THE CREATIVE MIND

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1946 PHILOSOPHICAL LIBRARY NEW YORK
My first words are words of thanks to the University of Oxford for the great honor she has done me in inviting me to address her. I have always thought of Oxford as one of the few sanctuaries where, reverently maintained, passed on by each generation to the next, the warmth and radiance of ancient thought are preserved. But I also know that this attachment to antiquity does not prevent your University from being very modern and very much alive. More especially in what concerns philosophy, am I struck to see with what profundity and what originality the ancient philosophers are studied here (did not one of your most eminent masters only recently touch up the interpretation of the Platonic theory of Ideas on its essential points?); and I am also struck, on the other hand, by the fact that Oxford is in the vanguard of the philosophical movement with the two extreme conceptions of the nature of truth: integral rationalism and pragmatism. This alliance of past and present is fruitful in all fields, nowhere more so than in philosophy. To be sure, we have something new to do, and perhaps the moment has come to be fully alive to it; but the fact that it is new does not mean that it must be revolutionary. Let us rather study the ancients, become imbued with their spirit and try to do, as far as possible, what they themselves would be doing were they living among us. Endowed with our knowledge (I do not refer so much to our mathematics and physics, which would perhaps not radically alter
their way of thinking, but especially our biology and psychology), they would arrive at very different results from those they obtained. That is what particularly strikes me in the problem I have undertaken to deal with here, that of change.

I chose it, because I consider it fundamental, and because I believe that if one were convinced of the reality of change and if one made an effort to grasp it, everything would become simplified, philosophical difficulties, considered insurmountable, would fall away. Not only would philosophy gain by it, but our everyday life--I mean the impression things make upon us and the reaction of our intelligence, our sensibility and our will upon things--would perhaps be transformed and, as it were, transfigured. The point is that usually we look at change but we do not see it. We speak of change, but we do not think about it. We say that change exists, that everything changes, that change is the very law of things: yes, we say it and we repeat it; but those are only words, and we reason and philosophise as though change did not exist. In order to think change and see it, there is a whole veil of prejudices to brush aside, some of them artificial, created by philosophical speculation, the others natural to common sense. I believe we shall end by coming to an agreement about them, and shall thus form a philosophy in which everyone will collaborate, upon which everyone will be able to agree. That is why I should like to fix two or three points upon which it seems to me agreement has already been reached; it will gradually be extended to the rest of them. The first lecture therefore will deal less with change itself than with the general characteristics of a philosophy attached to the intuition of change.
Here, first of all, is a point upon which every one will agree. If the senses and the consciousness had an unlimited scope, if in the double direction of matter and mind the faculty of perceiving was indefinite, one would not need to conceive any more than to reason. Conceiving is a make-shift when perception is not granted us, and reasoning is done in order to fill up the gaps of perception or to extend its scope. I do not deny the utility of abstract and general ideas,--any more than I question the value of bank-notes. But just as the note is only a promise of gold, so a conception has value only through the eventual perceptions it represents. It is not, of course, merely a question of the perception of a thing, or a quality, or a state. One can conceive an order, a harmony, and more generally a truth, which then becomes a reality. I say that we agree on this point. Everyone could see for himself, in fact, that the most ingeniously assembled conceptions and the mostlearnedly constructed reasonings collapse like a house of cards the moment the fact--a single fact really seen--collides with these conceptions and these reasonings. There is not a single metaphysician, moreover, not one theologian, who is not ready to affirm that a perfect being is one who knows all things intuitively without having to go through reasoning, abstraction and generalisation. There is no difficulty therefore about the first point.

And there will not be any more about the second, which we come to now. The insufficiency of our faculties of perception--an insufficiency verified by our faculties of conception and reasoning--is what has given birth to philosophy. The history of doctrines attests it. The conceptions of the earliest Greek thinkers were certainly
very close to perception, since it was by the transformations of a sensible element like water, air or fire, that they completed the immediate sensation. But from the time the philosophers of the school of Elea, criticising the idea of transformation, had shown or thought they had shown the impossibility of keeping so close to the sense-data, philosophy started off along the road it has since travelled, the road leading to a "supra-sensible" world: one was to explain things henceforth with pure "ideas". It is true that for the ancient philosophers the intelligible world was situated outside and above the one our senses and consciousness perceive: our faculties of perception showed us only shadows projected in time and space by immutable and eternal Ideas. For the moderns, on the contrary, these essences are constitutive of sensible things themselves; they are veritable substances, of which phenomena are only the surface covering. But all of them, ancient and modern, are agreed in seeing in philosophy a substitution of the concept for the percept. They all appeal from the insufficiency of our senses and consciousness to the faculties of the mind no longer perceptive, I mean to the functions of abstraction, generalisation and reasoning.

On the second point we can therefore be agreed. I come then to the third, which, I imagine, will not occasion any discussion either.

If such is really the philosophical method, there is not, there cannot be a philosophy as there is a science; on the contrary there will always be as many different philosophies as there are original thinkers. How could it be otherwise? No matter how abstract a conception may be it always has its starting point in a perception. The
intellect combines and separates; it arranges, disarranges and co-ordinates; it does not create. It must have a matter, and this matter can only reach it through the senses or the consciousness. A philosophy which constructs or completes reality with pure ideas will therefore only be substituting for or adding to our concrete perceptions as a whole, some particular one of them it has elaborated, thinned down, refined and thereby converted into abstract and general idea. But there will always be something arbitrary in its choice of that privileged perception, for positive science has taken for itself all that is incontestably common to different things; or in other words \textit{quantity}, and all that remains for philosophy therefore is the domain of \textit{quality}, where everything is heterogeneous to everything else, and where a part will never represent the whole except in virtue of a contestable if not arbitrary decree. One can always oppose other decrees to this one. And many different philosophies will spring up, armed with different concepts. They will struggle indefinitely with one another.

