

Prolegomena Philosophiae

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Abstract

Beginning from Aristotle's claim in the *Protrepticus* concerning what it means to philosophize, this essay considers three modern claims about the nature of philosophy, found in Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*, Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology*, and F. H. Bradley's description of metaphysics in *Appearance and Reality*.

Introduction

Among the fragments from ancient authors, relating to the early dialogues of Aristotle, in the Princeton revised Oxford translation of Aristotle's *Works*, appears: "If you ought to philosophize you ought to philosophize; and if you ought not to philosophize you ought to philosophize: therefore, in any case you ought to philosophize." A second sentence follows that intends to elaborate the point:

For if philosophy exists, we certainly ought to philosophize, since it exists; and if it does not exist, in that case too we ought to inquire why philosophy does not exist—and by inquiring we philosophize; for inquiry is the cause of philosophy.¹

This statement is one of the many renderings of the most famous passage in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, the original composition of which has been lost in its entirety. The *Protrepticus* stands in a dialectical relation to the *Antidosis* of Isocrates and is imitated in the debate over the value of philosophy in Cicero's *Hortensius*. Isocrates's view of philosophy stands opposite to that of Aristotle, who regards contemplation as the goal of the philosophic life. Isocrates insists that the pursuit of wisdom is the achievement of a life of temperance and just action. He says:

¹ *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:2416–17.

For since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight.²

Aristotle does not deny the value of philosophy in the pursuit of prudence, but he does not hold this pursuit to be the final end of wisdom.

Much of Aristotle's dialogue or "hortatory essay" (*logos protrepticos*) has been reconstructed from Iamblichus's *Protrepticus*.³ On the passage regarding whether to philosophize, Quintilian comments: "Sometimes two propositions are put forward in such a way that the choice of either leads to the same conclusion: for example "We must philosophize (even though we must not philosophize) ['philosophandum (est, etiam si non est philosophandum)']".⁴

A modern citation is that of Jacques Derrida, in the concluding paragraphs of his essay on "Violence and Metaphysics," which he simply attributes to "a Greek."

It was a Greek who said, 'If one has to philosophize, one has to philosophize; if one does not have to philosophize, one still has to philosophize (to say it and think it). One always has to philosophize.'⁵

² Isocrates, *Antidosis*, in *Isocrates*, trans. George Norlin, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2000), 335 (271).

³ See Anton-Hermann Chroust, *Aristotle: Protrepticus, A Reconstruction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964). The Urtext of reconstruction of the fragments is that of I. During in *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia*, vol. 12, 1961. Much can be learned concerning the *Protrepticus* from Werner Jaeger's discussion of it in *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of Its Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), chap. 4.

⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2001), 400–1 (5.10.70).

⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 152.

Derrida employs this claim about the necessity of philosophy as part of his theme of coupling Judaism and Hellenism, ending his essay with a line from the Circe chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the *copula* in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: 'Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet'?"⁶

As Anton-Hermann Chroust, the author of its English edition, puts it, the *Protrepticus* has as its purpose to be "an eloquent eulogy of speculative philosophy and an exhortation to live the 'philosophic life,' that is, a life dedicated to speculative philosophy."⁷ Chroust believes that the discussion of the interconnection of philosophic wisdom and happiness in Plato's *Euthydemus* is the likely source of Aristotle's main theme of the importance of the philosophic life in the *Protrepticus*. This discussion in the *Euthydemus* concludes with Socrates saying:

Since you believe both that it [wisdom, *sophia*] can be taught and that it is the only existing thing which makes a man happy and fortunate, surely you would agree that it is necessary to love wisdom [*philosophhein*] and you mean to do this yourself.

Clinias, the young boy Socrates is addressing, affirms: "This is, just what I mean to do, Socrates, as well as ever I can." Socrates then says:

When I heard this I was delighted and said, There Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, is my example of what I want a hortatory argument [*protreptickon logon*] to be, though amateurish, perhaps, and expressed at length and with some difficulty.⁸

In Chroust's reconstruction of Aristotle's text, the passage on philosophy is: "The term 'to philosophize' (or, 'to pursue philosophy') implies two distinct things: first, whether or not we ought to seek [after philosophic truth] at all; and, second, our dedication to philosophic speculation (*philosophon theoria*)."⁹ In his commentary on this state-

⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁷ Chroust, *Aristotle*, xvii.

