HOW TO MAKE PHILOSOPHY MORE RELEVENT

Visiting ten Indian universities in January, 1976, I found several persons concerned about how to make philosophy, generally, and their own departments, specifically more relevant to the needs and interests of students and of their communities. This problem is neither a new one nor one peculiar to India. Hopefully, the following suggestions resulting from my American experiences may help.

These suggestions will be divided into three groups : relevance to personal problems, to university problems and to contemporary crises.

Relevance to Personal Problems

Much teaching of philosophy is concerned with presenting and explaining the views of historically prominent philosophies and philosophers. This is as it should be. We should learn from history. But if students fail to see the relevance of such historical studies for the solution of their personal problems, they tend to lose interest or do not have their interest aroused in the first place.

1. My first suggestion is that at least one introductory course should be organized around a problems approach. Philosophy consists, initially and continuingly, in problems. No problems, no philosophy. All of the major problems of philosophy are personal in the sense that they arise out of questions that every person asks himself sooner or later. Surely by the time persons become college students, they have asked some of these questions, in varying ways, many times. Thus interest in most philosophical questions is aready present in many students. Philosophy teachers have an opportunity to satisfy, stimulate and inspire such interests, or to frustrate, stultify, deaden and destroy them. Method of approach and skill in using such approach can make the difference between relevance and irrelevance for students.

a. What are these problems ? Every person wants to know : " What am I ? " What is a self ? How is it like and different from other selves ? Is it one or many ? What are its constituents ? Does it have a nature ? How did it originate ? How long will it

last? Is it permanent or changing? Is it caused? If so, how? Can it cause? If so, how? How are mind and body related? If a self, or its parts, has certain characteristics, such as being spatial or non-spatial, temporal or non-temporal, purposive or non-purposive, free or unfree, then questions about these characteristics naturally occur.

Once doubts arise about answers that are given, as they do naturally, then every person wants to know: "How can I be sure?" What is knowledge? What is certainty? What is belief? These beget further questions about truth and falsity, about kinds and ways of knowing, about intuition and inference, about validity and invalidity, and about clarity of understanding and communcation.

Why live? What difference does it make whether I live or die? Why is life good, and what in life is good? What are goodness and badness? Are there different kinds of goods? Which are better: means or ends? What are the end values, the ultimate values, the goals of life? What are beauty and ugliness? What is art? When faced with alternatives, one of which seems better than another, which should I choose? What ought I to do? What is oughtness?

Since persons are essentially social, each student also wants to know how he is, and should be, related to others? The nature and kinds and importance of association, of groups, and of social processes, including those of education, earning a living, maturing through bearing social responsibilities, and of government all arise as personal problems. Philosophy teaching is inadequate as long as teachers, and departments fail to recognize these problems, their importance to students as presons, and the need for skillful efforts in trying to help students to solve them.

b. How are these problems organized? The variety and complexity of problems constituting philosophy leads to a grouping of them for convenience. One may teach students by explaining that special fields of philosophy, known as metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and social philosophy, have become established, and so students should learn about them. But the problems opproach makes sure that the problems are primary, not the fields. The

fields are derivative, at least so far as nurturing student interst is concerned. The problems mentioned in the foregoing four paragraphs constitute (at least partly) these four fields.

An instructor may call attention to the fact that when a student is inquiring about the nature of self, or time, or cause, he is already dealing with a metaphysical quecstion, and that, in doing so, is already engaged in metaphysical inquiry. His efforts to solve his problem constitute him a metaphysician. One does not have to master the history of metaphysics in order to be a metaphysician. All he needs to do is to ask metaphysical questions and to be trying to solve them. As a beginner, he is not an expert, but he is already a metaphysician. When students discover themselves already functioning as metaphysicians, for example, they often take more interest in exploring their own extended identity.

The same is true of epistemology and its subdivisions such as logic, philosophy of science and philosophy of language, and of axiology and its subdivisions of aesthetics, ethics and philosophy of religion and of social philosophy with its economic, political and educational subdivisions.

Too often omitted from classifications of problems into special fields is that function of philosophy as a comprehensive science. Each person wants to know not only about the natures of his existence, his krowledge, his values and his groups, but also about how they all fit together consistently. This concern for comprehensiveness includes concern about consistency of theory and practice, or how to live one's philosophy, especially when one has kept in mind that his efforts to answer more specific questions have served as contributions to his more wholesome philosophy of life.

2. Raising questions and understanding their personal significance is not enough. Persons may do this by themselves without needing the services of colleges, departments and instructors. My second suggestion has to do with improving the adequacy, and thus another kind of relevance, of the answers. Discussions among students usually bring up different kinds of answers, especially regarding popular problems already receiving popular solutions.

