

## **Philosophy and the Community**

Philosophy and the Community are bound to be related in some way, to some extent. Whether the relationship is close enough and good enough is of course another matter. However, if there is anything which we as citizens can do to determine this relationship, we certainly ought to try and determine it in a manner which is not unduly embarrassing or unduly restrictive for either ; that instead it is consistent with freedom for both and fruitful and significant on the whole.

Something like it can be seen in early Greece. Certainly the image of Socrates walking the streets and the market place, ready to go anywhere and meet anyone to discuss problems which excite and enthuse nearly everyone, would typify for many of us the relations which should exist anywhere between philosophy and the community. We do wish though that the citizens' court which sentenced Socrates to death had acted differently. Things do not always happen as you wish ; since the closeness of relationship between the philosopher and the citizen we find in the Greek scene comes very near to what many or most of us would desire and approve. It is genuine and significant and productive of results.

Something of this closeness survived in the Middle Ages, with not enough of its freedom and inventiveness, however. The learned

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were few and not excessively specialized in interest and approach so they were able to communicate not only with one another but also with the lay part of the population. But, on the other hand, society became more organised and more authoritarian ; the learned and the powerful became aligned to the detriment of both.

In modern times beginning about 300 years ago, freedom began to be conceded mutually. The intellectuals and the rulers became reconciled to a large degree. It could also be said that both became alienated from each other ; the freedom which came from alienation made the relationship less fruitful and less significant on the whole. It is difficult to say whether since the time of Descartes philosophy and the community have been as well related as they should be. In some ways yes, in other ways no.

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Unfortunately the relations between philosophy and the community in our time have been far from close. There has been less and less communication, not only between philosophers and the community at large, but also between philosophers and other men of learning : scientists, especially social scientists, writers, dramatists, novelists, poets and men of religion. Some of us may feel there has been less communication even between philosophers. This may seem an astounding thing to say but it is not without substance.

Modern philosophy started with a quest for certainty. Descartes set out in search of something he could not doubt but soon found that with this criterion he could not go further than his own immediate thoughts. Later he and others after him managed to go further and build most of the things commonsense and science feels certain about : material objects, other minds, general ideas, numbers, relations and so on. But the goal of certainty continued to

haunt and dog the philosopher's steps. Again, the philosopher found himself shut up within the charmed circle of immediate experience and much as he wanted to transcend it he found he could not really do so. Berkeley even boasted that this could not be done. On this showing at least matter would have no indubitable status. Material objects will have to prove their existence through perception. Perception, in short, became the criterion, the evidence of existence. However, the direction which Berkeley gave to thinking was unfortunate from Berkeley's own point of view. For he did want to save minds and spirits. He had little doubt that minds and spirits existed and were even important. But having made perception the minimum condition of existence, how could he save them much as he felt assured of them and much as he wanted to save them for his own philosophy? He did so by a kind of violence to his own thinking. Spirits, he said, were known proved through their operations, their visible activities, their behaviour, as we would say to-day. The accent placed on perception in the very beginning of modern philosophy put philosophical thinking in a very tight frame. Every philosopher felt committed to perception as the most important and the most crucial thing in human experience and human knowledge. Perception, that is to say, sense-experience, became the basis, the guarantee, the proof, of anything we could reasonably treat as knowledge. If Berkeley had treated operation or activities or behaviour of a thing as evidence of its existence, he could have admitted both material objects and minds to the orbit of existence. If he had done so, he would have done well by himself, by commonsense and by science. However, he decided to choose perception and handed it over as an unfortunate legacy to subsequent philosophy. If modern philosophy had come really to build something on sense-experience, if it had produced a more or less agreed account of all the things which seem valid and important to science and common-sense, it would have given us something to feel satisfied about. Philosophy and the community would have come to peace and

entered into a relationship mutually significant and helpful. But it was not to be. The result has been that philosophy to-day—even as an isolated alienated activity concerned with its own special problems—is not at peace even with itself, to say nothing of being at peace with other human disciplines. Philosophy—modern philosophy—gives one impression of an unending civil war among a people who had promised progress and prosperity, once they could be freed from the curbs on freedom placed by tradition, authority, culture, science, and everyday human prejudices. True, philosophers have made a lot of progress but this progress consists of weapons of war ; which weapons they are able to use only against one another. Their differences with disciplines outside their own circle remain. But there seems no chance that there will ever be a proper encounter. So the community at large remains at as great a distance from philosophy as philosophy is from the community.

