

## PHILOSOPHY AS CRITICAL AWARENESS

That philosophy is a highly critical discipline will probably be conceded by all those who are engaged in philosophizing as also by those acquainted with its history past and present; that its sole aim is to achieve critical awareness may not be acceptable to quite a few among them. Before, however, one is asked to accept or assess a particular definition of any concept whatever, one may rightly demand to have the definition explained to him. In this paper I propose to explicate the definition or conception of philosophy as critical awareness.

The description of philosophy as critical awareness gives rise to two important questions : first, what is the object or the subject matter with respect to which critical awareness is sought by philosophy; secondly, what exactly is implied in the quest of or demand for critical awareness? As we shall see the two questions are closely related, and the answer to the first question is not independent of the answer to the second. It may be asserted in the first place that the critical awareness which constitutes philosophy cannot pertain to the objects and facts that make up the visible world. We may seek information or knowledge of the objects or facts in question, but the knowledge or information is not properly described as critical awareness. *Such awareness is possible only in relation to that which may claim qualitative distinction or value.* Now such distinction can be claimed only by the human agents either for their activities or for the products of those activities. In common parlance criticism or critical evaluation is directed on the works of art and thought and also on voluntary actions to which moral epithets are applied. Thus we indulge in evaluative assessment not only of art works and scientific and reflective writings but also of the activities and lives of statesmen, warriors and saints. As a matter of fact the activities that call for evaluative assessment seldom lend themselves to direct observation. While judging the activities or actions of a person it is not so much the physical movements involved in them that interest us; what interests us are the *meanings* that are seen to accompany the activities in question (e. g. beating of a child by his mother or by a stranger) or to emerge as a result of an action or a series of actions. In either case what we seek to

I.P.Q...7

pass judgement upon are either the activities of men seen as productive of meanings, or the products of those activities viewed apart from the agent and his actions or activities responsible for it. Whereas an action or its result cannot be judged at all morally without reference to the agent, such products of human actions as works of art and thought can be very well appraised without reference to their authors. The reason for this difference is that, in order that an action may be judged as to its morality, its relation to the motivating factors in the agent should be known. No such knowledge is probably needed in assessing works of art and thought.

As already observed the activities and productions whose critical awareness is sought by us are such as claim qualitative distinction. The activities in question claim to be productive of goods or values and, the goods or values are such as admit of qualitative differences. It follows that these goods and values are different from the objects that are merely useful in an instrumental sense. Thus, while the awareness of the points of distinction in a work of art, or the points of logical strength in a theoretical principle or proposal is properly called critical awareness, the information relating to the composition or destructive power of the hydrogen bomb may be correctly described as knowledge or even as awareness, but not as critical awareness. Likewise, one may be aware of the dangers of atomic warfare, or of antagonising a powerful neighbour or a super-power, but that awareness too is different from critical awareness and is more appropriately characterized as a kind of knowledge or understanding. Our understanding of a friend, a diplomat, a rival or an enemy and the like, again, is not equatable with critical awareness. We talk of critical awareness only in relation to those activities ( as also the products of the activities in question ) that are consciously directed towards the production or attainment of qualitative excellence.

In the above discussion we have incidentally touched upon the subject of what constitutes the proper object of critical awareness. We may now proceed to fully characterize that awareness itself. Critical awareness, as we have already seen, is a type of evaluative awareness. Overtly or covertly it is also comparative awareness. Nobody can properly call Shakespeare a great dramatist who has not known other dramatists or playwrights. This will be seen to be true of all evaluative remarks of judgments. Furthermore, evaluative awareness is, in a peculiar sense, connected

awareness. This follows from its attribute of being comparative in intent and character. All systematic knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is logically connected knowledge. Critical awareness too, aspires to be connected awareness. Philosophy, in our view, seeks connected consciousness of the characteristics and norms that are experienced as constituting or determining the degree of excellence that can be properly attributed to the objects of evaluative assessment.

