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## Inaugural Lecture Series 63

# PHILOSOPHY, THE WORLD AND MAN: A GLOBAL CONCEPTION

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**PHILOSOPHY, THE WORLD AND MAN:  
GLOBAL CONCEPTION**

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by  
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## I. General Introduction: Preliminary Explanations

This lecture has a twofold positive—constructive purpose and a twofold negative—destructive purpose. On the positive side, it attempts, first, to determine the nature of philosophy, and second to indicate the value for the human race in general of philosophy so conceived: something which is, I believe, very inadequately understood not only by the general public and by the general academic or intellectual community (not only in Africa but throughout the world), but also and most ironically by the community of philosophers themselves. On the negative side it attempts to justify the judgement that two groups of thinkers universally regarded as philosophers are not philosophers at all: the first group being the earliest of the so-called philosophers in Western history, the ancient Greek thinkers of the sixth century B.C. known as the Milesians, and the second group (far more numerous and far more influential) being the latest of the so-called philosophers in Western history—the European thinkers of the twentieth century A.D. known generally as the Analytic Philosophers. In the second, third and fourth parts of the lecture I shall attempt to justify the negative judgements. Throughout, I shall attempt to justify the positive, constructive theses, and in the final part to state them and their implications more fully.

A fundamental, seemingly self-evident thesis of this lecture is that philosophy is, has always been, and must always remain fundamentally and ineradicably concerned with wisdom. Given the facts about the Milesian thinkers of the sixth century B.C. and the facts about the Analytic thinkers of the twentieth century A.D., there is a minor implication of that fundamental thesis, and a major one. The minor one—which will hardly disturb the contemporary community of scholars and philosophers — is that the Milesian thinkers are not philosophers at all and so should be excluded from all



future histories of philosophy. The major one—which will seem to my philosophical colleagues either outrageous, or merely eccentric and outlandish, or merely uninteresting and boring, unworthy of a serious response is that all those members of the Analytic School of Philosophy so-called, all those thinkers most highly and even almost hysterically esteemed throughout the world today as the leading philosophers of the twentieth century—are not philosophers either. The Milesian thinkers were by name Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes; the Analytic thinkers are by name Ludwig Wittgenstein, Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, A. J. Ayer, John Austin, Gilbert Ryle and Peter F. Strawson, to mention most of the most outstanding ones. There are further implications which will emerge in the final part of the lecture.

So much, then, by way of a summary introduction to the main themes of this lecture. Before plunging into the body of the lecture, however, I should like briefly to say something about its character. The first is that I have wished to present a genuinely philosophical lecture: one that grapples with fundamental philosophical questions by fundamentally philosophical means and advances fundamental philosophical answers, the whole being unavoidably controversial throughout.

The second is that philosophy in the twentieth century has become a highly technical discipline, most or much of it quite incomprehensible to anyone who has not devoted many years of arduous labour, under the guidance of masters, to the mastery of modern logic, modern mathematics and modern science. This audience, however, presumably consists mostly of laymen—laymen, that is, from the technical philosophical point of view, even if many of its members are, as indeed they are, experts in their own academic fields. Given my intention to deal with a highly controversial philosophical issue in an unavoidably controversial way, the fact that I am addressing an audience consisting mostly of laymen poses a

dilemma. At my disposal I have perhaps an hour or an hour and a half. If the philosophical questions are to be dealt with adequately from a technical philosophical point of view, ten or twenty hours would be needed, and the presentation would inevitably become incomprehensible. If, on the other hand, the lecture is to be reasonably intelligible, the presentation cannot fail to involve oversimplification—oversimplification to the point perhaps of serious distortion and even caricature. I have therefore tried to steer a middle course between the two extremes—oversimplification and incomprehensibility. If I fail, I beg your indulgence. I would, however, rather try and fail than not try at all.

## II. How Philosophy has been conceived throughout its history

We cannot adequately understand or appreciate “The Revolution In Philosophy” which the Analytic Philosophers so-called of the twentieth century think they have effected until we understand and appreciate the basic conception of philosophy they were revolting against.

The first point worth noting is that the earliest Western philosophers so-called—the Milesian thinkers—had no conception of philosophy at all: none, at any rate, for which there is any surviving evidence. Nevertheless, all philosophers and historians of philosophy—among them Bertrand Russell, John Herman Randall, Fredrick Coplestone, John Burnet, A. H. Armstrong, Robert S. Brumbaugh, Roger Hancock and W.K.C. Guthrie—say that philosophy, or at any rate Western philosophy, began in ancient Greece in the sixth century B.C. with Thales. One thesis of this lecture is that this is not the case, and that it is important—for reasons to be advanced later—to realize that this is not the case.

By my conception of philosophy, it is clear that the Milesian thinkers, *whatever* they were, were not philosophers at all. But let me not seem to be operating with a biased or a

personal and eccentric conception of philosophy; let us judge the Milesian thinkers in terms of the conceptions of the very philosophers and historians of philosophy who say that philosophy began with the Milesians.

