

# Visions of Philosophy

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## I

Characterizations of philosophy abound. It is ‘the queen of the sciences’, a grand and sweeping metaphysical endeavour; or, less regally, it is a sort of deep anthropology or ‘descriptive metaphysics’, uncovering the general presuppositions or conceptual schemes that lurk beneath our words and thoughts. A different set of images portray philosophy as a type of therapy, or as a spiritual exercise, a way of life to be followed, or even as a special branch of poetry or politics. Then there is a group of characterizations that include philosophy as linguistic analysis, as phenomenological description, as conceptual geography, or as genealogy in the sense proposed by Nietzsche and later taken up by Foucault.

These characterizations and images – together with any number of others – could, of course, be taxonomized in different ways. For instance, someone might want to gather together the images of philosophy as deep anthropology, therapy and phenomenological description on the ground that philosophy, so pictured, focuses exclusively upon the *human* – on the presuppositions of human thought and talk, on mental health, and on human experiences. But the way I gathered together the various characterizations and images into three groups reflects, I suggest, a fundamental divide in attitudes towards philosophy.

For those who favour the first group of characterizations – philosophy as grand metaphysics, descriptive metaphysics, or deep anthropology – philosophy is an essentially *theoretical, speculative* enterprise. (‘Speculative’, in the honourable eighteenth-century sense employed, for instance, by Kant.) Its orientation is necessarily and primarily towards Truth – truths about reality or, failing that, about the conceptual schemes we employ for capturing what we take reality to be.<sup>1</sup> For those whose image of philosophy is that of a

<sup>1</sup> Peter Strawson compared the ‘analysis’ engaged in by the ‘descriptive metaphysician’ with the enquiries of the theoretical linguist into the ‘deep structures’ of languages. See his *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

therapy, a spiritual exercise, edifying poetry or politics, philosophy is, in essence, a *practical, vital* enterprise. Its orientation is towards the Good, towards Life as it should be. The Good in question might be that of the soul, of the mind, of society, maybe of the world as a whole. For all the differences among them, it is this practical, vital orientation that gathers together Wittgenstein's image of philosophy as a cure for 'mental cramps'; the Buddhist's idea of philosophy as wisdom in the service of the overcoming of suffering; the Stoic sage's commitment to philosophy as an exercise aimed at peace of mind; Heidegger's philosophical 'poetry' that will attune us to Being and release us to live authentically; and Marx's embrace of philosophy as an engine of change, not interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, for those who characterize philosophy as linguistic analysis, conceptual geography, genealogy and the like, the enterprise is essentially defined in terms of its *method* or *style* of enquiry. Philosophy, so considered, has no intrinsic orientation of its own: rather, it can be placed in service to Truth or to the Good, or both. Linguistic analysis, for instance, might be thought of as, in the first instance, an 'under-labourer of the sciences', preparing the ground on which science will unearth its truths. Or it might be seen as, primarily, a method employed in philosophical therapy, a means towards that conceptual clarity that enables us to clear up the confusions that depress us and distort our lives. In Ancient China, a major preoccupation was 'The Rectification of Names', something deemed necessary both in order to align our thought with reality, but also for the proper conduct of government. Nietzschean genealogy, likewise, might be engaged in either for the truths it discovers about our concepts, or for the way that – the *pudenda origo* of our moral systems now exposed – we are released from loyalty to those systems and are free to create 'new tables of values'.

Precisely because characterizations of philosophy in terms of method or style assign to philosophy no orientation of its own, they strike me as being secondary. For they feed upon some prior vision of philosophy's aim and orientation. Maybe philosophy does have, or should have, its distinctive methods and styles of enquiry: but that will be because these are the methods and styles especially appropriate for an enterprise – philosophy – that is already understood in terms of a purpose or orientation.

<sup>2</sup> On Heideggerian 'poetry' and Marx's 'politics' as expressions of conceptions of philosophy, see Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics', in his *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

And if that is so, then the basis divide is between the two visions of philosophy as, respectively, theory or speculation orientated towards Truth, and vital practice orientated towards the Good, towards Life.

