

"Philosophy begins in wonder. And at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains" (MTr: 168).

Philosophy begins in wonder in the sense that it is *oriented* by the existential question about the ultimate meaning of human existence. Philosophy as such is *constituted*, however, not by this *vital* question but by a corresponding *theoretical* question—namely, about the meaning and the validity of any and all answers to the existential question, implicit as well as explicit.

Because the validity of any such answer can be determined only by first determining what it really means, philosophy's *cura prior* is analysis and interpretation of meaning. But philosophy's concern with meaning is distinctive. Unlike other humanities whose concern is, in one way or another, with the "surface meaning" of the expressions they analyze and interpret, its concern is not with that, or even with the relatively deeper meaning constituted by grammatical rules, but rather with the "deep meaning," and so with the logical *kind(s)* of meaning, constituted by their presuppositions and necessary conditions of possibility.

But philosophy's primary concern with analyzing and interpreting meaning in its different kinds is not its only concern. Its other concern—its *cura posterior*, if you will—is with validating, not, to be sure, all claims to validity, but any such as is expressed or implied by any answer to the existential question. Essential to its validating these claims is the purely formal, transcendental metaphysics and ethicsⁱⁿ which its primary work as analysis and interpretation of meaning naturally ^{includes} ~~culminates~~. Presupposed by any meaning and any kind of meaning are certain necessary conditions of possibility: of the possibility of human existence as the being that is capable both of expressing all kinds of meaning and of understanding and interpreting all such expressions; and of the possibility of anything whatsoever as the being that any kind of meaning must—directly or indirectly—be about. Corresponding to—indeed, necessarily implied by—the metaphysics explicating these necessary conditions of possibility is a purely formal, transcendental ethics, in the sense of completely general

principles concerning both how any existent, or any other being endowed with understanding and moral freedom, is to act and what she, he, or it is to do. Since any answer to the existential question perforce implies both a metaphysics and an ethics in this sense, whether or not it is a valid answer to the question depends on whether or not its implied metaphysics and ethics are in substantial agreement with the metaphysics and ethics necessarily implied by any meaning and any kind of meaning, such as philosophy, in its first aspect as analysis and interpretation, has the task of making explicit. In its second aspect, then, as existential reflection on the validity of any and all answers to the existential question, philosophy has the task of determining the fact, or the extent, of such dependence, i.e., such substantial agreement.

Yet even when philosophic thought—existential as well as analytic—has done its best, the wonder in which philosophy begins remains. It remains because, although philosophy is indeed *oriented* by the existential question, it is not *constituted* thereby, nor does or can it ever directly answer this question. Being a matter of critical reflection and proper theory, as distinct from self-understanding and life-praxis, philosophy, even in its existential aspect, is always only *indirectly* addressed to the vital question by which it is oriented. In this sense, or for this reason, the wonder in which philosophy begins, as expressed by the existential question, "How shall I understand myself and lead my life here and now?" remains even at the end—and that not only when philosophy has, in one way or another, fallen short, but even when (if ever!) philosophy has done its very best. For the existential question cannot be answered theoretically, by howsoever adequate a theory, but only existentially, by how I understand myself and lead my life here and now as an individual human being.