I. Philosophy

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1. The Beginning in the Cave

At one time or another, you have probably sat in front of the television, watching the screen. You saw landscapes, animals, people and consumer goods. You heard news, reports and advertising slogans. Most of the time, you assumed that what you saw and heard was real. But is what you saw and heard real? If it is real, is it the whole reality? And what is real in any case?

I would like to begin with an image. It is by Plato, the Greek philosopher (427-347 BC). It casts doubt on whether what we see and hear is in fact real. According to this image, we humans live in a cave. Ever since our childhood, we have been bound by chains round our necks and legs. We are confined to the same spot and able to look only in one direction. Between us and a fire burning behind us runs a path. Beside the path there is a barrier. It recalls the screens that entertainers sometimes erect in front of their audiences, across which they show off their tricks. The entertainers walk along the barrier, raising all kinds of implements, statues and other images made of stone or wood above it. Some talk; others are silent. We, the captives, however, can only see shadows – of ourselves, of each other, of the objects being carried past behind our backs – projected by the fire onto the opposite wall of the cave. We take these shadows to be real, and we believe the voices of those passing us to be the voices of the shadows. Thus, we fail to see not only anything lit up by the sun, but the light itself, be it that of the fire or of the sun.[1]

The image is obviously about us. Plato alienates our human situation in order to surprise us. Most of the time, we live in a

[1] Cf. R., Book 7, 514a-521a. The summary refers to 514a-515a.

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false familiarity, not only with the world, but also with ourselves. We may perhaps be surprised by some unusual human situations. But we are not surprised by our common human situation, which does not appear to us as something striking. To that extent, we are not our own closest neighbours, but our most distant ones. The alienation due to this strange image of our human situation disrupts the familiarity acquired by long habit, and we find ourselves where we would never have thought we could be – in a cave. And now we are struck. In order to become conscious of the common nature of our human situation, we need an uncommon one. In this context, I want to stress three particular points.

a) We are the captives of images presented to us by entertainers. The entertainers could have been the poets or the sophists. Today we might say the opinion makers. Their opinions are our reality.

b) Philosophy is the liberation from this captivity of the mind or this captivity in opinions. As the cave is also an image of the womb, we may further say that philosophy is the liberation from the womb of our prejudices. Thus, philosophy is a kind of second birth.

c) However, this liberation provokes a resistance within us. We have an urge to stay put in the cave of our prejudices. We are afraid of the pain of the second birth. Philosophy is not harmless: Sometimes it hurts. It drags us out of the security of our prejudices and takes us to where we no longer feel at home. It is almost as if we were transported to another planet. But then the earth – the cave – appears strange from the angle of the liberated. Liberation grants us a stranger's view. It allows us to see familiar things as if we were seeing them for the first time. In so doing, it removes us from the accustomed human order. Thus, philosophy is a kind of death, that is, the death of a human be-

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ing caught up in prejudice. Philosophising also means learning to die,[2] to use a definition from Plato as a metaphor.

The light in which things are visible outside the cave is that of the sun. Just what the sun is meant to represent in Plato's image we shall not be able to tell by the end of our reflections. But what this introduction to philosophy may perhaps achieve is to let a ray of light penetrate into the darkness of our cave and for a brief moment set aglow in sunshine the twilight in which we normally live. That is something you may actually expect from philosophy. For the journey from darkness to light has been regarded as the decisive symbol of philosophy in almost all ages and cultures in which philosophy has existed. But what does this symbol mean to us?

2. Word and Concept

Let us start with the word "philosophy". It appears rather late in the history of humankind, that is, about two thousand five hundred years ago, in Greece. It is made up of two Greek words, *"philos*", which means friend, familiar or lover, and *"sophia*", which means wisdom. A philosopher, then, is one who is friendly to or familiar with wisdom. Plato interpreted "philos" as meaning that the philosopher is wisdom's friend in so far as he does not yet have wisdom, but strives after it. He makes Socrates say to the young Phaedrus in the dialogue of the same title: "To call somebody wise, Phaedrus, seems to me to be something great and only appropriate to God, but to be a friend of wisdom or something of the kind might be more fitting

[2] Phd., 64a-68b. For a detailed interpretation of the cave image, see Ferber, 2nd ed., 1989, 115-148.