⁸ Plato, *Euthydemus*, trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 719–20 (282c–d).

⁹ Chroust, *Aristotle*, 3.

ment, Chroust summarizes the tradition of its claim as found in various fragments, most probably starting from the report of it by Alexander of Aphrodisias, the ablest of the commentators on Aristotle's corpus. But versions have been given by Clemet of Alexandria, Lactantius, and Boethius. Chroust's summary of Aristotle's claim is:

You say that one should (or must) philosophize; then you should (or must) philosophize. You say that one should not (or must not) philosophize, then (in order to prove your contention) you must philosophize. In any event, you must philosophize.¹⁰

Chroust's summary formulation brings out the ambiguity of whether Aristotle's claim is that one "should philosophize" in the sense of a choice one can make and that one "must philosophize" in the sense of necessity, not allowing for choice. One has a choice as to what form of life to lead, but mortality is a necessary condition of human life, about which there can be no choice.

Following his initial claim concerning the choice or necessity of philosophy, Aristotle proceeds to elaborate on and extol the merits and nature of philosophy more generally, saying, for example, that

the fact that all men feel at ease in philosophy, wishing to dedicate their whole lives to the pursuit of it by leaving behind all other concerns, is in itself weighty evidence that it is a painless pleasure to dedicate oneself wholeheartedly to philosophy.¹¹

There is perhaps nothing in the history of philosophy to equal the *Protrepticus* as a praise of philosophy, unless it be some of Cicero's statements.

Preceding the passage quoted above, advocating *philosophon theoria*, Aristotle characterizes *phronesis* as true wisdom.¹² *Phronesis* becomes the term central to Aristotle's political philosophy, and the intellectual virtue discussed in his ethics. Prudence or *phronesis* is necessary to govern human actions and civility, but contemplation (*theoria*),

¹⁰ Ibid., 48–49.

¹¹ Ibid., 24.

¹² Ibid., 2–3.

from which our word “theater” is derived, is tied to the achievement of the highest human happiness, or *eudaimonia*, literally that state of having a good daimon. Contemplation is simply to look upon or observe for the purpose of understanding, without regard to any subsequent doing or making. *Theoria*, *theorein* is what is at issue in Aristotle’s advocacy of the human necessity to philosophize. It is given that prudence is necessary for the conducting of human affairs, but is contemplation a necessity for human beings?

This is the question at the heart of the *Protrepticus*, and at the heart of philosophy itself, for philosophy is the only field that takes the meaning of its own existence as a central problem. When a physicist pauses to ask what physics is, the physicist is no longer engaged in pursuit of the knowledge of natural phenomena but is reflecting on the philosophical question of the place of physics in human knowledge. When science turns to reflect upon what science is, scientific investigation itself comes to a standstill. The production of any new philosophy is a redefinition of what philosophy is. It arises from grasping the nature of philosophy in a new way.

The existence of philosophy, like human existence, is characterized by the fact that it conceives Quintilian’s formulation as a version of “hobson’s choice”: an apparent freedom to take or reject something offered, when in actual fact no such freedom exists: an apparent freedom of choice where there is no real alternative. By interpreting Aristotle’s claim in this way, I wish to go between the horns of any dilemma that the various versions of Aristotle’s text may contain. To gain perspective on what this ancient definition entails, I wish to consider claims about philosophy made by three figures in the history of philosophy—Bishop Berkeley, G. W. F. Hegel, and F. H. Bradley—each of these being holders of metaphysical positions.

Bishop Berkeley

In his preface to *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley says: “We spend our lives in doubting of those things which other men evidently know, and believing those things which they laugh at and despise.”¹³ Other men know—or think they know—that the mind is the brain and that the world is composed of material things that exist

¹³ George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1954), 5.

independently of our perception of them. These facts about ourselves and the world are indubitable common sense.