We shall now try to understand some of the implications of the above view of philosophy. In the first place the view implies that philosophy can deal only with certain types of consciously directed or consciously enjoyed activities and their products, and not with objects produced by nature or existing in their own right. For instance philosophy cannot deal with such entities, existing or supposed to be existing as God, soul and the like.<sup>1</sup> Nor can philosophy deal with facts relating to such existents. In fact, any study of the existents is the study of the facts about those existents. For the same reason, it cannot be the aim of philosophy to arrive at *truths* about the world of the existents as ordinarily understood. Philosophy can study only that which is brought into existence by man's activity, provided that the agent should be inclined to claim a special sort of excellence both for the activity and for the products thereof. Here an additional fact may be noted: the sort of critical awareness aimed at by philosophy relates to the activities and/or creations, whose excellence is a mark of the excellence of the human person. Elsewhere we have designated such activities as cultural activities. Cultural activities, very briefly, are those that tend to enrich and/or to qualitatively improve the personality of man. Such activities are typified in artistic creation and enjoyment of art, in intellectual work and in moral or virtuous action. Philosophical reflection aims at achieving connected and comparative-evaluative awareness of the factors responsible for the degree of excellence properly attributed to a work of art or thought or to a virtuous deed or disposition. Since the quality of the work, deed or disposition in question reflects the quality of the human person associated with the former as an agent, it may be correctly maintained that the object of philosophical study and reflection is man himself.

The above description of philosophy should be supplemented by yet another thesis about the activities or creations of man whose

critical awareness is sought by the philosophers: the activities and creations in question should be *shareable* or enjoyable by all normal human beings with requisite sensitiveness and training. While it is presupposed that every normal human being is endowed with the sensitiveness to appreciate artistic beauty, logical consistency and moral rectitude, right sort of training is necessary for the enjoyment of more complicated and more developed expressions of the artistic, intellectual and moral impulses. An important part of the training consists in freeing the individual concerned from the inhibitions and conditioned responses, so to say, that obstruct the flowering and growth of his natural sensitivity; by and large, however, the training should comprise systematic acquaintance with manifold historical expressions of the aforesaid impulses. Here an important point may be noted. Both the volume and quality of such available expressions in a particular field is different at different historical periods. This circumstance necessitates fresh philosophical encounter with and reflection upon the particular field of expression. This may be easily illustrated with reference not only to the works of art and scientific writings to be scrutinized by the philosopher at a particular period in history, but also to the altered intuitions relating to moral and religious values. Thus, due probably to the influence of scientific and humanistic ideas, we are inclined today to admire more the person who is keen to serve man through social action than one who claims to worship God in cloistered solitude. It is the business of philosophy to seek and furnish critical awareness of the changing background and developments in the fields under reference. It may be noted here that the greater historical philosophers, e. g. Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, attempted to build up perspectives or visions embodying connected awareness of all the fields of cultural activity and creation mentioned above. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for a modern philosopher to acquaint himself well enough with all the sphere of cultures for the reason that the volume of creative work and the complexities and conflicts of intuitive perception in any field are so enormous as to rule out the possibility of the mastery of more than one field by any investigator however gifted. This accounts for the fact that even thinkers of the stature of Russell and Wittgenstein have not been able to produce systems comprehending the totality of man's cultural life. And here we feel bound to take notice of a curious situation in Western

