

# THE MEANING OF PHILOSOPHY

AN ADDRESS BY

DR. CHARLES MALIK

The following is a lecture by Dr. Charles Malik that was delivered at the American Junior College for Women in Beirut, Lebanon on February 24th, 1938.

It is difficult to determine the nature of philosophy. This difficulty is partly due to the fact that philosophy, like every spiritual endeavor on the part of man, cannot be appreciated from the outside. Just as you cannot know fully what Buddhism is unless you have lived for some time among Buddhists and have learned to view things Buddhistically, so it is not possible to obtain an adequate conception of the nature of philosophy until you have already spent some time with philosophers and acquainted yourself with their outlook. The strange paradox of philosophy is that you cannot understand what philosophy is unless you are yourself already somewhat a philosopher. I am therefore assuming from the very outset, what I believe I have some right to assume, that you, whom I am addressing tonight, are already philosophers. It is only on the basis of this assumption that I feel I can let you in on some of the secrets of philosophy.

To expect in advance simplicity of such a difficult enterprise as philosophy is to be unduly arbitrary. I do not promise you simplicity in what I shall say, but I do promise you the truth. If you find yourselves in respect of certain things I shall hereafter say in difficulty or perplexity I trust you will be good enough not to give me up there and then, but to stay faithfully by me to the very end.

And first let this be said at once, that philosophy is in a very unfortunate state in this part of the world. It is confused with “تفلسف,” in the colloquial sense of the term, so that when you say so and so is “متفلسف” you definitely mean to discredit the poor man of whom you so speak. I overheard two men the other day talking. They reached a point at which one of the two men became for some reason rather impatient with the other. He turned to him and said, “بقا فلسفة بال,” meaning, “enough with this nonsense!” If we are brought up to associate philosophy naturally and unconsciously with nonsense, you can judge for yourselves the difficulty under which philosophy finds itself here in endeavoring to make itself known and appreciated.

From this extreme of calling every species of nonsense philosophy we sometimes swing to the other extreme of applying the term to every man who happens to enjoy some literary fame, especially if he has written something that is a bit obscure and difficult. You often hear it said that Einstein is a great philosopher, whereas the truth is that the man knows hardly anything about philosophy. I have in mind five Arabic writers, of whom one is now dead, about whom I read statements in newspapers and in magazines that they are ‘great philosophers’. When somebody impresses us as saying something rather profound, we call

him a philosopher, even before understanding what he says. This then is the second way in which philosophy is confused in our minds and the term misapplied in practice. It is applied right and left to literary men who know nothing about philosophy save the name.

And our confusion does not end here. What we know about philosophy we usually pick up from popular books, newspapers and magazines. I am thinking of a friend of mine who gathered his ideas about philosophy from having read for some time three well-known popular Arabic magazines. I was talking with a student the other day; he said he knew quite a bit of philosophy. Upon asking him what he must have read, he said, "Will Durant's 'Story of Philosophy', and the Reader's Digest". The fragments of knowledge that we have of philosophy we pick up from fifth-rate sources, sources which are purely commercial and mercenary in their purpose, and which therefore have no internal feeling whatsoever for philosophy.

Then consider the state of neglect in which our own classical Arabic and Moslem philosophy finds itself. This philosophic heritage of ours is truly great, and can be of immense service to us in endeavoring to bring about a philosophical revival in the Near East. But there are no available modern editions of our classical philosophers. Damascus and Cairo have done splendidly thus far in putting out a few classical works, but what can still be done in this direction is a hundred-fold greater than what has been done already. A thorough grounding in classical Arabic philosophy is indispensable for any effort at a philosophical reconstruction in the Near East. In addition to acquainting themselves with what the classical poets said, or better 'felt', our educated young men and women should also know what the great Arab thinkers have thought. Unless they know this, and unless they know it at least as well as they know their English or their mathematics or their history, it will not be possible to talk to them philosophy in a way that will make them understand it and love it.

If the sorry state of philosophy here was limited to the fact that we confuse it with تفلسف and nonsense, that we apply it promiscuously to every man and woman who write obscure things, that we pick up the 'fragments' of knowledge that we have of philosophy from mercenary books, magazines and newspapers, and that we neglect completely our great Arabic philosophic heritage, if, I say, the plight of philosophy was limited to these things only, then the matter would not be quite as hopeless as it really is. For there are two other observations, of an even more important character, which I want to make about the tribulations of philosophy in the Near East. The first has to do with ourselves, the second with those who are doing their sincere best to open up the learning of the West before our minds.