Berkeley, the first philosopher of the great idealist tradition beyond Plato, finds the first so-called fact doubtful. Philonous, who represents Berkeley, asks Hylas: “You make certain traces in the brain to be the causes or occasions of our ideas. Pray tell me whether by the ‘brain’ you mean any sensible thing.” Hylas replies: “What else think you I could mean?” Philonous reminds Hylas that sensible things have their existence in the mind: “Sensible things are all immediately perceivable; and those things which are immediately perceivable are ideas, and these exist only in the mind. This much you have, if I mistake not, long since agreed to.” Hylas, the materialist, replies: “I do not deny it.” Philonous then draws the obvious conclusion: “The brain therefore you speak of, being a sensible thing, exists only in the mind.”¹⁴

This argument is one of the most simple and clever in the history of philosophy. It is matched only by that of Socrates in the *Phaedo* when he speaks of his disappointment in realizing that Anaxagoras’s account of causality was inexact. Socrates says:

It was a wonderful hope, my friend, but it was quickly dashed. As I read on [in Anaxagoras’s book] I discovered a man who made no use of his Intelligence [*nous*; he used his mind but did not realize it was the cause of what he was claiming] and assigned to it no responsibility for the order of the world, but adduced reasons like air and ether and water and many other oddities.

Socrates then applies Anaxagoras’s materialist doctrine of causality to his own being, asking, in effect: Do I think these bones and sinews are Socrates?

Socrates says:

But to call things like that reasons is too peculiar. If it were said that without such bones and sinews and all the rest of them I should not be able to do what I think is right, it would be true; but to say that it is because of them that I do what I am doing, and not through choice of what is best—although my actions are controlled by intelligence—would be a very lax

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

and inaccurate form of expression.¹⁵

The behaviorist doctrines of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* and B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* have been put to rest, but versions of behaviorism as a philosophy of mind forever raise their heads. They appear in Hegel's day in Lavater's physiognomy and Gall's *Schädelehre* (craniology or phrenology), the reduction of the human self to facial expressions or to the diagnosis of bumps on the skull. Hegel, in his section on these "sciences" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, says Gall's doctrine reduces the mind (*Geist*) to a bone—to a *caput mortuum*. Lavater's doctrine misses the fact that the face functions not only as a window to the soul but as a mask, with which we pass through the affairs of the world.

Hegel dismisses phrenology with a pun, saying that the "linking of high and low [mind and body]" is the same as that which "in the living being nature naively expresses in linking the organ of its highest perfection, the organ of procreation, with the organ of pissing [*Pissen*]." ¹⁶ The wisdom of the phrenological science of spirit reduces *Wissen* to *Pissen* in contrast to the true or phenomenological science of spirit that knows the difference between these two human capabilities. "Body language," a popular psychology that emerges from time to time (e.g., in *Psychology Today*), being a method for judging the meaning of people's personalities and situations, is a version of Lavater's "science" and, to an extent, of Gall's as well. The expert in body language draws conclusions based on the coupling of some broad principles concerning human activity with commonsensical observations and the fortune teller's art of stating what is often obvious in such a way that it appears divinatory.

In regard to the status of things in the world, Berkeley believed his view that *esse* (to be) is *percipi* (to be perceived) reflected good common sense. He thought it in accord with the ordinary view that, if something is real, it could be perceived. Instead his view was laughed at. The well-known incident of Dr. Johnson's attempt to refute Berkeley by

¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (New York: Penguin, 1969), 161–62 (98b–99a).

¹⁶ For a full discussion of Hegel's account of phrenology see Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), chap. 7.

kicking the stone capsulizes how his metaphysics seems to be contrary to common sense. Dr. Johnson thought that if stones had no material existence, as Berkeley claimed, and that they were “ideas” in the mind, his foot ought to pass through the stone without resistance. If Berkeley had thought that what we normally think of as material objects were the same as what we normally think of as ideas, Dr. Johnson’s foot would have refuted Berkeley.

In advancing the first version of modern idealism, Berkeley faced the issue that continues to stalk it as a philosophical position.¹⁷ No idealist had denied the existence of things independent of my ideas of them. Idealism is not solipsism. Berkeley makes this point clear for all idealism in a passage in *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*:

For, though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them though we do not.

He continues:

Whenever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatsoever. It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perceptions of them.¹⁸

For Berkeley, when an object is not being perceived by an individual mind it is being perceived by the eternal mind of God, such that ultimately all things are ideas in the mind of God, who is all mind, omnipotent and omniscient. The idealist, however, need not bring forth Berkeley’s God to avoid the absurdity of solipsism. We might instead assert, with Hegel, that there in principle can be no thing-in-itself, for the Kantian thing-in-itself is itself an idea of the thing held in mind. We

¹⁷ A. C. Ewing, *The Idealist Tradition from Berkeley to Blanshard* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957).

