

Philosophy as Wisdom of Love

(In honor of Sofia Ana Quisling, born October 25th, 2006)

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Wisdom evolves as we develop our intuitive and critical acumen to discriminate what we know and what we do not know, and to recognize the limit as well as the possibility of knowledge. Wisdom involves an active awareness that forms a living context in which knowledge is placed under a proper perspective and finds meaning and application in real life. In wisdom, knowing, feeling, and willing are unified while knowledge becomes resident within a matrix of meaning that informs human life. Thus in wisdom, informational knowledge attains to informed truth.

Attaining wisdom is akin to reaching the summit of a high mountain. The majestic view that spreads before you may have been seen by other climbers but you must climb the mountain for yourself to behold it. Although the view is common to those who have seen it, your experience of beholding it is still unique and original. In nature there exists the highest mountain, but in life there exists no limit in our climb to ever higher wisdom. As you climb up to reach a new summit, the cloud of unknowing that surrounds the mountains disappear to reveal still higher summits. For this reason a truly wise man or woman is always humble and eager to learn more.

Love of Wisdom

Today humanity possesses more knowledge than the Buddha, the Christ, Lao Tzu, or Socrates ever possessed. Yet, our philosophers and intellectual leaders are not necessarily wiser than they. In fact, the case seems to be the contrary. The English philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) states in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933):

A philosopher is not, as such, a scholar; and philosophy, more often than not, has foundered [stumbled] in learning. There is no book which is indispensable for the study of philosophy. And to speak of a philosopher as ignorant is to commit an *ignoratio elenchi* [irrelevant thought]; an historian or a scientist may be ignorant, philosophers merely stupid.

The philosophers who are thus merely stupid do not usually think that they are stupid because they are blinded by their intellectual cleverness and vast stores of knowledge. They indeed founder in their own learning. Having the knowledge of what Plato wrote in Greek by itself does not make someone a Plato. Having studied the work of Chuang Tzu in Chinese by itself does not make someone a Chuang Tzu. And having read the whole opus of Shankara in Sanskrit by itself does not make someone a Shankara. So then, what does it mean to develop wisdom without foundering in learning? What does it take to translate our greater knowledge into greater wisdom?

The term "philosophy" is etymologically derived from the original Greek word *philosophia*, consisting of the root *phileo*, "to love," and *sophia*, "wisdom." *Sophia* more specifically means (1) a kind of practical skill that one needs in performing music; (2) clever subtlety (which the Sophists—the instructors in practical philosophy—need in argumentation); (3) the ability to think, and to be creative (in poetry); (4) knowledge and understanding in any subject of higher learning; (5) real and true understanding of the highest values in life, which one needs in order to live according to the highest ethical standards.

Phileo, which is derived from the noun *philos*, signifying “friend,” specifically means (1) to like; (2) to be used to something; (3) to have friendly feelings for something; (4) to approve of something. The combined term *philosophia* (said to have been invented by Pythagoras) means (1) a scholarly occupation; (2) eagerness to learn; (3) a practical way of life to live according to a set of ethical guidelines; (4) striving for higher knowledge and wisdom. Thus, philosophy as “love of wisdom” contains a richly multifaceted and multidimensional meaning.

None of the ancient Oriental languages has a word that corresponds in meaning to the term *philosophia*. The concept of philosophy as the “love of wisdom” was therefore imported to the East from the West. For instance, the Japanese word for philosophy, *tetsugaku*, was a neologism invented by Amane Nishi (1829-1897), a leading translator of Western philosophical literature in the early Meiji era (1868-1912). Yet, the philosophical impulse for higher knowledge and wisdom is deeply rooted in the soul of humanity. In the East, this philosophical impulse was inseparable from the evolutionary spiritual impulse for self-realization, which defined the office of philosophy in the East as the Way of Realization. Therefore, such eminent esoteric schools of Eastern thought as Yogacara, Madhyamika, rDzogs-chen, Vedanta, Samkhya, Taoist, or Neo-Confucian schools were all born out of this spiritual-philosophical impulse.

In the West, the beautiful fruits of this same evolutionary spiritual philosophical impulse can be seen, for instance, in the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus and his followers; the German mystical tradition of Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, and Angelus Silesius; the German Idealist philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Hartmann; and the New Thought-Transcendentalist philosophies of Villanovanus, Swedenborg, Emerson, Evans, Hopkins, and Troward. From the time of Pythagoras and Plato, there existed a great current of thought that flowed into Western philosophy and culture, which formed the counterpart of the Eastern esoteric traditions.

Wisdom of Love

The philosophical impulse for higher knowledge and wisdom is tantamount to the spiritual impulse for the development of human consciousness. Consciousness is *con* (together)-*science* (knowing)-ness and the development of human consciousness means the continual increase of the togetherness or inclusiveness (quantity) of the knowingness (quality). Therefore, the office of philosophy as a way of realization is also the office of the evolution of consciousness. This means that philosophy as a continual striving for greater wisdom is an evolutionary movement of consciousness, which brings about a change or transformation in ourselves by opening our inner visions to ever wider horizons, resulting in the development, cultivation, and refinement of our soul or character (from *carecter* = inscription on the soul).

The reason that humanity’s great gain in knowledge has not translated into a gain in wisdom is because the office of philosophy has not served as a way of realization, and the way in which we acquire knowledge does not involve our self in any significantly transformative way. Therefore, our deep spiritual-philosophical impulse and yearning remains unfulfilled.

And the reason that the office of philosophy has not served as a way of realization and the way in which we acquire knowledge does not transformationally involve our self is because our desire for knowledge has become disconnected from the love that inheres in our soul. The modern and postmodern mind is imbalancedly outwardly directed, while the love that inheres in our soul can be tapped only by a sustained inward awareness. We have become masters of objectification and exteriorization but have lost

the inner ability to be aware of the subject or the interiority that is the seat of love and the ground of wisdom.

Wisdom develops through the development of the soul, and the soul develops through the evolutionary power of love. Love is the substance of life that moves life towards optimal unity and wholeness, and the soul is the subject of consciousness and the individual integrity of life that evolves as life moves towards optimal unity and wholeness through the power of love. Hence the more we love, the more we infuse our being with love, the more alive and aware we become. Love as the substance of life permeates our soul--our knowing, feeling, and willing. Therefore, when we charge our being with love, wisdom arises in our consciousness as the effulgence of love, as the Wisdom of Love.

Philosophy as the way of realization is not only the love of wisdom but, more fundamentally, the wisdom of love. Philosophy is the wisdom of love itself. Philosophy is the evolutionary movement of the wisdom of love. The wisdom attained through the love of wisdom is the higher summits of wisdom beheld by the vision that is the wisdom of love. It is the wisdom of love that moves us to love greater wisdom, even as it is the vision of a higher summit that impels us to climb up to it. Thus, the wisdom being attained unfolds from the wisdom being present. Therefore, in our spiritual-philosophical striving for wisdom and truth, it is wisdom itself that is the primary source of our striving.

Philosophy as the way of realization is a quest for wisdom born out of wisdom. And the Way is always in the Going. That is, authentic philosophy is never an achievement but is a movement, a continual striving. The wisdom for which the philosopher strives is always the wisdom that is born out of wisdom. Wisdom is the Light that radiates and the Word that resonates from this evolutionary movement and quest which is philosophy. Thus, the highest office of philosophy provides us with the *knowing* that serves our *being* in our evolutionary *becoming*. This is Philosophy as the Wisdom of Love, and this is the gift that I would like to give to humanity, especially the youth and the new born whose inborn wisdom will one day be reborn to bring forth a new vision never envisaged before.