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THE STUDENT OF PHILOSOPHY.

I.

WE who teach philosophy have much to say, in the lecture-room and elsewhere, concerning the ends, methods, and value of the study of philosophy. In this little paper, however, I propose to speak, not of the study of philosophy in itself considered, but of the far too much neglected topic of the conditions that make it wise for any individual to become, in any more extended or elaborate sense, a student of philosophy. I cannot nearly exhaust the topic; but I shall hope to suggest at once a certain sort of warning and an equally needed word of encouragement.

Philosophy is distinctly a specialty. Not all men need it. Many thoughtful and even some very wise people regard any very extended or careful study of philosophy with an unconquerable aversion. For such this specialty is not intended; and if much philosophical study were forced upon these unwilling people, it could do them nothing but harm. On the other hand, there are some minds that, especially for a certain time in youth, love philosophy with a passionate, or at any rate with a vigorous, fascination. As a fact, however, while a large number of these lovers of philosophy really need it, and grow in strength and character while they pursue it, one must also observe that not *all* of the youthful lovers of philosophy are really adapted to any very lengthy philosophical inquiries, or are capable of being genuinely benefitted by them. The philosophical teacher, if he keeps his eyes open, is well aware, sooner or

later, of the existence of persons to whom, because of the false spirit in which they are working, the study of philosophy has become, or is becoming, distinctly mischievous. Such persons ought to be warned in general, and, where it is possible, or prudent, in particular, against the further pursuit of a quest that occasionally becomes out-and-out poisonous to their mental and moral health. On the other hand, the existence of such persons is, in itself, no argument against the value, for humanity in general, and for academic youth in particular, of the wise study of philosophy by those who are called. Nor are those students who are truly called confined in the least to the ranks of those professional students of philosophy who are to give their lives to this one branch of learning. For a time in youth, many are called, to whom philosophy will never become a profession; but to whom philosophical inspirations and insights will remain treasures for a lifetime. One must learn to distinguish, then, between the student who needs and the student who does not need philosophy. The one will not only love the study, but will grow in manhood while he pursues it; the other will not always be protected by that happy indifference to philosophical issues which guards many weak and some wise spirits, but will, alas! often tend to continue his inquiries long after, through his evil method of inner brooding, they have helped him to lose his way in life. No methods of teaching philosophy can wholly guard the brooding weakling against such dangers. He must learn to become stronger or else he must let philosophy alone.

Where one recognizes a danger, it is not the part of an honest man to hide it. Where the danger concerns the use of an extremely precious thing, one only shows one's regard for the treasures involved by insisting that they are not for everybody. And where one advises those who are not called to let a given undertaking alone, one recognizes only the more frankly that diversity of gifts upon whose consideration our best modern educational methods depend. Meanwhile, if one defines the nature of any calling, and points out, not only who may well pursue it for a lifetime, but who may with safety, honor, and inspiration, give some of the precious moments of youth to its temporary service, one shows one's

self truly desirous of allaying, and not of exciting, unwise and unnecessary fears. Many of the objections often confusedly and indiscriminately urged against the free pursuit of philosophical truth by the properly prepared amongst the youth in our universities, many of the perils that have been insisted upon by those who ought to be wiser, but who actually love comfortable obscurity of speech rather than philosophical frankness and light, are deprived of much of their significance when we once understand that the eyes of men differ, that not all eyes are fitted for all sorts of difficult instrumental work, and that a study is not to be generally condemned because it is not adapted for *all* possible minds.

As a fact, a great number of youth need philosophy, some for a longer, some for a shorter time, some as a more absorbing, some as a less intense form of spiritual activity. All such, I believe, within their limits, become wiser, truer, sounder, more loyal men, because they have learned to search for truth where she most dwells and hides, namely, at the heart of the life of the Spirit,—have learned to search—yes, to wait, humbly to prove their own souls, to doubt where doubt is the fitting humility of thought, to distrust and to disprove where distrust and disproof mean the sacrifice of petty private opinions, to seek the light amidst the gloom, to wander where humanity's ways are most clouded with our natural errors and with the thick darkness behind which God hides himself. Such exercise, as has so often been said, may and should involve the "more faith" that lives in "honest doubt." Nor is such a search, for these who are indeed called, without its inevitable glimpses of a truth that, amidst all the obscurity of thought, flashes from time to time upon even the imperfectly prepared mind.