¹⁸ George Berkeley, *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, ed. Edwin A. Burtt (New York: Random House, 1939), 538–39.

may simply accept the paradox, the double truth, that we can think of things as independent and external to our thought of them and at the same time affirm that this is a thought mind has of them. *Nous* is in all things and is also the way in which we apprehend them. The world itself is *nous* and its relation to our power of *nous* as an individual thinker and perceiver is an internal relation. There is no absolute, external relation, except as a whole that we are always determinately approaching, but which we never determine, in the logic of Hegel's "true infinity" (*wahrhaft Unendliche*).

The world of hard facts that C. S. Peirce insists we must continually confront, is there—but as we confront these facts they become modified by our confrontation of them, and they are unable fully to maintain their independence of mind in the face of empirical science. In order for common sense to maintain itself against philosophical speculation, it must claim itself as a standard. It must begin to doubt what it thought it evidently knew and to believe what it laughed at and despised. It enters an inverted world in which it cannot abandon common sense and yet cannot verify itself as common sense without leaving common sense. If to be is to be perceived is a conception the mind has of objects, then to be and not be perceived is also a conception the mind has of objects.

G. W. F. Hegel

In his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel says:

As regards philosophy in its proper and genuine sense, we find put forward without any hesitation, as entirely sufficient equivalent for the long course of mental discipline [*den langen Weg der Bildung*—for that profound and fruitful process through which the human spirit [*Geist*] attains to knowledge—the direct revelation of the divine and the healthy common sense of mankind [*den gesunden Menschenverstand*], unconcerned with and undisciplined by any other knowledge or by proper philosophizing. These are held to be a good substitute for real philosophy, much in the way that chicory is lauded as a substitute for coffee.¹⁹

¹⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 125–26; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 3 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 63.

In regard to the Absolute, all that is required is a feeling that there is a divine order to things, and in regard to comprehending the nature of human experience, all that is required is the Germanic idea of “healthy common sense” or, put in English expression, a “healthy dose of common sense.”

Religious faith and common sense make unnecessary philosophizing and the study of the history of philosophy that is the basis of philosophizing. We are relieved of the burden of acquiring *Bildung* by realizing that we already are doing philosophy when we are thinking commonsensically, in the way that the figure in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* learns that he has been speaking prose all along, for otherwise he would have been speaking poetry.

Hegel continues, and considers whether instead of substituting common sense for philosophy we might substitute inspiration (*Genialität*). We might then engage in “philosophizing by the light of nature [*ein natürliches Philosophieren*], which thinks itself too good for conceptual thinking [*für den Begriff*], and, because of the want of it, takes itself to have direct intuitive ideas and poetical thoughts—such philosophizing trades in arbitrary combinations of a merely disorganized imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] of the marketplace, producing fictitious creations that are neither fish nor flesh, neither poetry nor philosophy.”²⁰ Abandoning common-sense thought goes to the opposite extreme of manufacturing fine-sounding ideas that make up a kind of high non-sense.

Hegel says that in all spheres of science, and even in practical endeavors, it is never doubted that a considerable amount of time must be spent learning what is required to engage in them. But, as he says:

As regards philosophy, on the contrary, there seems still an assumption prevalent that, though every one with eyes and fingers is not on that account in a position to make shoes if he only has leather and a last, yet everybody understands how to philosophize straight away, and pass judgment on philosophy, simply because he possesses the criteria for doing so in his natural reason—as if he did not in the same way possess the standard for shoemaking too in his own foot.²¹

Everyone has an opinion and thus everyone can philosophize

²⁰ Ibid., 126; 63–64.

²¹ Ibid., 125; 63.

straight away.

In a little manuscript titled “Wer denkt abstrakt?” (Who Thinks Abstractly?), written in April 1807 or shortly thereafter—about the time of the appearance of the first copies of the *Phenomenology*—Hegel points to the essence of his philosophical position: “Denken? Abstrakt?—*Sauve qui peut!* Rette sich, wer kann!”²² Let whoever can save himself do so. Philosophy is not for everyone, and Hegel has no ambition to instruct the world against its will. He speaks of a scene in a recent comedy, in which a Minister goes around during the whole play in an overcoat, then in the last scene suddenly unbuttons it and lets loose his flashing star of wisdom. Hegel then says he here will unbutton his metaphysical overcoat (*metaphysischer Überrock*). His flashing star of wisdom is that philosophy or metaphysics is not the formulation of abstractions, as many people think, but the attempt to think anything in terms of the whole of experience. The flashing star of wisdom is the Absolute.

