

Some time ago, I tried to encapsulate my view on the essence of philosophy within a single sheet of paper. It's only fair that, as we begin the course, my perspective is, metaphorically speaking, placed on the table. Though the following is not, strictly, a reflection as to what will be covered over the course of the year, it does reflect an impulse out of which my own presentation is living.

PHILOSOPHY AS LOVE INDWELLING WISDOM

It's perhaps too cliché to remind ourselves that 'philosophy' means 'love of wisdom', or that philosophy begins with standing in awed reverence before the world. After all, what do these statements actually mean? and then there is the added perplexity that philosophy can at times appear rather dry and seemingly unrelated to us or to the world. And yet...

Philosophy addresses some of the most important questions raised by humanity: questions pertaining to how we come to knowledge and truth; to the ethical or moral qualities in an action; and to beauty and of our own aesthetic appreciation and sensibilities - these all characterise the perennial philosophical quest. Philosophy may certainly begin with an awed awakening before the world, whilst its blossoming unfolds in striving to grasp this awakening within the complexity of its context.

The awakening and blossoming of that which we call philosophy are but love emerging and being brought to insightful consciousness.

LOVE, WISDOM, AND TRUTH

Peter Deunov, better known for the development of paneurythmy, speaks of love, wisdom and truth as the central virtues of human development. In an entirely different manner, another 20th century giant, Hans von Balthasar, speaks of the True, the Good and the Beautiful as transcendentals characteristic of God, and yet (he would say 'and therefore') indwelling within each human heart. Of beauty, he writes that 'we can be sure that whoever sneers at her name [...] soon will no longer be able to love'. To dwell in beautiful spaces, partake of beauty, enables one to open to love for our world and for the other.

It is characteristic of not only mystics, but so many philosophers deserving of their title, that love features so prominently. 'Love', Rudolf Steiner writes at the end of the very first chapter of *Philosophy of Freedom*, 'opens our eyes' to all the good to which we may otherwise remain blind. The good bears a philosophical closeness to wisdom, being the right choice when faced with the immediacy and complexity of the world: it is through the love-filled heart that wise counsel and guidance is graced.

Love, indeed, opens to us the world as well as the unique humanity of our neighbour. This is so reminiscent of Christ's response to what is the most important of the Torah: to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love one's fellow human being as oneself.

With love, there is a presence of the beloved that enters one's being. This beholding of the beloved allows a deepening of understanding to emerge, whether the 'beloved' is a topic of interest one is pursuing, a blossom, a cherished pet, the food one is about to partake, one's child, or indeed one's partner. Perhaps this also explains Paul's letter that points that of faith, hope and love, 'the greatest of them all is love'. It also closely connects with the Buddhist concept of Karuna, usually translated as 'compassion', that, in Buddhism, is considered an important precondition for Wisdom and Truth.

ON THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

If in essence philosophy stands as an insightful development of love flowing from within the human being, its practice will take myriad forms. First and foremost is the need to stop and behold, to take time for reflection, to persevere with what can be harduous demands required of thinking with the presence of new insights and an altered or expanding mental horizon, and to develop tolerance and equanimity without which the beholding required in awareness remains closed.

From thence, not only may more understanding and wisdom manifest, but love itself flow more abundantly into our own engagement with the world, leading to an enriched life.

PHILOSOPHY'S HISTORICAL UNFOLDING

Admittedly, philosophy is not a subject that can be sustained without the concurrent arduous development of clarity of thinking. This is reflected in so many of the carefully crafted philosophical texts across the centuries.

Amongst the foremost of contemporary philosophers, John Deely stands out as a shining philosophical beacon. In his *Four Ages of Understanding*, Deely presents this human endeavour as having four phases, of which the first three, at least in the West, is reflected by a characteristic linguistic culture: Greek, Latin, nation-based regional languages, and a semiotic consciousness. Rudolf Steiner, in his *Riddles of Philosophy*, pretty much pre-empts this, reflecting, however, differing phases of humanity's developing consciousness and focussing on individual philosophers who exemplify this awakening.

With philosophy, we consciously face a current situation where we are called to be not only mindful, but also reflective, and aware of both our mindfulness and reflectiveness - an ability that characteristically distinguishes and separates us from our animal cousins.

Philosophy, after a couple of decades of relative neglect, is again being consciously sought. Its history, as well as its foundation in love, wisdom and truth, may aid us towards insights into understanding, caring action, and the ability to rightly value freedom.

And it is these reflections that have lead me to have the temerity to offer this course.

WHAT IS THE COURSE ABOUT?

The study seeks to do two things: in the first instance, to seek to answer questions pertaining to knowledge, to living well, and the awed presence of beauty; in the second, in providing a journey through the development and waylays of the history of ideas as they emerged and took hold in especially the West. Why the West? simply, and though there are parallels, we have neither the time, nor the language skills, to be able to do justice to its development in Hindo-Sanskrit or Cathay-Chinese regions, settings and cultures.

Let us begin our awakening journey with an imaginative story exemplifying a peculiar understanding of the consciousness of animals. Typically, stimuli will engender one of three possible responses (or even a combination of these): a positive engagement (or in other words, one of desire); a neutral or non-response (such as the common sight of a small twig within a forest floor); or an avoidance exemplified by what Walter Cannon calls the fight or flight response - basically, get it away or get away from it (Cf his 1915 *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage*).

