

9 THE VALUE AND TASK OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY*

One often hears strange stories about Philosophy and philosophers. The very first question we shall have to put will inevitably be: Where on earth does a philosopher spring from, where does this phenomenon have its origin? Is a philosopher *made* or does he create himself? It is, perhaps, possible that circumstances — such as an unhappy marriage — contribute their share to the philosopher. And undoubtedly the possibility exists that someone might be born a man and die a philosopher. (Rather like the epitaph which the honourable family of a certain Scot erected: “Here rests J. MacDonald. He was born a man and he died a merchant.”)

Is a philosopher *born as one*? Someone, that is, who does not merely philosophize to live, but lives for philosophizing. In neither case has the philosopher any say in his being a philosopher. Philosophical problems — especially as to what a philosopher himself is — are the most difficult questions. One can go on asking without ever getting to a final solution.

I would like to entertain you for a few minutes with my own analysis of what a philosopher is. This will be done according to the modalities of the Amsterdam Philosophy which you know by now.

Numerical: a philosopher is usually a loner, a thoroughbred individualist.

Spatial: he drags his rationally-constructed hermit's dwelling of chewed and better-chewed printed papers and manuscripts round with him like a snail's shell, and at the slightest confrontation with any practical problem conveniently retreats into his shell.

Physical: usually not too tall of stature, with or without a bald head and a beard, serious of eyebrow and deep wrinkles upon the forehead. The fact that most philosophers are nevertheless neatly washed, combed and shaven is not always to their credit but is thanks to an attentive mother, wife or housekeeper.

Biotic: *all men are* not philosophers but all genuine philosophers are definitely of the male gender. (The few exceptions merely serve to confirm this rule!) Whether all philosophers are human is another matter. Perhaps we are here thinking too

* Previously published in *Perspektief*, 10(4): 198 - 216, December 1971

Andrologically, but sin against the consistent-problemhistoric method of Prof. Vollenhoven is fortunately not a mortal sin! Together with this there is normally a moderate craving for drink and an unbridled lust for smoking.

Psychic: most members of this genus apparently live in a Stoic fashion and in a world devoid of emotion. Very often there are also serious psychological deviations: a visitor to a university who had to be introduced by his guide to the local philosopher of the institution was warned in advance that this person was not quite “all there”. When the visitor sympathetically inquired why they did not give the poor man psychiatric treatment the reply was, “We can’t — then he stops philosophizing”!

Analytically speaking, this sort of person is fond of all kinds of quibbles (e.g. as to how many little angels can dance on the point of a pin). Not only do they know the answers to all the questions but also the questions for all the answers! They study the facts and draw their own confusions, so that every one of them who is worth his salt has succeeded in writing at least two cryptic articles in one or other known or unknown philosophical or pseudo-philosophical journal. Most of them have also written their very own doctoral thesis — rather an important achievement these days.

Furthermore, philosophers are naturally crazy about all sorts of interesting dilemmas: For instance the dilemma of the (poor) donkey dying of hunger between two equidistant bundles of hay, unable to choose between two equal goods.

Or the classical example of an Athenian mother attempting to persuade her son not to enter politics:

“If you say what is just, men will hate you, and if you say what is unjust, the gods will hate you, but you must either say the one or the other; therefore you will be hated”. Her son rebutted the dilemma with the following one: “If I say what is just, the gods will love me, and if I say what is unjust, men will love me. I must say either the one or the other. Therefore I shall be loved!”

Because the modern tendency is that people want to be entertained (not only in the bioscope and circus and on television but also at the school, university and

even church), I want to give you another very interesting example, namely the lawsuit between Protagoras and Eulathus:

Protagoras was a teacher who lived in Greece during the fifth century B.C. He taught many subjects but specialized in the art of pleading before juries. Eulathus wanted to become a lawyer, but, not being able to pay the required tuition, he made an arrangement according to which Protagoras would teach him but not receive payment until Eulathus won his first case. When Eulathus finished his course of study, he delayed going into practice. Tired of waiting for his money, Protagoras brought suit against his former pupil for the tuition money that was owed. Unmindful of the adage that the lawyer who tries his own case has a fool for a client, Eulathus decided to plead his own case in court. When the trial began, Protagoras presented his side of the case in a crushing dilemma: "If Eulathus loses this case, then he must pay me (by the judgment of the court); if he wins this case, then he must pay me (by the terms of the contract). He must either lose or win this case. Therefore Eulathus must pay me".

