PURSUIT OF PHILOSOPHY

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I

To Resume an Interrupted Discussion

My discussion with Anthony Kenny on the right pursuit of philosophy took place in Prague in April 1980. At that time my philosophy seminar had been harassed by the Czech police but we still managed to meet. The arrival of the Master of Balliol was anticipated with great expectations. Some expected a catastrophe which would definitely finish my seminar. I could not imagine the police interfering once Kenny was granted the visas. That is why I hoped for a breakthrough. If the police refrained from harassing us in this case they would hardly interfere on future occasions. My aspirations would have been fulfilled. Prague would have had a place where once a week young people could come and openly discuss philosophy. That would have given us strength to be as free as the physical parameters of the situation allowed, free enough, I felt—even without the possibility to travel abroad, to publish and to speak in public—to confront the system with a problem of governing a society with free people in its midst. I hoped the regime could grow up to the task and so get positively transformed without falling apart in the process. Hoping for the continuation of my seminar I hoped for the optimal development in our country. Our philosophy seminar was a step on the road towards a society which would maintain the social and economic framework of socialism but would allow free development of individuals.

Kenny arrived at our apartment about half an hour before the actual beginning of the seminar. It was essential for us—me and him—to discuss his talk a little beforehand. It facilitated my task of interpreting it into Czech for the students. Facing the hostile attitude of the Prague regime I had to operate on a week to week basis, every talk had to be prepared so as to retain its meaning and be worth the risk for the participants even if it was to be the last talk. That is why I kept asking my visitors to present themes that would be central to their thought, yet comprehensible to an audience without special preparation. Kenny chose to talk about the pursuit of happiness in the *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. He dealt with the problem in his recently published *The Aristotelian Ethics* (Oxford, 1978). In the book he proved, against the dominant opinions of scholars, that it was the *Eudemian*

Ethics which contained Aristotle's mature theory of ethics and that the three common books disputed between the two treatises belonged originally to the *Eudemian Ethics*. Though the matter as such was complex and involved highly technical procedures Kenny believed that the main results could be presented in a clear and intelligible manner, and what is more, contained a philosophic message of current interest. He would begin the talk by presenting some texts from the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Would I have a look at the passages in Greek?

I was relieved when I saw the *Nicomachean* passage (10th book, 1177a12 – 1177b6). In my text it was heavily underlined and marked by an exclamation mark. Though I had not read the text for years I was confident that little would be needed to get it revived in my mind. I began to sweat when I saw the lengthy passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1218b31 – 1219a39). I had never read the *Eudemian Ethics*. I would have loved to go through the text together with Kenny and benefit from his help, but there was no time for it. The students began to arrive. I excused myself and retired to the kitchen. I barely managed to read the text once when my wife summoned me to open the seminar.

If I remember it well Kenny began with the *Nicomachean* passage. There, he argued, happiness consists in the contemplative activity and philosophy becomes thus the primary source of happiness. For the *Eudemian Ethics* to which he came afterwards happiness consisted of an ideal functioning of every part of the soul. Kenny argued that the *Eudemian* conception was critical of the *Nicomachean* conception. Let me quote from his book: 'A person who organized his life entirely with a view to the promotion of philosophical speculation would be not wise but cunning, not *phronimos* but *panourgos*. The type of person whom many regard as the hero of the *Nicomachean Ethics* turns out, by the standards of the *Eudemian Ethics*, to be a vicious and ignoble character.' (p. 214)

We arrived at the point where I had to exchange the role of an interpreter for the role of a discussion partner: In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle considers the life in philosophy to be the source of happiness because the activity of intellect is the highest one. Why should I see it opposed to the ideal functioning of the other parts of the soul in the *Eudemian Ethics*? May not Aristotle be pointing in the direction of the theory fully developed in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he says in our *Eudemian* passage: 'The End (*telos*) is the best as being an End, since it is assumed as being the best and ultimate, for the sake of which all the other things exist'? (1219a8 – 9) In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle puts forward reasons why philosophy is the

accomplished source of good life, he points to its being most continuous and independent of external circumstances. Even if deprived of exchanging ideas with his colleagues (*synergoi*) he may continue doing philosophy (1177a12–b1). This is especially important for us in Prague who may face imprisonment any day. It further reminds me of Socrates. In the *Apology* he says: 'as long as I live and as long as I am able to I will not stop doing philosophy.' (29d)

Kenny did not oppose the 'Socratic' interpretation of the *Nicomachean* passage. He questioned instead the philosophic credentials of Socrates. Wouldn't I consider Plato a much better philosopher? I could not accept the question as simply as that. How can I accept that Plato was a better philosopher if Plato is full of Socrates? It would prejudice my reading Plato. While reading the dialogues I try to understand what was Socrates' philosophy that it gave him strength to do philosophy 'as long as he breathed' (29d). But should I not better return to my role of an interpreter?—At this point dozens of uniformed and plainclothed policemen stormed into the room.

