philosophy on still standing contemporary issues. Who has time both to be a Leibniz scholar and also to contribute to the metaphysics of modality, for example?⁵

Allison: Well, that has nothing to do in particular with the history of philosophy. I think this is just part of the plight of the contemporary academic. Leaving aside the history of philosophy, who can keep up with the latest developments in ethical the-

ory and modalities, or philosophy of language and aesthetics? Obviously, some people do a better job than others. Some people can just sit down and read an article once, and they get it; it's with them forever, and they can recall it 20 years later. I can't do that. But to say that the history of philosophy is relevant to or essential to philosophy doesn't mean that every good philosopher has to be an historical scholar. It means that every good philosopher has to have a good general knowledge of the history of philosophy — certainly, it should be part of graduate education — and I suppose some fairly comprehensive knowledge of, let's say, one or two of the greats that are directly relevant to his or her work. Some actually do have fairly comprehensive knowledge. In this department,⁶ just think of someone like Hintikka, who has an impressive grasp of Aristotle, Kant, Descartes. Or Sellars, who really is an impressive scholar. Or Rod Chisholm, who, I think (in spite of the fact that his philosophical work certainly was very much on the analytic side of things), has a very substantial philosophical grasp of the history of philosophy. So it's that sort of thing, I think, that's really desirable, because I think this is what enriches, what makes philosophy better.

HRP: Perhaps this would be a good time to turn more specifically to Kant and Kant's relevance to philosophy generally. Perhaps here's one way of putting a question along these lines: what in your view is true in Kant — and not just true, but true and relevant to contemporary philosophical concerns? I'll accept, of course, something recognizably neo-Kantian.

Allison: Well, the expression "true" or "true in a philosopher" I find a difficult one to deal with. Perhaps a weaker expression like "significant" or "still alive" or "vital and important" or something like that is more appropriate. Because once one gets outside of logic and some very specific claims, I find it hard to say that a philosophical position is true. It's powerful; it's compelling. Something like that.

About Kant, the first thing I'll say is that I think that, more than any other figure, he defined the agenda for subsequent philosophy. That is, the very problems in so many different domains — how are synthetic judgments possible? — or, just raising the kind of question: "How is X possible?" has become one of the basic ways in which we think of philosophical problems. Of course, many philosophers are strongly anti-Kantian; but that's part of what it means to set the agenda. And for a philosopher to do that in so many different areas of philosophy is certainly a mark of greatness; perhaps it's *the* mark of greatness.

HRP: So, there's Kant's legacy — certainly not to be pooh-poohed, but now say someone asks (I'll use a weaker word than "true"): what's viable in what Kant has to say on these matters? If you prefer, I'll ask something more specific. Let's take transcendental idealism. You present a very compelling reading of Kant on transcendental idealism, but is it a position that's still viable in either Kant's specific form or in some recognizably neo-Kantian form?

Allison: Put it this way: I think idealism in some form is always going to be a viable philosophical move, as long as there's philosophy. I think ultimately what you have in philosophy are a fairly small number of generic philosophical moves, and idealism is certainly one of them. I also think that Kant's transcendental idealism is the most sophisticated, at least up to his time, and compelling form of idealism. So in that

sense I think it still is a competitor in the philosophical arena. I don't make a stronger claim for it, and I never claimed to have proven that Kant's transcendental idealism is true. All I try to argue is that many of the objections to it are based on complete misunderstandings; it's a much more interesting and powerful philosophical position than it is generally taken to be. My work has been mostly in that direction. It's obviously one that I myself find attractive, so I guess I have to call myself an idealist of some sort.

HRP: Kant presumably thought that transcendental idealism was not merely attractive, not merely viable, but indeed true. And not merely a viable move that would be available perennially to philosophers, but one that he had established as being the proper move to make for a wide variety of questions. Perhaps, then, your take on the status of philosophical questions, as to their answerability, whether the questions are intrinsically perennial or not, differs from Kant's.

Allison: I think that's fair enough. Kant wrote the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, which is to be counted as a science, but I think that he is more typical than unique here. A

philosopher has to place some kind of faith in the finalness of his or her position, as a kind of driving force just to create philosophically. But of course in that sense, every philosopher is refuted by future developments, and this is going to happen to the philoso-

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phers who are with us now. So I guess an historian, looking back a couple of hundred years, can certainly have a deep and appreciative attitude towards Kant's significance and continued significance without having to be committed to the idea that his is the last word on any topic.