## II

I have spoken of ‘visions’ and ‘images’ of philosophy, and this, I think, is an appropriate vocabulary, especially when it is made to resonate with Wittgenstein’s remarks, at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*,<sup>3</sup> that distinguish *pictures* and *ideas*. There, the distinction is applied to views about language, and Wittgenstein contrasts particular ideas about language – such as that the meaning of a word is the object it names – from a larger picture of language, as a system of names. But the distinction is clearly intended to apply more widely. Ideas, he tells us, are ‘rooted’ in pictures, which means that pictures are more basic – so basic, indeed, that they cannot be decisively refuted, since they help to determine what counts as refutation. A Wittgensteinian picture, as one commentator explains, is given up by people only when they have been *converted* and experienced a ‘reorientation of interests’.<sup>4</sup>

Talk of ‘conversion’ and ‘reorientation’ does not mean that nothing can sensibly be said for or against a picture, so as reasonably to invite or to resist conversion or a change of interest. Indeed, Wittgenstein’s own point – when invoking the notions of meaning as use, language games, and the forms of life in which these games are placed – seems to have been to convert his readers away from what he saw as a distorting vision of philosophical enquiry. The vision in question is one of the two great rival visions I identified earlier – the picture of philosophy as theory, as speculation, with its orientation towards Truth. I am sympathetic to Wittgenstein’s desire to convert away from this vision, and this is a sympathy I shall be trying to justify in this essay.

Some care, however, is needed in order to see what is really at issue between the rival visions. Champions of philosophy as theory or speculative science will usually concede, or rather boast, that philosophy’s achievements can be exploited for bettering the human condition. At the most general level, their point will be that things go better for us when we know what is true, for by acting on the basis of beliefs that match up with how things are we are less liable to

<sup>3</sup> Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (London: Macmillan, 1969), §1.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36ff.

live in friction with the world. At the same time, proponents of the rival vision of philosophy as a practical, vital enterprise will readily concede that achievement of its practical purposes requires understanding – that philosophers, even if they see themselves as therapists or poets, need to be ‘in the truth’. Philosophical therapy, after all, is not like administering a drug, and philosophical poetry is not fantasy.

But these polite concessions do not entail that there is no genuine rivalry. For one thing, the concessions being made are liable to be accused by rivals of not going far enough. For example, there will be those – Fichte, perhaps, or William James – who accuse the champions of philosophy as theory or speculation of failing to recognize that the Truth towards which philosophy is allegedly orientated is, ultimately, inseparable from the Good. In philosophy, at least, the true is what it is good to believe.

Aside from accusations of this kind, and the counter-accusations they are liable to invite, there is surely a genuine rivalry, between the two visions, over the *essence* or *soul*, as it were, of philosophy. Is philosophy essentially Truth-orientated and only accidentally, if at all, a contribution to the Good? Or is it, conversely, an essentially practical endeavour, with whatever concern it needs to have for Truth subordinated to, and shaped by, its pursuit of the Good? Later on, I shall revise this way of putting things. But locating the issue in this way is, I hope, sufficient to allow me to proceed to the business of conveying my sympathy for the practical vision – of defending a conversion away from the vision of philosophy as theory and a reorientation of interests in the direction of the Good. My claim is that the practical vision is more faithful to the origins and continuing impetus of philosophy. So I begin with some remarks on the infidelity of the rival vision to these origins and impetus.

### III

Richard Rorty (see note 2) uses the name ‘scientism’ for the vision of philosophy as theory or speculative science. This is liable to mislead, for ‘scientism’ is more familiarly applied to a particular, modern version of that wider vision. I am thinking, for example, of the version articulated by W.V.O. Quine, when he writes that ‘philosophy is continuous with [natural] science’, and differs from the individual natural sciences only in the breadth of the claims it makes. Since ‘whatever can be known can be known by means of science’,<sup>5</sup> the

<sup>5</sup> ‘Philosophical progress in language theory’, *Metaphilosophy* 1, 1970, 1.

continuity of philosophy with natural science is just as well. Here we have a good example of a particular ‘idea’ rooted in the larger ‘picture’ of philosophy as theory.

Rorty’s paradigmatic example of an advocate of ‘scientism’ is a philosopher who is certainly no Quinean – Edmund Husserl. This is because, Rorty tells us, for Husserl philosophy is founded on the conviction that it can emulate and indeed surpass the natural sciences in establishing genuinely ‘universal knowledge’. And that is a pretty good way of characterizing the vision of philosophy as theory or speculative science. In this vision, philosophy is essentially driven by the desire to know, and therefore owes its origins and development to, above all, the challenge of *scepticism*.