The situation looked bad for Eulathus, but he had learned well the art of rhetoric. He offered the court the following counterdilemma in rebuttal:

"If I win this case, I shall not have to pay Protagoras (by the judgement of the court); if I lose this case, I shall not have to pay Protagoras (by the terms of the contract, for then I shall not yet have won my first case). I must either win or lose this case. Therefore I do not have to pay Protagoras!"

The study of these forms of arguments and the acquisition of the ability to follow them and evaluate them is a worth while pursuit. But just as there are some people who devote their whole life to gymnastics, there are also philosophers whose minds never seem to rise above this kind of intellectual gymnastics or exercise in Logic.

Historically viewed, it has thus far been established that most philosophers have indeed been born on their own birthdays but thereafter exist absentmindedly in a timeless world.

Lingually one could say an awful lot on this freak of nature. A philosopher is

one who possesses the magnificent gift of talking about everything with equal authority — note that the stress is on the *talking* and not the authority. (Someone has diagnosed “verbal diarrhea” in this connection.) Or in other words: he is someone who is able to express his thoughts with perfect incomprehensibility. And here too the philosopher is not so very far removed from the female species.

Socially considered: an independent, critical, a-social being who assumes that his hearer understands what he is saying. It is not only the Greek thinker Diogenes who tried to flee the world by ensconcing himself in a (wine) barrel!

Economically, a philosopher is an absolute wash-out, since his theories and other activities have no cash value. He evidently means little to society.

The absence of *aesthetic taste* — a few exceptions notwithstanding — is apparently also a typical feature. Philosophers who are also artists have never exactly flooded the earth.

Juridically they are characterized by a sublimated but unmistakable aggressiveness. But mostly they are as innocent as the people in the following anecdote: When the school inspector inquired *as* to who had demolished the walls of Jericho, the only answer he could prise out of the class was Charles's: “I've no idea, sir, but it really wasn't any of us.” When the inspector later complained to the class's teacher, Mr A, about the class's chocking Bible knowledge, he had to listen to the following comment: “Sir, Charles is an exceptionally honest boy. If he says it wasn't their fault you can believe him.” And when the inspector went to bewail his fate to the principal, this was the answer: “Mr A is a highly trustworthy teacher, and Charles a very reliable boy. If they say they don't know, it's the truth.” But the head did promise to take the matter up with the Department of Education. After some time the inspector again visited the school and when he inquired of the principal *as* to whether he had carried out his plan, the answer was: “Yes, I've written and the Department have replied that the matter is receiving attention”!

Ethically, philosophers generally suffer from camouflaged ambition. Seeing that most of them forget to get married, however, they cause few ethical problems (superficially, at any rate).

Viewed from the *aspect of faith*, most Western philosophers suffer from schizophrenia: their faith (assuming they can keep it) and their scholarship are two separate things from their point of view, which are either hostile to each other or have nothing whatever in common.

I doubt that it would be useful to continue further in this vein. It seems that philosophers just don't fit into the modalities of the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea. Philosophers are every bit as unfathomable as women. The only difference is that one can much more easily determine who belongs to the latter category than decide who ought to be regarded as a philosopher!

It is understandable that many students make the complaint that Philosophy gets you nowhere. This charge is not entirely without justification. So many of the great movements of Philosophy or philosophical schools have ended up in blind alleys. But at least a study of them shows where the blind alleys are.

The study of the History of Philosophy especially is regarded by some people as worthless. But actually it is an exercise in navigation. By studying the various movements in Philosophy we can plot our position on the intellectual map.

But we have been beating about the bush (characteristic of a philosopher?) too long already.

We will first of all have to say something about the crisis of the modern university to be able to show in the second part what the value of Philosophy can be at the modern university. After this positive exposition about the task of philosophy we will be able to answer the current attacks against Philosophy in the third part of this lecture.

The following scheme gives a survey of what we intend doing:

I. THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

- 1.1 One-sidedness, over-specialization
- 1.2 Professionalism
- 1.3 Chaotic character
- 1.4 Relation to society
- 1.5 The modern student

2. THE VALUE AND TASK OF PHILOSOPHY

2.1 Philosophy promotes

- 2.1.1 The coherence of the sciences
- 2.1.2 The mutual interaction of the sciences 2.1.3
- Asking the question “What? “
- 2.1.4 Broad-mindedness of the scientist

2.2 Philosophy gives

- 2.2.1 The classification of the sciences
- 2.2.2 Illumination
- 2.2.3 Penetration
- 2.2.4 Direction

2.3 Philosophy counteracts

- 2.3.1 Specialism
- 2.3.2 Pragmatism
- 2.3.3 The declining cultural level

3. THE CURRENT VIEWS ON PHILOSOPHY

- 3.1 Difficult
- 3.2 Impractical
- 3.3 Useless
- 3.4 Confusing
- 3.5 Dangerous

1. THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

Over the whole world today the crisis of the university is under discussion. It is felt that the university does not answer properly to the demands of modern society.