HRP: Perhaps *Glaube* is a psychological necessity, though I take it that Kant thought he had more than that. And if he didn't, presumably there's a criticism to be made of his arguments for his claims. I take it that the philosophical claims he makes are themselves to have synthetic a priori status.

Allison: Well, that's a different issue, because certainly many — not all — of the criticisms of Kant in the theoretical realm have come about as a result of appealing to scientific, mathematical, and logical developments after his time. So the question is to what extent is the philosopher to be blamed for not being omniscient. So one can say that, well, the actual argument of the transcendental aesthetic has to be revised somewhat in light of later developments, though I'm not sure that really counts as a criticism.

HRP: I didn't mean to be criticizing Kant, but I suppose my original question was: what, at the end of the day, ought one to think now about these Kantian moves, without blaming Kant for what has come afterwards? And if there are legitimate criticisms to be made — for example, in light of developments in science, mathematics, and logic — in what way might a Kantian accommodate these criticisms while remaining recognizably Kantian, so as to preserve the viability of a Kantian position?

Allison: Yes, OK. That's obviously a very difficult question. In a sense to be a Kantian is to be a neo-Kantian, unless you're a slavish follower of the letter of the text. So you have to ask yourself, "What is essential in Kant's analysis?" and that's of course itself a controversial question. In answer to it, I think 20th century philosophers like Cassirer have done very interesting things in trying to present a Kantian picture that is wholly compatible with relativity theory, etc. And I think that sort of thing is possible and is part of the job. That's not the job that I've taken upon myself, because I don't have enough of the scientific training. I wish I had; I think that's a very important kind of thing to do.

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But leaving the details of the science behind, what I take to be really fundamental in Kant's theoretical philosophy — true, if you will — is something like the sensibility/understanding distinction, and therefore that knowledge requires something to be given to the mind and some activity on the part of the mind to deal with it. And I think that analysis of the givenness condi-

tion is going to lead to something like Kantian forms of sensibility that are ultimately subjective in nature, and therefore to something like the doctrine of transcendental idealism. But from general considerations such as these one can move in at least two directions, and this marks the dividing line between two contemporary approaches to Kant. On the one hand, there are those (like myself), who tend to try to develop Kant's thought on the basis of a very general reflection on the a priori conditions of knowledge, which aren't closely tied to any particular body of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, there are those, and here I have Michael Friedman primarily in mind,⁷ who view Kant's thought in the context of his eighteenth century scientific, mathematical, and logical agenda. And I certainly don't disagree with that approach. That's just part of being a good historian. But if you limit yourself to that approach, and then ask questions like "What is 'true' in Kant?"

then it becomes more difficult to save Kant. Then the greatness of Kant becomes or consists in the fact that he was the philosopher who best expressed, or definitively captured, the basic presuppositions of Newtonian mechanics and, given the logical tools he had to work with, provided the best possible explanation of the nature and possibility of geometrical knowledge. So although I appreciate all that, I also want to ask whether some philosophical sense may be made of Kant's views on a more general, transcendental level that is not so closely tied to the science of his time.

HRP: Perhaps I might mention another feature of Kant's philosophizing that recurs in your writing and that I think is certainly of great moment in contemporary philosophy — that is, if you will, the non-naturalizability of the normative. This is a theme that, for example, came up recently in a talk you gave at Harvard on Patricia Kitcher's book⁸ in which there's an attempt to naturalize Kant on the mind. Of course, Kant being the synoptic thinker he is, this is not unrelated to his idealism, but perhaps you'd like to say something on these issues. I ask you this because here's an issue where I find in your writings more explicit hints (if that's not an oxymoron) about Kant's direct relevance to sexy contemporary debates. So maybe I could draw you out a bit about how you'd apply Kant's insights here.