As for ourselves, I think it is clear that we do not care very much for philosophy. Economically and politically harassed, our minds are elsewhere than in thought. We would always much rather enjoy life, than think about it, go to a movie or dance, than participate in

a lengthy, patient philosophic discussion. When we imagine and think, the substance of our thought is either something political—such as the situation in Palestine, or in the Arab world in general, or something sensuous—such as how to make money or how to enjoy a particular pleasure of the body, like food or sex. To rise above these things to ideas and truth and love and being, is quite impossible for us. We even hate the possibility of doing so, for the end of life to us is not truth, but pleasure; not understanding, but enjoyment. We would any time rather lose our-selves in the pleasures of the senses than in the delights of the mind. When we think of an ideal man, of a supremely happy person, whom we secretly envy, we never think of a man like Socrates, wholly given body and soul to the seeking and contemplation of truth, but rather of a person with lots of money, with a beautiful villa with gardens around it, and able to secure and enjoy all the ordinary pleasures of the body. A student wrote me once saying that he pictures paradise as a place where he lies indefinitely in the shadow of a tree close to his beloved. I think it is difficult for us to picture heaven as a place where the blessed gather together in the finest and freest possible spirit to discuss philosophy, that is to say, to discuss the deepest and most important problems of existence. I hardly think I am mistaken when I say that we do seem to have a very strong anti-philosophical streak in our very being.

Then consider how we are introduced to philosophy. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Near East was brought in touch with Western learning through the agency of the Anglo-Saxon and French peoples. The Near East owes these two peoples a very big spiritual debt. But it happens that historically with very notable exceptions philosophy attained its highest expression neither among the French nor among the Anglo-Saxons. These two great peoples have diverted their genius into political, social, artistic and literary channels. I am not saying an untruth when I notice that the Anglo-Saxon people, for example, have not produced a philosopher of the caliber of Plato or St. Augustine or Leibniz or Kant. The greatest spirits amongst the Anglo-Saxons have not been philosophers. To an Anglo-Saxon the highest spiritual virtue is not thought or contemplation, but action and feeling and experience. The history of humanity has known only three genuinely philosophical cultures: the Greek culture, the mediaeval Catholic culture and the German culture. The Near East is in almost complete darkness as regards these three cultures. Coming in touch with the Western spirit via the French and Anglo-Saxon cultures only, the Near East, in so far as it becomes reflective, is apt to view the world aesthetically and politically. All the Anglo-Saxon thinkers admit quite frankly that they do not care very much for thought in itself; they direct their mind to action and practice. Questions of 'use' and social 'utility' and 'adjustment' and social 'control' are uppermost in their minds. That is why their three original classical philosophies have been empiricism, utilitarianism and pragmatism, all of which deal with practice and utility, rather than with the ultimate

questions of life and existence. The Anglo-Saxons distrust thinking beyond a certain limit: an Anglo-Saxon mother would say to a friend or teacher of her son, "Don't put ideas into his head". Specializing in practice, and distrusting ideas, and particularly the 'putting' of ideas into one's head, the Anglo-Saxons have conquered the world. This is why I am talking to you tonight in the noble English tongue. It is doubtful whether the Anglo-Saxon people would have spread their culture throughout the whole world had they taken as seriously to philosophy and contemplation as the Greeks or Germans did. The paradox of this whole situation is that it is precisely because the English and the Americans have somewhat neglected the highest reaches of philosophy, and concentrated on practice and political action, that there is this evening the spectacle of a person like myself telling you in their own tongue that this has been the case, that philosophy is most important and that it is to be found at its best, not among the Anglo-Saxons, but among the Greeks, the mediaeval Catholics and the Germans. Thanks to the Anglo-Saxon relative neglect of philosophy, we are awakened today to its importance. And we can never fully appreciate this importance until we know and love Greek, German and mediaeval Catholic philosophy; all other philosophy is, in my opinion, like child's play beside the philosophies of these great cultures. Thus we see that one of the most important sufferings that philosophy has to go through in the Near East is the fact that the Western peoples who are educating and leading us to the light of knowledge and learning, and who will continue to do so for sometime to come, are themselves not very philosophical. A responsible Western educator in a very responsible 'Western institution in the Near East asked not long ago very earnestly the following question in a responsible meeting: "Is there, gentlemen, any difference between philosophy and non-sense?" In the minds of not a few other good people, there seems to be an essential connection between philosophy and ping-pong. It is inconceivable that Plato or St. Thomas Aquinas or Leibniz, working in an educational institution in countries and cultures less fortunate than their own, would choose to encourage and promote the production of larger oranges, reliable I.P.C. employees and good dentists, at the expense of philosophy and the allied interests of the spirit. Not before the spirit is first cared for can our Western educators really pass on to us what they mean to pass on, namely, the deepest and most precious secrets of their own cultures.