Some influence nevertheless penetrates. The community though not directly challenged by philosophy—philosophy being preoccupied by internal strife, as I have said—nevertheless comes to know of the weapons being forged by philosophers. It is reasonable enough to think that the weapons could be used against some of the favourite beliefs, values and ideas of the community, as soon as the philosophers had settled their internal disputes. Whether that eventuality arises or not, sober and thinking leaders of the human community must take stock of development within the philosophical community and set about rethinking their favourite foundations, their own special contexts. To learn from what goes on elsewhere is part of ordinary wisdom. Non-philosophical intellectual disciplines and human communities committed to any theoretical and practical positions would do well to examine not only what goes in philosophical and ideological circles apparently remote but also what goes on in their own immediate environment. They would do

well to see what is happening in the minds and thoughts and in the everyday work of men elsewhere ; to see whether all that is happening or might happen is what should happen ; and if not, what can be done to give thinking elsewhere and in our own circles, an healthy, fruitful direction.

Excessive pre-occupation with sense-experience, I have said, is the leading feature of modern academic philosophy. Even this narrow pre-occupation is vitiated by prejudices borrowed, I have no doubt, from naturalistic physical science. One prejudice of course is that existence is physical existence. This kind of thinking may be moderated in different ways and to different degrees. But by and large the prejudice remains and colours most modern thinking. Evidence of a thing has to be physical evidence ; it has to be evidence in physical terms, in immediate sensations and what can be inferred from immediate sensations. They are heaps of things commonsense and science and ordinary human beings feel obliged to take notice of. The battle, therefore, between what is patent and immediate and what is not so patent and not so immediate will probably go on in the future as it has gone on the past. It is not this that I want so say anything about at the moment. What I want to say just now is that modern philosophy has quietly and uncritically borrowed another prejudice from physical science, naive physical science, I should say. This is the prejudice which, I am glad, has been spotted by some and even awarded a name. It is the prejudice called reductionism. It is to think that when you have named the parts or elements of a thing, you have done as much as you need to do explain or to understand that thing. Few fallacies have played such havoc as the fallacy or reductionism has played in modern thinking. Have you a complex whole to deal with? Then all you have to is to name its parts, forgetting altogether that the parts happen to make a whole, a pattern or a system. They have come to have unheard of properties, nobody could have predicted.

The new properties are not properties which are due to the parts or even to relations between parts but to the whole, the pattern, the system as such. The system begins to have its unique impact. It comes to influence and determine the parts. The system, the whole, accordingly, is at least as valid and important, if not more valid and important, than the parts. The fallacy is wide-spread in philosophical thinking today; also in the kind of social-science thinking which is influenced by modern philosophical thinking. But it cuts no ice. It solves very few problems. Nor does it resolve many problems, though it does dissolve many important problems.

Modern philosophy then suffers from a terrible obsession, the obsession which looks only for certainties. It so happens there are not many certainties of the philosophical brand. Hardly any indeed, Therefore the gift of modern philosophy (apart from the technical refinement it continues to give to its vocabulary and to its distinctions) to commonsense (indeed to science) is a number of denials and dismissals. These denials and dismissals if taken seriously would make everyday life and even science and technology impossible. Philosophers do not attack science so openly. They have never done so in the past and they do not so do now. Hume's thinking was inimical to religion as it was to science. But he pressed his attack on religion, not his attack on science. Supposing the attack on science were to be withdrawn, the question is what next? There will have to be concessions to commonsense. Room will have to be found for the assumptions of commonsense. In one word, room will have to be found for the certainties both of science and commonsense. Among them are belief in material objects, belief in general ideas, belief in relations, belief in values. If you must concede all this you must concede the assumptions which these certainties entail. You must do some re-thinking. You must revise your narrow criteria of knowledge.

