

Philosophy and Reality

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A few years ago I wrote an article on philosophical thinking.¹⁾ What I discussed in it may be summarized as follows. Philosophy should be an activity of thought rather than a systematic doctrine. It should be functional rather than doctrinal. The function of philosophy consists of two kinds of activity, analytic and synthetic. The analytic activity is indispensable to philosophical thinking and theorization in general and it should be concentrated mainly on the inquiry into the nature of cognition in a broad sense of the word. In other words, analytic activity, implying both critical and reflective functions, should be engaged in the logical analysis and the epistemological examination of human knowledge. Without this activity philosophical thinking would lose its vital exactitude and fall into obscure and fruitless speculation.

There are three problem-regions which contemporary philosophy claims the legitimate competence to treat. One of these is epistemological region and the others are axiological and ontological ones respectively. Obviously the epistemological region is inquired into *ex hypothesi* exclusively by analytic activity. And in the investigation into axiological and ontological problems, on the other hand, synthetic activity works primarily, which should operate in this case, however, closely hand in hand with the analytic, because the epistemological foundation and the logical clarification by analysis is essential to any kind of learned activities.

1) "On Philosophical Thinking—A Personal Belief—", *Memoirs of the Osaka University of Liberal Arts and Education*, No. 11, 1962.

Now, in the present paper I am going to deal with the bearings and missions of philosophy in reality or, in other words, the actual significance and function of philosophy on the basis of the above-mentioned discussion.

1

As is well-known, a great number of philosophers in the past have given their own definitions of philosophy respectively. And from his peculiar basic point of view each philosopher has established the aim and mission of his philosophizing. Therefore, philosophy has never had a uniform mission yet. One might well think that it belongs to the essence of philosophy not to have any fixed aim. And this should be the case on account of the very nature that it is the product of human mind. Man feels and thinks in his own world. Everyone is a son of his age.¹⁾ His thought, however imaginary and unreal it may look, being necessarily relevant to his actual concerns, cannot transcend his sphere of existence. So is philosophy. It is strongly conditioned by the historical and social circumstances of the thinker as well as his character. These circumstances may be called in the widest generalization "reality". By reality mentioned here is not meant, therefore, the metaphysical entity beyond the limits of human experience, which has been the favorite subject matter of traditional philosophical thought, but the sensible and concrete whole that lies within them. It is, therefore, the totality of the possible and actual objects of experience.²⁾ Since reality, accordingly, is what man lives in and what he thinks of, it should actually underlie any type of philosophy.

Since early in the twentieth century a radical philosophical tendency called analytic philosophy³⁾ has been predominant in England, the

1) Hegel: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Vorrede, S. 16.

2) To make clear the difference between the reality as metaphysical entity and that in the empirical meaning, the latter may be referred to as "actuality".

3) This term is used here in a broad sense. More accurately to this philosophical trend belong some numbers of schools which differ in doctrine from each other so much that this term is not wide enough to cover them all.

United States, and some other countries. J. A. Ayer, one of its most acute advocates, once pointed out that the philosopher must confine himself to works of clarification and analysis instead of attempt to formulate speculative truths, or to look for first principles, or to make *a priori* judgments about the validity of our empirical beliefs, because philosophy is nothing but a department of logic.¹⁾ In his opinion, consequently, philosophy neither can nor should be in nature directly concerned with reality itself. This intellectual attitude has been assumed more or less by all the schools belonging to analytic philosophy. All of them unanimously leave reality out of court. They withhold from themselves the competence to deal immediately with it and regard themselves as merely qualified to be concerned with the method of the inquiry into it.

Certainly I think by no means that what analytic philosophers claim is thoroughly wrong. On the contrary, as will be mentioned below, their views may be to the point, so far as an aspect, not all, of philosophical thinking is concerned. But I cannot agree with them in the basic conception of philosophy. The assertion that philosophy should be exclusively analytic and that the whole task of philosophy should lie solely in giving logical and epistemological analysis of human knowledge does not seem to me undoubtedly correct. I rather believe that the most essential task of philosophy is to make an effort to give an integrated and unified theoretical picture of the real world. "It is the mission of philosophy to comprehend what exists." (*Das was ist zu begreifen, ist die Aufgabe der Philosophie.*)²⁾ This word of Hegel expresses very appropriately what is the starting point of every philosophical thinking. No theory can be worthy of the name of philosophy, if it leaves this point out of sight. Actually reality itself is where philosophy comes into being and what it is for. Philosophy is above all study of reality, of which the focus is philosopher's actual as well as intellectual concern about man and nature. To be

1) Language, Truth and Logic, Chap. II.