Common-sense thinking is based on reducing things to classifications through which they can be tagged as such-and-such and thus claimed to be known. Hegel thus inverts the claim of common sense to be concrete thought and metaphysics to be abstract. Common-sense thinking is what keeps us from seeing things as they really are in their fully determinate nature. Common-sense thinking is for everyone; philosophical thinking is only for the few who can save themselves from the abstractions of the many.

Ten years before Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*, in what has come to be known as “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism,” he spoke against what might be considered a parallel to common-sense thinking in philosophical thinking. He said that the philosopher must have as much aesthetic power as the poet, and that “Men without aesthetic sense are our literal-minded philosophers [*unsere Buchstabenphilosophen*].” For these philosophers, like men of common sense, “everything is obscure as soon as it goes beyond the table of contents and the index.” Poetry, Hegel says, is the “instructress of humanity” [*Lehrerin der Menschheit*]. Here Hegel, at age twenty-six, at the beginning of his career, holds that “we must have a new mythology, but

²² G. W. F. Hegel, “Wer denkt abstrakt?” in vol. 2 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 575.

this mythology must be in the service of ideas, it must be a mythology of *Reason* [*Mythologie der Vernunft*].²³

I do not think Hegel ever abandoned this aim. His works, especially the *Phenomenology*, contain a stylistic dialectic between *Bild* and *Begriff*. The alert reader, even the reader of the *Science of Logic*, will consistently find an image coupled with a concept. Poetry always takes us out of common-sense thought and language. Poetic power is what philosophy requires as its beginning point and constant companion. The mythology of reason is Hegel's answer to Plato's quarrel with the poets. If philosophy is a necessity, poetry is, too.

F. H. Bradley

In his preface to *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*, Bradley transcribes several sentences from his notebook. Among them is "Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct."²⁴ He introduces this claim by reminding his readers that we tend to hold our own pursuits in too much regard. Thus,

The metaphysician cannot perhaps be too much in earnest with metaphysics, and he cannot, as the phrase runs, take himself too seriously. But the same thing holds good with every other positive function of the universe. And the metaphysician, like other men, is prone to forget this truth.²⁵

Metaphysics is an art of reasoning. There can be no such thing as a metaphysical proof, in the sense that there can be no counterargument to the argument upon which a particular claim depends. For any argument advanced in metaphysics, and in philosophy generally, it is not beyond human wit to devise a counterargument. There are no conclusive arguments in philosophical inquiry. All such arguments fall within some stated or implied narrative that makes the arguments meaningful. No great work of philosophy offers an argument to prove its truth. Great

²³ G. W. F. Hegel, "Das älteste System program des deutschen Idealismus," in vol. 1 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 234–36.

²⁴ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), x.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ix–x.

philosophers in great works simply begin to make statements and distinctions. Arguments come in along the way, as their ideas are expressed. Bradley comes closer than most with his use of argument in his *Book of Appearance*.

In the *Book of Appearance*, Bradley considers whether various classic themes can be considered to be the absolute itself, such as substance, relation and quality, space and time, motion and change, causation, the self, things-in-themselves. In each case he shows that the attempt to claim such to be the absolute principle of the real ends the reasoning that supports it, in an indefinite regress, that must be summed, which is a self-contradiction. The principle of self-contradiction cannot itself be proved because it is the condition that governs any proof whatsoever. The absolute is thus no one property of the whole but the whole itself. To affirm less is to reduce reality to one of its aspects. Bradley says: "I am so bold as to believe that we have a knowledge of the Absolute, certain and real, though I am sure that our comprehension is miserably incomplete."²⁶

In effect, Bradley restates the issue of the *Protrepticus* with his question: "Is it possible to abstain from thought about the universe?" He holds that "even the average man is compelled to wonder and to reflect."²⁷ But to do so we must pass beyond common sense as the complete standard of thought. As Aristotle says in his famous assertion in the *Metaphysics*, philosophy begins in wonder (*thauma*). Wonder originates from the experience of an *aporia* in thought—when thought finds it cannot be consistent in some instance with itself. Bradley regards metaphysics as motivated by the same sense of mystery that gives rise to poetry, art, and religion. He says that when these cease to be of interest to us, so will metaphysics: "when, in short, twilight has no charm—then metaphysics will be worthless."²⁸