This completes the preliminary picture of the difficulties under which philosophy exists in this part of the world. Philosophy is equivalent in our minds to "تفلسف" and to talking nonsense. We apply the term right and left to people who really know nothing about philosophy. Our notions about philosophy are gathered in fragments from sources that are commercial and mercenary. We know almost nothing about our own great classical Arabic philosophy. We ourselves, by our mode of life and by our personal outlook on things, are

anti-philosophical. The European and American peoples who have helped and are helping so much to put us in contact with the spirit of the West themselves do not believe much in philosophy. Under the weight of these great difficulties, it is a life and death battle that philosophy has to wage in this part of the world, if it is going to be genuine philosophy, and not sheer sophistry. Keeping these crushing difficulties fully in mind, and in spite of them, I want now to endeavor to tell you briefly and simply what philosophy, true philosophy, really is.

In the first place, philosophy may be contrasted with the sciences. In arithmetic you study number; you learn the multiplication table, you learn fractions, and in brief you learn the various ways with which number may be manipulated. In botany you study plants; you study their classification, their methods of reproduction, their life - cycles, their evolution, etc. In chemistry, you study how various material substances react with each other; you learn that there are ninety-two elements, that they arrange themselves in such and such tables, that they form such and such compounds, and that such and such reactions occur under such and such conditions. In history you study the past, the events that occurred in it, the significance of these events and the causes that produced them. You thus see that in each of the sciences you have a specific subject-matter which you study in accordance with a specific method in philosophy there is no specific subject-matter, because everything is its subject-matter. Each science cuts off one part of the world, and studies that part alone; botany studies the plants alone, and does not bother about either number or history; and so on for each of the sciences. Philosophy is interested in every kind of being, whether it be a plant, a chemical compound or a historical process. But it does not study the detailed characteristics of all these beings; that philosophy leaves to the various sciences. Philosophy wants to know what each class of being is in itself as a class, and precisely how it is different from and related to the other classes of being. Thus it is not interested to know what the properties of such and such a particular chemical substance are; it studies what the nature of matter in general is. It does not study this particular plant, say the cypress tree; it studies what the nature of plants in general is. Similarly philosophy studies the nature not of this or that number, but of number in general; not of this or that historical event, but of history in general. What is history as such? What is number and quantity as such? What is matter as such? What is it to be a plant at all? What is it to be an animal at all? What is it to be a man at all? What is the nature of language? What is the nature of movement? All these questions are philosophic questions.

We may therefore say that the first way in which philosophy contrasts with the sciences is that philosophy studies being as being, whereas the various sciences cut off each a small portion of being and study it by itself but not as being.

Then there is another difference between the ordinary positive sciences and the science of philosophy. The sciences yield very partial views of the world, philosophy on the other hand tries to reconstruct the total picture. I have known a world-famous physicist who knows nothing about anything outside physics. As a result, his picture of the world is narrow and distorted. I know also a world-famous historian; in matters lying outside his specialty he is exactly like a child. In philosophy you endeavor to see the total picture of the world. Your aim is the whole truth, and not an abstract portion of it. In the construction of this total worldview you do not take only zoology, or only history, or only mathematics, into account; you take all the interests of man into account. Thus while each of the sciences is narrow, partial and abstract, philosophy, that is to say true philosophy, is broad, whole and eminently concrete. True philosophy is so concrete that it hurts.