Why might this vision be less than compelling? To begin with, it will only be as compelling as the picture it assumes of the special sciences, such as physics, as repositories of objective knowledge of reality. Philosophy, after all, deserves the labels of ‘theory’, ‘speculative science’, and ‘a quest for universal knowledge’ because it is reckoned to emulate and surpass the special sciences. Now ironically, it was Husserl – following the lead of Nietzsche and Bergson, and in turn followed by his student, Heidegger – who helped to render suspect the image, the self-image indeed, of the sciences as mirrors of nature, unclouded or uncontaminated by ‘all-too-human’ interests, perspectives, prejudices and purposes. If, in the light of the powerful criticisms advanced by these philosophers, this (self) image of the sciences has lost its power to compel, then the comparison of philosophy with the sciences – the invitation to see philosophy as the viable pursuit of ‘universal knowledge’ – will have back-fired. Like the sciences themselves, philosophy will have been rendered a particular perspective on the world, a particular way of organizing or regimenting human experience. This is not, in itself, to deprecate the philosophical endeavour, but it is to surrender the vision of philosophy as essentially orientated towards Truth.

Another reason for finding the vision unconvincing concerns the assumption that philosophy must be primarily a response to the challenge of scepticism. Here, too, there is a danger of the strategy back-firing. For, even if this assumption is true – which is hardly evident – it is not clear that it helps to secure the vision of philosophy as ‘universal knowledge’. And this is because, historically, sceptical challenges were intended more often than not, less as invitations or demands to people that they secure their shaky claims to knowledge, than as challenges to ways of living, to misguided pursuits of the Good. Consider, for example, Pyrrhonism, in both its Hellenistic and early modern forms. The last thing that was wanted by Pyrrho

and his heirs, like Montaigne, was to goad people into trying to establish their claims to knowledge. On the contrary, their point was to *deter* people from wasting time and energy on a febrile, frustrating and futile search for certainty. A similar observation applies to scepticism in the context of Indian thought. In defending the *pramāṇas* ('means to knowledge') against critics, the philosophers of the Nyāya ('Logic') school were not primarily concerned to establish the possibility of certainty, but to defend the exercise of certain capacities – such as perception and testimony – deemed to contribute to 'felicity' and 'release from the wheel of life'. And what some of those sceptical critics, like the Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna, were interested in arguing was not that we do not really know what we claim to know, but that we should reject the whole conceptual scheme within which calls for evidence, and distinctions between the veridical and the illusory, assume excessive importance. And that is because it is a scheme which puts human beings 'out of joint' with 'the harmonious whole' of the universe.<sup>6</sup>

There is something further that makes questionable the thought that, even if philosophy has often been a response to a sceptical challenge, it must therefore be pictured as, primarily, a theoretical exercise, as the attempt to establish 'universal knowledge'. Sceptical challenges only have the power to disturb if the kind of knowledge whose possibility is challenged is a kind that *matters* to people. Few people would devote a career to trying to secure beliefs that, as Descartes put it, 'no sane man has ever seriously doubted'. But, in that case, attention will shift to the question of why it is that philosophers attempt to secure the possibility of this or that kind of knowledge, of why it is that this kind matters. (For Descartes, it was the potential of scepticism to question the existence of God and the after-life which made confrontation with it an urgent issue, and that is because scepticism is thereby threatening 'the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life'.<sup>7</sup>) And it will then be tempting to characterize philosophy, not as a theoretical endeavour to establish 'universal knowledge', but in terms of vital goals that are too important to be left as matters of opinion or taste – in terms, therefore, of an orientation towards the Good.

<sup>6</sup> See the selections from the Nyāya-Sutras and Nāgārjuna in David E. Cooper and Peter S. Foss (eds.), *Philosophy: The Classic Readings*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 98.

IV

If it is not *per se* worries about the possibility of knowledge to which philosophy should be seen as a response, what is it that gives to philosophy its impetus and continuing breath? In a couple of books, I have suggested answers that invoke, respectively, the notions of *alienation* and *answerability*.<sup>8</sup> The answers gestured at by those terms are not, I think, at odds with one another: on the contrary, they complement one another. In this section, I shall rehearse those suggested answers, and in the following section indicate what seems to me to be some of their combined merits.