One contribution an instructor can and should make to student discussions is to assure that all major relevant kinds of solution become clear to students before they decide upon their own conclusions. An instructor may do this simply by asking further questions that will elicit the alternative types. When this does not work, he may propose such alternatives, even in the form of questions : " What do you think of this solution ? "

Thus my second suggestion is that introductory courses should be organized around a problems *and types* approach. How many types of answers should be given for each kind of problem is something that will vary with both the level of maturity of students and the competence of instructors. Having at least two types is necessary to sharpen the issue and to clarify each of the two answers. But understanding most problems will be enriched by considering more types of answers and exploring more issues in the process. For me, three seems a minimum number, so that both extremes may be stated and also some moderate or middle view can be considered. But, for bright students and those expecting further study in philosophy, surely a larger number is desirable.

One factor to consider regarding types selected for consideration is that some types are more significant than others, either because they have contributed to shaping the problem historically, because they come closer to solving the problem satisfactorily, or because they have achieved prominence in local sectarian doctrines needing adequate recognition and exposition. Nowadays, when more dynamic, evolutionary and complex solutions have emerged, students may be cheated if such newer options are omitted. Where greatly differing types occur in different cultures, student understanding of problems can be greatly enhanced by citing solutions from other cultures.

3. Continuing use of the problems and types approach tends both to require and to promote an attitude of tentativity in students. When more alternative solutions to each problem are examined, habits of entertaining solutions as hypotheses proposed for critical examination tend to become established. Students who become able to suspend judgement about issues thereby achieve ability to survey more alternatives before makingup their minds. Surely

consideration of more alternatives is conducive to more soundly based conclusions.

Survey of types invites not merely comparison but also argumentation. When instructors supply typical arguments for and against each type, they not only enrich student understanding but also provide opportunity for participating in constructive debate. Judicious critical evaluation of arguments presented by students may help to improve students' capacities for rational and constructive argument. A skillful instructor can use some occassions not only for distinguishing between dispute and debate but also for showing both the futility of disputes and how considerately argued debates may yield new information, new insight, and even newer solutions to personal problems.

Uncontrolled discussion by immature students soon yields waste of time for all. But an instructor who keeps in mind the goal of the discussion, and keeps reminding students about such goal when they wander, can help to generate not only interest but also enthusiasm for philoyophical discussion. How much creativity can be expected or should be desired is itself a matter for further consideration. But much student potential remains untapped in most philosophy classes.

Permit me to recall as an example my proctoring a class in elementary engineering for my son who had to be absent to conduct a conference in a distant city. I had expected student reports to reveal understanding of views presented in an introductory text. Instead I found beginning students reporting of genuinely new engineering projects that each had originated by his own-initiative and had tested, in a laboratory or in the community or both, and was now presenting for critical evaluation by other members of the class. When freshmen engineers are encouraged to exercize their creative initiative for personal and social benefit, why should not philosophy students be encouraged to initiate constrnctive proposals about philosophical problems ? Such encouragement not only makes philosophy more relevant for students, but it also makes philosophy eaching itself an exciting abventure.

My third suggestion has been to include arguments for and against each type, both a survey of typical arguments and

encouragement of student participation whenever there is prospect for creative contributions and/or for stimulating student interest.

4. My fourth suggestion is that the problems, types and arguments approach be used in other introductory courses, such as introduction to metaphysics, introduction to theories of knowledge, introduction to ethical theories, introduction to philosophies of religion, etc., when these are offered. Standard histories of philosophy, and histories of ethics, histories of metaphysics, etc. essential as these are for students specialising in philosophy, may be reserved for the third and fourth years. Although instructors will differ regarding the amount of detail needing presentation regarding each type when it is presented, continuing interest of students tends to be maintained longer in beginning courses when types are somewhat streamlined. Although undergraduate student interest in mastering a particular philosophy or philosopher may occur, probably most such interests are better served at the graduate level.

Relevance to University Problems

Whoever teaches in a genuine university (most universities and colleges have become so departmentalized that they should be called " diversities ") will find that students and teachers in many different departments have some common and some overlapping interests. Furthermore, the more specialized people in each department become, the more they need the services of other departments as supplements. i. e., to supply what their own narrowing specialization progressively omits from the larger picture of life which, together, the university departments aim to understand.

Philosophy is especially suited to both serve and to be served by other departments. Three kinds of such suitability may be observed.