Then there is a third way in which philosophy contracts with and is related to the sciences. The sciences as such never question their foundations. Philosophy, on the other hand, is a constant critic of the foundations of science. Physics takes such basic concepts like matter, motion, time and space so completely for granted that it never raises one question as to their meaning or reality. Mathematics does the same thing in respect of its fundamental concepts of number, equation, function, quantity and its ordinary logical rules of procedure. In biology the fundamental concepts of organism, function, environment, growth, evolution, structure, are all taken uncritically for granted. In short, every science builds on a foundation which it never questions. Philosophy is freer; it raises fundamental questions about the very foundations of science. When Newton discovered his law of gravitation he penetrated by a flash of philosophic insight beyond the then-known foundations of the science of physics. When Darwin proposed his theory of organic evolution he had a philosophic insight into the nature of life which went beyond the rigid biological conceptions of his day. I wish I could multiply these examples from more recent developments in physics and mathematics, but the point is clear, namely, that so long as you as a scientist remain rigidly and unquestioningly tied to the narrow limits of your science, you never progress. Unless your scientific habits of mind are stretched, and unless your comfortable mentality is undermined by philosophic doubt and wonder, you will not see any deeper than men have seen in the past. Philosophy must come in with its disturbing questions and criticise the foundations of your science so as to point out the way of progress to you. This has always happened in the history of science. Every step in the progress of science has been due to some scientist who had a philosophical bent of mind, and who therefore was able to see deeper into the nature of things than his fellow scientists were able to do. I quote here Alfred North Whitehead, a man who is at once a mathematician, a physicist and a great philosopher. "Insofar as philosophers have failed, scientists do not know what they are. talking about when they pursue their own methods; and insofar as philosophers have succeeded, to that extent scientists can attain an

understanding of science. With the success of philosophy, blind habits of scientific thought are transformed into analytic explanation.” When a scientist or a professor of science sneers at philosophy, he does not know in truth what he is doing. You can point out to him in all politeness that he owes the insight of his science to the philosophic activity of the scientists of the past, and that in the future it will not be by men like him that science is likely to progress, but by scientists who are free in spirit and who have a philosophical bent of mind. Philosophy is the savior of science from staleness, stagnation, blindness and meaninglessness.

These, then, are the three ways in which philosophy contrasts with the sciences. The sciences study severally the diverse beings that there are; philosophy investigates being as being. The sciences are partial and abstract; philosophy seeks to reconstruct the concrete picture of the whole. The sciences never question their foundations; philosophy is itself a disturbing question-mark ruthlessly traced on the very foundations of science.

Philosophy does not only contrast with and criticize the sciences; even more so, it contrasts with and criticizes commonsense. By ‘commonsense’ I mean our ordinary persuasions, our daily practices, the thousand and one halfhearted, half-baked, sentimental beliefs and hopes and expectations which we carry with us throughout life. Philosophy impatiently brushes aside all this falsehood of being and sentimentalism, and confronts us smack with the brutal truth. The first effect of this confrontation is for our eyes to be dazzled and blinded, and for our souls not to believe the truth. But philosophy is absolutely relentless, and not before we finally settle down in the truth, do we apprehend what philosophy really is all about.

The man-in-the-street is the symbol of commonsense. Like him, we live our lives for the most part in a superficial and false state of being. Rarely, if ever, do we come back to ourselves and face reality. Think how we, as being in commonsense, spend most of our lives comparing ourselves with others. ‘We are not as bad as they’. ‘What will others say to this?’ ‘Do as others do.’ In such ways we, as in commonsense, have the others on our mind all the time. In this mode of being, we never are ourselves. We do what the others do; we enjoy ourselves as one enjoys oneself; we read and judge literature, art, politics and even ‘truth’, as one judges these things; we find revolting what one finds revolting. Our total mode of being in our daily existence is prescribed for us by this strange ‘one’, this ‘one’ who is everybody and yet nobody, and who therefore levels down all distinction, all difference, all exception, all value, all excellence, to a state in which every-thing is as good as everything else.

And that is not all that there is to the ordinary mode of existence of commonsense, that is to say of the man-in-the street. He is marked by a superficial, external, accidental attitude towards things. He never penetrates beneath the surface of things, seeing them in terms of