There is nothing original, of course, in the suggestion that philosophy owes its origin and subsequent development to human beings' sense of alienation from the rest of reality. For Hegel, famously, the history of philosophy just is the story of the struggle by Spirit – and by its main 'vehicles', human beings – to overcome alienation. Philosophy's work will be done only when Spirit recognizes that there is, after all, no 'out and out other' to itself. After millennia during which human consciousness has been dominated by alienating dichotomies like mind and nature, or freedom and necessity, philosophy will eventually succeed in enabling us to 'find ourselves in nature' once more and to appreciate that our freedom presupposes rational necessity.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel's story of philosophy is but one attempt – albeit a particularly stirring one – to construe our intellectual history as that of creatures trying to resolve the matter of their status in a universe most of which indeed can strike them as 'out and out other'. And there is no need to subscribe to Hegel's particular story in order to appreciate the element of truth in the wider vision. Once human beings emerged from what Hegel called their 'sunkeness in nature', it must indeed have struck many of them how radically different they seemed to be from just about everything that surrounded them. Only they, it seemed, possessed, *inter alia*, a moral sense, a capacity for freedom, a feeling for beauty, and a tendency to worry about their relationship to the wider world.

The central issue posed for philosophy – the issue which, on this picture, drives the whole enterprise – is how, without cavalier

<sup>8</sup> *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 2003; *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Logic*, §194, and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §12 and §195.



dismissal of the uniqueness of human beings, they can nevertheless be perceived, and perceive themselves, to be integrated with the rest of reality. How, without rendering them aliens, freaks or danglers – set against and apart from what is ‘out and out other’ to them – may all that is distinctive of human existence be understood?

One thing, surely, that would soon have taxed our ancestors as they emerged from their ‘sunkenness in nature’ – from their innocence, as it were – must have been the question of whether what they thought, felt and did *measured up* to or was properly *answerable* to anything beyond itself. To be sure, there is a sophisticated modern, or postmodern, conceit that, as Rorty puts it, the only fidelity we require is ‘obedience to our own conventions’.<sup>10</sup> But that is a view – in so stark a form, at least – which few people entertained until recent times. It is a *late* view, and one which, arguably, no one really subscribes to even today. At any rate a case can be made for saying that such a conceit is *unliveable*. Whether or not that is so, it is surely true that, for a very long time, the search has been on for something to which our words, thoughts, feelings, purposes and deeds might be answerable – for what Kierkegaard called a *Maalestock*, a ‘measure’, a ‘qualitative criterion’.<sup>11</sup>

The ‘measure’ intended here is one of our lives as a whole, and certainly not simply, or mainly, of the accuracy of our beliefs. While it may be impossible finally to isolate the components of belief, feeling, purpose and action in our lives, the initial focus in the search for measure is liable to be upon purpose and action. For the ‘metaphysical horror’, as Leszek Kolakowski calls it,<sup>12</sup> that impels the quest for something to which our lives our answerable is the dark thought that it just doesn’t matter what we do and aim at, that nothing we seek and achieve is worth more than anything else we might have sought or achieved had life gone differently.

The upshot of these reflections on philosophy as grounded in concerns with alienation and answerability is that philosophy is indeed orientated towards the Good. For if this vision is cogent then, to put the matter in a somewhat Daoist idiom, philosophy’s enterprise is the dual one of a search for a sense of our integration with the way of things and a quest to find, within the way of things, a measure of our lives. Differently expressed, it is the endeavour to

<sup>10</sup> See the Preface to Rorty’s *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, in H. and E. Hong (eds.), *The Essential Kierkegaard*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 363.

<sup>12</sup> *Metaphysical Horror*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).



overcome alienation and to become liberated from the 'horrible' thought that lives are answerable to nothing beyond themselves.

### V

But how faithful is the vision articulated in the previous section to the genesis of philosophy and, more importantly, does it capture the continuing impetus of philosophy?

It speaks in favour of this vision, in my judgement, that it places the original enterprise of philosophy in close proximity to religion. The two are close since what philosophy endeavours to establish – the integration of human life with the rest of reality and a measure for the conduct of life – is promised by just about every religion to those men and women who adopt its dispensation. It is no accident, surely, that 'the axial age' in which the great religions emerged is the one in which philosophy is first pursued in a disciplined, critical form. Indeed, for many centuries, making a cut between works of religion and works of philosophy would have been an arbitrary procedure. Were the *Upanishads*, for instance, exercises in religion or in philosophy? A pointless question.

That philosophy emerged in the same climate of concerns as religion does not mean, of course, that every philosophy must be religiously committed. But it does suggest that the philosophies which belong to the main historical current of philosophy have shared the aspirations of religion – integration and measure – even when these aspirations have been pursued godlessly and naturalistically.

The best defence of the vision, however, is that it renders salient, and helps to ground, the discernible rhythms that run through and give form to what I just called 'the main historical current' of philosophy. One does not have to subscribe to a grand History of Philosophy, replete with Laws, Goals and Progress, in order to accept that a relatively small number of theses and antitheses – and the rhythm of their oscillation – gives structure and pattern to philosophy's history.