According to Roger Hancock, philosophy is ancient Greece was, in his own words, "an attempt to understand the universe by means of a logical investigation that is *a priori*, appealing to meanings of terms rather than to the evidence of the senses." According to Robert S. Brumbaugh, "Philosophy' . . . is the attempt to answer three fundamental questions. The first question is 'What is real?' or 'What is being?' . . . The second question is . . . 'What am I?' . . . The third question is . . . 'One world or many?'" According to A. H. Armstrong, "Philosophy in the sense in which the word was generally understood in the ancient world may be defined as the search after the truth about the nature of the universe and of man." As for John Burnet, he writes "I mean by philosophy all (that) Plato meant by it and nothing he did not mean by it."

By none of these conceptions of philosophy, however, is it possible to classify the Milesian thinkers as philosophers. First, there is no evidence in the surviving primary or secondary literature that the *purpose* of any of the Milesians was "an attempt to understand the universe," as Hancock puts it. There is no evidence whatever in the primary or secondary literature that any of the Milesians used the *means* ascribed to them by Hancock, that is to say, "a logical investigation that is *a priori*"; and there is no evidence whatever that they appealed "to meanings of terms rather than to the evidence of the senses." No-one knows *what* means they used,; no-one knows *what* considerations they based their "philosophical" speculations on, whether meanings of terms, sensory evidence, logical principles or anything else. There is *no* surviving evidence relevant to **these** questions. Nor is there any evidence whatever in the surviving literature that any of the Milesians were attempting to answer Brumbaugh's three

fundamental questions. Thales, for example, never said—to judge by the surviving evidence—*what* he thought was real; he never said *what* he thought being is, if he thought about it all; and he never said whether the world was one or many. Nor is there any evidence whatever in the surviving literature that the Milesians, in their speculations, were speculating about the *nature* of the universe or the *nature* of man, as Armstrong has it. There is no evidence in the primary or secondary literature that the Milesians ever even *had* a conception of *the universe*, or a conception of the *nature* of the universe, or a conception of the *nature* of man. They had, so far as we can tell, no such conception as the *nature* of *anything*. John Burnet's appeal to the Platonic conception of philosophy fares no better. But since he never tells us just what he thinks the Platonic conception is, we are, to begin with, helpless in our attempts to determine the status of the Milesians in terms of Burnet's Platonic conception of philosophy. Nevertheless it is independently determinable that for Plato the philosophical enterprise included the following components: the search for the truth about reality, including man; the search for the truth about the purpose of everything; the search for the truth about the way men ought to live, if they were to live at their best; the use of a special method of philosophising which he called dialectic; and the capacity to face critical discussion without making any assumptions. Only the first of these five distinct components is discoverable in *any* of the Milesian thinkers; *none* of the remaining four is.

Thus in the case of every one of these philosophers and/or historians of philosophy, the outcome of applying their *own* conceptions of philosophy to the thinkers they all classify as philosophers is that these thinkers are *not* philosophers and so do not deserve to be included in histories of philosophy. The attribution of such purposes, means, and concepts to the Milesian thinkers appears to be pure invention at worst and serious misinterpretation at best.

It is noteworthy too that in none of these four conceptions of philosophy is there any explicit, or even implicit, reference to wisdom, which, I said earlier, is a fundamental, ineradicable and eternal part of philosophy. Appealing now to my own eccentric, personal vision of philosophy so conceived, I may now say, what it might have been at least less appropriate to say earlier. By that conception *too* the Milesian thinkers cannot be accorded the exalted status of philosopher. There is no evidence whatever that their speculative thinking was in any way concerned with wisdom. That being so, we have no good reason to believe that it was, and therefore no good reason to reckon them among the philosophers of the Western world.

Isn't the question of the status of the Milesians an academic one? Does it matter whether we include them in or exclude them from the category of philosophers? I believe it does most profoundly. Abstract conceptions of things are in general obtained from a critical examination of the things exemplifying the conceptions. We cannot obtain a conception of *mathematician*, or of *logician*, or of *scientist*, by studying cases including children who know nothing of mathematics or of logic or of science. What kind of a conception of *man* would be obtainable from an examination of ostensible cases which included monkeys, baboons and apes? What kind of a conception of *religious man* would be obtainable from a study of ostensible cases which included not only Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, but also Hitler, Ghengis Khan and Marx? What kind of a conception of *religion* would be obtainable from an examination of ostensible cases which included not only Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also groups like the Hitler Youth Corps? What kind of a conception of *the just man* or *the just society*, or *the good man* or *the good society* would be obtainable from

an examination of ostensible cases which included not only Socrates, Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Mahatma Gandhi, but also the Emperor Nero, Lucrezia Borgia, Ian Smith; and British India, British Nigeria, the present South Africa, and the United States before the Emancipation Proclamation? What kind of a conception of *freedom* or *democracy* would be obtainable if among our ostensible cases of a free society or a democratic society or organization we included the Roman Catholic Church?

All these conceptions—the conceptions of man, religious man, religion, science, justice, democracy, freedom and the good—are, it seems to me, of the utmost importance to the human race. It follows, it seems to me, that it is of the utmost importance that our conceptions of these things be as true as possible, purified of all irrelevant, extraneous, distorting elements. For it is all but impossible for a man or a society to *be* just, or free, or democratic, or good, or religious if that man's or that society's conceptions of these things are false. Whatever the hypocrisy and self-serving rationalizations of many of the white South Africans committed to apartheid, there can, I think, be no doubt that many of them sincerely believe that South Africa at present is, on the whole, an essentially just society. Nor is it the empirical facts they are ignorant of; they know those empirical facts as well as anyone else in the world does. And as I have already ruled out hypocrisy, self-serving rationalizations and ignorance of the empirical facts of South African society, it can only be, it seems to me, their false *conception* of justice which accounts for their misjudgment that South African society is an essentially just society.