Allison: I think first of all, backtracking a bit, that this is a good example in that it illustrates my general view of the relevance of the history of philosophy. In a sense the debate between naturalism and anti-naturalism is as old as the hills, and I think one of the most interesting and philosophically fruitful segments of it is precisely the debate between Kant and Hume. So I think not just Kant, but the Kant-Hume debate is itself a kind of model or paradigm of, as well as an anticipation of, 20th century thought, because this clearly is an issue that's at the heart of contemporary philosophy. In fact, it's been at the heart of philosophy since Descartes and the origin of modern science. Throughout this period the issue has been, and remains, one of reconciling our conception of ourselves as autonomous agents who make normative claims with the scientific picture of the world. This is a deep metaphysical issue; but it has a history and wasn't always a problem, at least not in this particular form. Of course, its problematic status depends on something like the mechanistic, or quasi-mechanistic, view of nature. And to my mind Kant's greatness, or a large part of what interests me in his thought, lies in his attempt to preserve both the truth of the scientific picture of the world and the distinctive character of human agency and the rational norms that are inseparable from it, while at the same time rejecting the (still fashionable) Humean project of absorbing both agency and normativity into the naturalistic picture. By contrast, the naturalistic response, which Patricia Kitcher certainly represents in a very forceful way, is to enrich your concept of nature or naturalism so as to encompass the normative. I think that a defining characteristic of the Kantian position, or at least of my own philosophical position which I take from Kant, is that a hard and fast line is to be drawn between the natural and the normative. And of course this is itself related to a whole bunch of other problems — putting it in the simplest form, it's the "is-ought" issue.

HRP: We've spoken both about the past and the past's bearing on the pre-

sent. Maybe we can say a little about the future. First, let me ask what directions you would like to see Kant scholarship take in the future, or, if you prefer, what areas in Kant scholarship do you see as ripe for research?

Allison: Those are two very different questions. Because I think Kant scholarship — or Kant interpretation, to use a broader category than scholarship — has very often, and I think rightly, responded to developments in the field of philosophy at large. In a sense every generation rereads its Kant in relation to the problems of the day, and we can't know what these problems will be since we can't anticipate the future.

Nevertheless, within Kant scholarship I think there are a number of things that are ripe for being done. We can predict that there's going to be a lot more work on the *Opus Postumum*, and its relation to the classical critical philosophy. Of course, there are three options there. One, the most unattractive option, but the traditional view, is that this is a work of Kant's senility and therefore is to be rejected. And certainly the work that's been done on the *Opus Postumum* recently has been very much against that. Most of the *Opus Postumum* — which is simply a collection of notes and quite partial manuscripts and other notes associated with it, produced over a period of about five or six years — is now thought to be certainly not the product of senility, but of genuine philosophical importance. But among those who maintain its significance, there are still two quite different approaches. One is to see it as some kind of radically new departure that the elderly Kant made at least partly in virtue of his acquaintance with recent developments in German philosophy. In his last years he started to read Schelling and Fichte and so became a kind of incipient post-Kantian! Or at least that is what some people think. The other, I suppose, is to see the *Opus Postumum* in essential continuity with the classical critical position. And you find contemporary people working in both of those directions. But I think there will probably be a lot of doctoral dissertations on the *Opus Postumum* in the next ten, fifteen years, because it is still largely unmapped territory.

Another interesting area is in just the opposite direction; it's going backwards to the pre-critical Kant and seeing how the ideas of the *Critique of Pure Reason* relate to the very significant body of work that Kant wrote before the Critique. There's still an awful lot to be done in that area. And of course both the *Opus Postumum* and going back to the pre-critical texts, lectures and notes require an immense amount of scholarship. Since so much has been written about the transcendental deduction, and about the second analogy, and about the categorical imperative, well, I think that at least for a while these are going to be the kinds of areas in which some of the more interesting work is done.

The third is my own present main area of interest, the *Critique of Judgment*, which is beginning to get a lot of well-deserved attention. So those are my big three main areas over, let's say, the next decade — I can't speak beyond that — that Kant research is probably going to concentrate on.

HRP: Before I turn in closing to ask you about your current project, maybe I can ask a question which will tie in with some of what we were discussing earlier. As was said, there have been many changes in the history of philosophy as a discipline over the course of your career, and in Kant scholarship in par-

ticular. Now, you've mentioned what you think we will see in the future, but perhaps you could tell us what you would like to see in the future? In particular, have all of the changes you have witnessed been for the good, or have there been some changes that haven't been for the good — is there anything you miss from bygone days which you'd like to see recovered in Kant scholarship or in the history of philosophy in general, whether they be particular works, say, or particular approaches, or particular attitudes towards scholarship or interpretation?