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I have said that philosophers would do well to keep close to commonsense and science. Most of all perhaps they need to keep close to social science. For in social science we build convictions about the reality, validity, demonstrability and measurability of social facts and social entities. It is instructive to see exactly when and how a certain social entity comes into existence and exactly what makes it possible, indeed necessary, for us to declare that that social entity has acquired the status of an existent. An example is to be found in the experimental study of small groups, groups of two, three or slightly more persons. It is not the sheer coming together of persons, nor their relations which give rise to a group and make the group a group. It is a certain function—call it groupishness—which confers the crucial status. It is when the aggregate begins to perform *this* function that it becomes, and acquires the right to be called, a group. The aggregate may or may not come to do so. When it does not, doubt is left. Its sign is the crucial function, the distinctive operations, which come to be performed. A new factor is added to the elements and relations. Its evidence lies in the many new things the aggregate after metamorphosis is able to accomplish. The whole now begins to react on the parts, to shape and determine their separate and original properties. You cannot ask it to do more to acquire the status of an entity.

How very wrong would it be not to look at the functions a given whole performs ; but only at the parts and elements out of which it has risen or emerged. Something like it happens when bodies of a certain kind—aggregates otherwise of material particles—begin to perform certain functions, functions which can only be attributed to something new which has supervened on the particles. The validity of the particles is not to be denied. Indeed from a point of view, from a level, they are very valid indeed. But that point of view is not the only or the more generally valid point of view. From our everyday point of view, in terms of control of our

physical environment, for instance, in terms of social intercourse in terms of our loves and hatreds ; in these terms material objects are substantial, important and valuable entities. From the point of view of sociology they may be only classes, occupations, categories. From the point of view of physiology and neurology they may be only collections of cells. Which of these points of view is more and which less valid ? You cannot say. Only we must admit that the everyday point of view brings us these objects and persons as beings we are most seriously concerned with.

Talking of physiology and neurology—another set of sciences of which many philosophers take very little notice, one cannot but be reminded that leading neurologists and brain surgeons, whose daily occupation is to observe brain damaged patients and to see how the various functions with which the brain is connected, disappear on injury and reappear on healing, are not half-ashamed to concede that there is such a thing as the human mind which is not just the brain but something other than the brain. The philosophers may seize on the correlation between mind and brain and declare that the mind is the brain. Not the neurologist or the brain specialist. Indeed according to him the brain may be, indeed it is a most perfect switchboard ; but in the live intact human being, little doubt is felt that this switch-board does not and cannot function without a switch-board operator.

Psychoanalysis is yet another of those disciplines which philosophers tend to ignore. Most of the facts and entities that psychoanalysis brings to light, functions of the human mind which it is able to project on our attention, are entities which cannot be fitted into the narrow empirical frame which some philosophers have set for themselves. Even brilliant men need to know certain things, to look at certain important facts. To boast ignorance of these will not make the facts any the less important. Yet this is what Wittgenstein



appears to do. He read very little beyond engineering; which is to say beyond physics and mathematics, No, but he read James with gusto. Unfortunately little else. No Freud for instance and no Durkheim. If he had, his brilliant and unique mind would have produced a very different kind of Philosophy.

Philosophers have neglected other disciplines and areas of experience ; history for instance and economics. History brings us knowledge of the past. Historical knowledge is knowledge according to the strictest criterion. It is true ; we are certain of it ; and we have the right to be certain of it. So is knowledge which economics and the application of economics brings. How certain and how understandably and reasonably certain we are of our Five-Year Ten-Year, Fifteen-Year Plans. Our own plans to fight salinity and soil erosion go as far as that and even further into the future. So we have historical and economic knowledge, one projecting us into the future. Both are certain. Yet they have a slender basis in verifiable physical fact. So in knowledge of international affairs. In this we come to deal with real and often somewhat disturbing entities. According to modern empiricism there are or there should be no nations. Not so long ago I had a young Arab student placed in my care who had decided to write a dissertation on the Arab character. I had decided to look after him. He had not gone very far when one day having picked up a book he came to me distressed and almost saying, Perhaps Sir, our work has to stop. I asked him why ? He showed me the book *The Illusion of National Character*. We agreed that we must deal with it in the Introduction. The argument of the book was that as there is no nation, there is no national character ; there is no nation because a nation as such cannot be seen or touched or smelt. Every time you make the attempt you see or touch or smell a national, not the nation. You hit on an American, a Pakistani or a Chinese, not the American, the Pakistani or the Chinese nation. I told my young Arab friend I was not

impressed by this. But nor was he for that matter. The point of view which reduces a group to its members could be valid but only on occasions. The point of view which did not reduce a group to its members was more generally valid. Ultimately we decided to dismiss the argument of this book by saying that facts as such are ever far more relevant and important than an analysis of those facts, even assuming the analysis to be correct. But nobody would seriously deny that there are nations or that there are communities and groups of various kinds. Certainly not any of those who really concern themselves with these facts and want to do something about them. Bertand Russell is or has been a kind of atomist ; but even he would be the last to deny that nations *qua* nations do exist ; this because of his great and genuine concern with international affair.