color and size. He suspects no hidden meaning to what he comes across. Things are exactly as they seem. He flees reality and himself and his truth, never wanting to have anything to do with these things. He begins his day by reading the morning newspaper, only to put himself in a state of complete confusion about the world. He enjoys remaining in this distracted, dispersed state of confusion, because if he snaps out of it, he may begin to come back to himself, and that he will never do. And thus the morning newspaper is a God-sent institution whereby he begins his day by conveniently not being himself. Con-fused, disturbed and not himself, he talks and talks in-definitely. And what does he say? Nothing! And yet he 'knows' everything, from the latest piece of gossip to the hidden meaning of the recent events in Europe. Deliciously enjoying gossip, and always adding his original little bit to it, he is full of curiosity. He never stops tenderly by a thing to absorb its meaning, but he jumps from one thing to another, from one book to another, from one subject to another, from one place to another, always seeking something new and never finding it. And the more he seeks to satisfy his curiosity in this way, the more it becomes insatiable. Ask him what he is after, or what he means by what he says, and you will find that his answer is shot through and through with ambiguity. He doesn't really know what he means, nor what he is after. Beaten upon by waves of opinion from all directions, he reduces to a state of flux in which nothing is true or important. Ambiguous in his meaning, curious in his attitude, gossippy in his talk, he becomes unauthentic and ungentle in his being and indecisive in his existence. The hardest thing in the world for him to do is to make a decision, to make up his mind. He has no mind to make up, and consequently when you mention the word 'soul' in his presence, he says, but do I have a soul, and isn't the soul an antiquated concept? Indecisive and uncertain in his mind, he waits and waits for the great explosion to occur in Europe, in the self-relieving hope that the burden of existence will thereby 'somehow' become lighter. Never stopping to examine himself and to get to know who he is, he is completely unhistorical. He refuses to believe that he is the child of history, and that he answers to a certain nation and race and tradition and culture and destiny. Thus selfforgetful, unhistorical, indecisive and ungentle, he drifts along beautifully until he meets his death, a mistake in the bosom of existence.

This is the picture of the man-in-the-street. And this man-in-the-street is you and I in one mode of our existence. Every day we fall in this mode of existence, and we maintain ourselves in it the greater part of the day. The man-in-the-street, and we as partaking of his kind of existence, daily slip very smoothly into this commonsense point of view. We daily lose ourselves in things, compare ourselves with others, take life as it comes without asking any fundamental questions about it, forget our-selves, flee from reality, disperse ourselves all over the place, and never pause to become decisively historical. And if you and I ever snap out of this commonsense self-lostness, if we ever come back to ourselves and become

ourselves, if we ever gain real perspective on the world, if we ever disclose to ourselves our true authentic being with its real possibilities, then we do all this always by violently putting aside all our own concealments, and smashing our own illusions with which we have bolted our souls up inside our own confused prison.

Philosophy is the critic of commonsense. From the very beginning it was a revolt against commonsense. It is to this spiritual revolt that the sciences owe their existence and whatever culture there is in the world today its origin. Socrates went about exposing the fallacies and falsities and ambiguities and self-lostness of commonsense. He brought a new illumination to the mind of men wholly foreign to the false complacency of commonsense. Commonsense bore him for seventy years, and then it put him to death. For commonsense prefers falsehood to truth, and will always fight and kill any man who dares proclaim the truth, especially if this truth is its truth. Commonsense can face some truth, but never its truth.

Thus philosophy poses to commonsense searching questions. What is the end of life? Are we here only to eat and drink and feel our pleasures and exercise our pride, and then die? Or are we here to achieve a tremendous purpose, which if we miss, we miss everything in life? What is truth, and is it relative or absolute? What is beauty? Does beauty belong to the object of beauty, or only to the appreciating subject, so that only a beautiful soul can appreciate beauty? What is falsehood, and why is it that commonsense and the man-in-the-street are for the most part in falsehood? What is science, and the scientific method? How does science arise? What truthful phenomena does it report on? What is meant by a scientific theory? What is meant by saying that a molecule is a scientific fiction? Why is it that the world has progressed in science but not in ethics and morality? What does it mean to come back to yourself and face truth? Are we free, so that we can have a say in our destiny, or is our fate completely sealed already? Is this sorry, hum-drum existence all that there is, or is there a world beyond, a world infinitely removed in quality from this sordid life here below? Why is there this universal unrest in the world—life and love renewing themselves every spring, scientists working day and night to see deeper into reality, nations mobilizing and straining every effort to have the better of other nations individuals ever dissatisfied, ever profoundly unhappy? Why this universal phenomenon of unrest and dissatisfaction? What is the soul, and what does ambiguous commonsense really mean when it says, there is no soul? What is religion, and why have all Western religions arisen in this part of the world? Why are most of us these days atheists, believing not in God, but in cleverness and diplomacy and bank-accounts? What does it mean to love, and to love even those who hate and scheme against you? What is reality and what is appearance, and can you authentically distinguish between the real and the unreal, the true and the false, the genuine and the ungentuine, the substantial and the apparent, the essential and the accidental.