It is, in fact, a preparation that many need for life's real tragedies, to have seen the positive meaning, the hints of final and divine triumph, that are to be met with in the following of many of the most tragic and baffling of the ideal quests of philosophy. In philosophy, as in life, where the business in hand is of the gravest and most sacred, the undertaking must often, at moments, seem the most baffling, or even, to the weak, the most disheartening. But in philosophy, too, as in life, to

those who are strong enough to endure the crises of difficulty, a sound reason for one's faith in the quest is sure ere long, if only in brief glimpses, to appear to one's eyes. Well, as a mere matter of personal experience, it is to many a youth, so I insist, an important preparation for the conflicts of real life to have met thus in the study of philosophy with this sort of ideal anticipation of the hard facts of future experience. To the life-long lovers of philosophy it is this close relation between philosophy and life that constitutes the very ground and essence of their love.

II.

So much then, in general, for the value of philosophy for those that need it. But now, who are those that need philosophy, and how may we distinguish them from others to whom philosophy will rather prove a mischief than an aid? I may best here speak of the minds of the latter sort. I think that too little attention has been given to their definition and to the diagnosis of their cases.

Everybody knows that, just as there is much religious emotion and experience in the lives and in the fantasies of many of the insane, so, too, there may be found, amongst many more or less intelligent patients in the asylums, considerable metaphysical speculation. Not a few systems of philosophy, such as they were, have been written down, and occasionally with an even monumental industry, by painstaking lunatics whose wits remained formally coherent enough for the work and whose diseases happened to take a metaphysical turn. But now, as regards the insane, there is a certain rule whose mention here may serve at once to characterize a very general quality that must mark all forms of the distinctly insane sort of philosophizing. Says Dr. Charles Mercier, in his book called *Sanity and Insanity* (p. 385):

“The characters of the delusions that are entertained by insane people are almost infinitely various, there being only one class of circumstances to which they never refer, *viz.*, circumstances unconnected with the deluded person. . . . We never find a delusion which refers wholly to outside circumstances, and has no reference to self. A man will entertain the belief that he

is Emperor of China, but he will never entertain the belief that another person is Emperor of China, except he believe that the person so exalted gains by his exaltation a power of interfering in some way with the deluded person himself. Maclean, who was tried for high treason in 1882, had a delusion that almost everybody was dressed in blue, but he also believed that they dressed in this color in order to annoy him."

Well, this generally "egocentric" character of the insane delusion will appear also, as a matter of course, in the insane systems of metaphysics. The pursuit of the most impersonal truth will get, in such minds, a purely egotistic bias and interest. A lunatic, obviously a rather illiterate man, but disposed to metaphysics, once kindly wrote me from an asylum a letter containing his own philosophical views. They were, so far as I now can recollect (for I have mislaid the letter), of the most simple and exalted sort. Truth, righteousness, unity, peace, self-sacrifice, were the familiar catch words of the brief and tolerably incoherent harangue; but after the worthlessness of all men in the sight of God had been pretty fairly set forth in peculiarly and rather violently self-abnegating terms, the letter closed by substantially asserting that "I, John So and So, say this, and what I say is the truth,"—plainly merely because "I" say it. As a fact, the letter, so far as it was coherent at all, was a suggestion of a very familiar doctrine, and one not at all unworthy of consideration; but alas! the reason given for it was a bad one, and this reason constituted only too obviously my lunatic's whole interest in the subject. All men are naught in God's sight. Proof: I, the exalted So and So, having learned this before unknown truth, am pleased now to declare it.

Well, one need not be insane in order to be unduly egocentric. All children are normally very egocentric. Some few youth, even in our universities, keep the tendencies of their childhood in this respect remarkably intact, and join with great physical vigor and even with much mental acuteness a studious reverence for the accidents of the daily life of one particular lump of flesh, such as sometimes approaches the fervor of true piety. In such cases one honors the spirit of piety, but one regrets the limitations of its exercise. Not even middle life teaches all