We only mention five aspects of the crisis discussed by Prof. Dr H.G. Stoker in the first chapter of his *Beginsels en metodes in die Wetenskap* (Potchefstroom, 1961 and Johannesburg, 1969).

The different facets of the crisis are:

1.1 One-sidedness, over-specialization (specialism)

with the result of the disintegration of the unity of science and an undermining of the forming of the personality of the student.

Specialization itself is not evil, but necessary, not *specialism* (when the specialized scientist cannot, or does not want to, form an idea of what he is busy with and accepts his presence at the university as obvious). Then the danger of *operationalism* is great where the scientist is only interested in methods for the sake of methods, or *pragmatism*, where anything that works is acceptable (which may not be the truth).

1.2 Professionalism

The demands for professional training become so great that the academic training of the student suffers. The balance between scientific investigation for the sake of knowledge and professional training is endangered. The universities are getting the image of technical institutions, big factories or gigantic industries giving ready-made, instant products (like instant coffee, tea, porridge) to society. It becomes a multiversity. The result is that utility is becoming the only norm of university training. (Only the subjects which prepare the students for a certain profession are important). The implication is the forming of one-track minded students who will only be able to do a specific job and not be able to be leaders in the general sense in society.

1.3 The chaotic character of the present university

This especially concerns the so-called "neutral" university where the students are educated in different departments or by different lecturers of the same department according to colliding, clashing (religious) views or standpoints. Because you have no unity in spiritual direction you may have many principles and no unity among the different sciences.

This is not so serious a problem at a university with the device “In lumine tuo videbimus lumen” and where this motto is taken seriously by lecturers and students.

1.4 University and society

On the one hand it is regretted that the university placed itself at a distance, and on the other hand, it is felt that the university should distance itself from the emotional tensions of society, as an institution of learning. The first idea, namely, the responsibility of the university for the society, is at present very strong in Europe. The university should be engaged in the problems of society. The university can no longer be a place where you learn everything ... except the really important things.

1.5 The modern student

He is educated piecemeal and one-sidedly with the result of narrow-mindedness. The syllabi are becoming more and more difficult, examination fears and cramming for the examination result in the reproduction of the handbooks without insight. All that is attempted is to get a degree as soon as possible. There is no responsibility, no academic interest in science as such and its value, or the more fundamental problems of life.

SUMMARIZING: There is a tension at the modern university between:

- University and society .
- forming of a total view and specialization
- academic training and professional training
- mental (spiritual) and personality forming
- theory and practice

2. THE PLACE AND TASK OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY

Philosophy may be of great help in the so-called crisis of our modern universities. The correct philosophy will:

Promote

- the coherence of the sciences
- their mutual interaction
- the question of the *what*
- broad-mindedness of the scientist

Give

- classification (encyclopaedic task)
- illumination (of philosophical influences)
- penetration (into background of the crisis of modern civilization)
- direction

Counteract

- Specialism
- Pragmatism (the *how* only)
- Declining cultural niveau

2.1 Philosophy promotes

2.1.1 The coherence of the sciences

University means *universitas scientiarum*, the unity of the sciences. This unity disintegrates with the fast growth of science and the resulting specialization. *Philosophy, which studies the whole of reality in its diversity and coherence, may give a view of totality to the scientists who specialize in the study of a minute part of the whole of reality.*

Philosophy seeks to do for the sciences just what each science does for the doctrines it comprehends. In the latter case separate truths are brought into unity, and in the former, separate sciences. The one unity constitutes a science, the other a science of the sciences (*scientia scientiarum*) and shows that absolutely there is only one science, although it has various departments. The second unity is as natural, as legitimate, as important as the first.

You must not misunderstand me. Philosophy as total science is not the sum total of the partial knowledge of all the special sciences. Then Philosophy would look like a storehouse, collection depot, compilation or aggregation with no value whatsoever. (This is the reason why only Philosophy can be responsible for the coherence of the sciences at the university. It cannot be obtained by a few lectures on a certain topic

given by different faculties at the beginning of the year).

Modern civilization absolutely needs specialists. Specialization is an imperative but great harm is caused by extreme specialization. When a specialist confines himself, at the beginning of his career, to a small part of the whole, his knowledge of the rest is so rudimentary that he is incapable of understanding thoroughly even that part in which he specializes. The more eminent a specialist, the more dangerous he is. (A person knowing *all* about *nothing!*)-

Philosophy is the scientific tie which embraces all the special sciences. It unlocks the gate to all the basic questions of the sciences.