2) Hegel: *ibid.*

solely analytic is, therefore, certainly the necessary but not the sufficient condition for philosophy to fulfill its mission, because by being exclusively analytic it naturally cannot deal directly but only mediately with the real world consisting of man and nature.

2

Philosophy should be real in the above-mentioned sense of the word not only at its starting point but also through its course of development in order to render its task properly. But in fact it is prone to be away from being real all the same, satisfying itself with being mere unreal speculation by losing sufficient fidelity to the real. Now, since reality is essentially the aggregation of facts and/or of the relations between them, the real necessarily involves and implies the factual. Reality detached from facts should be meaningless in the sound understanding. Philosophy should be preceded by the knowledge of facts. Nevertheless, theories of many prominent philosophers which they themselves alleged to be real sometimes fell into unreal speculative doctrines by ignoring or misunderstanding the importance of the factual knowledge which was to underlie them. For instance, Hegel, while he emphasizes the origin of philosophical thinking from reality (as mentioned above), asserts that the rational is the real and the real is the rational (*Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.*)¹⁾ and that what exists is the reason itself. (*Das, was ist, ist die Vernunft.*)²⁾ No one, however, who relies on the common sense can find the persuasive ground for the validity of this assertion of his. What qualifies him thus to identify the real with the rational is, I believe, nothing but his *a priori* dogma or unprovable belief. He gave predominance to the dogma over the fact. This is actually reverse to straight thinking. In fact he once pointed out that philosophy is essentially reverse to common sense. His gospel may read, "In the beginning was the reason. All things were made by it.

1) Hegel: op. cit., S. 14.

2) Hegel: op. cit., S. 16.

And without it was not anything made that was made."¹⁾ In this very dogma I cannot agree with him.

At any rate philosophical thinking must keep itself in contact with the factual at all times. The factual is certainly the object of human experience and to deal with it on learned level is primarily the business of science, which is systematization of experience. So the philosopher must pay close attention to the contemporary stage of science and incorporate the results into its own theorization. For example, the philosopher who is engaged in the inquiry into nature should be well informed of the scientific theories on the structure of the universe advanced mainly by physics. In other words, philosophy as learning of reality should be, as it were, the reaper of science. It should utilize and synthesize the results achieved in various fields of science in comprehending reality. The philosopher must have sufficient understanding on the branches of science to which his theory is closely relevant. Each field of science aims at making its own interpretation of the world (Weltbild). And in the long run these world interpretations must be unified into an integral one. The unification of science in this sense belongs to the essential mission of philosophy. It is, therefore, to be regretted that some outstanding philosophers in the past, neglecting the serious significance of science, considered philosophy to be superior in the rank of learning to science. In Hegel's opinion, for instance, Newton's physics, viewed in the speculative light, fell into a fundamental mistake. But at present everyone knows whether Hegel was right or not. Of course there were in fact other philosophers who kept their theories in close contact with science, or who set forth their doctrines on the firm basis of science.

The fact that philosophy is the reaper of science means that in the relation of philosophy to reality science plays the role of mediator. For as is obvious from what has been discussed so far, philosophy requires and utilizes the results of science in making adequate and fruitful inquiry into reality. In this case philosophy works synthet-

1) After the Gospel According to St. John, Chap. 1.

ically as a matter of course. On the other hand, however, as analytic schools have properly pointed out, it is undeniable that one of the main tasks of philosophy should be to provide science with logical and epistemological foundation by its analytic activity. Therefore, philosophy should be synthetic as well as analytic in carrying out its essential business.