philosophy. While philosophers in England and America are largely occupied with the exploration and systematization of scientific and ordinary language—the latter relating mainly to the so-called cognitive concerns—the Continental philosophers are mainly interested in exploring the dimensions of human subjectivity. Further, the followers of both the camps seem to be united in ignoring the issues traditionally associated with religion. These latter type of issues seem to be debated mostly by the theologians as distinguished from the professionally trained philosophers. This last factor i. e. lack of interest in specifically religious issues and values, seems to divide the occidental philosophers from their counterparts in the orient. It seems to be patently wrong to us to restrict the field of philosophy to suit the convenience of a particular philosopher or tradition. Nor should the scope of philosophy be restricted on the ground that the method favoured by this or that philosopher, or this or that tradition, is suited only for certain kinds of inquiry. A particular philosopher may legitimately engage himself in doing ordinary language philosophy; that, however, would not justify the exclusion of philosophical reflection on the technical languages developed by the several sciences. So long as science is considered to be an activity that bestows qualitative distinction on those pursuing or contemplating it, philosophy will continue to seek critical awareness of the scientific adventure. For the man in the street science is probably important because of its practical utility in giving us control over the physical environment; the common man hardly sees or makes the distinction between the theoretical scientist who discovers new scientific truths, and the engineer who puts the scientific discoveries to practical use. But to the philosopher the distinction is all important. In a like manner the philosopher takes interest in the activities constituting the creation and/or enjoyment of art, love and friendship, anxiety and boredom, the practice of detachment and compassion, etc. which affect the human personality, positively or negatively, regarded as the bearer of values. A curious fact about the expression of these values is that they can be objectified and contemplated apart from the individuals responsible for their creation or active expression. The reason why such contemplation is both relevant and enjoyable probably is that the creations and expressions in question constitute *possible forms of life* for the contemplating minds. While attending to a work of art, a scientific theory or a

philosophical argument I undergo and enjoy a moment of expansion of my own psychical or spiritual life. Such expansion of my life occurs also when I contemplate the heroic or virtuous deeds enacted before me either in the actual world or on the stage. It happens that cultivated readers find themselves enjoying not only the exploits of heroes and heroins in fiction and drama, but also the biographies of lovers and saints and even the criminals. No wonder, then, that the existential philosophers should engage themselves in the analysis of the aforesaid phenomena.

What exactly is involved in the critical analysis and understanding of such phenomena as the works of art, scientific theories and modes of scientific reasoning or scientific proof or justification, moral conflicts, love, anxiety and the like?

All analysis proceeds from a point of view; equally, it may be asserted that it proceeds under the aegis of an interest or purpose. Non-appreciation of this fact was responsible for the posing of the "paradox of analysis", so-called, by some of the analytical philosophers. The paradox in question was stated thus : if the analysans states the same thing as the analysandum then it is redundant; however, if it states something different then it is incorrect. The resolution of the paradox lies in the following consideration : the analysis of a concept or proposition being determined by a point of view or purpose, the analysans is never wholly equivalent to the analysandum. What is true of analysis is true of definitions. No definition completely captures or exhausts the nature of the concept or object defined. All definitions are but partial elucidations of the concept or term defined. Thus the definition of man as rational animal tells us little or nothing about man's capacity to create and enjoy beauty, or to make moral distinctions. Even in equations used by the scientist or the mathematician, the expressions on the two sides of the sign of equality are not identical in all respects. Thus water may be equated with or described as  $H_2O$  by the chemist, but the description is true only with respect to the chemical composition of the liquid in question. In actual nature water exhibits a number of properties not possessed either by hydrogen or by oxygen. Thus the expression  $H_2O$  does not tell us anything about the thirst-quenching quality of water, or the property of river or seawater by virtue of which the latter supports the floating boats and ships. Similarly, in the following mathematical equations the expressions on the right hand side



indicate three different properties of the expression on the left hand side :

1.  $25 = 3^2 + 4^2$

2.  $25 = 5^2$

3.  $25 = \sqrt{625}$

Indeed, it would be unnecessary for mathematicians to use different equations of the above type unless each of them served a different purpose. *If two things have different functions or functional properties they may to that extent be taken to be different.* Needless to say that, while the two sides of a mathematical equation affirm identity in respect of numerical value of the expressions in question, even that degree of precision in the specification of identity may not be available in other fields including the physical.

