

Philosophy

“Philosophy” as a word is said to have been first coined by Pythagoras, and relates to the love of wisdom (Sophia), *not* the possession of it. Philosophy (in the Pythagorean sense) is the striving to attain to the state in which the *energy* of truth, or real ideas¹, penetrates into the whole of one’s being, not just the mind.

Jacob Needleman said (in his *The Heart of Philosophy* (1983), Introduction):

Man cannot live without philosophy. This is not a figure of speech, but a literal fact ... There is a yearning in the human heart that is nourished only by real philosophy and without this nourishment man dies as surely as if he were deprived of food or air. But this part of the human psyche is not known or honoured in our culture. When it does break through to our awareness, it is either ignored or treated as though it were something else. It is given wrong names; it is not cared for; it is crushed. And eventually, it may withdraw altogether, never again to appear. When this happens, man becomes a thing. No matter what he accomplishes or experiences, no matter what happiness he knows or what service he performs, he has in fact lost his real possibility. He is dead.

The fear of this inner death has begun to surface in the modern world. In quiet moments, an individual senses this fear of dying inwardly and sees that all the other fears of his life - his physical and psychological fears - are in no way related to it. At the same time, he senses -- along with this fear - a yearning or love unknown to him in his ordinary life. He sees that none of the other loves of his life - his family, his work, perhaps not even his God - are related to that yearning for something he cannot name. And he wonders what he can do to heal this profound division in himself between the wish for being and his psycho-social needs. Neither ordinary religion, nor therapy, nor social action, nor adventure, nor work, nor art can bridge these two fundamental motivations within him. But no sooner does a man move into the activities of his life than the awareness of this division within himself is forgotten.

What will help him remember? For it is absolutely essential that he remember this truth about himself. If he does not, he will be absorbed by the external forces of nature and society. He will be ‘lived’ by the emotions, opinions, obligations, terrors, promises, programs, and conflicts that comprise the day-to-day life of every human being. He will forget that there are actually two separate lives within him and that these disparate lives need to be related to each other. He will strive for happiness, creativity, love, service to the higher; for vitality, commitment, honor; for understanding, health, integrity; for safety, exhilaration, passionate involvement - but nothing of this will be possible for him in the state of metaphysical forgetfulness. As long as he does not remember the real twofold structure of his being, he and the life around him will form themselves into a tissue of illusion.

The function of philosophy in human life is to help man remember. *It has no other task.* And anything that calls itself philosophy which does not serve this function is simply not philosophy.

But modern man has strayed so far from philosophy that he no longer even knows what this sort of remembering is. We think of memory only as mental recall because the experience of deep memory has vanished from our lives.

Mr. Needleman points to a key matter – the need to *remember* – a factor that gnostic teachings return to time and again.

However, he goes on to say:

Philosophy is not an answer to anything. Nor, on the other hand, is it merely the technique of asking questions and criticizing assumptions. Philosophy is not clever. It is not cold. It is not angry. Yet it is disturbing, troubling. Moreover, the trouble it brings will never disappear, will never end. Why? Because no sooner does a man remember than

¹ Real ideas as distinct from conceptualised ideas.

he immediately forgets. Therefore, over and over again he must be reminded – and such reminders are not always pleasant.

But:

The authentic formulation of great ideas has the effect of bringing a man to silence; of stopping the mind. ... Only when thoughts are stopped can real thinking begin.

This is moving into the stuff of gnostic thought - a realm of thinking that will be addressed later in this book. However, the practise of deep philosophical thought of the cerebral kind is not (I suggest) the absolute answer to our life's conundrums, though it will appeal to some. But aspects of philosophy will indeed creep into the psyche of all those who begin to remember – those who ask serious questions about life; those who want to know the truth.

Certainly, without a question there can be no answer!

*There are those who see the world as it is, and ask, “Why?”.
And there are those that who see the world as it could be, and ask, “Why not?!”.*

Attributed to George Bernard Shaw.