Fichte may not have been too far wrong when maintaining, at the start of his *Wissenschaftslehre*,<sup>13</sup> that the only real dispute in philosophy has always been between *Idealism* and *Realism* (or *Dogmatism*, as he pejoratively called it). This is the dispute, in all its many shapes, between those schemes (like Fichte's own) which

<sup>13</sup> *Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 9ff.

would make the world more mind-like than we usually imagine it to be, and those which (like physicalism) would render the mind more world-like than we might imagine it to be.

It is hard, in my view, to understand the centrality of this dispute between Idealism and Realism – and the constant oscillation between them over the millennia – except as a conflict between two opposed strategies for addressing the issue of alienation. The world can be shown not to be ‘out and out other’, and hence alien, to human beings *either* by demonstrating that it is much more like us than we thought, *or* by proving that we are much more like it than we thought. To the first strategy belong the attempts, for example, to depict the world as purposive, or as ‘constituted’ by thought, or as a collection of divine ideas. To the second strategy belong the attempts to establish that, for example, we are purely material beings, or that human freedom and the moral sense are, if not illusions, then reducible to the same nature possessed by everything else that we live alongside. (Dualists, incidentally, do not stand outside the dialectic of alienation. For while they may try to be even-handed in recognizing the irreducible existence of both mind and matter, they are usually anxious to mitigate the alienating effect of the opposition they maintain. They will argue, for instance, that there is divinely established harmony between the two or, as in the case of some Indian schools, that an oppositional engagement with the material world is a precondition for an eventual purification and liberation of the mind.)

If Fichte exaggerates in judging philosophy to be no more than the prolonged battle between Idealism and Realism, this is because he ignores another, though not unrelated, struggle that has gone on for millennia. Here the pattern is one of recoils back and forth between three stances on the issue of whether there is a way reality is independently of how it is conceived of and described. According to one of these stances, which we might label ‘humanism’, there is no such way. The world is necessarily a ‘human world’, and no sense can finally attach to the idea that there is a way the world is that transcends our perspectives and ‘takes’ on it. As Sartre put it, it is only through human being that ‘it happens that *there is a world*’.<sup>14</sup> According to the other two stances, there is a way reality absolutely is, irrespective of our ‘takes’ on it – but a crucial difference separates these two stances. For the first, absolute reality can, in principle at least, be conceptualized and articulated: we can, with enough

<sup>14</sup> *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes, (London: Methuen, 1957), 552.

effort and luck, know what it is like. For the second, however, it cannot be conceptualized and articulated: reality must be an ineffable mystery to us. In honour of Kant, we might label these two stances 'dogmatic' and 'transcendental' absolutism respectively. The former is represented by all those metaphysical systems – from Spinozan monism to Logical Atomism, from Berkeleyan idealism to contemporary physicalism – which purport to tell us just how reality fundamentally is. The latter is represented by the many philosophies that invoke a notion – the Dao, Brahman, the Godhead, Being, or whatever – that is deemed to be radically mysterious and 'beyond' whatever can be articulated.

It is difficult, in my judgement, to understand why so many people have devoted so much time, energy and passion to defending or refuting the positions just adumbrated except by reference to a preoccupation with the 'vital' issue of answerability or measure. In relation to this issue, the position of the 'dogmatic' absolutist has its obvious appeal: not only is there a way that reality absolutely is, but we can know how it is and therefore hope to identify how our lives must go if they are properly to accord with fundamental features of reality – with, say, the divine will or with Nature's teleological ends. For both the 'humanist' and the 'transcendentalist', however, this is a pipe-dream, for it fails to appreciate that whatever we can conceptualize and articulate belongs, not to an absolute order, but to a perspectival world, one that is the way it is only in relation to human purposes and interests. For the 'transcendentalist', this cannot, however, mean abandoning the idea of absolute reality, for then our lives would be without anything to answer to beyond themselves. What has to be accepted, though, is that this reality is radically mysterious, and that while we can have intimations of the Dao, Being or whatever – intimations sufficient to provide some measure for our lives – this does not approximate to the crisp, theoretical, propositional knowledge aspired to by the 'dogmatist'.