Hence the great importance of a correct conception of philosophy. For, in the first place, every one of the concepts mentioned above is a *philosophical* concept: its true nature is determinable, if determinable at all, only by philosophical investigation. It follows that any philosophical investigation

of them conducted on the basis of an unsound conception of philosophy and of philosophical investigation is bound to go astray fundamentally. In the second place, philosophy conceived essentially as the pursuit of wisdom is philosophy conceived essentially as the search for the guide of life; and it is what each of us takes to be the fundamental guiding principles of our individual lives that essentially determines the character and quality of our individual lives and of the societies in which we live. But if that is what philosophy essentially is, then it is of the utmost importance that we make no mistakes about the actual systems of philosophy and the actual philosophers: that we do not accord the status of philosophy and philosopher to systems of thought which are not *philosophical* systems of thought and to men. If we can go astray with respect to the Milesians—who are presented to us universally as philosophers—we can go astray with respect to the thinkers of the Analytic School, whose influence in philosophy and in the world has been incomparably greater, and in my judgment incomparably more destructive and pernicious.

The issue is not the trivial one of classification; and it is not an academic issue: what the issue is and what is at stake the quality of human life and of human civilization.

The term “philosophy” has today, and has had throughout its history, many senses; in this respect it is like many other terms. But just as scientists, mathematicians, logicians and theologians have justifiably appropriated words in ordinary use and redefined them for the purposes of their particular investigations, so have philosophers.

In particular they have done it for the term “philosophy.” The original Greek of the term is “*philosophia*,” and the crucial part of that compound term is term “*sophia*.” Passmore has argued that although the term “*philosophia*” has ordinarily been translated as “the love of wisdom,” the Greek term “*sophia*” had in the sixth and seventh centuries

B.C. a much broader sense than the English term “wisdom.” “Briefly, then,” he writes, “‘*philosophia*’ etymologically connotes the love of exercising one’s curiosity and intelligence rather than the love of wisdom.”

It seems reasonably clear to me that what Passmore is trying here to do is to sever the link between philosophy and wisdom; and he is trying to do it by bringing in etymological considerations. It is true, unquestionably, that the Greek term “*philosophia*” had a number of senses in ancient Greece none of which was essentially connected with wisdom: true, but irrelevant; for etymological considerations can never be decisive in determining the meaning or meanings with which any word has been used over the course of thousands of years. The fact is, as Passmore and every other historian and student of Greek philosophy recognizes, that with the appearance of Pythagoras in the sixth century a sea-change came over Greek thought and life, and through it was transmitted to all subsequent Western thought of the kind now known as philosophical: for Pythagoras appropriated the terms “*philosophia*” and “*philosophos*”—terms already in wide use in the senses indicated by Passmore—and gave them a special sense for his special purposes: a special sense which has survived to this day and which I am here engaged in defending.

What was that sense? According to Passmore, the *philosophos*, the philosopher in Pythagoras’s special sense, the lover of *sophia*, was seeking *sophia* in the sense of “knowledge based on contemplation.” But that is not true; such an account leaves out crucial factors in *sophia* as understood by Pythagoras. As John Burnet has correctly pointed out, “wherever we can trace the influence of Pythagoras, the word has a far deeper meaning. Philosophy is itself a ‘purification’ and a way of escape from the ‘wheel’ (of suffering and existence).” But even Guthrie, who quotes this passage from Burnet approvingly cannot seem to get it right; for he goes on immediately to write that for Pythagoras *philosophia* meant “using the

powers of reason and observation to gain understanding.” Certainly it meant that much at least, but it meant far more than that. The Greek thinkers after Pythagoras, and all major Western thinkers after that, never sought understanding for its own sake, whether based on contemplation or upon any other process. They always asked: To what end? To what purpose? How does it serve man? They were never the equivalents in philosophy of those in art who have said that art is for art’s sake. As they would have said and did say that art is for the sake of man, so they would have said and did say that philosophy and philosophical understanding is for the sake of man: and no major philosopher throughout history has ever said otherwise—until we come to the twentieth century reductionists of the Analytic School, of whom Passmore is one. So, then, what Pythagoras meant by *philosophia* is this: a way of life which, with the help of all the human powers of apprehension, was intended to gain such an understanding of reality and of man as would enable man to attain the highest good attainable by man.

This note, first sounded by Pythagoras, became stronger and clearer in each succeeding thinker—who may now, for the first time, be called philosophers—until it reached its height in the great triumvirate of Greek thought, the glory of Greek philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. For the sake of brevity, I confine the following account to Aristotle.

In his *Metaphysics*, the first systematic metaphysical treatise in history, Aristotle gave three “names” to his metaphysical enquiry: *First Philosophy* (that is to say, the science of being as such, and of those absolutely fundamental principles presupposed by all thinking); *Theology* (that is to say, the science of God); and *Sophia*.