Our contention is that philosophical analysis of a concept or conceptual complex is governed by the general aim of assessment or evaluation; for this reason the analysis in question may be called critical analysis. Philosophical analysis of a concept, proposition or a conceptual complex or phenomenon, fastens its attention on those features of the concept or complex that are relevant for its assessment in terms of its *avowed* aim or purpose. Thus, while analysing an explanatory concept in a scientific discourse, we attempt to highlight those aspects of the concept, as also the inter-relations of the aspects or features in question, that figure in the functioning of that concept. Such a concept claims value by virtue of its capacity to reconstruct the phenomenon indicated by it in a manner that makes that phenomenon intelligible. A similar aim or purpose controls our analysis of propositions in logic. Logical analysis of a term, proposition or argument draws our attention only to those features of the analysed entity that figure in the inter-connections among the components of a proposition, a pair of propositions or the group of propositions constituting an argument or inference. Other features including phonetical and even grammatical peculiarities of the entity in question are ignored by the logician. Analogously, in attempting a moral analysis of an act of murder or assassination, while we feel rightly concerned to ascertain the motivating factors behind the agent's action, and the consequences of the action, intended and unintended, we do not bother much about the physical details of the way the action realized itself.

It has been averred that the question 'What is Physics?' is not a question in physics but in philosophy, maybe the philosophy of physics. When a philosopher seeks to define physics, or economics, or art, even philosophy itself he is viewing these disciplines as 'forms of life'. Before a form of life may be evaluated and appraised as to its meaning or significance for man in terms of its avowed aim or purpose, it should be properly defined and demarcated. There is a strong prejudice that philosophy is a cognitive enterprise comparable to science. The prejudice may be justified provided it is understood that the term cognition carries *different* senses in different context. Thus the sort of cognition or knowledge obtained by the physicist is distinct in kind from the cognition or knowledge produced by our sense organs, even if the knowledge of the former kind is tested and confirmed with reference to the latter. This will be clear to anyone who ponders the fact that, according to physics, the sensory qualities of objects are merely subjective appearances. The knowledge yielded by the human sciences, so-called, is likewise different from that pursued by the physicist. The illumination or knowledge produced by such normative disciplines as moral discourse or literary criticism seems to differ from the knowledge both of the physicist and of the social scientist. Thus the knowledge or understanding that a particular sonnet of Shakespeare or Keats is superior in quality to a sonnet written by X, or that one action expresses or embodies a higher degree of, say, courage or benevolence than another, is different in kind from a statement or generalization about atoms or electrons or the details about the production and distribution of an exchangeable commodity. To us the differences among the aforesaid forms of cognition seem to be obvious. The logical positivists, indeed, considered sense perception to be the paradigm of knowledge, but they did not succeed in reducing even physics to sense-datum statements, pure and simple. Failing to make out a case for physicalism, the neopositivists tried the subterfuge of denying cognitive status to all value-statements including probably the critical statements. Their extreme thesis, the so-called verificationist view of meaning, made short work not only of moral and critical discourse, but of philosophical discourse as well.

But there seems to be an important point favouring the positivistic emphasis on sense experience. All sorts of *meanings*, including moral and aesthetic meanings, seem to be tied up with



sensible objects and processes. This seems true even of mathematical meanings. Even these latter have to depend on visible marks or audible sounds for their expression. What all this, however, indicates is the primacy of sense experience. It does not prove the identity, e.g., of moral, or mathematical meanings with sensory qualities. (Otherwise statements about mathematical meanings would cease to be necessary).

It happens that, while philosophy may legitimately be interested in defining physics or physical science, it can not properly be interested in defining engineering, mechanical civil or chemical. The reason is that science as quest of knowledge has a bearing on the qualitative growth of the human mind; on the contrary, the science of engineering has relevance only for man's practical affairs. The philosopher's interest in defining diverse cognitive disciplines is related to his desire to understand different forms of and diverse approaches to reality. The desire, of course, is informed by the conviction that knowledge of the real, pursued in a disinterested spirit, is worthwhile for man. Philosophy, indeed, values knowledge apart from its utility. This means that the knowledge that interests the philosopher is that pursued for its own sake; such knowledge contributes mainly to the *qualitative growth and distinction of the human mind*. Since, from our view-point, the most important characteristic of a piece of knowledge is the degree of validity or certainty it can claim, philosophers have tended to take interest in mathematics on the one hand and the physical sciences on the other. On the other hand, their interest in moral and critical discourse goes to show that certainty is not the only thing that matters for our preoccupation with a field of inquiry. The physical sciences, for instance, can never rival mathematical disciplines in the certainty of their results; this, however, is no argument for the discontinuance of their investigations. For analogous reasons, it will be foolish to persuade thinkers and writers to cease to take interest in moral and aesthetic issues.