II

Encounters with Socrates

Kenny wrote about our Prague meeting in *New Statesman* (99th Vol., 18 April 1980, p. 574): 'I began to expound Aristotle's theory. Tomin would translate each passage with my commentary, sometimes adding comments of his own which he would then translate back into English. After a while, other members of the seminar joined in. A former professor at the Charles University, Radim Palous, objected to Aristotle's identification of philosophy with good life. His argument was succinct: 'If the good life was the same thing as philosophy then a better philosopher would be a better man. But Plato was a better philosopher than Socrates, but he was not a good man.' Our lack of sympathy with the Aristotelian ideal made Tomin look uncomfortable. But he was not going to challenge the comparative evaluation between Socrates and Plato.' It is strange how our memories differ. I did challenge Kenny's evaluation of Socrates and that was why the former professor at the Charles University rushed to his support.

Let me discuss some cases of philosophic disregard for Socrates, beginning with Kenny's book on Aristotelian Ethics.

Kenny wants to establish a dramatic contrast between the *Eudemian* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Eudemian Ethics* is the one in which happiness consists of the activity of all the virtues, whereas the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives prominence to contemplative virtues and thus to the life in philosophy. And yet, it is in the final paragraph of the *Eudemian Ethics* that Aristotle defines happiness as consisting of contemplating God *while feeling as little as possible the other part of the soul* (1249b16 – 24). The passage raises a question mark on Kenny's contention that Aristotle holds throughout the *Eudemian Ethics* that the activities of all parts of the soul are equally part of happiness. Kenny does not face the problem directly; to obviate it he uses Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* when interpreting the notion of 'service and contemplation of God' with which Aristotle's enquiry into happiness in the *Eudemian Ethics* culminates. Kenny refuses to accept the interpretation of *serving God* as *cultivating intellect* which derives support from *Nicomachean Ethics* (1179a23): 'serving the intellect endears us to the Gods'. He rather detects in 'service and contemplation of God' a reference to the *Euthyphro*: 'There a long section is devoted to a discussion of *he ton theon therapeia* (service of Gods—JT) in which Socrates argues that the notion is unintelligible . . . The service of the Gods which Euthyphro has in mind includes prayer and service: but it includes also acts of justice such as Euthyphro's attempt to punish a murderer—the endeavour which gives the whole dialogue its framework. If Aristotle does have the *Euthyphro* in mind here, then the service of God could well include acts of moral virtue . . . It is certainly not alien to Aristotle's manner in the *Eudemian Ethics* to defend the moral opinions of the plain man against the paradoxes of Socrates.' (Kenny, p. 178.) Here Kenny speaks tentatively about Aristotle's reference to the *Euthyphro*. Sixty pages later he speaks with certainty; the *Eudemian Ethics* 'is shot through with reminiscences of Plato's ethical dialogues from the *Euthyphro* to the *Philebus*' (p. 230). It must be so if the contrast between the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, as established by Kenny, is to hold. But can the contention of Aristotle's reference to the *Euthyphro* be upheld once we take a look at the dialogue itself?

Kenny plays with the idea of Aristotle as a defender of Euthyphro's notion of service of God, i.e. of his moral opinions as those of a plain man against the paradoxes of Socrates. But in the dialogue Euthyphro is not a plain man, he professes himself to be an expert in theology. His theological expertise was what put him above all his fellow citizens in his own eyes (4e – 5a). Kenny claims that the service of God 'includes also acts of justice such as Euthyphro's attempt to punish a murderer'. But Euthyphro did not prosecute just any murderer; he intended to prosecute for murder his own father. Furthermore, Euthyphro in his zeal overlooked that no direct murder was committed by his