of us the gentle and gracious art of blessed objectivity. All of us tend to forget what we know of that most essentially humane of arts whenever we are painfully weary or are ill in body. The madly egocentric gloom or exaltation or thoughtfulness of the insane are thus but morbid intensifications of a common human weakness. Yet this morbid intensification is highly instructive. And I venture to apply the lesson of it to the case now in hand by suggesting when and how the study of philosophy may, outside of the asylums, still show the morbidly egocentric turn in those youth who are not called to pursue it, but who do pursue it because it happens to seem to them somehow to justify, and perhaps also to gratify, their aforesaid pious reverence for that particular lump of flesh that men call by their private name. In thus characterizing a morbid tendency which the teacher of philosophy occasionally observes, I speak, I may say, with every sympathy for our common human frailty. The love of the flesh is an old story, and who of weak mortals shall call himself wholly free? But it is of the abnormal that I must here speak. And I call it an abnormality that disqualifies for an extended study of philosophy whenever I find a youth who persistently uses the philosophical labors that ought to tend to free his spirit, as a means for binding him closer to the flesh. I confess freely that I understand only too well his temptations to selfishness and to self-absorption, and I am not ignorant in the least of why he finds these temptations subtle and dangerous. But the whole matter is one of degree. There is, so I maintain, a degree of this egocentric concern that distinctly disqualifies the sufferer to profit by philosophy; because, in such cases, philosophical study becomes to him not objectively dispassionate reflection, but morbidly helpless brooding, and so is not, what in wholesome cases it surely must be, a spiritual tonic, but is, on the contrary, a poison.

When you philosophize, you reflect. The object of your reflection is the meaning, the worth of some portion of humanity's deepest life and convictions. You must of necessity find this life and these convictions presented to yourself in the form of your self-conscious experience. Hence, in one sense, philosophy is indeed an inquiry into the very

heart of self-consciousness. Who am I? How and what do I know? What is my relation to the universe? What ought I to do? What may I hope for in the world? These are critical philosophical problems, such as, for instance, Kant formulated, such as every spiritually worthy philosophical research takes into account. The *Ego* is thus, in one sense, indeed the "principle of philosophy." The implications of rational self-consciousness are the peculiar province of philosophical reflection.

But now, for every man, there are at least two views of the Self. For the one view, my true Self is nothing less than myself engaged in rational, in objective, in loyally impersonal thoughts and deeds. This higher Self is the person who has, or who must learn to have, an office, who lives, and can live, only in and by some form of practical or of contemplative self-sacrifice. "Our wills are ours to make them thine,"—such is the essential instinct of a healthy self-consciousness of this type, in presence either of the theoretical and authoritative truth, or of the active calls of duty. And however carefully, or even sceptically, philosophy may reflect upon the embodiments, the types, the formulations, that this, the fundamental instinct of the rational Self, has taken on, however cautiously philosophy may question this or that expression of human faith, the deeper "faith" that "lives" through and in all such "honest doubt" is the faith that the rational Self *ought* to find, and then humbly to serve, the Master, *viz.*, the truth, the right, the law, the "impersonal" (if one means, as one so often does, by "impersonal," the objective, the universal, the finally and essentially significant). If I doubt wisely, I say, "The Lord is hiding himself, but when I find him I steadfastly propose to surrender, to submit, to serve." Not my will, but his be done. The truth shall not be what I, in my private capacity, tumultuously desire, but what in the end the facts shall determine, what the light reveals beyond myself. I question indeed myself; but I do not therefore love myself. My very questioning is a sort of a coldly merciless hating of my petty self. I reflectively question myself only because I am thus far in my ignorance unworthy of my calling. I question myself solely because I want, not to fulfil private desires, to get my inner and

petty gains, to have my selfish way, but to be transformed into the likeness of the truth that was there before I questioned, and that is not tumultuous like my momentary desires, but is eternal.

On the other hand, every man finds, or, in so far as he is the mere victim of passion, may find in himself the fleshly, the petty, the merely and basely empirical self, the narrow *Ego*, the worthlessly capricious man of the moment. Now the morbid students of philosophy aforesaid always stubbornly confuse this little *Ego* with the actual object of a wise philosophical reflection. To them the issue is not, What truth shall I serve? but, How can I induce the truth to gratify me? To them the fundamental question is, How may my tumultuous caprices be satisfied? How may the dignity of my private personality be vindicated? How may the "person" called by my poor little name be shown to be of unutterable importance? What admirable sensations will philosophy aid me to get? What rapturous sentiments of self-worship can I learn to cultivate? How can I free just my flesh from bondage to anything beyond me?

Now the root of this stubborn confusion lies in the fact that the self-consciousness whose "implications" a wise philosophy examines, is something that is essentially universal, self-surrendering, unselfish; while, on the other hand, for each one of us, our sharing in this universal, this humane selfhood is always empirically linked with a fleshly experience that can never by any possibility be justified or even understood, until, through a wisely philosophical surrender of its pettiness, one has come into relations with a world of universal truth. Too many imagine that, at the outset of philosophy, when one learns to say *Cogito ergo sum*, the Self that thus is the starting point is known as essentially identical with the private personality of the wretched fleshly Caius or Titus who happens in his unworthiness to be just then privileged to philosophize. This, for a wise reflection, is simply not true. The wise way is to say: Who Caius is, and who Titus, this I know not yet, nor shall I ever learn until I get at truth far beyond the private personality of either Caius or Titus. I try to ignore the accidents of the flesh. I don't want either