Van Riessen stresses the two sides of the university: The universal and the special side of the training. In respect of the universal side he means the over-all, all-round, general scientific view. Philosophy gives this general scientific approach to reality. That is why the student has to philosophize *as well as* specialize. "In order to philosophize thoroughly it is necessary to specialize, and in order to specialize efficiently it is necessary to philosophize". (Van Riessen)

The approach to science ought to be both universal and special. That is why Philosophy should not be a subject which is free to be chosen or not, but one which is *compulsory* for every student, irrespective of the direction of his study. J.H. Newman (*The idea of the University*), correctly considers Philosophy to be the *core* of the university. In the Netherlands, Philosophy is not a department but a *faculty at* the university, an inter-faculty, and, what is more, the *central* inter-faculty. Today, at many universities you find an introductory course in Philosophy for all students (a kind of inter-faculty Philosophy) or a *studium universale*.

2.1.2 *The mutual interaction of the sciences*

For the wellbeing of the university and the best possible training of the student for his eventual task in society, there should be contact and interaction between the different sciences in order to help and counterbalance each other. Philosophy, which studies reality, may promote this interdisciplinary help of one science to another.

By a true co-ordination of the sciences and a comprehensive insight into their natures, it must help us to see how and when they can assist each other. *There are problems which require a combination of sciences for their solution*. Certain combinations of the sciences are possible, (cf medical science, education, etc.) while

other are absurd. It is only through a clear apprehension of the respective natures and relations of any two or more sciences that we can perceive whether one can be made to operate with another to the attainment of a given end.

Some of the most important advances which have occurred in the history of science have been due to the associated action of two or more sciences. It is quite erroneous to suppose, as some persons do, that the true way to advance any study is to devote the whole mind exclusively to it so as to have no thought: or interest beyond it. Many problems are so complex (cf. for instance, the study of the human being) that it is vain to hope that they will be mastered otherwise than by the conjoint and concentrated efforts of many sciences. Special investigations only enrich science when they are directed and guided by enlarged views.

2.1.3 *Asking the question: "What?"*

In the light of the increasing influence of science on practical life, the responsibility of the university becomes greater and greater. It is not only necessary to know the *how* (things work), but also to ask the question: *What are we busy with?* Philosophy is very well fitted to function as the conscience of the university, and to show the sciences their responsibilities. (Anything that works in practice is not acceptable as right and good).

The *what* includes much more. All special sciences aim merely at the extension and acquisition of knowledge. They assume that there are things and truths to be known, but make no attempt to verify the assumption or even understand what it implies. Philosophy will have to help the other sciences, by answering questions like "*What is knowledge?*", "*How is it possible?*" "*What is scientific knowledge?*"

The critical self-questioning will awake the philosopher in every scientist because it will confront him with the fundamental or basic questions of science.

The *what* includes all the most fundamental questions (*what is life*, justice, morality, art, faith, freedom, responsibility, law, etc. etc.?) which the special sciences encounter but cannot solve, but which are of the greatest importance for the sciences. These last questions of each special science may be treated in the special "vak-filosofie". (Cf. Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Law, etc.).

2.1.4 *Broad-mindedness of the scientist*

This is more or less the conclusion of the foregoing points. Every specialist, owing to a wellknown professional bias, has the tendency (in some or other degree) of believing that he understands all of reality, while in reality he grasps only a small part of the vast field of science. Philosophy may help fragmentary aspects not to be absolutized as representing the whole.

The weakness of many of the scientists whom we meet at the universities and laboratories today is due to the mediocrity of their goal and the narrowness of their life. Men grow when inspired by a high purpose, when contemplating vast horizons. Philosophy may be an aid in this direction – instead of being a “one-eyed professional idiot”.

2.2 Philosophy gives

2.2.1 *The classification of sciences*

Philosophy, as a comprehensive survey of the sciences and a deeply grounded knowledge of their principal relations to one another, is indispensable to a correct conception of the special province of any science.

The boundaries of most sciences are very ill-traced, their definitions most irreconcilable. The first question which the student of any science ought to ask is: “What is it? “ “What is it about? “

It is impossible for the different scientists to determine the subject matter (field of investigation) of their sciences on their own because it is impossible to fix the field of investigation and position of a science without reference to the neighbouring sciences, and even to the general system of the sciences. (As it is impossible to fix the position of a nation or country without reference to the surrounding nations and even the general geography of the earth. An atlas with a separate map of every state of the world cannot dispense with, cannot supply the place of a map which will show them in relation. The more complete an atlas with regard to special maps, the more need there is for a general one because the student will be completely lost in the necessary details without such assistance).