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and more correct in tone."[3] Accordingly, philosophy is not a state, but a movement or activity. It strains to move away from something towards something else. It would like to move "from here to there".[4] It is a relationship like love. It is love of wisdom in a new sense of the word. Wisdom here means neither technical skill nor practical cleverness, but knowledge. For, unlike religion, philosophy does not want only to believe or to have faith, but to know. Philosophy is the human urge for knowledge driven to its extreme.

However, even Socrates, who did not presume to know much, recognised a difference between knowledge and true belief or opinion, which he regarded as the foundation of his search for knowledge: "I think I do not merely guess that true belief and knowledge are different things, but if I were to assert that I know anything at all – which I would not wish to do with regard to many things – I would count this one thing among those that I know."[5] The difference between knowledge and a true opinion is that knowledge can supply reasons. Knowledge is "true opinion with reason";[6] whereas true opinion without reason "falls outside knowledge".[7] For Socrates, philosophy is the *activity* of giving and taking reasons.[8]

In the course of the centuries, the word "philosophy" has undergone great changes of meaning. I will highlight only two of these.

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[3] Phdr. 278d. Transl. Ferber. An important discussion regarding the word "philosophy" is found in Walter Burkert, 1960, 159-177.

[4] Phdr. 250e. R. 529a. 619c. Tht.176a-b, basic formula frequently used by Plato.

[5] Men. 98b. Transl. Ferber.

[6] Tht. 201d. Transl. Ferber.

[7] Tht. 201d. Transl. Levett.

[8] Plato uses the word for the first time in this new sense in Ap. 28e.

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Philosophy in the usual sense, as the word is mostly used today, means a way of thinking or conception. We speak, for example, of the philosophy of the management of an enterprise or the philosophy behind the politics of a country, such as the philosophy of reciprocal deterrence or disarmament. In what follows, I will not use the word in this sense.

In contrast, philosophy in its real sense means the *doctrine* of first reasons and causes. The definition dates back to Aristotle (384-322 BC).[9] Philosophy in this sense is the exploration of principles. For principles are in fact reasons. Philosophy is the doctrine of the fundamental reasons for that which is.

This has brought us to the subject matter of philosophy. It is the world and everything in it. This is how a medieval thinker put it: The "religion" peculiar to the philosopher is the study of that which is. Potentially, therefore, any object may become a topic of philosophy: a mouse no less than a man or nature, a picture such as van Gogh's *Sunflowers* the same as a computer. But the philosopher is also interested in concepts such as space and time. Anything knowable is the subject matter of philosophy.

An object becomes the subject matter of philosophy when it is considered from the angle of specific questions. A fundamental question is simply: "What is X?"[10] X can stand for any object. This question marks the transition from the active attitude to the contemplative or theoretical. Initially, we cleave to the active attitude to things and humans. We use things, whether they are made by nature or humans. We use a computer, but we do not ask: "What is a computer?" or "What is artificial intelligence?" We may want to have more space, but we do not ask:

[9] Cf. Metaph. Book 1, Chapter 2, 982b9-10. Revised Oxford Transl.

[10] Cf. the title of Thomas Nagel's essay, 1974, 435-459.

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"What is space?" We ask: "Is there any time left?", but not "What is time?" We may set traps for the mice in the cellar, but we do not ask: "What is it like to be a mouse?" Humans often use other humans as means to their ends, but they do not ask: "What is a human being?" – for example, in contrast to a mouse or to another animal or to a computer. Normally, we are so confounded by the world that we are unable to ask such questions. It is as if, for all our bustle, we are in a stupor or asleep and dreaming.

The philosopher, in contrast, is a man who disturbs our sleep. We begin to wake up when we begin to wonder about things or to be astonished by them. Thus, since Plato, the capacity for wonder has been regarded as the beginning of philosophy: "For this is an experience that is characteristic of a philosopher: this wondering. This is where philosophy begins and nowhere else. And the man who made Iris the child of Thaumas was perhaps no bad genealogist."[11] Iris is the rainbow, which still fills us with wonder today. The sea god Thaumas, Iris's father, is the "wonder". And Aristotle confirms: "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophise."[12]

But what makes the philosopher wonder is not the extraordinary but the ordinary. That is something that generally no longer astonishes people. Just as we no longer notice a sound we always hear, for example, the surf of the sea, so we take no notice of the ordinary because we have become accustomed to it. In the same vein, the fish will be the last to discover the water. But for the philosopher, the ordinary is the extraordinary, which he tries to explain. He needs no other miracle. Thus, he

[11] Tht. 155d. Transl. Levett.