What, according to Aristotle, is *Sophia*? Not, God forbid, as Passmore would have us believe, the exercise of curiosity and intelligence! Certainly it involved at least that, or something like that; for, as Aristotle said in that same treatise.

philosophy begins in wonder, wonder at the strangeness of phenomena and of the universe. But it involves far more than that. What more? Aristotle characterizes *Sophia* at length in very definite terms: first, concretely, in terms of *the wise man*, then in more abstract terms. Both characterizations make it crystal clear that the wise man is not *just* a man exercising his curiosity and intelligence—something he could do by playing chess, or by observing the behaviour of a society of ants, or by observing the behaviour of those who pass for philosophers in the twentieth century. Aristotle, like all his predecessors as far back as Pythagoras, was a true philosopher who would have scorned the *mere* exercise of curiosity and intelligence; for, clearly, it might be exercised on idle and trivial matters, on foolish and wasteful matters, and in the service of evil matters.

In abstract terms, then, *Sophia*, he says, is that knowledge which is *the most universal, the most difficult to attain, the most exact*, which is *supremely for its own sake* and, lastly and most crucially for my purposes, which is *the most sovereign of all the (others) sciences*, that is to say, which *knows the purpose of everything*—that purpose being *the good* of each thing. The ethical note could hardly be trumpeted more purely and more strongly.

It does not matter, for my purposes, whether any of us agrees or disagrees with Aristotle’s conception of wisdom, or even, like the Reductionists of the twentieth century, banishes concern with wisdom from philosophy altogether. What matters for my present purposes is the fact, in my judgment, that ever since Pythagoras every great philosopher in the history of philosophy, Western or Eastern, has placed a conception of wisdom at the heart of his philosophy. It can be found in Democritus, Lucretius and Plotinus, in St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, in Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, in Locke, Berkeley and Hume. It can be found even in the two great predecessors of the Analytic Movement in

Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore; and it can be found in every major philosopher of the twentieth century outside the Analytic School. It is only in the Reductionists of the Analytic School, starting in the third decade of this century with Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the Bible of the School of Logical Positivism, and again a generation later in his *Philosophical Investigations*, the Bible of the School of Linguistic Analysis, that the whole mighty 2500-year-long tradition of classical philosophy, rooted ineradicably in wisdom, has been repudiated root and branch.

What, then, according to the radical reductionists of the Analytic School of thinkers, is philosophy? How, according to them, is it conceived, and what are its tasks?

### III. The Twentieth-Century Revolution in Philosophy

Since the seventeenth century the world has been shaken by revolution after revolution. There were, to begin with, the scientific revolutions: in astronomy the heliocentric theory of Copernicus and Galileo; in biology the evolutionary theory of Darwin; in geometry the non-Euclidean theories of Riemann, Lobachevsky and Bolyai; in mathematics the logico-mathematical theories of Frege; in physics, the relativity theory of Einstein; and in the application of various scientific theories in the technological-industrial revolution. There were revolutions also in the sphere of human life: social, political, economic and moral.

These revolutions outside of the domain of philosophy had their counterparts inside the domain of philosophy. In the seventeenth century, the French philosopher, Descartes, lamenting the interminability of philosophical controversies—controversies originating in ancient Greece some 2,000 years earlier and continuing unresolvably some 2,000 years later—traced the source of the trouble to the inadequacy or the unsoundness of the methods used by philosophers when they used methods at all; and so he inaugurated a revolution in the

*method* of philosophy—a method by which he thought that the foundations of philosophical truth could be determined unquestionably and defended unassailably. But if the success of a revolution is to be measured by the extent to which it succeeds in accomplishing what it is supposed to accomplish, then Descartes' revolution must be accounted a failure: for the philosophical controversies continued unabated—except that now the sufficiency and validity of Descartes' method itself was added to the list of interminable philosophical controversies. Intended to terminate philosophical controversy, Descartes' method itself became just another subject of interminable philosophical controversy.

In the eighteenth century, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant continued the lamentation—itsself interminable since the seventeenth century—that for all its 2200-year-long pretensions to be a science like all the other sciences, metaphysics could not honestly claim to have established the truth of a single metaphysical theory or proposition; and so he inaugurated what he called a *Copernican* revolution in philosophy: a revolution not in method but in the way we apprehend and think about reality. But Immanuel Kant's revolution too, like Descartes', far from being able to establish philosophical truth, itself became a subject of interminable philosophical controversy.

This brings us to the third revolution in the domain of philosophy—a revolution which is radically unlike the first two and which is far more radical in its import: the revolution which is universally known in contemporary philosophy as "The Revolution in Philosophy." It is radically unlike the first two in the following respect at least: the Cartesian revolution was a revolution with respect to philosophical *method*; the Kantian revolution was a revolution with respect to *ways of apprehending and thinking about reality*; but neither revolution concerned itself with the very nature of

philosophy itself; both left it more or less intact. "The Revolution in Philosophy", in radical contrast, was and is a revolution with respect to the very conception of philosophy itself.