Bradley is firm that metaphysics is not properly conceived as an activity of the human self that supersedes the other functions of the mind. It should set the standard for proper reasoning. He holds the position that is held by many, that to attempt to deny metaphysics is to engage in metaphysical claims. He says:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

And the opponent of metaphysics, it appears to me, is driven to a dilemma. He must either condemn all reflection on the essence of things—and, if so, he breaks, or, rather, tries to break, with part of the highest side of human nature—or else he allows us to think, but not to think strictly.²⁹

To every person capable of reflection, questions of the ultimate nature of things and their reason for being and their causes occur in one form or another, just as ethical questions naturally occur to such persons. But most people put these questions aside as unanswerable, or settle on some provisional view, only later to find it doubtful, and for the questions to recur.

In the mental life of the non-philosopher, yet reflective person, these questions come and go, like ghosts, receding into the background only to reappear unexpectedly. Philosophy brings these mental shades into the light of reason and approaches them systematically, with the careful use of language in its power to express ideas. Bradley says: “I certainly do not suppose that it would be good for everyone to study metaphysics, and I cannot express any opinion as to the number of persons who should do so.” He adds: “But I think it quite necessary, even on the view that this study can produce no positive results, that it should still be pursued.”³⁰

Metaphysics is written into the human condition, into our selfhood, whether or not we wish it to be so. Those who become philosophers cannot help themselves, and humanity as a whole cannot help itself, as it has allowed philosophy to persist for twenty-five centuries in Western culture, even though philosophy, during these centuries, has held an uneasy and often difficult and dangerous position in relation to the politics of the *polis*. By those who take it up, the philosophic spirit is transmitted from generation to generation. Once it was allowed into society at the hands of the Presocratic physicists, philosophy never left. Like the spectators of the great games at Olympia, the philosophers are there. And, curiously, without the spectators the games are not there.

²⁹ Ibid., 3–4.

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

Conclusion

We may join Aristotle's principle of the psyche—that all human beings desire to know—to Hegel's dictum of the true—that the True is the whole—to formulate a doctrine of wisdom. There are three kinds of knowledge that contend to make philosophy unnecessary: common sense, poetry, and physics (understood as empirical science generally).

Common sense cannot replace philosophy because by means of it nothing can be known that is not the subject of common experience. Common sense cannot take us to the extraordinary experience upon which philosophical knowledge depends, as Plato says in the *Seventh Letter*:

for this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself.³¹

Poetry, although gained through the inspiration of the Muses and sustained by their mother, Memory, can only begin the wisdom philosophy seeks, for poetry, tied to images, cannot take us to what can be known only noetically: the forms that are beyond the images. Physics—although the archetype of the knowledge of nature, and requiring the power to theorize—is tied to the empirical. Unless it becomes philosophy it cannot take contemplation beyond the knowledge of the natural and cosmological to the whole, to wisdom, that, as Cicero says, is a knowledge of things divine and human.

Philosophy becomes unavoidable once we realize that our natural propensity to know has as its center to know ourselves as knowers. This realization is a learned ignorance, based on awareness of our mortality as a being, standing like a middle term of a syllogism, between animals that are mortal but do not reflectively know that they are mortal and gods, who are immortal and have no need of self-knowledge, being just what they are. Although all that is human exists in this middle position between the purely natural and the purely divine, not all people, I think, are imbued with Aristotle's principle of the desire to know. In regard to

³¹ Plato, *Seventh Letter*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1659 (341c–d).

knowing, the ancient distinction holds that there are the few who know, there are those who can come to know through the teachings of those who know, and then there are those who do not know.

In generation after generation, in the great city of the human race, only some people become philosophers or seek to become philosophers. Most people live apart from its pursuit—they are the *hoi polloi* of the Greek *polis* and the citizens of the Cartesian world of scientific research, technology, electronics, and gadgets and the ethics of diversity and globalization that today invade and condition our lives. Over and over again only a small number of people take up the pursuit of philosophy, a number that likely remains constant.

No one enters philosophy willingly; one day one finds oneself in it and slowly realizes one has somehow been here all along. Once in philosophy, it is as impossible for us to leave as it was for Socrates. Philosophy leaves the individual no alternatives. As to the question of whether philosophizing is necessary or whether it is not, there is only a single answer, as the *Protrepticus* suggests.