



Philosophy as love indwelling wisdom

Jean-Michel David on the essence of philosophy

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 panegyrythmy, 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', which, in Buddhism, is itself 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, each of which, at least in the West, reflects a dominant 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, appears to again be 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.

[As well as having taught Philosophy at University, Jean-Michel has been teaching in Steiner schools and in adult education for three decades. He will be offering a new course in Philosophy in 2016 on Friday evenings at the Michael Centre. For details or to contact Jean-Michel, visit www.fourhares.com]