Modern philosophy has another dimension, a very different one from the one I have described until now. This dimension uses the writer's craft for its propagation. It is interested in propagation much more than is academic philosophy. It expounds itself and impinges itself on the attention of all and sundry, the attention of ordinary as well as scholarly readers, through its great artistic creations. Its impact is wide-spread and many people seem influenced rather deeply by it. If a philosophical school is to be adjudged important by the quality and quantity of its impact, then perhaps no other contemporary school is as important as this. Its leading contemporary exponent—altogether the most central figure of the movement now—has written some of the best-sellers of our time. He also spurned the offer of a Nobel prize. For some reason—the reason often given that existentialism is not systematic, that it is not set forth in straight prose and paragraphs, does not seem enough—this philosophical movement is not respected in academic, certainly not in British academic circles whose pre-occupation with Wittgenstein I have already described. However, the most high-brow literary journals, concerned with the most exciting social and political themes today,

take serious notice of it. The movement then is exciting, penetrating and important : its leaders brilliant, able and warm. Its liaison with the community is patent. That some deep-lying psychological needs of the community—at least the European community or the European continental community—have become identified with the movement is obvious enough. This and the fact that its protagonists use the writer's powerful skills to reach the common man supplies the key to its nature. It is the reaction to prevailing moods ; the cumulative result of two world wars and the disturbing awareness of a third in the offing. It is the reaction to all this of some very sensitive, imaginative and talented souls, who have chosen also to give powerful expression to it. It resembles the reaction of a poet to a desperate human situation. No wonder, the existentialist varies his expressions from time to time, so that his message becomes confounded by the fluctuations of accent. Same is the message of a poet in the manifold of his moods. However, the existentialist message is widely described as the message of despair, that of loneliness, of failure of reconciliation. A sense of disappointment seems writ large on existentialist writing, a sense of rebellion against current values. In the interest of what alternatives it is difficult to say. From beginning to end—from Kierkegaard to Sartre—the movement is one consistent, unabated protest against the cant and hypocrisy, the sham professions and effete idealism of middle-class European society. In many ways small and large existentialists have also expressed sympathy with oppressed and the downtrodden. But they have not found their intellectual roots. What do they stand for on metaphysical, economic and social issues or problems? Nobody can say. For they seem to be now on one side, now on the other. But because of their appeal for the common reader if not for the common man, existentialists are far more meaningful than the Wittgensteinian group. For the latter, issues which seem meaningful are important to all ordinary people, are just meaningless, not worth the trouble of discussing. One

difference between the two movements is difference of approach, of earnestness and practical concern. The Wittgensteinians teach and expound and explain, The existentialists preach, propagate and persuade. The Wittgensteinians are systematic, logical, careful, consistent ; the existentialists are unsystematic, illogical, unconventional, inconsistent. The Wittgensteinians even as radicals seem to be ordinary business-like human beings ; the existentialists seem to be saints more concerned about others than about themselves. Even their offences against traditional morality or mores produce little offence against themselves. Their negativity seems to fill a vacuum, a psychological and social need. They may be destructive but they are irresistible,

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Let us now turn to the question, what can be done to promote a better liaison between philosophy and the community ?

The first thing to do, and which indeed can be done assuming a due awareness of the need of it is achieved, is a closer relationship between philosophy on the one hand and on the other, other intellectual disciplines and other areas of human activity and experience. Philosophical discussions can and should be held in the presence as co-participants of social scientists, social psychologists, sociologists, historians, economists, jurists, even men of affairs and public men with interest in human aspirations and human anxieties, hopes and fears. Dr. C. D. Broad has deplored the breaking away from the parent Moral Science Faculty at Cambridge of such studies as economics, history, political theory, sociology and jurisprudence, which once formed part of it. The composite faculty attracted many men of genius and the results were good. Broad's reasons for deploring this change are not well stated. He seems to think that philosophy with a number of other studies living and growing as it were under its wings was more important. With those studies gone to set up