[12] Metaph., Book 1, Chapter 2, 982b12-13. Transl. Ross.

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is, as it were, a "specialist" in what is no longer noticed because of its unspectacular ubiquity. He has to say what nobody else says. He has to speak where everybody else is silent. As the unnoticed is usually something quite general, the philosopher's expertise, in contrast to that of the specialist, concerns the general. Consequently, many of the most important philosophical questions are formed around general notions such as "what", "where from" and "what for". Basically, these are children's questions. Some of them have aroused the interest of philosophers to a special degree. Most frequent among them are "what" questions. They can be formulated in the following sentences of three or four words.

a) What is there? This is the fundamental question of the doctrine of what is, the doctrine of being or ontology. For the present, instead of "the doctrine of being", we could say "the doctrine of reality". Aristotle and many other philosophers right up to our own century have seen the question of what is as the fundamental question of philosophy. But as our understanding of the term "being" is inadequate, this question must first clarify the meaning of the word "being".

b) What do we know? This is the fundamental question of epistemology, given special emphasis by the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes asks himself whether it is not the case that everything we believe we know is deception and therefore our life comparable to a dream. The purpose of this question is by no means to demonstrate that our life is really a dream. Rather, by way of radical doubt – that is, doubt reaching down to the roots – Descartes wants to arrive at what is certain beyond any doubt about our ability to recognise the world as it is. The question "What do we know?" then becomes "How can we know anything?"

c) What do we say? This is the fundamental question of the philosophy of language. It expands Descartes's doubts about

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knowledge to language. Is language only a means to express our thoughts? Or can it also steer our thoughts in a wrong direction? If so, the philosopher's first task would be "to break the tyranny of the word over the human mind",[13] as Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) put it. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is one of the most important thinkers who came to regard knowing our language as the central topic of philosophy. For him, the question "What do we say?" turns into "What is the meaning of what we say, i.e. what is the meaning of a word?"

d) What is truth? This is the fundamental question of the doctrine of truth. As our understanding of the term "truth" is also inadequate, the doctrine of truth must begin by clarifying the meaning of the term "truth". Then it has to establish criteria for what we may consider to be true. As there are likely to be several criteria, the doctrine of truth must finally search for the main one.

e) What is good? This is the fundamental question of ethics. Ethics is the doctrine of what is good. As our understanding of the meaning of the term "good" is, again, inadequate, ethics in the first instance must look into the meaning of the term "good". But the good is something that should be done. Therefore, the question "What is good?" leads to the question "What should we do?"

To put it very simply, the philosophical questions asked in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages were primarily about being, those asked in modern times mainly about knowledge and those asked in the twentieth century particularly about language. Philosophical problems, too, have their youth, their prime and sometimes their old age, when they fade into the background.

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[13] Begriffsschrift, Preface, XII. Transl. Bauer-Mengelberg with an alteration by Ferber.

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Ethical questions, like those about truth, have been asked in every epoch of the history of Western philosophy. Other questions are more peculiar to specific periods.

Naturally, these five "what" questions are not all the questions there are. At the start of an introduction, we cannot be conscious of all philosophical problems, let alone of their possible ranking order. Our awareness of problems must also ripen. Progress in philosophy, therefore, is also essentially progress in our awareness of the problems that surround us but are not sensed by us. Therefore, philosophical progress does not consist in the discovery of new empirical facts, nor in the creation of new technologies, be it for making bread or bombs.

Philosophy is not useful in this immediate sense, but neither does it do any harm. When I once asked "What is a philosophical question?", a student replied, with some justification: "A philosophical question is a question where the answer doesn't matter." But man does not live by bread alone, nor is he destroyed by bombs alone. False thinking, too, can contribute to destroying him and his surroundings. Philosophical progress is progress in thinking and consists in the elaboration and refinement of queries. In this process, we may realise that some questions are wrongly put and we may have to reject them as being nonsensical. But the reason we are able to ask such questions is not only that we live in the darkness of the cave, but that we can also become conscious of the darkness. Occasionally, we see light falling into the darkness. Then we, too, experience something of the liberation mentioned in the image of the cave. And then we may count ourselves among the race that tries to rise out of the darkness towards the light. That is the human race.