The more science becomes divided and sub-divided, (which is happening

increasingly in our modern specialization), the more urgent, the more imperative becomes a knowledge of its greater general outlines in order that each scientist may recognize how his special department is related to others. The greater the multiplication of sciences, the more chaotic must be the effect they produce, unless the mind can locate them aright, can refer them to their place in a system, and see how they stand to one another, and the whole. Only when a scientist has limited his own discipline will he be able to get a view of the coherence of the whole scientific activity of the university. He who does not see the necessity of a demarcation of his science may absolutize his own science with the result of one-sidedness. (Cf. the “-isms”: mathematicism, historism, etc., when one science is regarded *as a* model for *The Science*.)

Classification of the sciences is the encyclopaedic task of *Philosophy* at the university. To be distinguished from the more or less historical or *organisational classification(s)* of science into faculties, sub-faculties, departments, sections and the *bibliographical classification(s)* of the sciences to be able to run the university library. The philosophical, organisational and bibliographical classifications should assist each other in reaching a more or less uniform system.

I am not a proponent of the idea of a “queen of the sciences” (*regina scientiarum*). During quite a long period of the Western thought Theology was regarded *as* the queen. I am not rejecting this to introduce only another queen, namely, Philosophy.

You may just as well call Philosophy the servant in this encyclopaedic task! (Remember that the idea of the queen/king belongs to the sphere of the state and that of chess and not to that of science).

2.2.2 *Philosophy gives illumination*

Every science must take its starting-point in certain philosophical presuppositions. No science can do without religious and philosophical assumptions (Cf. 2.1.3 where we stressed that every scientist encounters so-called last or fundamental questions, where he accepts the answer of a certain philosophy or combination of philosophies).

The foundation of a house is qualified by the special structure of the house, but it does not depend on the house. On the contrary, the house can only

exist in dependence upon its foundation which has to provide the house with its basic security. No science (worthy to be called science) can exist without a basis in philosophy.

Philosophy may be defined as the scientific counterpart of a world and *life view*; just as the latter is total in its outlook, the area of philosophy also includes all of cosmic existence. All the other special sciences limit their field of research to a particular segment of reality. Just as the special segment of reality studied in some special science is related integrally to all of reality, so each science is related to Philosophy.

The illuminating function of philosophy is that it can reveal to the different sciences their philosophical presuppositions, and show how different fundamental philosophical assumptions influenced the results of the scientific endeavour.

This is a very important function of Philosophy because the special sciences are not always aware of their philosophical *pre-supposita* and the decisive influence thereof. Philosophy will help to evaluate the systems and schools you encounter in the special sciences.

It will not be surprising if a scientist does not like philosophical reflection on the basis of his science which force him to account for the pre-suppositions out of which he practises his science. But he should do it if he does not want to be unmasked as an uncritical and, therefore, bad philosopher or chance-philosopher.

2.2.3 Philosophy gives penetration

As the scientific counterpart of a life and world view Philosophy will be able to penetrate into the roots of the contemporary crisis of the modern university because this crisis forms only part of the crisis of the whole Western civilization.

2.2.4 Philosophy gives direction

Our intellectual and spiritual wilderness of today cries out for direction. Nowhere does its urgency impinge more insistently than in the field of scholarly pursuits. We want perspective at the university because without perspective no man and no community can live.

The correct Philosophy, a Philosophy taking seriously the device “in lumine Tuo

videbimus lumen”, in other words, a Philosophy which accepts in obedience a Light to show us the way through (the dark) cosmos which is not our own sinful human light, will be able to give direction to a university which is also willing to be obedient to this Light. (*Every* science should study its field of investigation in the light of the Word of God, and not only Theology or Philosophy).

2.3 Philosophy counteracts

2.3.1 Specialism

This is only the negative part of what we have already argued in the first point, namely, that Philosophy promotes the coherence of the sciences.

Philosophy is fitted and needed to counteract the evil intellectual and moral influences of specialism (N.B. not specialization). We are narrow by nature, and we require to have our narrowness guarded against, corrected, not confirmed and intensified. Different minds have different natural attitudes. These attitudes find their appropriate spheres of exercise in special studies and special departments of practical life. A man with a flair for languages may have no turning to mathematics, etc. Individuals will have it that their excellences are the only excellences — the pursuits which they prefer to those which all men ought to prefer. The poet looks down on the man of business *as a* creature of low and grovelling habits, and the latter in turn, casts a sarcastic glance towards his aerial friend, with the suspicion that he must find his castles in the air — even by moonlight — very poor places to live in!