Possibly man can achieve surer success in business and politics; even an engineer or a physician, with a measure of competence, may feel reasonably certain of achieving tangible results. Such success is seldom assured in purely theoretical fields. Theoretical workers in different fields are, presumeably, impelled by an obscure desire to fathom the unknown or the mysterious. Viewed in the historical perspective philosophy, indeed, seems to be the least

promising of the cognitive disciplines that might claim to have discovered dependable truths. Philosophy has been noted more for disturbing man's intellectual complasance and self-confidence by disclosing confusions and contradictions in the concepts and conclusions invented and reached by different disciplines, than for giving him helpful guidance in pursuing those disciplines.

It is often affirmed, and rightly, that critical philosophy is inclined to analyze, examine and appraise the fundamental concepts, beliefs or presuppositions of different scientific disciplines — and also perhaps itself. This is because philosophers feel tremendously concerned to have awareness of the *conditions and criteria* of truly objective knowledge in different fields. Here it may be asked : are not philosophers also interested in understanding the character of such entities and concepts as space, time and causation? Seeing that such eminent philosophers as Plato, Leibnitz and Kant have theorized about the aforesaid entities or concepts, they cannot be excluded from the subject matter and purview of philosophy. And, since space, time, causation etc. can, by no stretch of imagination, be identified with human activities or their products, our definition of philosophy is open to the objection of being too narrow or overtly restrictive. My reply to this objection is as follows. Philosophers tend to take interest in space, time and causation not as phenomena to be explored by them, but as *concepts* used by the sciences in their attempt to explain physical and other kinds of occurrences or phenomena. In fact, the philosopher, as such, has no special competence and no special *method* at his disposal, to investigate the phenomena in question. All he can do is to reflect on the reports and theories about them presented by diverse intellectual disciplines, e. g. physics and history . It is in their capacity as *explanatory* concepts that space, time, causation etc. interest the philosopher. The philosopher is driven to reflect on these concepts as part of his activity of reflection on the *qualitative* aspects of the scientific enterprise. It may be noted that philosophers have always claimed interest in investigating the nature of reality-probably in the hope to discover the nature of the values and the prospects of their realization by man. The modern philosopher's interest in science seems to be due mainly to the fact that the scientists, encouraged by spectacular practical successes of such disciplines as physics, chemistry and medicine, have, at least by implication, started making exclusive claims of

merit for their procedures and methods. As a consequence of the scientist's successes, his disciplines, if not also his personality, has acquired intriguing interest for the philosopher. It may be added here that, before the rise of modern mathematical science or sciences, the scientist or the investigator of physical nature had no status comparable to that of the poet or the philosopher or even the statesman, not to speak of the saint or the prophet.

One reason why the modern philosopher may not describe his discipline as concerned to investigate reality is that the reality, as revealed by, say, physics is hardly such as to intrigue or interest the traditional lovers of wisdom, or the devotees of the True and the Beautiful, the Sublime and the Holy. Hence also the need of a new conception of philosophy. For philosophy can occupy itself with only what is either intellectually intriguing or worthy of serious and abiding concern. The philosopher's propensity to pay attention to the intricate and the intriguing accounts for his interest in the puzzles and paradoxes encountered in metaphysics and logic. But, surely, these cannot constitute his *sole* concern, as Wittgenstein proposed in the *Investigations*. Resolutions of puzzles and perplexities, of paradoxes and dilemmas, are only part of the philosopher's enterprise of scrutinising the conceptual tools of logic and the sciences. The positive role of the conceptual devices, together with the degree of success attained or attainable through them, is equally deserving of the philosopher's notice. As stated earlier the primary aim of philosophy is critical awareness of activities and objects that claim to be intrinsically valuable. Maybe the principal object of philosophical analysis and appraisal are the diverse cognitive disciplines pursued by man, but these cannot be held to be the exclusive concerns. For men had claimed intrinsic worth for their artistic creations as also for virtuous deeds and saintly life. Philosophy cannot possibly dictate what mankind should or should not take to be intrinsically valuable; it has rather to follow the lead of human history in the matter. It is not necessary that a particular philosopher should occupy himself with all the spheres of human values; but this is no reason why he should be permitted to exclude some of these spheres from the purview of philosophy. Nor can the degree of certainty attainable with respect to one or other field of values be made a determining factor in delimiting the field of philosophy; for, as Aristotle has observed, 'it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each