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3. Philosophy and Common Sense

An introduction to the key concepts of philosophy may give rise to a mistaken idea that "we are here – philosophy is there", as if we had been led into philosophy from outside. In reality, we are neither outside nor indeed above philosophy. We are *in* philosophy, even if we believe that we are outside it. We are introduced to it from within. For we already have a philosophy without which we would hardly be able to live, even though we are usually unaware of it. After all, we all have a sound intelligence.

A sound intelligence is also called common sense. According to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), sound intelligence is nothing more than the average intelligence of a sound human being. Moreover, sometimes the intelligence or common sense of one is the stupidity or nonsense of another. As in the proverb, the "owl" of one is the "nightingale" of another.

Nevertheless, our common sense comprises a basic stock of convictions that nobody would be able to abandon without being declared mad. These include personal convictions such as "I am". But in addition to me, there are other people: my father, my mother, my siblings, my wife, my husband, my children, my colleagues and many more I do not even know. I live in a world. This world existed before my birth and will continue to exist after my death. In addition to the human beings I know and those I do not know, there are other creatures, animals and plants. Despite, and after, all the transformations, somehow I am still the same. Like all other living creatures, one day I will no longer be here.

Common sense is also a philosophical sense. But within this common sense, we all have our own world. It is illuminated by the light beam of personal opinions and interests. Whatever is in this beam is seen clearly. Whatever is outside it is hardly there.

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Thus, as a rule, for us, most other people hardly exist. Our world, usually, is a small world. It is in fact only a part of the world, which is all our thought can comprehend, even if we sometimes take it for the whole.

There are philosophers who assert: "Whatever we are justified in assuming, when we are not doing philosophy, we are also justified in assuming when we *are* doing philosophy."[14] It is true that we have a basic stock of convictions from which we can hardly deviate, even in philosophy, without leaving the human community. A poet or composer also expresses feelings that anybody can have, for example, joy or sadness or even a joyful sadness. Likewise, the philosopher can express ideas that anybody may have, for instance, the idea of human ignorance or transience. On the other hand, the thesis of the incorrigibility of a sound human intelligence, or, as it is normally called, common sense, would probably detain us in the cave of our prejudices.

If common sense implies "community", it does not imply "immunity". It may even appropriate revolutionary insights. For example, once upon a time, common sense believed that the earth was flat, that the sun revolved round the earth, that about one fifth of all births were unavoidably accompanied by puerperal fever, etc. It still believes that the world can be known as it is. But this idea has proved doubtful.

Thus, we all already have a philosophy. We can philosophise only because the seed of philosophy is in us. But the philosophy of our common sense is not only undeveloped, but sometimes even wrong. However, what seems to me decisive in this context is that we cannot correct this philosophy from an extraphilosophical standpoint, but only from a philosophical

[14] Chisholm, Person and Object, Chapter I, 16.

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one. We cannot step out of philosophy to look at it from outside and to adopt a standpoint that would supply us with a yardstick for judging what is right and what is wrong about our everyday philosophy. Rather, common sense must create this yardstick – and essentially take the elements for self-correction – out of itself. This has been aptly put as follows: "We are like sailors who must rebuild their boat on the open sea, without ever being able to put into dock and reconstruct it from the best components."[15] Just as there is no standpoint outside language from which we can speak about language, there is no standpoint outside philosophy from which we can philosophise about philosophy. The practical consequence of the impossibility of a philosophical standpoint outside philosophy is the unavoidability of philosophising. Aristotle expresses this by the following dilemma: We have either to philosophise or not to philosophise. To prove that we do not have to philosophise, we have to philosophise. Therefore, we have to philosophise also when we deny that we have to philosophise.[16]

4. Philosophy, Science and Art

But has philosophy not been replaced long since by the sciences? At its origin among the Pre-Socratics, philosophy could not be separated from science, but today, one would think, the sciences have caught up with and indeed overtaken it. Now it only needs to deal with the residual problems of the sciences, until the residual problems, too, are completely taken over by

[15] Neurath, 1932-1933, 206. Transl. Schick. The image has become famous as the motto of Quine, Word and Object, VII.