father. Was it not rather death caused by negligence? Euthyphro's father bound hand and foot a hired labourer who had killed their domestic slave. He tossed him in a ditch and sent a messenger to Athens to enquire what to do with the offender. Before the messenger returned the offender died. Socrates insisted that Euthyphro had to be pretty sure of his theological expertise if under such circumstances he was ready to prosecute for murder his own father. That is why he scrutinized his theological expertise. Unhappy about Euthyphro's understanding of religious duty were the plain people around him: his friends and relatives tried to dissuade him from prosecuting his father but Euthyphro remained encapsulated in his 'superior knowledge' (4d). Only Socrates succeded in piercing Euthyphro's conceit. At the end of the dialogue, instead of fulfilling his intention of entering the court to present his indictment, Euthyphro went away in haste. In the *Life of Socrates* Diogenes Laertius writes: 'When Euthyphro was about to indict his father for killing a foreigner, Socrates, having discussed with him some points about piety, diverted him from it.' (II.29)

Aristotle shows humorous understanding for some offences of sons against their fathers. In the seventh book of the *Nicomachean* (i.e. sixth *Eudemian*) *Ethics* he writes: 'When impulses are natural, it is more excusable to follow them . . . witness the man who was had up for beating his father and said in his defence, "Well, my father used to beat his father, and he used to beat his, and (pointing to his little boy) so will my son here beat me when he grows up; it runs in our family"; and the man who,when his son was throwing him out of the house, used to beg him to stop when he got to the door, "because he only used to drag his father as far as that".' 1149b4–13—Rackham's translation in Loeb). But I doubt that Aristotle would choose Euthyphro for the model of his ideal of 'service and contemplation of God' with which he brings his search for a good life to its culmination in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Greater attention to Aristotle's philosophic encounters with Socrates in the *Eudemian Ethics* would be advisable. I will plead for it further face to face with Irwin and Burnyeat.

1. After I left Czechoslovakia I talked a lot on Plato at different colleges and Universities, once even in Canada. The philosopher who invited me to his seminar could not get over the damage which I did to his students' minds and to better me he gave me '*Plato's Moral Theory*' by Terence Irwin. By that time I had heard a lot about the book. As I.M. Crombie said in *Philosophy*: 'It must be read by every student of Plato's moral theory or, indeed, of Plato, and it will be usefully read by every student of moral theory.' Oxford University

Press printed it in 1977 and reprinted in 1979. It was extensively discussed in seven issues of the *Times Literary Supplement* between February and September 1978.

Irwin draws a sharp line between Socrates and Plato. He renders the Socratic doctrine by the formula CA→KSV→TV→ED and Plato's mature standpoint by the formula NR→not-ED→not-TV→not-KSV→not-CA. (Irwin, p. 159.) If we understand the abbreviations we obtain Irwin's solution of the Socrates-Plato problem.

CA stands for *Craft-Analogy*. Socrates 'claims that virtue is a craft' (Irwin, p. 75). There follows KSV, *Knowledge is Sufficient for Virtue*. Socrates 'recognizes no moral virtue which is not craft'. TV stands for *Technical* conception of *Virtue* (Irwin, p. 84); for Socrates happiness (consisting of pleasure) is a determinate end to which virtue prescribes instrumental means. Disputed terms are eliminated from moral accounts and moral disputes can be settled 'by some analogue to measurement' (Irwin, p. 72–3); ED stands for *Elimination of Disputed terms*.

The doctrine of Plato is that of *Non-Reducibility* of forms to sensible properties: NR. The Socratic claim of the *Elimination of Disputed terms* is abandoned: not-ED. The technical conception of Virtue falls apart: not-TV. The principle that Knowledge is Sufficient for Virtue cannot be upheld any more: not-KSV. Identification of virtue with craft, the Craft-Analogy disintegrates: not-CA. The dialogue in which it was supposed to have happened, in which Plato rejected Socratic moral doctrine in its entirety is the *Phaedo*. According to Irwin it was in the *Phaedo* that Plato identified the Socratic 'conception of virtue as a measuring craft concerned with pleasures and pains' and rejected it as a *slavish virtue* (Irwin, p. 161).

Let me now have recourse to Plato's *Phaedo*. Friends of Socrates assemble in the prison; that evening Socrates must die. Socrates discusses with them philosophy; he explains why he faces death without fear. Philosophy liberates from fear, even from fear of death. He contrasts courage of the Many with the courage of a philosopher. With the Many even courage is a disguised fear and thus a slavish virtue. They are afraid of being held for cowards. The slave is motivated by fear.