1. Service to, as well as service from, single departments often occurs. Law programmes sometimes require courses in ethics and logic (background for evidence and argumentation). Some business programmes include courses in ethics, either a general introduction to ethics or an ethics course designed for business students. Mathematics departments often give credit for philosophy courses

lized, people in other departments no longer have the previous in symbolic logic; sometimes they teach symbolic logic courses for which philosophy departments give credit. A course in philosophy of science may be found desirable as a prerequiste by many science departments. Courses in philosophy of history, philosophy of education and social and political philosophy often serve departments of history, education, sociology and political science. For twelve years I taught a course in introduction to aesthetics required for students majoring in speech and drama Art departments often desire courses in aesthetics and philosophy of art.

Techniques for cooperating with other departments vary. In addition to giving a philosophy department course as desired by others, a philosophy teacher may offer to teach a related course in a another department. That is, he might teach business ethics in a businesses department, symbolic logic in a mathematics department, philosophy of education in an education department, or philosophy of history in a history department. Still another method is to list the some course in two departments, so that students may obtain credit in either department; such a course could be taught in alternate years by instructors from both departments or, if money is available or instructors are willing to take the time, two instructors can join in teaching the course each time it is offered.

When courses with considerable philosophical content in other crepartments are recognized, they may be authorized for philosophy soedit. Foreign language departments often teach foreign philosophies. History departments sometimes teach intellectual history. Cultural anthropology and human geography courses tend to emphasize philosophical ideas and ideals at times. Richness and variety can be added, especially to small departments, by judicious selections of courses from other departments. One who expresses willingness to accredit such courses may discover or create willingness to reciprocate.

2. Groups of departments, such as the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, provide special opportunities for philosophy. Survey courses in the natural sciences often include sections on philosophy of science, inductive methods, history and methods of discovering new knowledge. Social science survey courses also include introductions to scientific methods, and to social and politi-

lac philosophies, as well as historical treatments of the origins of ideas, types of philosophy, and their distribution as described by cultural relativists. General courses in the humanities should find the influence of philosophy pervading each course, unless philososhy instructors are timid, lacking in insight, or haughty. Whenever a new course in the humanities is organized, some one from the philosophy department should be present and, if insightful, cooperative and diplomatic, he may be called on to lead in organizing it.

3. The university or college as a whole needs a wholesome perspective. The philosophy of a university may have been stated originally by its founders. But times change. Universities taken on new functions. Advances in knowledge can make earlier ideals obsolete. New demands by students increasingly challenge university policy. An alert and concerned philosopher may play a central role in establishing or changing university policy.

For many years my university has a standing committee on the aims and objectives of the university. The philosophy department chairman was chairman of that committee. Its task was two-fold : On the one hand, it sought to formulate as much agreement about the general aims of the university as possible, including unmet goals and desirable limits, in light of present and prospective financial support and student needs. On the other hand, it had responsibility for ideals about balance and fairness to departments (and thus to students) when some tended to expand too much and others too little. What is not always obvious to a philosopher is that, if he himself has such ideals resulting from his philosophical studies, he may be better suited than others for giving assistance in deciding upon general university policy

Fifty years ago in the United States I observed that philosophy professors became college deans and presidents quite out of proportion to their numbers as faculty members. Why ? The philosophers tended to " see things whole " and thus to see the relation of each part (i. e., each department) in its relation to the whole. He thus naturally recognized the need for the contribution made by each. People in other departments could trust the philosopher to do justice to their interests more than specialized competitors in other departments. But times have changed. Now that much philosophy

teaching has become increasingly specialized, even narrowly specia-reason for trust. When our university sought a new president recently, it employed a specialist in public administration, with no training in or interest in philosophy at all. When philosophy departments become narrowly specialized, it may well be that they deserve to become extinct. The task of seeing things whole, in a person, in a university, and in a nation, still needs to be done.

My point here is twofold. On the one hand, many colleges in India may still need the guiding hand of a philosopher in policy making and even in administration. On the other hand, universities increasingly fractionated into multiversities and diversities also need the insights and motivations of philosophy to keep them together and, increasingly, to help restore them to wholesomeness. When a philosopher achieves a wide-ranging understanding, insight into human nature and human needs, wisdom about the goals of personal and social living, appreciation of the contributions made by all departments and specialities, and sufficient urbanity not to be disturbed by petty deficiencies in daily practice, his services are needed for university guidance. His task is not merely to keep philosophy relevant to the university and the university instructed by, inspired by and guided by wholesome philosophy. His task is also to help keep the university itself relevant, something increasingly difficult to do these days. But plenty of opportunity awaits those who become competent.