Note that the 'aggression' of a wolf towards a lamb-as-meal may *look or appear* somewhat similar to the 'aggression' of a wolf seeking to remove a territorial adversary, yet that is due more to the limited expressive capacities of the wolf as well as, importantly, of our own perceptive and typical cognitive capacities - were we able to *smell* the difference, I am certain the two situations would reveal vastly different affective states in the wolf. In the first instance, one of (positive) desire; in the second, of (negative) exclusion or repulsion.

Our human situation *prior* to the specific awakening to which I refer may be described in similar terms, and our biological makeup and instincts lead us to have responses that are desirous/positive, neutral, and repelling/negative. But what happens when we gain this meta-cognitive awakening, when we stop and consciously behold with awed question, with awed reverence, with awed puzzlement, the world we face and in which we live?

Questions such as: 'What is this?' (with which, of course, a puzzled dog sensing a new marking may somewhat similarly, though not self-reflectively, engage); 'Why is this here?'; 'What am I doing?'; 'Why am I doing it?'; 'Should I be doing it?'; 'Why / Why not?'; 'Why am I here?'; 'What am I?'; 'What is death?'; 'What are the stars?'; 'How do I know?'; 'Why do some things appear beautiful and others repulsive?'; 'What is beauty?'; 'Why do some sounds sound harmonious?'

If we looked at everyone of these questions and sought to group them into fields of enquiry, we would likely end up with the three-fold form I present here that will to a very large extent guide our enquiry:

- 1) HOW DO I/WE KNOW, AND WHAT IS THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH?
- 2) WHAT SHOULD I/WE DO, AND WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE GOOD?
- 3) WHAT IS THE INHERENT ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE AND OF BEAUTY?

We can see that each of these leads to different kinds of investigations dependent on the type of further questions we may have.

The first leads to both epistemology proper as well as investigations on the cognitive makeup of the knower (whether the knower is ourselves, a rose-bush, a bee, bird, angel, or a serpent). The various idioscopic 'sciences' develop precisely out of the nature of these secondary types of questions. Philosophy itself transcends these and holds the more cenoscopic question in view.

The second question, similarly, leads to both ethics as well as to various social branches that look at organisational, societal and political structures that ultimately seek to enable or maximise wellness as determined to be of eudemic worth or merit.

The third question leads to aesthetics as well as questions of the ultimate reality of the cosmos, of the essence of God, and hence of metaphysics and theology.

What is interesting is that all too often through the course of human history, answers to questions of the first type have slipped as unintended statements as though answering questions of the third. Typical ontological statements (what is there) are of a different nature to the type of ultimate metaphysical nature addressed by the third type of question.

HUMAN UNFOLDING OVER THE COURSE OF TIME

In order to better gain an understanding of this human striving, we shall, following both John Deely and Rudolf Steiner, look at the development of how these types of questions have been addressed by dividing time from primal philosophical beginnings through to the present into phases.

With Deely, and as previously mentioned, these are divided and reflected through the dominant language used in the philosophical corpus of the West. The languages are to be taken as 'markers' or indicators of the type of answers and the type of philosophical enquiry and thinking exemplified: roughly from approximately the 6th century BC through to the 4th century AD, the Greek (period and) language dominated philosophical discourse; from the 4th through to the 17th, Latin (as period and dominant language); from the 17th through to the present, the Modern period with its multiple and various national languages; and, importantly for Deely, into the 21st century (though periodically present in the most developed thoughts of thinkers in each of the former periods), a semiotic developing consciousness unfurling a fourth - Semiotic - age into which we have the opportunity to participate. Aristotle, Augustine, Peirce, and Peirce are dominant figures in the proto-development prior to this current (and, he would say, genuinely 'post-modern') Semiotic age.

Rudolf Steiner somewhat similarly divides this development into recognisable phases - though here we should be mindful that key figures not only exemplify and determine the division, but that, furthermore, Steiner presents human consciousness as developing through various cultural ages (beginning in 747 BC and in 1414 AD) taking place within zodiacal periods (approximately 215 AD for the change from the Age of Aries into Pisces, in which we currently remain) as well as the birth of key individuals (such as the Buddha, Christ, and Mani). Roughly (and very roughly at this stage, though I'll get into more specific details on the first day), the periods Steiner presents in his *Riddles of Philosophy* are of approximately 800 year cycles: from the 6th century BC through to the early rise of Christianity; from there through to John Scotus in the 9th century; thence into the important scholastic phase until the Renaissance; and from the Italian Renaissance through to the present (or at least, the 'present' at the time of Steiner's writing - what he may have made of 20th century development remains conjecture, even if well founded).

During the first term, we'll look at the historical development focussing on what Deely calls the Greek and Latin Ages. With only a few weeks, there is little time to do justice to the incredible wealth gifted us from the likes of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Peirce (amongst others!). Selections and discussions will inevitably seek to provide a sense for the philosophical consciousness of the times as well as providing some key insights that reflect on those three key questions earlier posed. Term two will take up Modernity with the development that took place with the birth of science and its reflections in the philosophical endeavours of the likes of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and from thence into Peirce and semiotic development... not sure how we'll get through this in six sessions!

Term three will revisit this history through Steiner's *Riddles of Philosophy*. Many of the same individuals will be revisited, and we shall be able to again sense into and develop this human striving. Term four will revisit, in more detail, the philosophical questions earlier characterised through Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* as well as Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.