Irwin's theory asks for a radical transformation of roles in the *Phaedo*. Plato is identified with Socrates and Socrates with the Many. But the reader who would know of Plato and Socrates only from Irwin would never even learn that in the dialogue it is Socrates who criticizes the Many for their *slavish*

virtue. There is not the slightest hint of it in the main text or in the extensive notes. But I cannot help asking what does it tell us about Plato if Plato chose Socrates in his last hours to voice in Socratic disguise his own devastating criticism of Socrates? How is the *Phaedo* read and understood at Universities all around the English speaking world that such an obvious question has not been raised by any classical philosopher? It is time to consult Aristotle's view of Socrates in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Irwin's theory stands and falls with his contention that Socrates accepted—together with the Many—the identification of the End of moral activity with pleasure, and enquired only into instrumental means for achieving that End. In the first book of the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle contrasts Socratic theory with his own. For Socrates the End (*telos*) was knowing virtue 'owing to which he used to inquire what virtue is, but not how and from what sources it is produced'. For Socrates 'knowing justice and being just go together'. Aristotle prepares the ground for his novel understanding of morality by drawing a distinction between theoretical and productive sciences. He points out that Socrates treated ethics as if it were a theoretical knowledge since only there knowing and being coincide. Aristotle ranges ethics among *productive* sciences (not yet *practical* sciences, that important distinction will appear only later—one of the signs of the early provenience of the *Eudemian Ethics*; that much against Kenny's locating the *Eudemian Ethics* as later than the *Nicomachean Ethics*). That is why 'in the case of goodness it is not the knowledge of its essential nature that is most valuable but discovering the sources that produce it.' (1216b3–22) Aristotle criticizes Socrates for paying all his attention to enquiring into the essential nature of goodness, the ultimate End, but forgetting that attention must be paid foremost to the means by which and sources from which it is produced (cf. 1214b6–1215a10).

2. M.F. Burnyeat in 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy' (*The Philosophical Review*, XCI, No. 1, January 1982), claims that for the ancient philosophers 'one's own body has not yet become a part of the external world'. In a footnote he cautions that 'Platonic soul-body dualism is not to the point here, since it puts no epistemological barrier between soul and body' (p. 39). I do not understand what Burnyeat means by 'no epistemological barrier between soul and body'. If it comes to Socrates he seems to have drawn a pretty distinct line between us and our body. In the seventh book of the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle writes: 'the old Socrates used to say, throwing away spittle, hair and nails, that we throw away the parts which are of no use and finally the body, when it dies.' (1235a37–b1.) In the *Phaedo* when Crito asks 'How shall we bury you?' Socrates replies: 'As you wish, if you catch me and I don't escape you . . . I will not persuade Crito that I am this Socrates who now talks to you

and structures every argument, he thinks me to be the one whom he will see a little later dead . . .' (114ce). Burnyeat should pay perhaps more attention even to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The *Metaphysics* raises a question mark over his main claim that for the ancients— before Descartes—the 'monism which claims that ultimately all there is is mind and the contents of mind' (p. 8) was an inaccessible theory. Aristotle explicitly *states* and fights the theory that would identify being with what is perceived: 'if only the perceived is, then nothing would be without animated beings since there would be no perception' (1010b30–31) and further on he contends that for such a theory 'nothing ever came to being or will be if nobody had perceived' (1011b5–6). Curiously enough, Burnyeat discusses the 1010b30–35 passage in his footnote but he seems oblivious of its bearing, even of the fact that Aristotle does not express there his own view but a theory which he is gunning for. Burnyeat writes in his footnote: 'At *Met.* 1010b30—35 the *aistheta* (the perceived things—JT) that are conceded to depend for their existênce on being perceived must be actualized sensible qualities or else Aristotle will be slipping into the Megarian account of possibility which he disputes on this very ground in *Met.* Θ 3.' The 'Berkeleyan' type of idealist monism is just as clearly perceived and just as strongly rejected by Thomas Aquinas in his comments on the given passages of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. If the ancients formulated the theory in a succinct form and rejected it, that is a very different thing from maintaining that the thought was inaccessible to philosophers before Descartes.