The revolutionaries themselves trace their origins back to David Hume in the eighteenth century. It seems to me better traced back to Gottlob Frege—the great German mathematician—in the nineteenth century. For in the last quarter of that century, Frege, profoundly unsatisfied with the state of arithmetic, attempted to show how all of arithmetic was reducible to logic, or, in other words, how all arithmetic concepts were definable in terms of logical concepts, and how all arithmetic propositions were translatable into purely logical propositions. The foundations of arithmetic were thus logical foundations, and those were far better understood and far more secure. All this remained largely unknown to the world, however, until the re-discovery of Frege's work by Bertrand Russell at the turn of the century, and extensively worked out by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell in the monumental work, *Principia Mathematica*, in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Mathematicians were astonished by the achievement; but the philosophers were overwhelmed and stunned. Here was a philosopher—Bertrand Russell (at the time Whitehead was still a mathematician and theoretical physicist)—who seemed, in the most rigorous possible way, to have demonstrated the truth of a proposition that nearly all philosophers had never even given a thought to: that these two great sciences logic and mathematics—both having been originated in ancient Greece thousands of years ago and developed independently of one another for 2,400 years—were not two entirely distinct disciplines, but unifiable in a single theory.

After the initial profound shock in the philosophical community throughout the world, philosophers were all the readier to heed the philosophical applications Russell made

of his great logico-mathematical achievement. I can only summarily indicate them—I fear rather incomprehensibly to most laymen—in this lecture. The first was that the new logic had proven the only adequacy of the Aristotelian logic, which was almost the only logic anyone knew anything about at the beginning of the twentieth century. That in turn proved the inadequacy of the Aristotelian substance-attribute metaphysics, which according to Russell was a reflection of Aristotle's subject-predicate logic. That in turn proved the inadequacy of the Christian theology which, through St. Thomas Aquinas, who had on the whole adopted the Aristotelian metaphysics in order to formulate and explain the Christian picture of the universe, had become almost the official doctrine of the whole Roman Catholic Church and thus at least of Roman Catholic Christendom. Russell used the new logic also to undermine the foundations of the Kantian philosophy and the Hegelian system of philosophy. He was gradually arriving at the conclusion that the whole classical tradition of philosophy, from its very beginnings in the sixth century B.C. in ancient Greece up to the beginnings of the twentieth century, was fundamentally and irremediably defective. As he wrote: "Philosophy, from the earliest times, has made greater claims, and achieved fewer results, than any other branch of learning. Ever since Thales said that all is water, philosophers have been ready with glib assertions about the sum-total of things; and equally glib denials have come from other philosophers ever since Thales was contradicted by Anaximander. I believe the time has now arrived when this unsatisfactory state of affairs can be brought to an end . . . The problems and the method of philosophy have, I believe, been misconceived by all schools, many of its traditional problems being insoluble with our means of knowledge, while other more neglected but not less important problems can, by a more patient and more adequate method, be solved with all the precision and certainly to which the most advanced sciences have attained."

In this passage Russell was echoing the dissatisfaction already expressed by Descartes and Kant concerning the interminability of philosophical controversy and the unsolvability of philosophical problems; echoing also the dissatisfaction with the conception of the problems and methods of philosophy as hitherto viewed. He was thus taking note of two facts which have troubled all philosophers at least since the seventeenth century: first, the solubility of *scientific* problems, or the answerability of *scientific* questions, or the terminability of *scientific* controversy; second, the insolubility of *philosophical* problems, the unanswerability of *philosophical* questions, the interminability of *philosophical* controversy. Science was always making progress, accumulating an increasing body of knowledge over the centuries; philosophy was never making progress, at any rate in the sense of establishing any *truths* acceptable to the general community of philosophers and increasing its stock of established truths over the centuries.

But there is a radical difference between Russell's revolution and that of Descartes and Kant: Russell's consisted essentially in the advancement of a radically new conception of philosophy itself. As he also wrote in the same work: "The topics we discussed in our first lecture, and the topics we shall discuss later, *all reduce themselves, in so far as they are genuinely philosophical, to problems of logic. . . every philosophical problem, when it is subjected to the necessary analysis and purification, is found either to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be, in the sense in which we are using the word, logical.*" As he proclaimed in the title of that lecture, "Logic (is) the essence of philosophy." "Philosophy is the science of the possible," he said, and it is only when philosophy is so conceived, that philosophy would at last be able "to become a science. . . to aim at results independent of the tastes and temperament of the philosopher who advocates them . . . adequate, in all branches of philosophy, to yield

whatever objective scientific knowledge it is possible to obtain."

That is the beginning of the twentieth century "Revolution in Philosophy": that revolution in the very conception of philosophy which goes by the name of the Analytic School of philosophy. Russell had already characterized the new method of philosophy as "the logical-analytic method"; and the successive developments followed rapidly.

Russell, as we have noted, reduced philosophy to logic. Rudolf Carnap reduced it still further: "Philosophy," he wrote, "is the logic of science," or, "the logical analysis of science," or "the logical syntax of the language of science."

Ludwig Wittgenstein carried the reduction still further: "All philosophy is 'a critique of language'. . . The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical propositions', but to make propositions clear. . . . The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science—i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone wished to say something metaphysical [e.g., that God exists], to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions." Thus according to Wittgenstein, there are no philosophical propositions; the only meaningful sentences are those of the natural sciences; most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works, he said, are nonsensical or meaningless. If Russell reduced philosophy to logic, and Carnap reduced it to the logic of science, Wittgenstein reduced it propositionally to nothing and proclaimed that almost everything to be found in the vast classical tradition of philosophy was meaningless or nonsensical. Carnap was more explicit about his repudiations: the whole body of traditional philosophy, the whole body of traditional metaphysics, the whole body of

traditional epistemology, the whole body of ethics and morality, the whole body of religious doctrine consisted of one great mass of nonsense, strictly meaningless sentences. At one point he repudiated all philosophy of *any* kind, maintaining that, apart from science, the only intelligible intellectual activity was *the logical analysis* of science, an activity not to be called philosophical.