These are some of the fundamental questions which philosophy puts to commonsense. Commonsense can by itself never rise to the level of putting these questions to itself, let alone answering them. You never hear the man-in-the-street, or you and me as we sit down and gossip about things, raise and discuss these questions. It takes philosophy to make commonsense questionable. And it is for this reason that commonsense doesn't like philosophy. It squirms and squeals and writhes under the judging weight of these questions. And when fully exasperated, it points its accusing finger at philosophy swearing never to have anything to do with it. In this mood, commonsense confronts philosophy with two commonsense questions, which it thinks are fundamental. The first of these questions is the following: "You philosophers have been raising all these questions and discussing them; do you think you are getting anywhere? Have you ever answered any of them? Don't you see how you go round and round in circles without getting anywhere? Aren't you ashamed that you haven't progressed since the days of Plato, but are still asking the same old questions?" And the second question that commonsense puts to philosophy is this: 'What is the `use` of philosophy anyway? You philosophers remain living up in the clouds; why don't you come down to earth and do something about this world of misery and struggle and activity? What has philosophy done to justify its existence?"

It is not for the sake of commonsense that I shall answer these two questions here. For it is plain common: sense in raising these questions is not interested in the truth, but only in dismissing philosophy with one shrug of the shoulders. It is for your sake, who are interested in the truth, that I shall attempt here to answer briefly these two accusations of philosophy.

Philosophy does yield answers to its questions. It does not go round and round in circles, but it always gets somewhere, though where it gets is certainly not where commonsense wants it to get. Far from being ashamed that it hasn't progressed since the days of Plato, it is actually proud of this fact. For philosophy deals not with the passing and evanescent, but with the eternal and everlasting. It is the high office of philosophy always to remind humanity, lost as it is in pleasure and gossip, that there are eternal problems which are above time and which have nothing to do with progress and the excitements of history. The proper end of man is not pleasure and happiness, but the apprehension and the living in the presence of these eternal truths. Man never becomes noble and free and divine and truly himself except when he lets himself stay in the truth. And the truth is eternal. It is not easy to show you here how philosophy answers its questions, nor how its tremendous development throughout history has been unitary and steady. To understand the `progress of philosophy' you have to study its history and follow the internal unfolding of its questions. There is more unity and more understanding among the philosophers, in spite of their radical differences, than among any other crowd of men. Two philosophers across the ages,

separated by thousands of years, understand each other far better than two neighbors or colleagues separated by their private selfish worlds of interest. Even if philosophy gets nowhere, it remains true that it has produced such wonderful spirits as Socrates and Pascal and Spinoza and Kant, spirits the mere mention of whom is sufficient to reduce to dust and ashes. All commonsense cleverness and pleasures and gossip and pride. Even if philosophy does not answer its questions, it remains true as one great man has said, that it is far better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.

The second question that commonsense poses to philosophy is : What is the 'practical use' of philosophy? What has philosophy done for the world? Again I never mean by what I say below to 'answer' commonsense. But the services of philosophy to mankind are numerous. I mentioned before how the sciences arose within the lap of philosophy, and how it is only a philosophical bent of mind that has made possible the progress of science. Then I spoke of how philosophy brings commonsense to its senses, if ever it can be brought to its senses, and confronts it with the truth. Also I suggested that if philosophy has done nothing except produce such spirits as Socrates and Spinoza and Pascal, then, believe me, it has done enough for humanity. I am quite aware that all this does not impress commonsense which wants 'practical results' in terms of money and houses. Between them, Aristotle and Plato, controlled the imagination and intellectual destiny of mankind for two thousand years. Is this impressive enough for commonsense? Between them, Augustine and Aquinas, control the responsible thinking which occurs among the more than three-hundred million Catholics in the world. Is this impressive enough for commonsense? Fascism and Naziism are, on their doctrinal sides, the direct descendants of the teachings of Nietzsche in the nineteenth century. Mussolini said that he owed a great deal to Nietzsche and William James, one a German and one an American philosopher. There is associated with the German cabinet today one Alfred Rosenberg, the official philosopher of present-day Germany who, whether or not you agree with him, dictates his style of thinking to the seventy million Germans. The minister of education in Italy till lately was Gentile, a first-rank philosopher, Russia today is organized on the materialist philosophy of Karl Marx. There are sold in Russia every year thousands of copies of Hegel's logic, one of the most abstruse works in the history of philosophy. Do these things at all impress commonsense?