But back to 'The Aristotelian Ethics'. Kenny himself values most his arguments for the Eudemian origin of the three disputed books which in modern times are almost exclusively printed only within the framework of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I agree with Kenny that the *Eudemian Ethics* should be printed with the three common books as its intergral part. That does not mean that the *Nicomachean Ethics* should be mutilated in its stead. If the ancients could produce both texts as integral, labouring with their pens, one might expect that the modern press should be up to the task as well.

III

When the Classical Tradition of Philosophy Meets Actuality

After the police entered our apartment forcefully and illegally —they shoved aside my wife who tried to stop them; even in our country there exist definite legal conditions under which police may enter an apartment against the wish of its occupants. They disrupted the seminar, and took Mr and Mrs Kenny away. All the rest of us were then driven to the police headquarters.

The prison authorities were not prepared to put up with such a lot of people. We were brought into a big hall which normally serves for meetings of the police staff.

When I look back I cannot help thinking that at that stage it ought to have occurred to me that all was over and that my seminar was finished. But not even a shadow of such a thought passed through my mind. I knew that something important had happened, but it had nothing to do with the intrusion of the police. In our short encounter Kenny managed to challenge my conception of philosophy.

We tried in Prague to find and pursue philosophy which would give us strength to be free wi'hin structures of institutionalized unfreedom. Desire to be free, to grow and enrich each other intellectually was what constituted my philosophy seminar. My doors were opened once a week for everyone who dared to enter. The only ground on which the participants kept coming was their expanding capacity to learn. What kind of philosophy had Kenny in mind when, criticizing Aristotle's Nicomachean conception of the good life, he censured the unrelenting pursuit of philosophy?

But was it not just what I expected and wanted to happen? Did I not wish to get our thinking questioned, stimulated and enriched by the impact of highly qualified philosophy? When philosophers from Oxford began to come, it was not only the participants of my seminar who were affected. The whole of institutionalized philosophy was stirred into motion. Those who gave up their philosophic thinking in order to keep their posts of professional philosophers were moved to think again.

What was the situation which induced me to invite philosophers from Oxford? Our country was in the grip of a spiritual lethargy caused by the fatal intervention of the five Warsaw Pact armies. Philosophic thought was frozen, philosophers barren. How could an armed intervention have inflicted such a state of lameness on our capacity to think? Philosophers were not sent to prison camps as would have happened in the fifties.

The majority of our prominent philosophers were Marxists. Marxism was the ideology of the ruling Party. Our Marxists flourished in the sixties when they vied for power with the Party apparatus. They were really thinking in the sixties and their thought gradually dissolved and supplanted the outdated and crippled ideology of the Party apparatus. But it was the struggle for political power and influence which moved their Marxism to lively thought. After the Russians came, the regenerated Party apparatus deprived Marxist

philosophers of any political influence. They could retain their posts if they gave up theoretic aspirations. In Marxism theory is never merely theory. But that is why their thinking died when the political aspirations of Marxist intellectuals were stifled.

Academic philosophy in the West surely was not linked to power-politics. I thought it to be an expression of pure intellectual drive to know and understand the world in which we live. I invited philosophers from Oxford with the hope that they would stimulate that pure intellectual drive which needs freedom of thought and freedom to express and share with others that thought as strongly as one needs air to breathe. I did not expect to hear that for the academic philosophy in Oxford the very drive towards philosophy was morally questionable.

What has happened to academic philosophy? Had not the time come for us, however weak and badly prepared we were, to question its incapsulation in the exigencies of an academic discipline? Having their university posts, do they not brush aside all those for whom no places are left?

I looked around. I realized that in the big hall we were left alone. Not a single policeman was with us. Perhaps an atmosphere of so many young people radiating the confidence of doing the right thing drove the police to withdraw to their office rooms. Aristotle required, it seemed, the proof that philosophy could survive in almost any circumstances. For months I had prepared myself to give a course on Aristotle in my seminar. Would people be willing to listen to my introductory talk? They responded as if they came there just for that purpose.

I had prepared myself concientiously and yet I felt unprepared. I intended to begin my course on Aristotle several months earlier, in September, and devote to him the third year of my seminar. (The first two years we devoted to the Presocratics and Plato.) I hoped to prepare myself in the summer. But when September came I was not ready. I was glad that Hejdanek, Nemec and Palous agreed to lecture in the seminar and that philosophers from Oxford helped. In the meantime I read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* together with Thomas Aquinas' commentary. Aquinas follows Aristotle paragraph by paragraph, but his comments refer to a latin translation. So I read every paragraph first in Greek, then in Latin, back to the Greek and then Aquinas' comments. After Aquinas I returned to the Greek once again, to see what his comments did to my understanding of the text. And really, at that point I felt that I understood every sentence of the paragraph. And yet, when I went through the *Metaphysics* in this manner, I was deeply frustrated in the end. The grasp of the whole eluded me.