Carnap, pre-eminently, represented the positivistic wing of the Analytic School, a positivistic wing prefigured in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. But there were hints of the linguistic conception of philosophy already in the *Tractatus*, and those hints became a full-blown *linguistic* conception of philosophy in later writings of Wittgenstein, most prominently in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Gilbert Ryle propounded a linguistic conception of philosophy very explicitly: "the detection of the sources in linguistic idioms of recurrent misconstructions and absurd theories. . . this is what philosophical analysis is. . . *this is the sole and the whole function of philosophy.*"

This is what philosophy had become by the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century; and very largely still is in the minds of many philosophers throughout the world. Such retreats as there are, or modifications of those extreme conceptions of philosophy, back toward what I call the classical conception of philosophy, are mostly half-hearted, timorous, and often silent.

All reference to wisdom has been banished from philosophy: philosophy is now either the logical analysis of science, or the detection of absurdities and nonsense in the utterances of classically-minded philosophers: in both cases an exclusively second-order discipline — no longer a direct investigation of reality at all. [Cf. *Second Order: In African Journal of Philosophy*.]

#### IV. An Assessment of the Revolution in Philosophy

Has the Revolution succeeded?—It is perfectly clear, from what I have said so far, that I do not think it has; but I have yet to explain in detail and in theoretical terms why I think so.

It should be understood by my judgement that Analytic Philosophy so-called is not philosophy at all and that its adherents are not philosophers at all does not in the least imply that I do not value and even cherish the constructive work they have done and continue to do, e.g., in the philosophy so-called of science, that is to say, in the logical analyses of science, both natural and formal, in all its dimensions. But in exactly the same spirit I value and cherish the work of the natural and formal scientists themselves without for one moment confusing it with the work of philosophers.

The next question is Has the Revolution in philosophy succeeded? —There is, to the best of my knowledge, no way to answer that question except in terms of a specific criterion that rival theories of the nature of philosophy must satisfy if those theories are to be acceptable. The criterion, of course, must not be arbitrary, otherwise *any* theory of the nature of philosophy can be justified *ad hoc*, that is to say, by just manufacturing a criterion which your theory satisfies and no other theory does.

All theoretical definitions of philosophy fall into one or the other of two classes, it seems to me. The first class consists of definitions of philosophy-as-it-is more or less as it has been throughout recorded history, is now, and will be in the future. The second class consists of definitions of philosophy-as-it-ought-to-be, regardless of what it has in fact been throughout history. The definitions of the first class are, it seems to me, further characterized as *a posteriori*, *nonreductionistic*, and *nonexclusionistic*: and the definitions of the second class are further characterizable, it seems to me, in the opposite terms—*a priori*, *reductionistic*, and *exclusionistic*.

By *a posteriori* in this context I mean that the theoretical definitions take explicit account of the actual systems of philosophy recorded in history as essentially unalterable and uneliminable data. By *nonreductionistic* I mean that the theoretical definitions are intended to specify all the essential features of those systems actually found in the historical record without eliminating any. By *nonexclusionistic* I mean that the data provided by the historical record are not arbitrarily ignored or excluded more or less wholesale from consideration in the framing of the theories.

The theoretical definition I shall advance in the final section of this paper is intended to be a definition of the first kind; it is intended to be *a posteriori*, *nonreductionistic* and *nonexclusionistic*. All the definitions of the analytic philosophers so-called seem to me to be definitions of the second kind: that is to say, they regard the data of the recorded history of philosophy as essentially eliminable and irrelevant to the framing of their theories, data which may be ignored or excluded wholesale; and those definitions are not attempts, on the basis of an inductive examination of the historical data and subsequent abstraction of essential features, to state the essential features of philosophy as it has been found recorded in history.

By my criterion there can be no question that the theoretical definitions of philosophy advanced by the analytic philosophers so-called are inadequate: fundamentally and irretrievably inadequate. None of the systems of philosophy recorded in the history of philosophy, Western or Eastern, satisfies any of the theoretical definitions of the Analytic School; none of them is classifiable as a philosophy in terms of any of those definitions. But the suspicion might then naturally arise that in my treatment of this question I have loaded the dice in favour of my own personal vision of philosophy: that is, that I have so framed my criterion of the adequacy of any theoretical definition of philosophy as to

predetermine the outcome in favor of my own conception of philosophy.

The question thus arises of the impartiality and adequacy of my very criterion. Given the inevitable outcome of the application of it to the analytic definitions of philosophy, the analytic philosophers so-called would presumably question and indeed repudiate it, preferring their own instead. But what is their own instead? To the best of my knowledge, no reductionist has ever raised, addressed or answered that question. I suggest, then, that the following answer is the only possible answer consistent with and warranted by their general analytic outlook.