The so-called *beta* faculties (natural sciences) say of the *alpha* faculties (arts, etc.) that they only play with words, they are slaves of words (like a drunkard the slave of his drink) with which they look at the age-old problems again and again. Their voluminous dissertations in beautiful language written on such topics as “Being” and “Nothingness” are only compilations of what has been said since the time of Plato!

The people of *alpha* faculties, on the other hand, have not a good word for the *beta men*. They are dry, barren men of numbers, materialists, experiment registrars, a-romantic, a-historic and un-emotional immature beings who write thinnish dissertations in a secret language, in bad English, about irrelevant subjects.

Sectarianism (just as imperialism) in science is unlovely and baneful in its consequences.

Philosophy, as we have said, in the first point (“Promotes coherence”) will afford the most important guidance in education in science because it can exhibit the sciences in their true natures and relationships (coherence).

The truths which lie *between* the sciences are as real and have equal claims to attention as the truths *within* the sciences. If the relations between the facts (of a specific science) are important how should the relations between the sciences not be of extreme interest and value?

2.3.2 *Philosophy counteracts pragmatism*

The modern society demands from the university *as* quickly as possible the results (students) which will work in practice. They must know the *how* (things work) and not bother themselves or the community with the abstract *what* questions.

In this way the university becomes a top level school of preparation for a profession only, a first rate trade (technical) school, or a combination of such schools, a drive-in university. The tendency today of the university to disintegrate into a multiversity is very strong. This is so especially in the USA with its dominant pragmatistic spirit — *as long as something works, it is all right*. Philosophy, *as* the scientific search for and contribution to wisdom, is perhaps the best suited to rescue the university *as an* institution for scientific investigation and research too, and not only a preparation centre for a profession.

Science, truth and wisdom *as such* have value, and not only their application in practice.

2.3.3 *Philosophy counteracts the declining cultural level*

The university always has been a centre of culture. The latest growth of the modern universities, the specialization and other tendencies at the university give it more or less the image of a factory, and not a cultural centre. The task of the university in training wise men of culture (Cf. Van Riessen: *The university and its basis*) is forgotten. According to its nature (described above), Philosophy is equipped to be a great aid in this task of cultural forming.

3. CURRENT VIEWS ON PHILOSOPHY

After this positive elaboration on the task of Philosophy at the university it may be worthwhile to confront ourselves with some of the current views on the value of Philosophy.

Usually Philosophy is not taken seriously at the university. This can be seen from the various jocular definitions of philosophy:

“The science to which ignorance goes to learn its knowledge, and knowledge to learn its ignorance. On which all men agree that it is the key but no two upon how it is to be put into the lock”. (De Morgan).

“She is queen in exile, having lost her *entourage* but not her regal demeanor, hoping that someday her prodigal servants will return disillusioned with themselves”, or “philosophy defines all else; but cannot itself be defined”. (Hegel).

The university is an educational centre. Education ought to be described as the exercise of formative power over the development of a person’s life; it is leading someone to a certain goal according to certain norms; guidance along certain lines; it is building up (edification) a lasting habit of thought and if vision — not a shard of job training or a piece of “smart thinking”. In this cultural forming Philosophy is indispensable.

Usually Philosophy is regarded as:

- difficult
- impractical
- useless
- confusing, and even
- dangerous.

3.1 Philosophy is difficult

Philosophy is difficult because in the *History of Philosophy* you have to try and follow the complicated ideas of a lot of men with great intellect. You have to trace the development of Western thought for more than 2 500 years!

In *Systematic Philosophy* you have to make a study, not of one aspect of reality, as in the special sciences, but of the whole of reality in its differentiation and coherence.

We may say that Philosophy, as a general science, is concerned with the totality of all the aspects of created reality, and aims to give a theoretical insight into the whole coherence of our temporal world. As such, Philosophy is involved in the

fundamental questions of every special science.

The teaching of Philosophy should thus help you in the fulfilment of your more specialized tasks, equip you to evaluate the systems or ideas which you encounter in your studies, and enable you to form a proper view of the place of your particular studies in the total framework of the theoretical enterprise at the university.

Philosophy might be difficult, but he who accepts the challenge will find it worthwhile.

3.2 Philosophy is impractical, theory only

People think philosophers are always absent-minded, dwelling in the clouds and that they seem to lack the know-how of practical life. Many famous philosophers even forget to get married!