class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits'. The conclusion is that aesthetic, moral and religious forms of life or experience belong as much to the subject-matter of philosophy as do the various scientific disciplines.

An objection may be raised that our definition of philosophy would include literary criticism within its scope since such criticism cannot but consist of critical awareness of the qualitative aspects of a work of art or literature. Now aesthetics is already regarded as a legitimate branch of philosophy. It may also be granted that the activity of the literary or art critic is nearer to that of the philosopher than to the activity of the scientist. The main difference between criticism in question and aesthetics, I suppose, is one of generality. Thus a critic may examine and pronounce on the style of an author or artist or a single work of art or literature, without being called upon to define the concept of style and its relationship to linguistic, psychological and such other factors as content, age, moral or philosophical outlook. The critic's main concern are the factors that distinguish the authors or artists studied by him from one another; the philosopher's, the universal essence or essences that are responsible for the emergence or realization of a peculiar style in or by an author or artist.

As regards religious philosophy the starting point, according to us, can only be the perceived values reflected in the lives of the pronouncedly religious persons, i. e. the saints—irrespective of their divergent beliefs about God, soul, immortality etc. Thus, while the Buddhists hold beliefs dimetrically opposed to those of the Hindus regarding the aforesaid entities, there may be detected far-reaching similarities of attitude and behaviour among saints belonging to these and other religions.

As the interested observer of these diverse forms of life or spheres of experience and activities, the philosopher may properly address himself to questions of the following types: (a) Does every discipline presuppose some fundamental concepts and beliefs? If yes, how are these related to the age and culture wherein a particular discipline is pursued? What bearing do the presuppositions have on the validity of the generalizations and conclusions reached by the investigators in the various disciplines? (b) How do different disciplines compare with respect to their fundamental presuppositions? How do their procedures and conclusions compare in respect of their several avowed aims and purposes? (c) How do the objects

or experiences studied or attended to by different disciplines—i. e. the physical and human sciences, art and literature and philosophy itself—compare ontologically? What bearing, if any, does the ontological status of the aforesaid objects and experiences have for the quality or meaningful existence of human life? The last pair of questions concerns mainly the being or ontology of diverse intentional objects. A systematic, satisfactory answer to the foregoing questions is likely to take the form of a “vision” as to the constitution of the human universe, i. e. *the universe as it exists for man* at a particular point in his intellectual and spiritual history. It should finally result in the enlightenment called “the wisdom of living”. The recent preoccupation with the “conditions of an utterance having sense”, so poignantly treated by Wittgenstein in a diversity of contexts, has, it will be seen, a bearing on the question of the relationship between the intelligibility of a discourse and its validity; indeed, the two qualities tend to coincide in literary discourse.

A related question concerns the possibility and extent of communication, achieved or achievable, by men in different spheres of inquiry or experience. Seeing that the sensory experiences of men (depending as they do—as pointed out by the sceptics—on distinct sets of physiological conditions) are unique and unshareable, how are people able to communicate with one another? Secondly, granted that communications occur and also that men are able to agree as to the validity of some beliefs, does that validity depend, finally, on the identity of ontologically independent objects figuring in consciousness, or on a complicated network of conventions, interest, and purposes involved in speech and actions? Is it the objectivity of the *referents* of our speech that generates shareable beliefs or cognitions, or is it our *agreement* made possible by aforesaid conventions and other factors that produces the illusion of the objectivity of the referents?