3

There is another aspect of the relation between philosophy and science left untouched so far. Philosophical thinking in general should be formulated into the form of theory. And the theory alleges to be true, or in other words, to correspond completely to reality. But in fact there is no clear evidence of the truth in this sense. Theory whose truth has not been definitely confirmed should be called hypothesis. It may be said that philosophical theories are actually hypotheses, although they always avow themselves to be statements of truth. So far as truth is concerned, as is well-known, there are two kinds of it: logical (analytic) and factual (synthetic). If philosophy should be a study of reality, as I have maintained hitherto, it should be concerned mainly, not exclusively, with the latter. In opposition to logical truth, for which the criterion is absence of contradiction, by factual truth is meant what follows. In learning generally a proposition or a set of propositions are stated of facts in order to make accurate explanations which are consistent with each other on the more or less regular relations between them. The totality of these relations is the connotation of reality. And what these propositions designate is not confined to descriptions of the present state of reality, but it necessarily includes predictions on its future state. So here arises the problem if or to what extent these descriptions or predictions are compatible with facts. I understand the factual truth to be the compatibility of propositions with facts in this sense. Of course science seeks this kind of truth, but the scope of its individual field is restricted. It covers only parts, not the whole of reality. As mentioned above, however, philosophy seeks to form an outlook or a

picture of the whole reality.¹⁾ In doing this business philosophy has to combine into unity the factual truths discovered by various inter-related branches of science.

Since philosophical theory is thus the unification of factual truths on reality, it requires the examination of its validity. In this respect the same is true with scientific theories. In other words, philosophy should be verified or falsified through the reference to facts. It is true that the propositions which can be neither verified nor falsified are meaningless and fruitless. And in the procedure of verification philosophy, being the reaper of science, requires the aid of relevant branches of science. Science fills, therefore, here the role of verification medium for philosophy. As the recent history of philosophy shows, so far as verification of scientific propositions in particular is concerned, there have arisen so many complicated questions as regards its possibility and adequacy that no final and unambiguous solution of them can be found in the field of the so-called philosophy of science. But in any case I want to emphasize that the verification of philosophical theories through the medium of science requires serious consideration.

Now, since science makes descriptions and explanations on facts, it has nothing to do with the evaluation of them. Scientific inquiry should be essentially free from any kind of evaluative attitude but in the case of setting up its aim or being conscious of its significance. How should philosophy, then, bear itself in regard to evaluation? Certainly philosophy has been defined in many ways. But if it means such theoretical inquiry into reality as I have discussed in this paper, namely, if philosophy is understood as learning on the whole reality on the basis of unification of some numbers of interrelated branches of science, I maintain that philosophy must be indifferent to evaluation

1) Philosophy is concerned with the whole reality and science deals with the partial. But the word "whole reality" may sound too ambiguous. By this word should be understood the entities which can be expressed by such general concepts as nature, man, etc. These entities have been treated by metaphysical speculation traditionally.

as science is, because philosophy in this sense may well be referred to as the unified science.

On the basis of those fundamental conceptions that have been shown so far, I propose here an idea of philosophical study of human being.

4

Since the very early stage of the history of philosophical thinking man has been its object, because philosophy is directed for the most part by the fundamental desire of human mind to know himself. So *anthropology*¹⁾ (study of man) has been naturally the main field of philosophy, as Ernst Cassirer describes in the brief historical sketch in his work on *anthropological* philosophy.²⁾ The fact that man thinks of himself means that his self is a problem to himself and therefore that he puts a question of himself to himself. Arnold Gehlen, one of the distinguished *anthropological* philosophers in the contemporary Germany finds in this state of affairs one of the basic ideas of his theory. He maintains, "The need which reflective men feel to interpret their own human existence is not a mere theoretical one. (It is essential to the very nature of their whole existence. And interpreting oneself implies facing and objectifying oneself.) ... There is a living being, to whose most important characteristics belongs the necessity to assume a posture to itself. (It is man.) ... Man must interpret his nature and therefore bear himself actively, posturing against himself and others."³⁾ In short, man is a living who finds a problem in himself and/or with himself.