Allison: Well, I think most of the changes that I've liked could easily also be described as a return to earlier ways of doing the history of philosophy. Within the Kant world, just think of the classical people like Paton and Kemp Smith. They're very different, but in both of them there's a combination of philosophical questioning and historical fidelity and concern. So I don't think that there's anything all that novel in more recent developments in the history of philosophy, except by contrast to its immediate, very anti-historical predecessors.

HRP: So all is well in Kant scholarship and interpretation as it is now? There are no remaining or new areas of sickness? I'm not asking you to say anything nasty about anyone in particular.

Allison: Well, there are an awful lot of wrong-headed interpreters.

HRP: Fair enough. Well then maybe we should turn to what you're working on now. Maybe you could tell us some-

thing about your current projects. You mentioned work on the third Critique. Perhaps you could tell us something about that, and if there are other projects, perhaps you could also tell us something about them.

Allison: I have something that's a completed project. That's a collection of essays that will be coming out at the end of this year, which contains my work on the theoretical and the practical philosophy, most of it since the last two books.⁹ The paper dealing with Patricia Kitcher is in that. In this collection I partly respond to my critics, and partly develop some of the ideas that I had expressed in my books in more detail and in different directions. So that's what I've done recently. But what I'm actively engaged with now is the project on the third Critique. I guess I view it as the third great project of my career, and I hope it will result in a book. I felt from the beginning that there are three great ideas in Kant or, if you will, doctrines. One is the ideality of space and time, which I wrote about in *Kant's Transcendental*

"I think the third great idea in Kant is a much messier one, this idea of the purposiveness of nature, which is manifested in the beautiful and in the teleological realm. So my current project is to try to work out a compelling interpretation of that idea, which is the central theme of the third Critique."

Idealism. The other is — we've already talked about it — this conception of freedom, and reconciling freedom and agency with the causal determinism of nature. And I wrote my *Kant's Theory of Freedom* on that, so I'm really running out of big projects. I just have one left, because I think the third great idea in Kant is a much messier one, this idea of the purposiveness of nature, which is manifested in the beautiful and in the teleological realm. So my current project is to try to work out a compelling interpretation of that idea, which is the central theme of the third Critique.

HRP: Has your deepening understanding of the third Critique led you to alter any of your views on the first two?



Allison: I have to think about that. Nothing comes to mind off-hand. But what I have found is that going back to the first two has certainly deepened my understanding of the third Critique. Specifically, I had done a lot of work on the transcendental dialectic after I had written my idealism book. I find that has become very fruitful for interpreting dimensions of the third Critique. There are parts that I had of course

worked on for years, and that had been largely mysterious to me to say the least, that I'm beginning to get some insight into through my understanding of the first Critique. As long as that keeps on growing, I think I'm still alive philosophically.

HRP: Are there any plans to work on other authors besides Kant? Earlier in your career you published on Lessing and Spinoza, for example.

Allison: Yes, although time has its limits. I would like to do more work on Hume, and I certainly hope to return to Spinoza. I'm also becoming very much interested in some of Kant's immediate followers — not so much Hegel, although I do have an interest in Hegel, but I'm thinking of the immediate period of the 1790's, which in Germany was a fascinating period, and so the kinds of criticisms of Kant that emerged during that period of time is a crucial period for research. Fred Beiser recently wrote a very interesting book dealing with that period.¹⁰ And I'd like to be able to do some more with it. I have a very good graduate student now who is writing a dissertation on Solomon Maimon and his critique of Kant, which in many ways anticipates a lot of the contemporary debate about the nature and status of transcendental arguments. It's another example of the usefulness of the past. So those are my future interests. ☐

Endnotes

- ¹Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
- ²Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- ³*Journal of Philosophy*.
- ⁴Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) and *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
- ⁵Margaret Wilson, "History of Philosophy in Philosophy Today; and the Case of the Sensible Qualities," in the *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1, January 1992, pp. 204-206.
- ⁶The Boston University Department of Philosophy.
- ⁷Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- ⁸Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- ⁹Henry Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays in Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁰Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).