I had always thought that I would understand what philosophy was about after I had grasped Aristotle's thought. Having failed once again I was exhausted, the seminar ran well without my active participation; I did not feel obliged to keep giving it my passive assistance. Someone else could fulfil the role of interpreter for the Oxford visitors. I felt I had to get out of Prague and get some manual job, in forestry or on a state farm. This was the third year of being officially unemployed, supported by a stipend from the West—it was beautiful as long as my studies progressed, but now I simply could not take into my hands a book in Greek and enjoy reading it. This situation began to wear me down. I visited the local employment office and asked for help in getting a job outside Prague. The next Wednesday, when W. Newton-Smith from Oxford gave his lecture, the police for the first time invaded the seminar. That poured new life into me. That evening I began to read Aristotle again. I felt ready to start the course. It would not be a smoothly running affair. We would be struggling to understand Aristotle's text from week to week, without any definite promise of success in our quest to grasp Aristotle.

With Plato it was different. I was convinced that there I was on the right track. I rejected drawing the lines between the early, middle and late dialogues as marking the Socratic, transitory and Platonic stages in Plato's philosophy; as though Plato could not be tempted in his ripe old age to attempt a picture of Socrates as he learned to understand him better over the years of his own progress in philosophy. I did not see how Socrates and Plato could be disentangled and separated. All Plato's dialogues and the whole of his Socrates were Plato. Plato gave Socrates flesh and blood of his own thought in every dialogue where Socrates plays a central role. But having said that, I still felt the need to distinguish within the indistinguishable. I accepted two basic criteria: (1) I felt free to consider as Socratic anything which helped me to understand the not-knowing Socrates outstretched towards knowledge, ever again on the road towards knowledge, ever again reaching his hands towards definite results and ever again finding them wanting, without ever becoming agnostic, i.e. without ever turning the not-knowing into a philosophic doctrine, thus doing philosophy which made him rather die than give it up, and that not out of some heroic stand, but simply because he would not harm himself by consenting to give it up. As he says in the *Apology*: 'as I never wronged another, I will assuredly not wrong myself' (37b—Jowett's translation). (2) With Plato I accepted as his critical step towards himself his construction of the ideal state governed by philosophers. The philosopher-king could not be the one who did not know, his right and duty to govern derived from his being in possession of knowledge.

But back to Aristotle. I did not find any such device to facilitate my approach to his philosophy. In trying to get hold of him I was not even sure whether I was not looking for something which could not be found. Aristotle was perhaps an essentially aporetic thinker, ever again ready to start his thought from a zero point, staying as rugged and incoherent as the disparate reality which he tried to peruse in all its corners. But even so, some of his concepts open the possibility to encompass the whole of intellectual history in one glance from their vantage point. Such is the concept of *thought contemplating thought* which Aristotle coined for the highest intellectual activity, that of the supreme God.

Homer's Gods did not know contemplation for its own sake at all. Their thinking was of course superior to that of mortals, but in devising clever schemes, their thinking nowhere transcends a purely instrumental role. Consider, in contrast, Aristotle's concept of pure self-reflective intellectual activity as the highest End, in order to appreciate the development which the Greeks made between the two. But note that it was Homer who marked the first gigantic step towards Aristotle. In Homer the Greeks could appreciate the experience of living for hours in the realm of the poetic word, thus transcending the actual reality of their daily concerns. At first glance it looks as if the gap between Homer's Gods and Aristotle's God consisted in the anthropomorphic shape of the former; Aristotle's God transcends anthropomorphism reaching into the heights of abstract philosophic speculation. But in fact, Aristotle's 'thought thinking thought' is equally anthropomorphic. Reflect on Aristotle's 'thought contemplating thought' when you read his passages critical of Plato; how he must have relished contemplating his teacher's thought.