There is a story of three philosophers who were walking and talking on a railway station platform. When the station master announced the departure of the train, the three men had to run to catch the train, but only two of them succeeded – just in the nick of time. “Sorry, that you missed the train”, said the station master to the third man. “That’s not so bad”, he replied, “it is rather a pity for my two friends; they came to see me off”.

Philosophical discussions can easily be dismissed to the realm of theory which has no intrinsic connections with practical situations and daily routine.

I should make the remark here that our Philosophy (theoretical explication of our world and life view) is not isolated from our walk of life, but is a part of it. Our walk is closely bound to a world and life view and to philosophy, since the serious walker looks about him and orientates himself as he goes. He knows both his destination and the various stages of his journey as he reaches them.

It might be helpful to consider that theoretical activity is not so much *different* from those activities commonly called practical, *as* it is *another kind* of practical activity. The difference between the professor of medicine and the medical doctor is not that the one is a theorist and the other a practitioner, but rather that it is the practice of the former to investigate certain aspects of man, and to impart the results of these investigations to the students who wish to become doctors, whereas it is the practice of the latter to use the knowledge thus acquired to cure people in whom these aspects appear to be malfunctioning.. The activities of

both are very practical, even though one is and the other is not, theoretical. Theory is not opposed to practice, but the impractical to the practical.

As with every science, Philosophy is of a theoretical, but not impractical, nature.

3.3 Philosophy is useless

Because you will not find two philosophers who are in full agreement with each other, Philosophy is called useless. A Philosopher is by definition, somebody who thinks differently about a subject!

Moreover, after more than 2 500 years of thought the philosophers are still busy with the same old problems, which they can never hope to solve definitely. How different from, for instance, the natural sciences. They are steadily and continuously advancing and are achieving better and better results. And what a harmony between the scientists.

Philosophers, as Dagobert D. Runes defined them, are amazed at what most people take for granted. But what is the practical use of all the critique of the philosophers?

It also depends, to a great deal, on which philosophy you take as your point of vantage. I will try to show you that my philosophical standpoint is not useless. It will give you a firm basis, a solid ground.

It will help you to distinguish and also see the coherence, the unity of life, to be alert and watchful, equipped for your life's task.

In course, I will only be able to provide a few signposts, guidelines, a frame of reference for our further study. Here and there pitfalls are marked, distinctions are made, you are reminded of fundamentals, which should assist you during the rest of your study, when the bulk of the work has to be done. I want to give you a map to oversee the whole so that you do not get lost in details.

3.4 Philosophy is confusing

“Philosophers and opossums have the habit of looking occasionally at the world upside down. It is a surprizing experience”. (D.D. Runes: *Dictionary of Thought*). Elsewhere: “Philosophy can never be defined because it is the search for the

indefinable”, and “Philosophy is the Cinderella of sciences; she does not even possess her own definition”.

Our present situation is confusing enough. Why should I study a science (Philosophy) which enlarges my confusion and uncertainty?

We want perspective, insight, how to “place” things, to see what is the root and what the branches, who we are, and what we are doing.

Without perspective no man and no community can live. Especially in Philosophy, where you have to study the whole of reality in differentiation and coherence, a perspective is needed.

We require in Philosophy (as everywhere else) a perspective that is not our own, a light to show us the way through the cosmos. Nowhere in creation is there one single place where we can come to rest, nowhere in our world is there a source of dependable light. We will have to look for a perspective beyond, outside of ourselves, above creation. Every possible ground we may test in creation will give way. We could expect the only meaningful and trustworthy light for our Philosophy to come from the Father of Lights, our Creator, who revealed Himself to us in his Word, the Bible.

I am very much convinced that everything in the world of learning depends on the *point of departure* of one’s thought, upon your *standpoint*. Your standpoint as the central point is not of a theoretical, but of a pre-theoretical nature. It is religious in character.

After the fall into sin God asked Adam: “Where art thou? “ It means that God did not find man in the place in which He had put him in creation. This is the religious meaning of “place”. After the fall man no longer had the correct standpoint to oversee the whole of reality and the philosopher became a man in a dark room looking for a black cat which does not exist!

The redemption in Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, however, made it possible to get the correct starting-point back again. Christians, by the grace of God, are the blessed possessors of it. Men who have discovered such pure gold can never belong to a silent generation while the world cries out its need for a directing principle, in the field of Philosophy *as well*.

3.5 Philosophy is dangerous

Philosophy is only once mentioned in the Bible, namely, by Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians, and then only to warn his readers not to be carried away by it. It is important, however, to notice that it is a *certain kind* of philosophy against which he warns us. A new English translation of Colossians 2:8 reads: “Be on your guard; do not let your minds be captured by hallow and delusive speculations (Philosophy), based on traditions of man made teaching and centered on the elemental spirits of the world and not on Christ.”