There are, I believe, a number of theories, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, underlying their theoretical conceptions of philosophy: first, that the facts of the history of philosophy are more or less—far *more* than less—irrelevant to the problem of framing an adequate and sound definition of philosophy; second, that all seeming philosophy prior to their revolution in philosophy has been fundamentally misconceived, as a consequence of which its problems, subject matters and methods have also been fundamentally misconceived; third, that if the problems of philosophy are to be genuine and not pseudo-problems, its solutions to be genuine and not pseudo-solutions, and its controversies to be resolvable and terminable, not forever unresolvable and interminable, then philosophy has to be more or less—far *more than* less—fundamentally reconceived and redefined: redefined *not* in the light of what philosophy has in fact been throughout its recorded history, but *only* in the light of the possibility of success as a distinct form of intelligible intellectual enquiry.

The fundamental reductionist criterion of the acceptability of any definition of philosophy is, then, I suggest, that *only* if philosophy is conceived and defined as the reductionists severally conceive and define it is there any possibility of

success in the philosophical enterprise: that is, in the enterprise of propounding genuine philosophical questions, seeking genuine philosophical answers in accordance with effective (not futile) philosophical methods, finding genuine and true philosophical answers, and resolving genuine philosophical controversies—propoundings, seekings, findings and resolvings with respect to which the community of competent enquirers would agree more or less unanimously, as the community of competent enquirers in the natural and the formal sciences do with respect to their own problems. That, I remind you, is what Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap and all the others promises.

By that criterion—not *my* criterion, but the criterion of the reductionists themselves—what must be the verdict? Total failure, it seems to me: philosophy so conceived can claim not a single success in the sense specified since philosophy so conceived was inaugurated by Russell at the turn of the century. The examples are innumerable: in general they include every philosophical problem, answer, method and resolution proposed by any reductionist; for whatever problem, answer, method, and resolution has been proposed by one reductionist has been questioned and repudiated or denied by another unresolvably, often by many others, even within exactly the same philosophical camp. The fate of the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness is a striking example: every formulation of the criterion hitherto proposed by logical positivists has been found fundamentally inadequate by other logical positivists themselves, or even by the proposing positivist, until they have all finally lapsed into silence on the question. The fate of the theory of probability is another: though Carnap and Reichenbach, espousing essentially the same conception of philosophy, took opposing sides in theory of probability—Carnap the *a priori* or logical side, Reichenbach the *a posteriori* or frequency side—for nearly a generation, the issue between them remained

unresolvable, and both died having failed to resolve it. The fate of the theory of logical truth is another: Carnap and Quine, espousing essentially the same conception of philosophy, were never able to resolve their fundamental differences over the nature of logical truth despite decades of controversy. There is, I think, no need to multiply examples for illustrative purposes: the failure of the reductionistic theories of philosophy, even in terms of their own criteria, is evident—though perhaps concealed by criteria of success which themselves over the decades have become increasingly reductionistic. The interminability of controversy which was supposed to be a defining characteristic of the classical philosophical controversies is a defining characteristic of the new philosophical controversies too. I conclude then, that the reductionistic conceptions of philosophy, then, are not only fundamentally inadequate; they are also fundamentally unsound.

## V. Philosophy, The World and Man: A Global Conception

Philosophy I define—in what is intended as a theoretical definition of the *a posteriori* kind—in the following terms. It is:

- (i) an enquiry into the nature of wisdom,
- (ii) by means of all of man's powers of apprehension (whatever they be: the power of reason, the power of sense, the power of memory, the power of intuition, etc.),
- (iii) an enquiry which is
  - (a) comprehensive in scope,
  - (b) systematic in structure,
  - (c) uncompromisingly critical in attitude,
  - (d) broadly rational in procedure,
  - (e) absolutely free in the sense that it is to be unconstrained by any external authority, uncommitted to any pre-determined dogma, postulate, or supposed revelation, governed only

by the philosopher's quest for truth and his commitment to the welfare of the human race,

- (f) open-ended in the sense that in principle the enquiry may go on forever, nothing in the philosopher's tentative conclusions being immune to repudiation or revision, all being provisional;
- (iv) an enquiry whose ultimate practical purpose is the determination of the conditions under which the good of man is maximally realizable, that is to say,
  - (a) the individual conditions,
  - (b) the social conditions,
  - (c) the political conditions,
  - (d) the economic conditions,
  - (e) the educational and other institutional conditions,
  - (f) even the religious and ecclesiastical condition and finally,
  - (g) the cosmic or existential conditions.

When I say that the enquiry is to be comprehensive in scope, I mean that, subject to the limitations which the fundamental concern for wisdom itself places upon philosophical enquiry (in short, no philosophy for philosophy's sake: a purely disinterested enquiry determined only by the enquirer's personal interests and curiosities), it will be an enquiry about the whole of reality, the whole of humanity, and the whole of human nature. Only by enquiry which is that comprehensive in scope, it seems to me, will it be possible adequately to determine the conditions under which the Welfare of the human race is maximally realizable.

Professor W. V. Quine—now generally regarded as the world's foremost living philosopher—has maintained that the unit of linguistic meaningfulness is not, as most philosophers had supposed, the *word*; it is not, as many twentieth century thinkers have said, the *sentence*: the unit of linguistic meaningfulness, Quine has said, in what has been taken to be

one of his more radical theories, is *the total system of science*. What exactly this means, and on what grounds he asserts it, I cannot stop to explain. I mention it, however, because it is in a certain respect analogous to the thesis I shall advance: that is, the thesis that the unit of *philosophy* is a philosopher's total system.