[16] The dilemma is handed down to us in several versions. Cf. Die Zeugnisse zu Aristoteles, Protreptikos, 1969, A3-A6, 21-22. Transl. Hutchinson and Johnson.

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the sciences. This view can rightly point out that individual disciplines, such as physics, psychology, mathematics and others, have broken loose from philosophy, and that the process of differentiation into special disciplines continues. Philosophy, the daughter of Thaumas the "wonderful", has become the mother of many sciences. Thus, formal logic, for example, originally was part of philosophy. Today, in its mathematical shape, it has increasingly established itself as a discipline in its own right, which again breaks down into sub-disciplines.

However, the view that the sciences can replace philosophy may be countered as follows: New sciences also create new philosophical problems. Formal logic in its mathematical shape led to the philosophy of mathematical logic, informatics to problems of artificial intelligence and biotechnology to ethical problems, for example, whether we may morally do what we are technically able to do. Though the same questions are asked time and again, the range of philosophical problems does not remain the same. Scientific progress also creates new philosophical problems. To the extent that the new sciences address these self-created new problems, we may talk about the 'philosophication' of the sciences. Thus, philosophy has not moved out of many sciences, but has rather moved into them.

On the other hand, many of the individual sciences are unable to access many problems of philosophy. Thus, none of the individual sciences asks what it actually means *that something is*. Rather, they assume that something is, without explaining the meaning of this "is". Nor do they normally ask general questions such as "What is knowledge?", "What is language?", "What is truth?", "What is good?" The sciences claim to be roads to the truth, but they do not ask "What is truth?" On the other hand, where the sciences do ask such questions and try to answer them methodically, they begin to be philosophical. The limited range of the sciences, then, is another reason we cannot

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say that philosophy has been replaced by the individual sciences. But without doubt, parts of philosophy have been taken over by the individual sciences. This process of the scientification of originally philosophical disciplines will continue.

But is philosophy a science in any case? Several philosophers have believed that philosophy is related not so much to science as to poetry. Accordingly, they expressed themselves in a metaphorical rather than a conceptual language. In this context, we may mention Plato with some of his dialogues, say the *Phaedrus*; St Augustine (354-430) with his *Confessions* (397); Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) and others. There is a sense in which they produced philosophy poetically. Today we can observe again that some philosophers are trying to speak like poets.

Conversely, we also find an increasing 'philosophication' of the arts today. This is how the French poet Saint-John Perse (1887-1975) put it in his Nobel Prize address of 1960: "Since even the philosophers are deserting the threshold of metaphysics, it is the poet's task to retrieve metaphysics; thus poetry, not philosophy, reveals itself as the true 'daughter of wonder', according to the words of that ancient philosopher to whom it was most suspect."[17] The ancient philosopher in question is Plato, who ushered the poets out of his ideal state. I would like to name two such philosophical works of art: first, Samuel Beckett's (1906-1990) *Waiting for Godot*. Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting for a Mr Godot, who is expected to come and does not come. Godot is an allusion to God or at least an important unknown person. *Waiting for Godot* can be regarded as a symbol of a life spent waiting for an event that does not take place. Another example is the film *Stranger Than Paradise*

[17] Saint-John Perse, 1972, 444. Transl. Auden.

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by Jim Jarmusch (born 1953). Two men are travelling aimlessly from New York through America, ending up in Florida, which may symbolise paradise. One of them falls in love with his cousin, whom he has met at the home of his Hungarian aunt and taken to Florida. When the cousin tries to leave for Budapest without warning, he decides on the spur of the moment to follow her. But she misses the plane and stays in Florida, while he catches it and flies to Budapest. It is not easy to put into words the philosophy shown, but not articulated, by the film. But it shows the meaninglessness, randomness and unpredictability of real life, which is even less familiar to us than the Paradise we dream of.