Why did the supreme Intellect contemplate his own thought and not the World? One reason of course was that only the highest object was worthy of God's contemplation, his own thought. But there was another reason. To contemplate nature in its movement, change and variety presupposed that thought itself moved from potentiality to actuality and to keep such thinking continuous required effort. That is why the highest Intellect is living the indivisible unity of his thought for eternity (*Met.* 1074b25—1075a10). All this sounds abstract, out of date, having nothing to do with us; it seems so abstract that it has nothing to do with Aristotle himself, just an upshot of thought alienated into abstraction. But consider the tremendous intellectual effort which is concentrated in his *Metaphysics* and *Physics*, in his treatise *On the Soul* and *On Heaven*, the tremendous toil invested in his treatises on nature in general and on animal anatomy in particular, his work on biology, consider his meticulous observation of human character in the *Politics* and *Ethics*. All

that is structured with respect to the highest Intellect and as a road for getting as near to him as possible. The best state is structured so as to give its free citizens the time and support needed for their intellectual activities. He worked out his all-inclusive system of thought to be contemplated by those around him and for subsequent generations. He toiled to bring mankind as near as possible to the ideal. If so, then there is a strange paradox involved. Instead of imparting spiritual vigour to contemplative thought of subsequent generations he left it trapped in the structures of his system. Those who were under his spell were at best reduced to a stature of learned commentators. It was only when European thought started to study nature using actual observation and experiment and stopped studying it from Aristotle's writings that thought regained its vigour, and, as a consequence, a road was opened to enjoy Aristotle, to let him enrich our thought without thwarting it. Great work was done by generations of scholars, reliable texts were compiled out of preserved manuscripts, lexicons and indexes and commentaries opened the road towards enjoying his work. Aristotelian studies became a respectable and ever more demanding discipline. Secondary literature piled up. To write anything worth publishing presupposes today an enormous study of secondary literature; it is beginning not to be worth while. Instead of opening up at last, the experience of vigorous contemplation, Aristotle once more threatens to become a cancerous tumour in the body of human intellect. In smaller countries like our country it is considered useless even to try to develop a proper study of Aristotle; how could we ever compete with the Germans, the French and the British. And it is not just the fault of the regime; people at the Universities stopped claiming the right and duty to open, from generation to generation the greatest treasures of thought which simply would enrich the spiritual life of the nation, to make it wholesome, to keep it vigorously rooted in the best traditions of thought. Such a task is difficult and has wide social implications. It really is not easy to devote one's life to studying Aristotle just for the greatness of the immediate experience of understanding, and thereby giving up the perspective of building on one's understanding a brilliant scholarly career with many books attributed to one's name. Instead of realizing how important it nevertheless is for every civilized nation to have such people and to try to find ways to develop new structures for their development and employment, every possible obstacle is put in their way. When I came to the University as a Junior Fellow, my colleagues asked me what I intended to do, and when I said that my aspiration was to read and understand Plato and Aristotle in Greek, my former teacher of classical philosophy exclaimed: 'But it cannot be done'. Somehow, it seems, the very thought that there should be people whose sole life task should be to enjoy as fully as possible the treasures of contemplative thought and open the possibility of doing so for others who are capable of such a feat, is

unacceptable to those who are responsible for institutional backing of education. Scholars must sweat and toil and pile up their publications; to read many of these productions is, for the most part, committing a crime against one's own intellect. And all this with Aristotle in the background, who did his best to open up to mankind the possibility to enjoy activity of free contemplation of what is worthy of it. And it is doubly sad to see how all space for free thought is destroyed in socialism, which was destined by Marx to make the leap into the realm of freedom.

Let me measure that failure against the background of an Aristotelian concept. Aristotle divided people into free citizens and slaves. Free citizens by nature were all those who possessed active intellect. Slaves were those whose intellect was merely passive. But Aristotle was aware of the social dimension of this division: 'if weaver's shuttles would weave by themselves . . . masters would not need slaves' (*Politics*, 1253b33 – 1254a1). Marx recognized that the development of modern industry created precisely that situation. The time had arrived when human society could provide for everybody's essential material needs allowing everybody free time for intellectual development. Where did that historic attempt to create such a society end up?

A policeman entered the hall. He asked what we were doing. 'Philosophy', I replied. Would he join us? The policeman disappeared without a word. In a moment the hall was full of police. The people were shouted at, every one had to stand facing the wall, nobody was allowed to speak. That was the end of my seminar. We could never meet again. For subsequent weeks and months the prestige of the police was applied to the task of preventing us from getting together to resume our work.

IV

Can Philosophy Become Worthy of Unrelenting Pursuit?