Relevance to Contemporary Crises

News headline readers cannot escape awareness of mounting evidence of growing cirses threatening extinction of mankind. Doomsday prophesies have failed in the past. But scientifically established evidence in many different professions point to the same conclusion. If we do not change our extravagant ways, the end of mankind is in sight. Extravagant population production, resource consumption, environmental pollution, military preparation, criminal permissivness, and now deficit spending, all contribute to cumulating crises.

Philosophy is relevant to such crises in two ways : First as contributer and cause. Second as possible saviour, or as partly responsible for providing guidance in changing our ways

1. Philosophy has helped to cause our crises by permitting itself to become increasingly irrelevant to practical issues. This occurred partly because philosophical traditions embedded in cultures, including religious institutions, that originated millenia in the past have tended to remain static. Reverence for ancient seers and their insights has been too strong to permit renewed contributions needed to account for significant changes. Popular, and in many cases professional, philosophy has become increasingly obsolete. Failure of philosophy teachers to call attention to such obsolescence and to seek vital replacements is a part of such cause.

The problem becomes both more obvious and more aggravated when comparative philosophy and comparative religion reveal similar obsolescence in other cultures also. When philosophers cannot overcome obsolensence in their own culture, how can they expect to do so in other cultures ? I must not dwell on causes of irrelevance. What is important is to regain relevance. The importance of regaining relevance here may make the difference between survival and extinction of mankind.

2. If, as seems increasingly so, the world lacks an acceptable guiding philosophy, whose task is it to provide such a philosophy ? Our crises have accumulated partly because, for some time now, our leaders have made decisions on the basis of immediate and local pressures to the neglect of relating such decisions to the long-range needs, aims and goals of mankind. Leaders who try to be farsighted too often find philosophical and religious advice impractical because based on obsolete presuppositions. In the United states, where freedoms of speech, press, religion, etc., nurture diversity, and in the world, where conflicting cultural presuppositions cannot be overcome under the pressures of decision making, leaders have developed the habit of making decision without reference to philosophy. Thus, in practice, philosophy itself, at least as a responsible and authoritative profession, is, where not obsolete or extinct, at least extremely ineffective.

If mankind cannot change its way wisely and effectively without some agreement about its ideals and goals that are workable in terms of contemporary conditions, then, doomsday prophets claim, mankind will cease. Why should not today's philosophers willingly face the task of rethinking the nature of man and the universe in

terms of present knowledge yielded by the sciences? Why are we not capable of mastering the newer insights needed to understand present crises when we have had examples in the past, such as Augustine and Hegel, who have, with help from others, produced masterful syntheses of many diverse and seemingly contradictory trends in human nature, society and the world? The very needs facing mankind in critical ways themselves provide clues to the kind of solution needed.

I cannot take time here to more than sketch some characteristics that the needed philosophy must have. First of all, complexity. It must be able to depict multitudes of different kinds of complexity. It must explain how and why person socially become increasingly more and more interdependent. It must account for increasingly rapid rates of change and demonstrate whether and what limits of growth and of rapidities not merely in quantities but also in intricacies exist. It must incorporate Asian and Western opposites by showing how they function complementarily. It must restore confidence in the value of honesty in dealing with persons one will never see again and, indirectly, persons one will never see at all. It must rediscover the ultimate bases for moral appeals in human nature, so that arguments regarding policy decisions can, with confidence, be shown to rest on sound bases. It will include still other musts, some of which I do not know.

It is not my purpose here to propose the kind of philosophy needed. I have some suggestions to offer, under the name "Organicism," but these are tentative and will be modified as new evidence appears. My point is that now what the world needs most is philosophy, a philosophy that is adequate to guide our leaders in terms of soundly based, demonstrable principles. Whose task is it to provide such a philosophy? Is it not the task of present teachers of philosophy? If a teacher does not feel adequate to put forth such a proposal, he may still feel some compulsion to understand the problems and to survey solutions suggested by others.

One of my philosophy department colleagues is using the Club of Rome publications as classroom textual material to stimulate discussion as well as to provide understanding of crisis issues. Should not every department of philosophy have at least one

course concerned with mankind crises ? The future of mankind is a philosophical problem. Today it seems an increasingly urgent one. Do not philosophy departments, which fail to demonstrate their concern for relevance by alerting and enlightening their students to the kind of philosophy needed for human survival, themselves deserve to become extinct, even if mankind does not become extinct as a result of their neglect ? Current crises for mankind provide philosophy with one of the greatest apportunities it has ever had for demonstrating its relevance. Why not help to make philosophy relevant now ?

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