Nevertheless, the majority of philosophers have stressed the scientific character of philosophy. One of these is, again, Plato with his dialectic, even though it is never fully developed in his dialogues. He understood dialectic as a science, which, by means of an elaborate conversation, tries to find out what everything is. Other such philosophers are Aristotle with his *Metaphysics*, that is, the "theoretical science of first causes and principles";[18] Descartes with his *Principles of Philosophy*, which tries to anchor the unshakeable principle of philosophy in consciousness; and not least Kant (1724-1804) with his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as Science* (1783). In the twentieth century, it was above all Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) with his programmatic "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" (1911) and Rudolf Carnap (1891-1970) with *The Logical Structure of the World* (1928) who tried to develop a scientific philosophy and in so doing laid the foundations of philosophical trends that are still effective today. Scientific, for them, means logically compelling for anybody who

[18] Cf. Metaph., Book 1, Chapter 2, 982b9-10. Revised Oxford Transl.

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is able to follow the train of thought. All those who set out with the same basic assumptions are bound to arrive, by step-by-step deductions, at the same conclusions, so that there is no room left for personal opinions. It is no coincidence that Kant wrote his main work, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), under the motto "About ourselves we keep silent" and dispensed with an autobiography. For it is not the person, but only the work, that counts. It must be said, however, that this dream of a scientific philosophy, to which all human beings are committed, has never been fully realised.

Not only are the basic assumptions of almost all philosophers open to some kind of challenge and the basic terms in use generally ill-defined, but the conceptual analyses and derivations also usually leave much to be desired. The elimination of all personal opinion seems to be as impossible in philosophy as the elimination of all errors. It is true that even in the most exact natural sciences, in mathematical physics, for example, there is no absolute knowledge valid for all time to come. All the laws of physics that are valid today could prove to be false by tomorrow (cf. p. 68). But while in physics there is a degree of agreement about what laws are valid, the disagreement about the principles of philosophy that has existed ever since the Pre-Socratics will continue, albeit at a different conceptual level. The idea of converting this fundamental dissent in philosophy into a consensus by scientification will probably remain an illusion. For philosophy, that is, the human striving for knowledge, seems to contain a demand that successfully resists scientification.

On the other hand, drawing a clear-cut dividing line between science and art, as between subjective and objective, is hardly feasible. Rather, philosophy has proved to be so malleable that any attempt to define it too narrowly would be inappropriate. Just as philosophy itself has no sharp boundaries

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separating it from "non-philosophy", there are also no sharp boundaries between philosophy, science and art. Even at the level of form, a certain diversity is a characteristic of philosophy. A purely scientific or a purely subjective philosophy has probably never existed, but different degrees of subjectivity and objectivity there are. The classical philosophers of the past and the present have spent their lives looking for objective truth, but were only able to express it in their subjective ways. Since they did this well and each in his own unmistakable style, most of the significant works of philosophy, from Plato's *The Republic* (about 365 BC) to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1954), are also works of literature: Their form and content cannot be separated, but the literary form is part of the content.

Thus, the narrative frame of a dialogue by Plato can tell us various things about the content of the dialogue. A great philosophical work, as it were, leaves nothing to chance and, like a good dialogue by Plato, takes no step in vain. Great philosophy, therefore, does not preclude, but actually includes, the structured expression of a great human being: "The greater the man, the truer his philosophy",[19] says Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). "Truer" is probably used here in the figurative sense of more significant and richer. Conversely, the Platonist Alfred Edward Taylor (1869-1945) was not ashamed to confess his uncertainty: "But we can all make it our purpose that our philosophy, if we have one, shall be no mere affair of surface opinions, but the genuine expression of a whole personality. Because I can never feel that [David] Hume's [1711-1776] own philosophy was that, I have to own to a haunting uncertainty whether Hume was really a great philosopher, or only a 'very clever man'."[20]

[19] Spengler, DW, Introduction, Section 15, 41. Transl. Atkinson.

[20] Taylor, Hume and the Miraculous, 365.