### Generalisations in Philosophy

A final question about philosophy that may be asked is: Is philosophy purely a critical undertaking or has it also a constructive role or function? The query presupposes a dichotomy between critical and constructive activities which is itself questionable. It seems to us that, whatever the conception of philosophy

accepted by investigators, it is not possible to deny to it a creative role or function. The critical awareness sought by the philosopher in fact, is by no means a passive affair, to be equated with or conceived as an act or series of acts of quiescent contemplation. For one thing the awareness in question involves meaningful contemplation of differences of quality; for another, it may involve active search for, and formulation of, criteria implicit in the perception of aforesaid differences. Apart from this, the philosopher is frequently driven to notice and make general statements about analogies, mutual bearings and differences of worth among forms of life and experiences differing in class or kind. Thus, the philosopher alone may undertake a comparative study of the logic of the physical sciences on one side and that of the humanities on the other; likewise, the philosopher may be asked to discuss and decide whether and how far e. g., moral values are commensurable with, say aesthetic, utilitarian and intellectual values. He may also discuss whether and how far, seeing that morality is concerned largely with social well-being and religion with the individual's own salvation or perfection, the moral and religious pursuits and values are compatible, incompatible, or complementary. The philosopher is likely to publish the results of his deliberations in the form of general statements. It follows that in his quest for critical awareness the philosopher cannot avoid formulating general statements or hypotheses.

It has been suggested that the philosopher is required to indulge in other sorts of generalizations as well. Herbert Spencer, for instance, thought that the function of philosophy was to formulate most general laws from which generalizations of the particular sciences could be deduced as corollaries. Thus, as a philosopher, he formulated the general law of evolution, which, in his view, could be shown to have applications in the fields explored by the different sciences-physical, biological and socio-psychological. In a similar vein Bertrand Russell, having noted that a philosophical proposition must be general, declares that such a proposition 'must be applicable to everything that exists or may exist'.<sup>2</sup>

The trouble with the aforesaid sorts of laws or propositions is that one scarcely knows how they can be verified or validated. The question, how a philosophical statement may be tested or validated, is a difficult and tricky one. It does not admit of a



simple and conclusive answer. Indeed, the extent of continuing disagreement among philosophers should predispose us to think that, probably, philosophical statements or hypotheses are not susceptible to objective proof or validation.

In this connection the following observations are in order. (1) First, an acceptable theory of philosophical proof or validation cannot possibly be worked out without a conception of philosophy that is generally acceptable. Thus, the question regarding the status and justification of, say, the Verification principle or a theory of meaning is inseparable from the query concerning the character of philosophical discourse in general. If it is conceded that that discourse consists of second-order statements then it may be surmised that the method of their verification or validation would differ from that applicable to first-order statements. (2) Part of the process of assessment of validation of an hypothesis consists in showing whether or not it is adequate to the data taken to be relevant. Thus a normative ethical theory may be shown to be adequate or otherwise with reference to some crucial instances of moral judgement generally endorsed by a community or culture. In the absence of a reasonable consensus as to the relevance or significance of the data sought to be unified by an hypothesis it would not be possible to assess its merit. (3) A philosophical theory generally presents itself as a body of interconnected concepts or definitions. As in science, these definitions or concepts can seldom be assessed each in isolation from others. A philosophical theory or vision, too, can be properly evaluated and appraised only when taken as a whole. Considering the immense variety and extent of significant data in different domains of investigation and experience, and the diversity of tastes and temperments, predispositions, and predilections characterizing thinkers and connoisseurs in philosophy, it scarcely seems possible that mankind would ever be able to assent to a single vision of the universe of meanings and their place in it. All that can be reasonably expected is that, thanks to their growing preoccupation with objectivity and evidence, philosophic minds would continue to advance towards mere satisfactory conceptions of their discipline and towards forging more acceptable syntheses or visions of the data and the territory scanned by them.

## NOTES

1. Philosophy, however, can deal with these regarded as explanatory concepts, i. e. as part of the conceptual device for explicating religious experience or values *as realized in the human person*.
2. *Mysticism and Logic* (Penguin Books, 3953), "On Scientific Method in Philosophy", p. 106.