

## PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

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**Abstract.** The paper presents the applications of philosophy to life. Philosophy has been serving the homo sapiens for thousands of years. It has been the queen of all sciences and was the cradle for entire human civilization. The topic, 'Philosophy and Life' is so extensive and rich in its nature that many volumes of books could be written but my purpose to write on this topic is to clear the misconceptions regarding philosophy and its significance to life, which are present among various circles in the present age. What is the nature of philosophy? How was it in the past? What is life? Has it meaning and purpose in this world? How does philosophy contribute for man today? How will it improve the quality of life of man in future? Which philosophy of life should man adopt to make this world a heaven? These are the questions, whose answers are tried to be sought out in this paper.

Man's impatient mind has ever been in search of the hidden realities in the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (universe). The history of man reveals that he has contributed to the improvement of the world. Thales' search for the ultimate substance made a start to the odyssey of philosophy, which journeyed through various trenches, uneven paths, faced numerous challenges from

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the invaders — superstition, religion, science — and now has entered present age as the poor King Lear.

Philosophy, in the modern age, is facing a severe criticism by various circles across the globe for its lack of application to the human life. For many, it is a futile discipline and its study is considered to be a wastage of time and also branded as an escape from reality that leads to an ivory tower in this epoch of science and technology. Philosophers are alleged to have indulged in abstract speculation, hair-splitting and shallow meditation which by no means serve the modern man. Will Durant writes:

“Some ungentle reader will check us here by informing us that philosophy is as useless as chess, as obscure as ignorance, and as stagnant as content.”<sup>1</sup>

I repudiate all the allegations leveled against philosophy and attempt to justify its application and proximity to life.

The term, ‘Philosophy’ is coined from two Greek words, ‘Philo’ means love and ‘Sophia’, wisdom, so philosophy is the love of wisdom. A person who is lover of wisdom is a philosopher. Philosophy is a dynamic human’s endeavour, always ready to meet the ever new challenges. It is a creation of human mind. From ancient to present times, it faces infinite challenges. Whenever man faces any intellectual problem, he rushes toward philosophy to resolve them. Copleston rightly says that:

“Philosophy, which is the work of human spirit and not the revelation of God, grows and develops; fresh vistas may be opened up by new lines of approach or application to new problems, newly discovered facts, fresh situations, etc.”<sup>2</sup>

Formal philosophy began with Thales in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. All the early philosophers were scientists. They were in search of the building blocks of the universe. They were interested to make an enquiry into the world and nature around them. The Greeks are said to have believed that philosophy starts in wonder. Discussing problems, analyzing the situation and asking queries are signs of courage. Without speculation and investigation the whole society may go astray. Philosophy has a spark for life. When a man

analyses himself, he could be able to philosophize all the difficult situations. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were the great intellects of the ancient Greek Philosophy. They laid a foundation stone for the western thought.

Philosophy in the medieval age lost its glory and vigor. Religious interpretations dominated the philosophical spirit. After the medieval period, at the commencement of 17<sup>th</sup> century, Descartes, aiming to establish the reign of philosophy, crowned man again with reason. Again the true motive of philosophy got momentum for certainty and objectivity in all the spheres of life. Two epistemological poles were established; rationalists advocated reason as the sole source of knowledge, prominent among them are Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. While, on the other hand, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, giving rise to empiricism rebelled against the rationalistic position and believed in sense experience. Kant, the towering German philosopher tried to reconcile these two leading epistemological approaches. He broke out a revolution in philosophy called Copernican revolution.

Modern philosophy is skeptic by nature; this trend was initiated by Rene Descartes at the outset of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper worked in this field and carried this tradition to the new heights. Both succeeded in evolving a critical school of thought in philosophy. Russell says:

“Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answer can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation...”<sup>3</sup>

Karl Popper, a critical rationalist, regards philosophy as a problem solving science. It works as a philosophical activity. There is no stagnation in philosophy, it challenges the traditional thought and sets new directions in search of ever new vistas of knowledge. The problems may be philosophical or scientific in

nature. He expresses his views in, '*Nature of Philosophical Problems and Their Roots in Science*':

"I believe that the function of a scientist or a philosopher is to solve scientific or philosophical problems, rather than to talk about what he or other [scientists or] philosophers are doing or might do. Any unsuccessful attempt to solve scientific or philosophical problem, if it is an honest and devoted attempt, appears to be more significant than a discussion of such a question as 'What is science?' or 'What is philosophy?' ... We are not students of some subject matter but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline."<sup>4</sup>

As an academic discipline, philosophy is commonly subdivided into areas such as epistemology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of science and several disciplines of the natural and social sciences. Epistemology deals with knowledge; its nature, sources, limitations and applications. Metaphysics is the study of being. Logic sets the standards for the validity of human thought. Ethics being a normative science, evaluates individual and social conduct of man. And aesthetics deals with the nature of beauty in the universe. Philosophy with these areas of studies directly or indirectly concerns the life of man. All the knowledge is for man and philosophy grasps all the fields of knowledge. All the branches of knowledge spring from philosophy. Therefore, it is rightly called the mother of all sciences. Today natural sciences have departed from philosophy and have their own independent spheres. Philosophers make inquiry into the answers given by pure sciences. Mostly philosophers are not satisfied only with meditation about the things, they also put their observations and speculations to rigorous analysis. They use logical reasoning in order to analyze various concepts.