Philosophy has influenced the course of events more than any other single human enterprise, with the exception perhaps of religion. The practical power of philosophy is proven by the fact that certain countries and institutions now and in the past allow only one species of philosophy within their borders. If philosophy is 'useless', as commonsense feigns to 'know', why should certain countries be afraid of the spread of unauthorized ideas among their citizens? No, my friends, the truth is, as Bertrand Russell has said, "men fear thought as

they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tryed wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not-afraid. It sees man, a feeble speck, surrounded by unfathomable depths of silence; yet it bears itself proudly, as unmoved as if it were lord of the universe. Thought is great and-swift and the chief glory of man”.

The Near East is at present in one of the most critical periods of its entire history. It is seeking to find itself. Its problem is how to conceive and achieve for itself a destiny. In this historical task nothing is more important for our destiny than a thorough-going reconstruction in our fundamental ideas. Such a reconstruction is the job of philosophy. There can be no new nation in this modern world without a basic system of beliefs with which it regulates its life. Unless we want to build our national house on sand, so that the first wind that blows will smash it, as has happened more than once in our history, we must have a basic philosophy which reaches way deep down to the nature of things. The roots of our convictions about ourselves and about the world must themselves be dug out and reconstituted. This revolution in our view of the world can only be brought about by the hard labors of philosophy. A nation in process of becoming can afford to lack anything except its fundamental metaphysics. And if it does lack this, while enriching itself on every side with music and art and science and technology, we will have, as Hegel has said, “ the strange spectacle of a cultured people having no Metaphysic—as it were a temple, in all other respects richly ornamented, but lacking its Holy of Holies.”

The Arab world must definitely come out of its shell and face fearlessly and joyously the inner spiritual light which is the secret of the life of the West. This inner spiritual secret is the disciplined backbone of thought which stretches from Socrates to Bergson. Only by absorbing and placing itself integrally once again inside this unitary tradition of thought can the Arab world at all stand on its feet.

We need engineers, we need doctors, we need economic experts, we need factories. Yes, all these things we desperately need, and it will be a crime of the highest magnitude to entertain any ill will towards our sanitary, economic, technical, industrial and political awakening. But above everything else we need men and women who are disciplined in thought and who know that in the end the spirit alone matters. These disciplined men and women will have left commonsense and its illusions wholly behind, and will never again believe that things are what they seem. Trained in thought, wholly oriented towards truth and truth alone, wholly convinced that things are not what they seem, forgetting about their private interests and their bodily pleasures when it comes to a question of the truth, seeing the

world in the light of the eternal and not in the image of the transient and evanescent, these men and women can then lead us by the might of their example and the high authority of their sacrifice. Never again in their life will they pretend to know what they do not know. Never again in their life will they take things for what they are not, but only for what they are. Never again in their life will they allow themselves to think that they are what and who they are not.

Disciplined in thought and truthful in being, this new race of men and women will ground their existence in knowledge and not in opinion, in certainty and not in flux, in eternity and not in time, in reality and not in appearance, -in truth and not in falsehood. Modulated by philosophy and tempered by understanding, they will face life and its adversities with a wisdom which is not from this world. They, falter before no difficulty, they stoop to no meanness. Their communion is only with God and their thought is only of things divine.

The meaning of philosophy is the wisdom and in-sight and mellowness which it imparts to human life. Without it life, as Socrates said, is not worth living. The meaning of philosophy is the philosophers themselves. Never be deceived into believing that philosophy is an abstract system of ideas; philosophy is literally the philosophers themselves. The philosopher refuses to abstract his philosophy from himself. His philosophy is the expression of his personal existence. When you think of philosophy do not think of ideas, but of Demokritus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Ibn Sina, Al-Kindi Aquinas, Cusanus, Pascal, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, James, Bergson, Whitehead. It is this line of men that will continue to live long after everything that excites us today has perished. If we see the vision of the truth which philosophy and these men are able to disclose to us, then we will let it flower in our minds and in our midst. And if we do so, then, and not before then, will we begin to see why we exist.