

PHILOSOPHY

English-speaking countries. Chapters of the literature of freedom are written in every tongue and inscribed in the hearts of men of every nation. The rapid shrinking of the world has spread the infection wide and brought a growing conviction that there can be no lasting freedom anywhere without freedom everywhere.

In a world which is now, for better or for worse, one world, not only in theory and before God, but in the everyday practical experience of its human inhabitants, we have to-day to decide which it shall be, the better or the worse. The worse way is to subject the whole of that world to one of its parts—to whatever part may be bold and powerful enough to achieve and hold the mastery. The better way is to create a federation of the whole which is stronger than any of the parts, and which may preserve peace and promote co-operation among them.

The rise of the Nazi and Axis power has forced this issue. It drives us to choose between a worse evil and a better good than mankind has ever known before. We must be visionary and utopian if we are not to be unprecedentedly base; in order to be realistic we must be loftily idealistic.

But this ideal has long been working in us. It is humanism, Christianity, liberalism, and democracy, carried to their logical conclusions. It means having the courage of our humane, Christian, liberal, and democratic convictions. It means attending to the unfinished business which was long ago included in our agenda. Most certainly we have a right to call it ours.

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

May 28, 1942.

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

DEAR SIR,

Even after his death much has been written about Henri Bergson and his Philosophy. But little appears to have been said about his "profound interest," as he himself repeatedly put it, in Indian thought. Having had the privilege and pleasure of meeting him in Paris in 1937, I wish to say a few words now on what transpired then. Here I may be permitted to state that I happened to refer to some points bearing on this subject in a short speech at the Philosophical Association of the University of Mysore, in January 1942, at a meeting held in honour of this great philosopher's memory. I am now writing out what I said on that occasion, as I am growing very old, and I fear I may by postponing fail to discharge a debt I owe to men like him, whom I met in my European tours, and whose minds were exceptionally free from all prejudices.

When I called on him he was ill and the attendant (probably the medical) hinted to me that the interview should not be prolonged beyond ten or fifteen minutes. But the patient would not permit me to take leave even after an hour and a quarter. Such was his love of matters philosophical even in his illness.

Having been asked about the peculiarities of Indian thought, I commenced with a reference to the *ONE* and *only* distinguishing feature of Philosophy in India. The West, I said, mistook India's Religions, Scholasticisms, Mysticisms, or Speculations for her Philosophy. In Europe and America multiplicity and variety characterize even what is called Philosophy. From Thales down to the present day, every thinker, be he philosophic, be he religious and the like, gives his own interpretation of life or existence, criticizing every other. Many, I added, had already disagreed with Bergson himself. This must go on to the end of time. And the evil *social* consequences of such continued multiplication of differences are quite patent.

The Indian thinkers say that *endless* antagonisms, wranglings, or wanderings in mazes of this kind are a characteristic of religion, scholasticism, mysticism, speculation and the like. And they ask, "Is there no knowledge revealing truth *common, universal, and harmonizing*?" Of what value is *Philosophy* if there be no certainty attached to its solutions? Truth common or universal, they say, must be the quest of *Philosophy*. What are called "truths" could only be degrees of or approximations to "Truth" *as such*.

CORRESPONDENCE

Everywhere the man of religion and the like holds that whatever he *likes or delights in, or whatever he thinks he knows or intuitively, is truth*. But history has shown how such beliefs have led not only to dis-harmony but also to inhuman cruelties and murders. Philosophy in India, therefore, long ago set its heart and mind upon seeking truth *universal*. It strives to attain this goal in *this* world, before death claims its due. It holds that the satisfactions of religions, scholasticisms, mysticisms, and speculations are just as good as the satisfactions derived from Art. They appeal to and vary with *individuals*. Indian Philosophy asks, "Can nothing bring about the 'good' and the 'comfort' of *all* humanity or all that exists, here, in *this* world?" Its answer is, "Truth by its nature is *common* and *universal*, and productive of *universal* good. And it is attainable in *this* world." Again, what do we mean when we make statements like these: "This is true" or "This is not true"? They convey no meaning unless we know what truth signifies. Unless we know what truth is, how could we say that "intuition," if not intellect, reveals truth?

He who starts without enquiring into the meaning of Truth, may be a religionist, a scholastic, a mystic, or a speculationist of the highest order, and be revered and followed by millions that know not what Truth is or even to ask what Truth is. But in India one cannot be considered a philosopher, whatever else he may be, unless he *commences* with a clear statement of the meaning of Truth, a clear knowledge of this Pole Star. In this country one who is eager to make voyages on the sea of philosophical knowledge, must equip himself with a clear definition of Truth. Otherwise, one will be like unto a mariner without a compass.

Here, Professor Bergson enquired as to how such Truth could be known or attained. I then gave a brief account of the method with its steps of which the first is "the Elimination of self" or "Depersonalization" the value of which every scientist of the West fully recognizes. The next step is the consideration of the *totality* of the available facts of experience, not fractions of them or the experiences of individuals only. European and American scientists though alive to the importance of this step, have as yet no idea of the co-ordination of the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep even of individuals. Lastly, I went on to the third condition or step. But even before I tried to state it, Professor Bergson *himself* referred to it, viz. the need for purging the mind of all its prejudices and pre-conceptions so as to secure what in India is termed "child-like purity and simplicity."

In these respects Western science is in perfect accord with the philosophic attitude of India, I said. And I added that Professor Bergson had rendered the greatest service to the cause of truth in making clearer the inseparable connection of Science with Philosophy, though Science goes only a part of the way. But as in Science, truth *verified* is truth for all, so in Indian Philosophy truth *verified* is truth for all, which alone can bring about the *good of all*. If there is but one truth (*universal*)—not truths—there can be but **ONE PHILOSOPHY** for the whole world.

Here the great philosopher of Europe made a remark which I consider most valuable, and which I can never forget. He said, "Yes, Philosophy is nowadays only a sport."

And I stopped talking though he was not for my winding up my Indian shop. He said that he was "profoundly interested" in Philosophy as pursued in India. This he stated in writing also subsequently. He repeated a number of times his desire that I should stay in Paris for some time and acquaint the Western thinkers with this peculiarity of Philosophy of India. This was not all. Even after I left Europe he made his friends write to me to find out when I would visit Europe again as he himself was growing old. Had he been in vigorous health, I might have succeeded in inducing him to pay a visit to India. Such a proposal had been actually made to him, at the request of His late Highness, the Maharaja of Mysore.

To sum up: He appeared to agree *fully* with the Indian thinkers in the view that the first thing to do in "Philosophy" is to make the meaning of Truth clear, and then to show whether one's interpretations of life or existence harmonize with it or not. If Truth be the same to all, there can be but one *Philosophy* in the world.

"Satyam Ayatanam" (Truth is the *resting* place).

"Sarva satwa sukho hitah" (Which promotes the happiness and good of *all*).

V. SUBRAHMANYA IYER.

VANI VILAS MOHALLA, MYSORE, INDIA,

May 6, 1942.