Life as a miraculous dynamic force sprouts from one source, the Absolute Being. It springs out from an origin and has been advancing ahead in different directions. Henri Bergson, French philosopher, believes that life is a creative force in the universe

called *élan vital*. Life exists in different levels from lower sentient animals to higher sentient animals. Man is the highly evolved being. Man has moral choice and social responsibility that is imperative for the reconstruction of social strata of life. Sentient beings are distinguished from non-sentient beings. Right from the antiquity, life has been debatable problem to philosophy. Mark A. Bedau writes:

“There are three giants in the history of philosophy who advanced views about life, and their views still echo in contemporary discussion. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle expressed the view that life is a nested hierarchy of capacities, such as metabolism, sensation, and motion. This nested hierarchy of capacities corresponds to Aristotle’s notion of “soul” or mental capabilities, so Aristotle essentially linked life and mind. As part of his wholesale replacement of Aristotelian philosophy and science, Descartes supplanted Aristotle’s position with the idea that life is just the operation of a complex but purely materialistic machine. Descartes thought that life fundamentally differed from mind, which he thought was a mode of consciousness. Descartes sketched the details of mechanistic hypothesis about life in his *Treatise on Man*. Some generations later, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* struggled to square Descartes’s materialistic perspective with life’s distinctive autonomy and purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

Like other metaphysical problems, life has been an elusive reality to man. It has purpose and meaning. The universe is designed in the best possible way. It is the excellent creation by God. Albert Einstein expresses:

“I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature.”<sup>6</sup>

To trace the roots of philosophy requires to peep into the history of mankind. Philosophy is a path, a way forward. Life of a

man and Philosophy are so interwoven that both cannot be separated from each other. Life without philosophy is romantic, irrational and purposeless. Socrates says in *Apology*:

“... I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living ...”<sup>7</sup>

To live philosophically is a real life. We consciously or unconsciously do philosophy. In the history of mankind, there are certain people who led their lives philosophically. In this respect, Socrates is an epitome. Will Durant writes:

“Socrates chose to be her martyr rather than live in flight before her enemies; Plato risked himself twice to win a kingdom for her; Marcus Aurelius loved her more passionately than his throne; and Bruno burned at the stake for loyalty to her.”<sup>8</sup>

It were the glorious days of philosophy, when every one credited it as a sublime and great discipline of knowledge. It was the fountain head of wisdom and courage in the ancient age. Will Durant dejectedly states:

“Those were great days for philosophy when bravely she took all knowledge for her province, and threw herself at every turn into the forefront of the mind’s advance. Men honored her then; nothing was held nobler than the love of truth. Alexander rated Diogenes second only to Alexander, and Diogenes bade Alexander stand aside lest his royal carcass should hide the Sun.”<sup>9</sup>

The subject-matter of philosophy is life, nature and the universe. It copes with the challenges of life, nature and the universe. It is an ardent intellectual passion for search of the truth. Philosophy has set new standards of living and elevated the status of man amongst the creatures of the universe. W. D. Joske writes:

“Philosophy is also believed to concern itself indirectly with the meaning of life, for it is thought that many purely philosophical disputes, about such topics as the

existence of God, the truth or falsity of determinism, and the nature of moral judgments, can render certain attitudes to life more or less appropriate.”<sup>10</sup>

Philosophy ratiocinates the problems subject to both the theoretical and practical aspects of life and the world. In antiquity, cosmology was the branch of pure philosophy. It studies the structure of the universe. Bertrand Russell advocates the scope of philosophy in academic as well as in social life. He states in his *‘Unpopular Essays’*:

“Philosophy has had from its earliest days two different objects which were believed to be closely interrelated. On the one hand, it aimed at a theoretical understanding of the structure of the world, on the other hand, it tried to discover and inculcate the best possible way of life. From Heraclitus to Hegel, or even to Marx, it consistently kept both ends in view.”<sup>11</sup>

Philosophy, in spite of its serious nature, provides pleasure. Plato’s *Dialogues*, Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and Russell’s writings are magnum opuses of the world literature. Will Durant writes:

“There is a pleasure in philosophy, and a lure even in the mirages of metaphysics, which every student feels until the coarse necessities of physical existence drag him from the heights of thought into the mart of economic strife and gain.”<sup>12</sup>

Philosophy is not only an enquiry into metaphysical and religious problems; it also penetrates into individual and social attitudes towards life. We learn how to make a living and philosophy tells us how to live. Joseph Agassi writes:

“Philosophy consists of attitudes toward life or ways of life and inquiries in such regard, and they come in a great variety, of course.”<sup>13</sup>