For the 'humanists', meanwhile, measure and answerability must be, as it were, internal to human existence: for while they reject the appeal to mystery as much as the appeal to an absolute that may be articulated, they are usually unwilling entirely to give up on the quest for measure. The measure or 'criterion' of our beliefs, values and purposes, it might be suggested, is the strength and authenticity of the commitment we have to them. Or the proposal might be that we answer to all that there is to be answerable to when we adopt beliefs, values and purposes without the intrusion of comforting and self-serving illusions – of the kind, it will be added, to which absolutists are prone.

## David E. Cooper

So, to conclude this section, the history of philosophy – its rhythms, patterns of recoils, its alliances and disalliances – falls better into place when it is envisioned as the story of a long enterprise engaged in by human beings who struggle to resolve the ‘vital’ issues of alienation and answerability. The story manifests the endeavour to live well, to lead lives that are integrated with, and measure up to, the way of things. Thus envisioned, philosophy has been an essentially practical or vital undertaking, orientated towards the Good.

## VI

In this final section, I want to consider a predictable objection to the vision I have been recommending. The objection is not, I think, fatal, and it provides a welcome opportunity to guard against a misconstrual of the position I have advanced.

A sympathetic critic might concede that philosophy is thoroughly implicated in the endeavour to live well and with a sense, therefore, of integration with a way of things to which human life is answerable. But this critic will insist that philosophy itself is best characterized as a particular *means* towards the success of this endeavour – a specifically theoretical, speculative, ‘scientific’ means. Philosophy, then, is a search for truths, albeit ones that may then be practically and vitally exploited for a wider enterprise directed towards the Good.

Well, it was cheerfully conceded in section II that philosophy’s way of securing integration and answerability – its angle of approach to the Good, as it were – is that of *understanding*. In that sense, yes, philosophy is orientated towards Truth. But this is not to concede that the understanding philosophy seeks is simply, or at all, a *means* to the resolution of vital issues. And this is because the understanding sought is not finally separable – as a means is from its end – from the Good towards which it is orientated. It is the idea of an *opposition* between orientations towards the True and the Good – one that my earlier remarks might have encouraged – which now needs to be revised in the light of the critic’s objection.

The revision will invoke something like the Ancients’ equation of knowledge with virtue. This equation was most often employed to stress that a virtuous person must have knowledge. A bad man, as the Stoics urged, cannot be wise. But the equation can be, and has been, employed to emphasize that a person is not possessed of the relevant kind of knowledge – philosophical understanding, in effect – unless he or she is attuned to the Good. For the understanding in question has not been acquired or fully absorbed unless it brings

with it precisely that transformation of vision and comportment towards the world which was the purpose in seeking it.

Stoicism furnishes a good example of connection. In Book 3 §2 of his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius writes that the Stoic philosopher or sage, who has achieved ‘deeper insight into the processes of the universe’, will therefore find ‘hardly any phenomenon’ that does not give him pleasure and invite his respect and admiration. For as he explains later (Bk 10 §21), this ‘insight’ embraces the appreciation that ‘the universe loves to produce all that [is] produced’, an appreciation that requires the sage in turn to ‘love’ the world as a whole. Failure so to ‘love’ the world – to feel integrated with it, and to find the measure of one’s life in it – entails that one is not, after all, a sage, a Stoic philosopher, for one cannot as yet have achieved that authentic ‘cosmic consciousness’ which is the criterion of sagehood.<sup>15</sup>

Many other examples from the history of philosophy could be given of this insistence that philosophical understanding is lacking or incomplete unless manifested in virtues that are in turn manifested in an appropriate comportment towards the world. For the Buddha, for instance, unless enlightenment or understanding cuts a person free from the ‘unwholesome roots’ of greed, aversion, and delusion, then it is not enlightenment or full understanding. For properly to understand, and not simply to mouth, such doctrines as that of ‘not self’ *is* in crucial part to be transformed in the way one sees, and feels and acts towards other people. But there is no need to pile up more examples in order to appreciate the central point being made. The understanding that philosophy seeks is not ‘mere’ propositional knowledge that may or may not then be exploited for some practical purpose, and that may or may not be employed as a means to the resolution of some ‘vital’ issue. Rather, it is an understanding that is already invested with an orientation towards the Good, already ‘on the way’ towards resolution of the ‘vital’ issues that give philosophy its impetus.

The understanding in question, to give it an old name, is wisdom or *sophia*. So my conclusion, my proposal, could be expressed by saying that philosophy is indeed philosophy, the love and pursuit of wisdom. The journey towards that conclusion has been, I hope, a little less boring than the conclusion itself.

<sup>15</sup> On Marcus Aurelius, see the illuminating discussion in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. M. Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 190ff and 250ff.