In defining philosophy, Bertrand Russell then went on to define the concept of a *philosophical proposition*; and many twentieth century thinkers have done the same, even if their *definitions* of a philosophical proposition deviated more or less from his definition. Philosophers have tried, that is to say, to specify the features or characteristics which uniquely distinguish a philosophical sentence from a scientific, or religious, or theological, or commonsensical proposition; and then, given the *general* class of philosophical propositions, they have tried to distinguish those sub-classes of philosophical propositions which were, more specifically, metaphysical, or ontological, or epistemological, or logical, or ethical, and so on.

In my view, that cannot be done and should not be attempted. In my view, and in accordance with my conception of philosophy, *any* sentence of *any* kind—whether commonsensical, scientific, logical, epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, mystical or whatever—may form a proper part of a philosophical system, provided that it is linked explicitly to the quest for wisdom either in its theoretical dimensions or in its practical dimensions, and provided in addition that the requirement of rationality is satisfied. For no system of thought and practice properly called philosophical can make any appeal to faith or to revelation, for example.

The implications of this may not immediately be evident. One is that the philosopher, in his quest to determine the nature of wisdom and the conditions under which it is maximally realizable in all the spheres of human life indicated

above will inevitably study the history of the human race in general; he will inevitably study the history of human societies and institutions (religious, political, economic, social and so on); he will inevitably study the sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, ethnology, astronomy, geology; logic, mathematics, geometry)—all, let it be noted, *first order* studies, with the possible exception of the last three (logic, mathematics and geometry). He will inevitably study the works of the novelists, the dramatists, the poets for any insights he can glean from them. And above all he will study himself and all those around him: everything he sees, hears, smells, tastes, feels. For the philosopher everything—*everything*—is grist for the mill—just so long as he treats it with uncompromising use of his critical and rational faculties, and just so long as it is all done in the service of wisdom and ultimately in the service of the human race.

For the philosopher, as I conceive him, is ultimately struggling to work out a philosophy for humanity, a philosophy of civilization: a philosophy which will serve, as far as that is humanly possible, as “the guide of life” for humanity as a whole.

A second effect of this conception of philosophy, perhaps not immediately evident, would be an immense enrichment of its content. No more these dismal, crabbed, microscopic, interminable analyses of the language and concepts of the natural sciences, or of the language and concepts of the formal sciences, or of the language and concepts of religion, or of the language and concepts of morality, or of the language and concepts of ordinary language etc.: for that has been the whole content of Analytic Philosophy so-called. It is no wonder, then, that the only major work of political philosophy produced in the twentieth century—*A Theory of Justice*—was produced only about a decade ago by a philosopher—John Rawls—who begins by saying that he rejects the

Postivistic and Linguistic conceptions of philosophy. And *no* member of the Analytic School—which is now at least half a century old—has produced a single major work in moral philosophy, or one which can possibly be of any use to the human race in its fearful struggles. Their impoverishment of philosophy can scarcely be exaggerated—though I am trying.

A couple of centuries ago Bishop Butler said that “probability is the guide of life::; and all philosophers and philosophers so-called since then have repeated the dictum as if it were a self-evident truth. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concept of probability has become of increasing importance to the sciences; and so one finds the dictum quoted in almost all works on probability during those two centuries. Thus in the most considerable work on the subject probably ever published, Rudolf Carnap, as a logical analyst of science, devoted the last thirty years of his career mainly to the analysis and systematization of the concept of probability in his monumental work, *The Logical Foundations of Probability*. Central though the concept of probability is to the sciences, however, it most certainly is not the guide of life; the good Bishop’s vision failed him on that occasion. *Wisdom*, not probability, is the guide of life; the probabilities can at most serve only to indicate the facts which the principles of wisdom must take into account if the principles of wisdom are to be applied in various spheres of human life in order to work out the best possible organization of human life individually, socially, politically, economically and so on. There is probably more genuine and valuable guidance to be found in a single paragraph, or even sentence, in the New Testament, the Old Testament, the Western or Eastern, Northern or Southern, than in the whole of Carnap’s monumental work, bristling with logical and mathematical formulae: religious documents and religions which, not incidentally, the Logical Positivists and the Marxists are

united in being openly committed to eradicating from the face of the earth, and which the Linguistic Philosophers deal with only in order to detect in the linguistic idioms of religious documents the sources of recurrent misconstructions and absurd theories, in Gilbert Ryle's words.

The great enrichment of the content of philosophy which, I said, is involved in the conception of philosophy which I have advanced in this lecture is not something revolutionary or novel; it is not more than the restoration of philosophy as it used to be before it was emasculated and impoverished by the Analytic School. *All* the great philosophers in history—ever since Plato and Aristotle at least—have in fact done what I am now saying should be done. *All* their philosophical systems, when all their philosophical works are taken as a body, were immensely and wonderfully rich in content, drawing upon every conceivable source for illumination. Marx said: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways the point, however, is to *change* it.” He was, as usual, wrong: the philosophers throughout history have *not*—most emphatically *not*—only interpreted the world; in accordance with the basic conception of philosophy which, I say, they *all* espoused, they *have* tried to change it. And they have often *succeeded*. When the reforms of human life and society in all their dimensions proposed and fought for by the philosophers have been guided by a true conception of wisdom, the benefits of human life and society have been incalculable.

This, then, is one man's vision of philosophy, the world and man—for the time being.