To lead a happy life, where philosophy guides us and paves the way for happiness, it also plays a role of mentor in adjusting man’s life in the world of diversity in the best possible way. Philosophers with a practical bent of mind do not believe like

Leibniz that it is the 'best possible world' but they do try to construct the new world to live and to reconstruct the existing one. Joseph Agassi holds:

“Like all intellectual activities, philosophy is, in part, the search for good ideas - that is, for ideas, theories, and general truths that have intellectual value. Philosophy thus shares this search with religion (or theology), mathematic, and science in an effort to explain the world around us and adjust as best as possible.”<sup>14</sup>

Philosophy deals with many problems of crucial nature. All these are due to wisdom and for wisdom. A wise man can raise questions and can give answers to these questions. Philosophy studies life in two ways: It examines life as such, and its social aspect. With the rapid surge in population, the problems are also being increased with the corresponding pace. Man forms groups, societies, and cultures. With the swift flow of human population, Mega cities are being formed that create a lot of socio-economic, political, environmental, educational and moral problems for modern man. Philosophy provides solutions to these challenges. In this regard, philosophy is and has been resolving such issues through various modes of thought.

Applied ethics deals with the problems encountered by modern man through business ethics, environmental ethics, bio-medical ethics, computer ethics, administrative ethics and media ethics. Morality is the hallmark for peace in the world. Isaiah Berlin, British Scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in his, '*The Proper Study of Mankind*' writes:

“Ethical thought consists of the systematic examination of the relations of human being to each other, the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring, and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based. These beliefs about how life should be lived, what man and women should be and do, are objects of moral enquiry; and when applied to groups and nations, and, mankind as a whole, are called political philosophy, which is but ethics applied to society.”<sup>15</sup>



Philosophies of social and natural sciences are mainly concerned with the issues related to the social and pure sciences. Modern man is facing various social and scientific challenges; industrialization, global warming, pollution, and nuclear weapons. This nuclear weaponry may displace the earth from its orbit. Will Durant says:

“We move about the earth with unprecedented speed, but we do not know and have not thought, where we are going or whether we shall find any happiness there for harassed souls. We are being destroyed by our knowledge, which has made us drunk with our power. And we shall not be saved without wisdom.”<sup>16</sup>

Political philosophy guides man how to get peace in society. In Politics, philosophers are the true torch-bearer in the modern turmoil of the world. A philosopher king can serve the mankind in the best possible way. Plato states in the *Republic*:

“... philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands...”<sup>17</sup>

Philosophy of language determines the origin, functions and applications of language to human life. Language is a mode of communication. Clarity in language and thought is imperative to good human life. Philosophy in this context does the right job. Ludwig Wittgenstein in ‘*Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*’ says:

“The object of Philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of Philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions”, but to make propositions clear.”<sup>18</sup>

Philosophy of education is chiefly concerned with the issues subject to education, pedagogy, curriculum, freedom of thought and indoctrination.

Man has historical knowledge as an asset. Philosophy has transferred and transmitted this perennial knowledge to the coming generations. Isaiah Berlin thinks:

“Wherever concepts grow firm and clear and acquire universal acceptance, a new science, natural or formal, comes into being. To use a simile that I can not claim to have invented, philosophy is like a radiant sun that, from time to time, throws off portions of itself; these masses, when they cool down, acquire a firm and recognizable structure of their own and acquire independent careers as tidy and regular planets; but the central sun continues on its path, and does not seem to diminish in mass or radiance. The ‘status’ and vitality of philosophy is another matter, and seems to be directly connected with the extent to which it deals with issues that are of concern to common man.”<sup>19</sup>

Aesthetics focuses on the art and beauty in the nature. It makes the nature more attractive and beautiful for man. Logic promotes critical reasoning, freedom of thought, and valid reasoning in the daily walks of life. It liberates man from conformity, dogmatism, prejudices and irrationality. Russell writes:

“The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from the common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason.”<sup>20</sup>

Law and philosophy is the study of the relationship between thought and its implementative form. It makes life ideal. Man will discover new avenues of life in future with philosophy.

The natures of philosophy and life are alike. Both are dynamic. Life is a perpetual flux and there is no stagnation in it. Like life, philosophy is also a dynamic, an ongoing and a living activity. These are both perennial and juxtapose to each other; new problems in life and their new solutions by philosophy. Will to live philosophically is a true philosophy of life. It motivates man to accept the coarse realities of life with love, courage and knowledge. Russell, in the Prologue to his *Autobiography*, writes:

“Three passions, simple but overwhelming strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy-ecstasy so great I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness — that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it, finally because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what-at last I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.”<sup>21</sup>

Philosophy and life are inseparable. Philosophy elevates and illuminates life. Without philosophy, a scientist cannot be a good

scientist, ruler cannot be a good ruler, teacher cannot be a good teacher and even a man cannot be a good man. It rejuvenates life and makes it worth living. The end of philosophy is to discover certainty and objectivity and deliver man's mind from prejudices, conformity, narrow-mindedness, and all frivolities in the affairs of daily life. Philosophy loves life and life loves philosophy.

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