I would like to introduce you to a scripturally directed Philosophy that would not be confusing or dangerous.

It would be a pure illusion if I should imagine that I could convince you in a purely theoretic way that my starting point in itself is true. For in this question we are concerned with my religious convictions, which are not capable of theoretic discussion. Here I can adduce only an absolute standard of truth offered in Revelation. The convincing power of the Word of God is not that of theoretic demonstration.

The implication of my choice of standpoint is not that I will not be able to bring up any appreciation for the work done by philosophers who do not believe in the God of the Bible. The study of the history of Philosophy is a very important part of Philosophy because it enriches your own view, it enables you to see the problems more clearly.

The implication of my starting point in Philosophy is in the second place not that I will penalize any student who has other convictions. On the contrary, it will make the discussions even more interesting!

The implication of my starting point is that you know who you have in front of you. A man who humbly wants to start his scholarly enterprise in the light of the Word of God. I do not want to indoctrinate you but I want to be honest with you. Nobody can philosophise without a pre-theoretical religious commitment, but some people don't want to believe it or prefer to let you remain in the dark about it. I believe that the Word of God is a light not only for this or that nation, but for all nations. Unlike the history of Philosophy you study it is not a Western product. I hope that the Philosophy I will try to build up on this universal basis will also be of

significance for you.

It is impossible to educate people without mentioning one's own standpoint, since education means to give actual direction to the development of a person's life, to lead him toward a particular goal according to certain norms.

Perhaps you will not be able to do much with Philosophy. I hope that scripturally directed philosophy will do much to you!

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, C. *Philosophy and Christian Faith*. London, Tyndale Press, 1969.
- De Jongste, H. De religieus-didactische benadering van de student voor de visie van de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee. *Philosophia Reformata*, 22:164-175, 1957.
- Du Plessis, P.G.W. Beginvrae en antwoorde in die Wysbegeerte. *Perspektief*, 9(4) en 10(1): 58-73, March 1971.
- De Nut van de Wijsbegeerte. *Correspondentiebladen*, 31:25-27, May 1967.
- Louet-Feisser, J.J. Wetenschap in toga. Vakspecialisme en wijsgerige eenheid in de toekomstige universiteit. Utrecht, A. Oosthoek, 1962. (Reprint 1970/'71 in series Christeliljk Perspectief with new title.)
- Loutt-Feisser, J.J. Student in wijsbegeerte. Een perspectief op de interfacultaire functie van de filosofie in de universiteit. Assen, Van Gorcum, 1969.
- Popma, KJ. Het nut der wijsbegeerte. *Correspondentiebladen*, 14(1): 5-7 May, 1950.
- Spier, J.M. :Wijsbegeerte en vakwetenschap. (*In: Wijsbegeerte en levenspraktijk*. Kampen, Kok, 1948. p 213-233).
- Strauss, D.F.M. Wijsbegeerte en vakwetenskap. *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap*, 3(1): 7-19, 1967.
- Strauss, D.F.M. Wysgerige grondprobleme in die taalwetenskap. 'n Inleidende studie. Bloemfontein, SACUM, 1967.
- Strauss, D.F.M. Die samehang van wysbegeerte en vakwetenskap (3 vols). Bloemfontein, M.A.-Thesis, 1969.
- Taljaard, J.A.L. Die plek van die wysgeer binne die struktuur van ons tegnologiese eeu. *Perspektief*, 6(1): 1-6, June 1967.
- Taljaard, J.A.L. The age of the manager and the task of the philosopher. *Perspektief*, 9(4) en 10(1): 74-78, March 1971.
- Unesco: The teaching of philosophy, and international enquiry of Unesco. Unesco, 1953.
- Van Riessen, H. Uit en voor de praktijk. *Correspondentiebladen*, 15:1-5 Dec. 1951.
- Van Riessen, H. *Filosofie en wysheid*. Delft, Waltman, 1962.
- Van Riessen, H. The goal of philosophy (*In: Christian Perspectives* 1962, p. 73-131. Ontario, The Guardian Pub. Co., 1962).
- Van Riessen, H. Colleges in de Wijsbegeerte. Wat, waar, waarom, wie, hoe, wanneer? *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte en Psychologie*,

165

57(2): 105-119, 1965.

Van Riessen, H. Wat is Wijsbegeerte? *Bulletin van die Suid-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir die Bevordering van Christelike Wetenskap*, no. 11: 167-190, Nov. 1967.