Man is the nearest and the most concrete reality to himself. Accordingly, it is quite natural that man should have been, and should be a philosophical problem to himself. As has been discussed above,

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- 1) This term and the like in italics in this article will be used as "study of man" in the etymologically primary and the more generalized meaning as is mostly the case with the German word: *Anthropologie*.
 - 2) An Essay on Man, Part I, I. The Crisis in Man's Knowledge of Himself.
 - 3) Gehlen, A.: Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt, 4., verbesserte Auflage, Einführung, S. 9. (my translation)

philosophical thinking on reality must be real not only at its starting point but also through its development. So in making inquiry into human being philosophically, "the philosopher is not permitted to construct an artificial man; he must describe a real one. All the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based upon and confirmed by our experience of man."¹⁾ In other words, if *anthropological* philosophy needs to meet the requirements for being real study, it must receive a great deal of assistance from many branches of empirical science dealing with human beings. Man is really a complex being. The entity of man integrates many aspects, each of which is respectively the object of a branch of empirical science. Biology, physiology, psychology, sociology, physical and social anthropology, ethnology, economics, and many other sciences treating the border field between them are among the branches of the so-called human science. And every one of them has made an enormous progress in recent times. The differentiation in their field and scope has also been radical. "Owing to this development our modern theory of man lost its intellectual center. We acquired instead a complete anarchy of thought... Theologians, scientists, politicians, sociologists, biologists, psychologists, ethnologists, economists all approach the problem (of man) from their own viewpoints. To combine or unify all these particular aspects and perspectives was impossible."²⁾ Another well-known *anthropological* philosopher said, "We have a scientific, a philosophical, and a theological *anthropology* that know nothing of each other. Therefore we no longer possess any clear and consistent idea of man. The ever-growing multiplicity of the particular sciences that are engaged in the study of man has much more confused and obscured than elucidated our concept of man."³⁾

1) Cassirer, E.: *An Essay on Man*, p. 11.

2) Cassirer, E.: *op. cit.*, p. 21.

3) Scheler, Max: *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, S. 13 f. (translated and cited by Cassirer in his "Essay on Man", p. 22, my italics.)

Nevertheless, however difficult or even almost impossible it may look, philosophy must make efforts to unify the results of science, so long as it wants to fulfill its mission of the inquiry into the whole reality. Each branch of science makes its characteristic picture of the world through its peculiar perspective. It is the task of philosophy to combine these individual pictures made by empirical science into a unified one. In doing this, philosophy plays the role of the reaper of the various fields of science on the one hand and of the mediator between them on the other. So is the case with man. In rendering the task of unification in this sense in regard to man, philosophy requires a theoretical center or focus, as was mentioned above, on which the results of human sciences are concentrated and therefore without which the unification itself would be impossible. This focus is the general outlook on man, that is to say, what man is considered to be in the fundamental point of view. But it is to be regretted that this very general outlook is turning difficult to obtain in the human situations of the contemporary times. For at present man himself stands on the very unstable foundation. He cannot be confident in himself. Moreover, he is about to lose the true sight of himself in the most intricated circumstances. The significance of his own existence is being called in question. For instance, recently some serious issues on man like the following have been raised on the part of scientists as well as of philosophers. Is there any basic differences between man and machine? If any, what are the differences? And if no, is man nothing but a kind of precision instrument? These issues themselves show obviously that man stands at a crisis. Some people may claim that they are closely related finally to the traditional problem of philosophy on mind and body. Now that, however, various kinds of highly organized automatic machines have been developed in a large scale and that many new theories on automation like cybernetics have been advanced in rapid succession, such answers to those questions as philosophers have given on mind and body in the past are not only unfruitful but off the point. And

in order to give adequate answers, *anthropological* philosophy has to call for the aid of even physics and mathematics that have been considered to be fairly away from the so-called human science. Kant, who emphasized the dignity of personality with sincere respect, would despair of the future of mankind in face of such humiliating situations. But we may not give up the effort to search for the focus of man's self-orientation through the inquiry into the reality of man.

Now, I believe that the crucial point in *anthropological* philosophy is the relation between "natural man" and "cultural man". Originally in human being nature and culture are connected with each other so closely that one cannot be separated from the other. Such definitions of man as *animal rationale* and *animal symbolicum* show in fact basically that man is essentially a unity of nature and culture. The question is, however, how and why nature and culture constitute a unity in man. To this question many philosophers have tried to give various answers. But most of them are from the speculative viewpoint. Speculative explanations are at present of no use. What we require is the *scientifico-philosophical* inquiry into the basic problems of man.

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