Caius or Titus to be the centre of the universe. I know that each, as he here is in the flesh, must always appear, until I learn his universal business, his reasonable duty, as a mere momentary accident, whose moods change, whose thoughts flit, whose vanity is as obvious as is this his seemingly quite accidental entanglement with the noble business of a true search for self-consciousness. I care neither for the flesh of Caius, nor for the moods of Titus. Some day I may be clear as to the true business of all such people. Meanwhile, until I get light, I will, so far as in me lies, see to it that Caius and Titus mind their present earthly business, their conventional human tasks, until better tasks shall be learned. My philosophical doubts shall not justify idleness, selfishness, brooding, moodiness, vanity, sentimentality, pleading for personal recognition. For it is just *because* I want to escape selfishness and sentimentality, and the whole hateful privacy of my chance moods, that I philosophize. My question, What is truth? means simply, To what ought one to submit? and it implies, therefore, that the only rational state of a man is some form of busy submission. To this faith, upon which my very doubting depends, I will at least be loyal. Caius and Titus shall work in harness, shall submit, shall sacrifice themselves, in order that they may not unlearn the self-sacrifice which my philosophy is seeking to define. The Self that I seek is the universally self-sacrificing being who knows truth by submitting to it, and who submits because he knows. Until I learn his truth, the very business of philosophical doubt shall only make me the more rigid in demanding of myself simplicity and objectivity of life.

III.

But now, amongst the students of philosophy in a great university, one occasionally finds types of persons who can never get this saving grace of objectivity, and who nevertheless pursue philosophy with all the more avidity, because they suppose that its reflective processes constitute some sort of justification for their own intense subjectivity. The duty of humanity to get clearness as to its sacred business, such students

confusedly identify with their own supposed right to an unlimited self-indulgence of inner life. They thus abuse their intellectual privileges; and from such abuse nothing but harm can result.

Here, for instance, one may see a sensitive and mobile personality gifted with a natural or acquired fondness for posing. Now the wise philosophical student, being essentially tolerant, learns, as he studies the history of philosophy, to comprehend and to compare many different points of view, and so, in passing, to assume sympathetically, provisionally, submissively, and with healthy plasticity, numerous historically important intellectual attitudes towards the truth,—to assume them for the moment, I say, comprehendingly, and even lovingly, before he undertakes to criticize them, or to decide for or against them. For one cannot criticize or decide till one has first understood. But all this the wise student of philosophy does as a means to an end, never as an end in itself. His tolerance of the many attitudes, his provisional assumption (as he passes through his historical studies) now of this, now of that point of view, is a means to the enlarging of his consistent and rationally comprehensive humanity. He is tolerant of the many points of view, simply because he is rigidly devoted to the one truth of which all these are partial or at least attempted expressions. The wise student of philosophy, therefore, never confounds intelligent tolerance with the vain love of shifting one's spiritual attitude merely for the sake of showing one's mobility. But now comes into the philosophical lecture-room the young person who loves to pose. His only thought, as he studies and as he imitatively assumes the attitude, now of this thinker, now of that, is: "How wise, how deep, how interesting I am becoming! I can laugh with the laughing and weep with the weeping philosophers. I believe so far in nothing; and I have, and at heart I really desire to have, no objective standards; but when people ask me what I get out of the study of philosophy, I can pose, I can dissemble, I can seem mysterious, I can put on vast airs, I can pretend to tremendous sentiments, I can mystify my environment and can multiply my trickiness, as never before." Well, what can be said of such a spirit? Here is essential insincerity, posing

