

APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY

The Definition of Philosophy

Philosophy is very difficult to define since it has been and is different things to different men. I shall in this talk try to state what a philosopher means by it. If civilization has progressed it is due to the comprehension of the fact that mankind can only survive and has survived because of its unconscious recognition of the need for planned activity. It was not an accident that men have always sought to plan their lives according to the available knowledge at any historical period. It is not an accident either that the thirst for more and more knowledge plays a very important part in the development of science. Philosophy originally meant a way of life, of wisdom or reason. Now Philosophy is the parent of all sciences which are but particularized method of knowing the nature of the actual world. But the knowledge it seeks of having 'unified knowledge' the truth or conclusions of the sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and others. Unified or self-consistent integral knowledge is its ideal and its standard. It is for this reason too that it becomes the source of normative sciences, like ethics and politics and aesthetics. It is, of course, not to be confused with applied sciences, for philosophy is aware of the values that are ultimate, unlike applied sciences whose values are immediate and are but those which could well be described as catering to utilities. Thus philosophy is known as the Science of sciences and the Art of arts.

Philosophy aims at comprehensive and systematic knowledge and this includes its ability to direct or plan all our activities for the realization of ends. For knowledge is power, that is to say, it has the capacity to control action and direct the future. Do we have such a competent knowledge which could guide us in every manner? Obviously that is beyond the ability of any philosophy that is made to depend upon the changing truths of science. As it has been remarked the recent great and large developments and discoveries of science have changed considerably the nature of the science have changed considerably the nature of the sciences

themselves. And for this same reason Philosophy would have to be re-written every ten years. This dependence on sciences for material has made philosophy apparently undependable. But because it has tended to become undependable, people have not ceased to philosophize. For as I have remarked, it is impossible for men to live without some sort of recognition of a common and intelligible world within which they could act with safety, and even the common man in the street behaves as if he dwells within a dependable world. He is certainly not mistaken in his intuition or 'animal faith' that the reality whether perceived by his senses or understood through his reason or intellectual activity is in some definite sense a system, though he may find that his actual ability to act in conformity with its nature may be limited in direct proportion to the quantum of knowledge he possesses. It is thus with the desire to plan one's life that one links up one's philosophical interest. Thus we are aware of the fact that philosophy is the thirst of intelligence towards the acquirement of knowledge of the nature of the phenomenal world as well as its relation to the ends of right conduct to true being, and creative delight that comes out of the aesthetic appreciation of the harmony which that *constructed* knowledge grants.

Thus philosophy has a theoretical side, which is what nowadays men know it by, that side which consider the fundamental structure of reality through a critical appraisal and appreciation of the evidence of all types of experience ; and it has practical side because reality is hynamic and not static demanding seeks "to comprehend the universe as a whole , not like the physicist or the biologists a special department of it, but the whole mass the religions consciousness of the saint, the aesthetic enjoyment of the artist, and the history of the human race, no less than the discoveries of the physicist and biologist , contribute".

Philosophy is today relegated to do the task of post-scientific systematization and thus has receded into the background in the life-interest of most people. But it can be seen that this attempt to ignore philosophizing is bound to be ruinous in the long run to all activity. We cannot invent machines of science nor its amenities without a sort of understanding of the world we should like to live in. This ideal of a correct

and true world, as philosophers in the past have seen, becomes luminous to our vision only when our present thoughts and aims become sources of misery. After all misery, like dirt which is matter in the wrong place, is wrong reaction, and leads of the recognition of the imperative need for more knowledge. This was the incentive to knowledge, and is the only practical incentive to knowledge, this need for a comprehensive understanding of both facts and ends, has been one of the chief sources of strength in the formulations of great philosophies, which constantly harped on the fact of 'freedom from misery' as the ideal of philosophy. This is the fact that relates philosophy with religion. This is the practical utility of philosophic discipline.

At any rate philosophy is not to be considered to be aiming at an escape from practical life, through an unmitigated devotion to fundamental truths of abstract permanence. Nor should it be considered to be limited only to an intellectual understanding of the world or reality or universe or experience. It is impossible to limit human intelligence to the comprehension of reality only by means of concepts of reason. Man as a personality goes beyond the limits of reason in his deepest understanding of reality and begins to feel its reality within himself as richer and fuller and more direct. But even when that happens, man does in fact utilize his reason to stabilize himself and communicate his finds to others. In this sense, philosophy like languages helps man to communicate the truths of inner experience of subjective to others. And these of mystical insight and religious revelation are beyond the range of philosophic rationality. But whether these are to be considered to be true for all or not, is capable of being determined only by means of actual verification in other's experience, if not by means of the nonself-contradictoriness with one's own or other's experiences. There is no doubt a possibility of thinking of self-evidence of truths of spiritual consciousness, just because of their directness as in perception. But then they are so very description of such subjective experiences of one's self could lead to their being accepted as truth.

There is one very important fact that men normally understand by philosophy, that is, that it is essentially a tool of religion or its accessory. In India at any rate

philosophy has meant not merely intellectual life based on a rational comprehension of the nature of reality, but also religious life based on the recognition of ultimate values such as God, Holiness, beauty and goodness which include the acceptance of Life after death and even existence beyond in other worlds. This view is considered to be entailed by the fact that philosophy cannot shut itself up to the findings of positive, sense-dependent sciences or even to the principles of reason as such, but must go forward to embrace the whole of reality. Thus starting from materialistic philosophy which seeks to synthesize knowledge only on the basis of the sense-experience, the scope of philosophy has gradually been broadened to include all the experiences that man as multiple-personality, as a dweller in several planes of reality experiences. For if the aim of Philosophy is total knowledge of Reality as it is in itself, it cannot abdicate that function. Philosophy thus embraces even the sphere of Religion. And indeed one could distinguish between Philosophy and Religion only by the fact that the latter is practice and realization of Philosophy in the life of the individual. It must be clear from what has been stated above the Philosophy is to be defined as the investigation into the nature of entire reality of Universe in the widest sense of this term. It is Brahma-jijnasa. In a sense this investigation is bound to be done with purely intellectual thought, even when the contents or materials of its investigation are sensory or supersensory, subconscious or supraconscious, for man is at present dominantly intellectual. If man could ever evolve beyond his present mentality, then his consciousness going beyond the limitations of intellect would yet be philosophical though not purely intellectual. Total knowledge of Reality is an ideal that could only be achieved slowly, gradually. The liberation of man from ignorance by means of knowledge is not to be attained except gradually and the philosophic quest will remain an ideal, so long as man's consciousness is limited either to specific means or arbitrarily defined ends and does not undergo essential transformation into direct cosmic consciousness.

I have so far sketched the nature of Philosophy and given a definition of it. One more question remains to be answered. For whom is Philosophy? For all intelligent persons, for scientists as well as materialistic economists. This fact have been so clearly perceived by thinkers that in recent years they have been striving to

make the study of philosophy compulsory. Those who believe they have nothing to learn from philosophy are those who debunk the life of Reason as well as life and seek refuge in irrationalism and sentimental pragmatism. Philosophy thus is necessary for the progress of civilization, when it is accepted as the science taken in its broadest sense of Reality.