

## PHILOSOPHY AS WONDERMENT

Joyously, so long ago,  
My eager mind did strive  
To study and discover  
Nature in her works alive:  
She, the everlasting Oneness  
In the manyness divined.  
Big minuteness, tiny bigness,  
All according to its kind,  
Ever changing, ever constant  
Near and far, far and near,  
Shaping and reshaping . . .  
Why but to wonder am I here!

J.W. von Goethe - Parabase.

Goethe gives evidence in this poem of a true natural scientific method of research. But philosophy too takes its start from wonderment. One must be able to enquire out of wonderment. He who already knows everything does not need philosophy, just as little as he who sleeps through life. However, he who experiences something in life, even the smallest something, as a mystery, is inherently a philosopher. To be able to solve a riddle, one needs wonder. One wonders when one does *not* know something, when one has the courage to be interested and to admit to oneself: 'I don't know.' Really good questions spring from wonderment. What one *knows*, or an answer to a question, prompts not wonderment but satisfaction or gratitude.

Questioning arises from wondering, and one must be able to 'forget' what one already knows: Firstly, one must be able to forget the content of what one knows, because otherwise, this content would influence one's questioning

and thereby distort the question that arises. Secondly, in true questioning one must put aside the attitude of one who knows, because this knowing attitude would darken the light which the question in its entire scope and all its aspects causes to appear. However, one may keep that which one has *become* through learning, cognition, and knowing. Through the act of knowing, one is a human being in the process of becoming. Before I had started my medical studies, I was a completely different person from who I was after I finished my medical studies. Of course I changed in that period because of the life lessons I experienced, but also through the knowledge I gained. And when now, in philosophising, I can leave all my knowledge out of consideration and at the same time still be able to realize that all my knowing is not yet wisdom, then I can understand *myself* as someone who is in the process of becoming when I am philosophising. Yes, this person who *I am* is the starting point for asking in wonderment.

Fear of the unknown, of the not yet known, of the 'I do not know it (yet)' on the one hand, and the self-satisfaction of 'I already know that', through what is familiar, what is understood on the other hand, are the two enemies of wonder. These two strive against any questioning.

But can one ask capriciously? Can one start asking questions at any point one pleases? Can one ask: what is the human being, what is thinking, what is being, what is logic, etc.? Are answers at all *possible* here?

Or is there a prior question, a question which really can only be posed first? Is it possible to find this first question and indeed, in such a way that the answer to it will organically call up a new question?

Philosophy is not a game of chess, in which at the beginning, all the concepts are already in a certain order. The first chess move in a certain sense determines the whole game. Every move defines the course of the game more strictly, until a checkmate ends the process.

At the beginning of philosophising, no fixed position of concepts can already serve as a starting point; inwardly, one must hold oneself quite impartially without being a fool. For it would be foolishness if one were not to discover a *specific* question, if one wanted to remain in one's impartiality. The first question I have found determines the course of my philosophy. If I can choose my first question freely without any kind of inner necessity through lawfulness in thinking itself, then my question does not well up from wonderment, but from partiality, subjective partiality. Through my inclination I choose a first question from various possible questions and I *call* this question the first question.

However, If I leave all my opinions, preferences, and knowledge out of consideration, if I only observe the riddle of where to start in my questioning, then a question becomes visible which lies even before the first question, namely: with which question does a philosophy begin in wonderment?

## THE ART OF ASKING

‘Thus it happened because of the sin  
that You have loaded upon Yourself,  
that thou did not ask for the lance and  
the Grail  
and because of that, many other bad  
things  
have happened to You.’

*Parsival – Chrestien de Troyes.*

Before we can give this first question a concrete content, we should submit the questioning itself to examination. In this prologue we do not yet apply an exact technique of logical thinking, but we develop free, naïve observation. When I inwardly observe myself as a human being questioning, I can know directly from this observation, from this inner perceiving, that this questioning on my part signifies that I am in a state of unknowing. This can be a general questioning. I can be conscious that a human being has a limited knowledge, that he does *not* know many things, that he is actually always unsatisfied because of that, and that as a human being, he is always striving. He is always striving for a more complete knowledge.

I have a concrete question on the other hand, when I become aware that my knowing is incomplete, when I confirm that I lack specific knowledge. I inwardly clothe this lack in words and experience the yearning to find an answer.

Questioning flows from imperfection. The experience of a question for which no answer has yet been found stimulates our awareness of our human inadequacy. Man does not like feeling inadequate, and this is why most questioning goes on unconsciously.

Through their upbringing and through our own actions, children are driven out of the paradise of not-knowing as soon as possible. We try to make them stuff themselves earlier and earlier from the tree of knowledge. They get so much information - at an age in which questioning is a life need - that nothing is left over for them to ask about; there is nothing for them to wish for. And when a child is still not satisfied by all the knowledge it gets, when there is no end to its questions and it is highly intelligent then it has to jump a class or two at school. For questions *must* certainly be answered, and preferably before they are even asked.

If modern education achieves one sure result, it is to wean the child away from its natural inclination to question. The child develops a passive, non-critical mode of learning and is taught to be a student who can complete a course of study at university within a few years, quickly, efficiently, based almost entirely on factual knowledge: much knowledge but few questions.

But *life* is also our teacher and life presents riddles to every human being. Love and suffering do not bring man scientific questions but life questions and in doing so, they protect the human capacity to question. However, this book does not concern itself with this questioning attitude to life, but with how to regain a questioning attitude in *science*.

When we therefore begin to search for a first question,