Scholē is the necessary environment of philosphy, it is *free time* for intellectual activities. Thus Antisthenes claimed *scholē* as his most exquisite wealth: 'I see whatever is worth seeing and hear whatever is worth hearing and what I value most, I pass my days together with Socrates in free time' (Xenophon, *Convivium*, IV. 44). Antisthenes and Socrates did not ask anybody's permission in claiming *scholē* for philosophy, they took it, confident that in case of dire need no occupation was so humble as not to provide them with sustenance (IV. 40). They were ready to reduce satisfaction of their material needs to a minimum, and that made their claim

on *scholē* absolute. Yet, Socrates was acutely aware of the social and political dimension of *scholē*. In the *Apology* he challenged his fellow citizens—the assembly that would sentence him to death: 'What is fitting for a poor man who is your benefactor, and who needs free time to exhort you? there is nothing, men of Athens, so fitting as that such a man be given his meals in prytanaeum,' (36d). Plato and Aristotle in their different ways both claimed that obtaining *scholē* for all those capable of doing philosophy was the the supreme task of a well-structured and well-governed state.

It is when I think of the double-commitment of a philosopher—to do philosophy under almost any circumstances, but at the same time, just by doing so to confront the society with its duty to provide a philosopher with *scholē*, not as a matter or charity, but in the interest of its own moral and spiritual health – that I am reminded of Jan Patocka. He was one of those dismissed from the Charles University after the communist takeover in 1948. Whatever hardships he might have suffered as an intellectual deprived of his position, he was too much of a philosopher ever to give up philosophy. In this he was different from the others, who, once deprived of their academic standing, lost their philosophic commitment. Patocka's fascination with philosophy soon began radiating across the ideological barriers with which the Marxist philosophers surrounded themselves. Whoever had his philosophic interest aroused by Marx was sooner or later attracted to Patocka. To approach Patocka and thus to expose oneself to the unbridled wrath of ideological watchdogs required daring and moral and intellectual stamina, qualities which became prerequisite for opening the road towards the Prague Spring 1968, i.e. the socialist society with inbuilt structures of intellectual freedom. After the Soviets interfered, Patocka became a leading spirit of Prague's 'intellectual ghetto' where all those cast out of the social structures of the regime found refuge and continued their work in an atmosphere of unprecedented internal freedom. As the prestige and influence of the 'intellectual ghetto' began to spread—any literary work of merit was published in the samizdat 'Petlice'—in 1977 several hundreds of leading intellectuals signed the Charter 77 document, in which they claimed for themselves, for their children and for the whole nation basic human rights. Jan Patocka was among the first spokesmen of Charter 77. He died shortly afterwards as a result of a prolonged police interrogation.

Not long ago I came unexpectedly across Patocka's memory. I visited my uncle Joseph Brozek in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In an issue of an emigrant journal 'Free Czechoslovakia' from September 1944 I read Brozek's article about Patocka's pamphlet 'Czech Civilization in Europe' which Patocka published in the late summer of 1939. Brozek emphasizes that Patocka's was

the last free voice of the Czech 'philosophers-statesmen'. In his pamphlet Patocka called for a renewal of the drive for moral perfection which Christianity introduced, a revival of intellectual courage which was the heritage of the Enlightenment and he demanded due attention to the almost missing contemplative element which Europe inherited from the Greeks: 'Against this background every nation which strives to be a member of the spiritual and cultural "concert" of Western civilization must erect its ideals and measure its achievements . . . What does it matter that Europe does not know and does not acknowledge the depth of our love for that which is most deep and most holy in it. Having turned its back on us, it made us experience the most bitter lot and march on the hardest road. Yet we shall continue in this struggle as long as we have the slightest chance to do so.'

In Prague Kenny warned against 'unrelenting pursuit of philosophy without regard for the moral virtues'. (Kenny, p. 214) I was wrong in rejecting his warning out of hand. In its actual impact it implies the question: whether a philosophy can be developed and practised which would make that warning superfluous, the philosophy for which the drive towards open and free expression would be as essential as is the air for breathing, a philosophy which would never pretend to possess wisdom worthy of secretiveness and dissimulation but would strive to achieve unity of thought, word and action. The moral and intellectual aspirations of Eastern Europe are oriented towards Western Europe, and thus the question of a philosophy which would provide a basis for intellectual and moral integrity assumes historical dimensions of global importance.

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