house elsewhere, its importance became reduced. I would deplore the separation because the separation resulted in alienating these studies from one another, and more because it resulted in alienating philosophy from other disciplines. Together flourishing under the same roof they would have kept one another steady, ready to teach as well as to learn. Separated they could only grow with a dangerously cramped vision able to see things only from a specialist narrow point of view, not from a broad universalist point of view. My own view is that if a liaison between philosophy and other intellectual disciplines had continued it would not have become so sure of the denials and dismissals which it came to adopt as its professional ideology. Most of all it would have found it impossible to endorse the dismissal of metaphysics as glibly as apparently it has. It would have found it impossible to escape the hard fact that everybody in the world is a metaphysician, the social scientist, the historian, the expert in languages, and, of course, the common man. Religious people make no secret of their metaphysical attitudes. Their metaphysics is their creed. But even those who think that metaphysics is impossible nevertheless have a sort of metaphysics. There is commonsense metaphysics which some philosophers would be ready to formulate and defend. There is cultural metaphysics enshrined in the syntax of every language. There is positivist metaphysics. There is metaphysics aglone and it is impossible to escape it. Even those who profess to be unconcerned with it discover they have a secret concern with it.

A liaison with other fields of experience, art, politics, administration, human and familial association, would have taught the philosopher what real experiences in our day-to-day physical and social environment can be. The philosopher in turn would have been able to teach all the others how loose are our ordinary formulations of these experiences and how uncritical is our analysis of them.

An area of obvious intellectual and practical human interest

with which the philosopher should be associated in his professional programmes is jurisprudence. Juristic concepts and theories depend for their criticism on collaboration between jurists and philosophers. Their collaboration in the past has been tremendously fruitful. Only recent developments in philosophy have been forbidding. Nevertheless some influences flow from one side to other. But the unfortunate part is that while others turn to philosophy with commendable concern and curiosity, philosophers do not show the same concern with others. They have become alienated and are content to remain so. One thing philosophers can learn from the law courts and judges, indeed from the whole institution of legal administration, is that within limits it is both possible and desirable to achieve decisions. Achieving decisions is a sort of commitment with legal administration. Even it, however, is not bound to produce a decision, not always, in every case. When no decision is possible, even it would report failure. But we find that the commitment to produce decision as far as possible produces results. It is this which the philosopher needs to learn. If and when he learns it, he will have made a great difference to philosophy. So one important thing is a commitment to produce decision as far as possible. Philosophers would do well to try and create an institutional machinery by which philosophical issues can be disposed of. There will have to be recognised schools and systems and their accredited protagonists and courts modelled perhaps on the jury or the panel system. The panels of judges will have to include non-philosophers to balance professional bias. There could be appeals from one court to another and at the top a world panel of judges for the disposal of issues with a universal interest; and so on and on.

When such a thing happens philosophers and non-philosophers may come to have different views on what constitutes and what does not constitute evidence. I was so intrigued to find the other day in a book on evidence a whole chapter, a real long chapter, devoted to

an exposition of recent experimental studies we owe to Sir Frederick Bartlett and others. These laboratory studies seem to have opened new interesting avenues to the assessment of evidence, The chapter is aptly called 'Mistaken evidence'; the following chapter on false evidence is equally aptly called 'Invented Evidence'.

Could not the philosophers equally learn from the jurist? He could learn that criteria of evidence can be excessively severe and that if they are too severe we can have in law no decision and in philosophy no agreement. No wonder so many certainties in science and commonsense are not certainties in philosophy.

A third practical upshot of my own consideration of the subject of 'Philosophy and the community' relates to existentialism. I said that existentialists are sensitive minds wielding the skills of forceful formulation and communication. Their impact is wide-spread even though the positive and constructive part of their programme is very little or nothing. It poses a big question for the community, the world community as well as every local community. They must all ask, what are the existentialists angry about? What are they rebelling against? The answer could be found in one word, viz., our professions which are not backed up by practice, a habit which seems to have become a peculiar modern malaise. If not this, then it is something else the existentialist protests against. In any case, the moral of it for all of us is that if moral, psychological and social vacua linger too long, they may not always produce a constructive solution, but they may certainly produce a rebellion more destructive than constructive, more unsettling than settling. Therefore while positive unwittingly teach us how important it is to back isolation, existentialist teach us how important it is to remove psychological vacua in thin in thinking and social vacua in daily practice