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5. Philosophy as an Ideal

The terms "philosopher" and "philosophy" have not only a descriptive meaning, but also an evaluative one. Like knowing the objective truth, philosophy, too, is an ideal that has been approximated but never fully realised. The reason, in addition to all human inadequacy, is the difficulty of the questions asked by philosophy. We may be surprised that we can live without having solved at least those philosophical questions that affect us personally. Levin in Leo Tolstoy's (1828-1910) novel *Anna Karenina* was probably not alone in experiencing some painful moments because he found no answers to questions such as these: "Without knowing what I am and why I'm here, it is impossible for me to live. And I cannot know that, therefore I cannot live."[21]

Once we start solving philosophical questions, we feel sooner or later that we are not equal to solving them completely. But we must live and philosophise or at least try to do so, for the most important questions human beings can ask themselves are the philosophical questions. Moreover, the human mind has the ineradicable tendency to ask these questions. All men, Aristotle says, by nature desire to know.[22] All men, one might also say, by nature desire philosophy. For the human mind is philosophical by nature. Philosophy is the fulfilment of this striving for knowledge, which, however, most of the time only exists as a possibility and is often hampered and misled in its development.

"Music unfolds me", Goethe is supposed to have said. Philosophy does something similar. It unfolds our understanding of

[21] Anna Karenina, Part 8, Chapter 9. Transl. Richard Prevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Harmondsworth 2003.

[22] Metaph., Book 1, Chapter 2, 982b9-10. Revised Oxford Transl.

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key concepts. But, to make things more difficult, this unfolding conflicts not only with external obstacles, but also with internal ones. These lie essentially in the "weakness of the arguments"[23] in which we "seek refuge" to consider "in them the truth of things".[24] The arguments give us not an immediate access to the "truth of things" but use our own cognitive instruments, such as name, definition, image and concept. Our cognitive instruments do not give us the essence we seek, but only "properties", "appearances" or "aspects" of the essence. They show it as it shows itself in their perspective. Therefore, as much as we seek what being, knowledge, language, truth or good 'really' are, as little do we find *what* they 'really' are. We find their essence only in the way that it shows itself in the perspective of our cognitive instruments.

The philosopher seems destined not to find what he seeks. His soul seeks the What or the essence.[25] This search is, as it were, implanted in a philosophical soul. Perhaps it is even in the interest of almost everybody. Thus, Plato makes Socrates ask: "Or don't you believe it to be for the common good, or for that of most humans that the real nature of each existing thing should become clear?"[26] Similarly, Aristotle writes: "And we believe that we know most about all things if, instead of their quality, size or location, we know what is man, or fire."[27] Even

[23] Plato, Ep. VII 343a. Transl. Ferber.

[24] Plato, Phd.99e.Transl. Ferber.

[25] Cf. Plato, Ep. VII 343b-c and my interpretation, 2007, 65-66, 94-121. I am grateful to Hermann Steinthal, 1993, for his correction of an error in my interpretation of *mógis* (hardly), even though this does not eliminate the ignorance of the philosopher's incarnate soul, cf. Phd. 66e.

[26] Chrm. 166d. Transl. Sprague with small alteration by Ferber.

[27] Metaph., Book 7, Chapter 1, 1028a36-b1. Transl. Ross. Small alteration by Ferber.

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if we deny that there is any essence, we implicitly assume an essence. Even if, like Wittgenstein, we do not accept an essence of language, but only a "family resemblance" between languages,[28] we still assume an essence of language. "Family resemblance" means the common features and differences between family members: Applied to languages, it means the common features despite the differences between languages. The assumption of (necessary) features common to languages is in fact the assumption of an essence of language.[29]

Of course, the cognitive instruments themselves present to the soul only what it does not seek, that is, not the essence, but only "properties", "appearances" or "aspects" of the essence, for example, "family resemblances". The philosopher trying to make headway in the struggle with a problem seems destined to be heading towards defeat. This had been put somewhat dramatically as follows: "He is always striding towards defeat and even before joining the battle he bears the wound in his temple."[30] The same experience, but with a more positive outcome, is conveyed by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) in a poem called "The Walk" (cf. p. 223): "So does, what we were unable to grasp, grasp us, full of appearance, [...] and transform us, even if we fail to reach it."

[28] Cf. in particular PI § 63-67. Transl. Anscombe.

[29] Cf. e.g. the detailed critique of Wittgenstein's conception of family likeness in PI, § 63-67, by Holenstein, Sprachliche Universalien, 169-210. No English translation.

[30] Ortega y Gasset, 1983, 434.

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