as tolerance. Here is a profound love of dissembling, speaking in the language of the love of truth. Here is an abuse of the very best power of the docile and receptive intellect; and it is such abuse of the best that is always, in any walk of life, the worst. But what is it that here marks the abuse of the best? How shall we distinguish the posing that endlessly dissembles, by means of assumed attitudes, from the love of truth that is fearlessly and patiently tolerant of various and manifold opinions? I answer, the distinction is one dependent on the spirit, on the practical good sense that determines the patience of the tolerant man, as distinguished from the morbid insincerity of the mere lover of spiritual postures. The tolerant man shares and comprehends with docility that he may some day learn to discriminate and to judge in accordance with the authoritative law. But the lover of poses is merely pleasing his own vanity by the display of his agile untruthfulness. There are some amongst young men, just as, according to an unkindly old tradition, there are said to be some amongst their sisters, whose only idea of the process of reflection seems to be gained from their experiences in front of their mirrors. Upon the unkindly old tradition I have here no comment to make. I am speaking here of young men. I have known young men of just this sort; and I have warned them to let philosophy alone. I venture to repeat the warning here. You may attempt to philosophize or not. You may be wisely tolerant or morbidly flippant. But it remains eternally true that in the moral world your fate depends, not upon how well you have posed, but upon what you have accomplished of a man's wholesome work; and not upon what you have seen in the mirror, but upon what God has seen in you. Studying philosophy gives no possible indulgence as regards this quite universal rule of life. And it is the teacher of philosophy who must be the first of men to recognize this, both for himself, and, in the proper time, for the students whom he advises. So easy for some young people in a tolerant age is the confusion of laxness of life with openness of mind! So easy, and yet so fatal. No, the modern youth who proposes to study philosophy is called to one of the highest of intellectual privileges, and therefore to one of the

hardest of duties. He must be tolerant ; and yet he is bound at the same time to be strenuous — tolerant in the appreciation of manifold opinions, strenuous in loyalty to the truth as he may be permitted to see it, and in readiness to pursue it faithfully until he does see.

Again, one occasionally meets the young man whose life is already poisoned by essential selfishness or disloyalty or even downright treasonableness of conduct. Never having tried with any great seriousness to do his duty, he now comes to philosophy with a certain air of pretentious intellectual humility. The trouble with him, so he has discovered, is that his duty has never been made intellectually clear to him. If he could only find out why it is worth while to believe, to serve, to do a man's business, to be loyal to anything, of course he would submit. For he thus far is sure of only one thing, namely, of his power of self-control. As a fact, to be sure, so he substantially confesses, he has seldom or never exerted any self-control such as has involved genuine self-sacrifice for an objective cause ; in other words, he has never concretely proved his worth as a man. But then one doesn't need experience in order to become sure of one's personal importance. Such knowledge, at least, is *a priori*. "I think, therefore, I am a very important person." This is the Cartesian axiom in a slightly different but rather familiar version. As an important person I shall of course be able to guide my life soberly enough whenever philosophy shows me why. Until then I am quite free from obligations. My philosophical teacher must show me both the law and why to serve it. That is his trade. The operation often amuses me and also of course perplexes me. I wait contentedly or discontentedly (as the moment's mood determines) for the outcome, and I offer objections to each step as it is presented. That is my only part in the affair. The agitation occasionally involved in my state of suspended judgment is indeed at moments a little trying. Why can't the philosophers be clearer? Really, I often feel quite confused. It is a shame that so clear-headed a person should be thus beset with doubts! It must be somebody's fault.

Well, now, this mood is an actual one. I have met several young

men who even rather complacently confessed that this was their state, and who then begged for philosophy to show them both their duty and the worth of its service. I confess frankly that such men always remind me of a pet cat that I owned in boyhood, and that, finding itself idle and overfed, used sometimes to appear to beg me, not only for food, but for an appetite also. No, philosophy will never give you the appetite for duty. And why not? I answer: For two reasons. (1) Because unless you already have the appetite for duty, the hard toil of philosophy will never really attract you. You will tickle your curiosity for a while, and inflame your vanity as you study the subject; and that will be the end. Only the already strenuous can watch through the night of doubt. The others finally take to revel, gaming, or sleep. And (2), because so long as at heart you are not a person of dutiful purpose, but of chaotic whim, reflection can never find in you the nobler self-consciousness that once for all is not in you to find, but at best will show you nothing but your own fleshly chaos,—the endlessly perplexing puzzle of your chance and baser selfhood. Philosophy can never reflectively find a meaning in a life which has thus far simply chosen to have no meaning. The light can show only what is there. Let only confusion in at your door, and the light in vain struggles through the dusty panes of your spirit's window.

In brief, then, philosophy is, by right, and in the possession of thought's fullest freedom, a questioner of particular faiths; yet only the essentially faithful at heart have any business to pursue philosophy. The man who is practically strenuous has some right to deeply theoretical problems. You may honestly doubt what you will when you study philosophy; but unless you doubt in the spirit of one essentially devoted to loyal living, philosophy can do nothing for you. For one of philosophy's deepest discoveries is that wise doubt, when thoroughly carried to its reflective extreme, is full of positive implications. For that very reason, however, the doubts of the self-centred egoist, because they have no deeper implications, lead nowhere. The truth only comes to those who are ready to surrender their caprices to the law.

Josiah Royce.