Here, then, is the question which arises, and which I consider essential. Since any attempt at purely conceptual philosophy calls forth antagonistic efforts, and since, in the field of pure dialectics there is no system to which one cannot oppose another, should we remain in that field or, (without, of course, ceasing to exercise our faculties of conception and reasoning), ought we not rather return to perception, getting it to expand and extend? I was saying that it is the insufficiency of natural perception which has driven philosophers to complete perception by conception the latter having as its function to fill in the spaces between the data of the senses or of
consciousness and in that way to unify and systematize our knowledge of things. But the examination of doctrines shows us that the faculty of conceiving, as it advances in this work of integration, is forced to eliminate from the real a great number of qualitative differences, to extinguish in part our perceptions, and to weaken our concrete vision of the universe. For the very reason that each philosophy is led, willy-nilly, to proceed in this way, it gives rise to opposing philosophies, each of which picks up something of what the other has dropped. The method, therefore, goes contrary to the purpose: it should in theory extend and complete perception; it is obliged in fact to require that many perceptions stand aside so that some one of them may become representative of the others.--

But suppose that instead of trying to rise above our perception of things we were to plunge into it for the purpose of deepening and widening it. Suppose that we were to insert our will into it, and that this will, expanding, were to expand our vision of things. We should obtain this time a philosophy where nothing in the data of the senses or the consciousness would be sacrificed: no quality, no aspect of the real would be substituted for the rest ostensibly to explain it. But above all we should have a philogophy to which one could not oppose others, for it would have left nothing outside of itself that other doctrines could pick up; it would have taken everything. It would have taken every thing that is given, and even more, for the senses and consciousness, urged on by this philosophy to an exceptional effort, would have given it more than they furnish naturally. To the multiplicity of systems contending with one another, armed with different concepts, would succeed the unity of a doctrine cap-
able of reconciling all thinkers in the same perception—a perception which moreover would grow ever larger, thanks to the combined effort of philosophers in a common direction.

It will be said that this enlarging is impossible. How can one ask the eyes of the body, or those of the mind, to see more than they see? Our attention can increase precision, clarify and intensify; it cannot bring forth in the field of perception what was not there in the first place. That's the objection.—It is refuted in my opinion by experience. For hundreds of years, in fact, there have been men whose function has been precisely to see and to make us see what we do not naturally perceive. They are the artists.

What is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness? The poet and the novelist who express a mood certainly do not create it out of nothing; they would not be understood by us if we did not observe within ourselves, up to a certain point, what they say about others. As they speak, shades of emotion and thought appear to us which might long since have been brought out in us but which remained invisible; just like the photographic image which has not yet been plunged into the bath where it will be revealed. The poet is this revealing agent. But nowhere is the function of the artist shown as clearly as in that art which gives the most important place to imitation, I mean painting. The great painters are men who possess a certain vision of things which has or will become the vision of all men. A Corot, a Turner,—not to mention others,—have seen in nature many an aspect that we did not
notice. Shall it be said that they have not seen but created, that they have given us products of their imagination, that we adopt their inventions because we like them and that we get pleasure from looking at nature through the image the great painters, have traced for us? It is true to a certain extent; but, if it were only that, why should we say of certain works--those of the masters--that they are true? Where would the difference be between great art and pure fancy? If we reflect deeply upon what we feel as we look at a Turner or a Corot, we shall find that, if we accept them and admire them, it is because we had already perceived something of what they show us. But we had perceived without seeing. It was, for us, a brilliant and vanishing vision, lost in the crowd of those visions, equally brilliant and equally vanishing, which become overcast in our ordinary experience like "dissolving views" and which constitute, by their reciprocal interference, the pale and colourless vision of things that is habitually ours. The painter has isolated it; he has fixed it so well on the canvas that henceforth we shall not be able to help seeing in reality what he himself saw.

Art would suffice then to show us that an extension of the faculties of perceiving is possible. But how does this extension work?--Let us notice that the artist has always been considered an "idealistic". We mean by that that he is less preoccupied than ourselves with the positive and material side of life. He is, in the real sense of the word, "absent-minded." Why then, being detached from reality to a greater degree, does he manage to see in it more things? We should not understand why if the vision we ordinarily have of external objects and of ourselves were not a vision which we had been obliged to nar-
row and drain by our attachment to reality, our need for living and acting. As a matter of fact, it would be easy to show that the more we are preoccupied with living, the less we are inclined to contemplate, and that the necessities of action tend to limit the field of vision. I cannot go into a demonstration of this point; I am of the opinion that an entirely new light would illuminate many psychological and psycho-physiological questions if we recognised that distinct perception is merely cut, for the purposes of practical existence, out of a wider canvas. In psychology and elsewhere, we like to go from the part to the whole, and our customary system of explanation consists in reconstructing ideally our mental life with simple elements, then in supposing that the combination of these elements has really produced our mental life. If things happened this way, our perception would as a matter of fact be inextensible; it would consist of the assembling of certain specific materials, in a given quantity, and we should never find anything more in it than what had been put there in the first place.

But the facts, taken as they are, without any mental reservation about providing a mechanical explanation of the mind, suggest an entirely different interpretation. They show us, in normal psychological life, a constant effort of the mind to limit its horizon, to turn away from what it has a material interest in not seeing. Before philosophizing one must live; and life demands that we put on blinders, that we look neither to the right, nor to the left nor behind us, but straight ahead in the direction we have to go. Our knowledge, far from being made up of a gradual association of simple elements, is the effect of a sudden dissociation: from the
immensely vast field of our virtual knowledge, we have selected, in order to make it into actual knowledge, everything which concerns our action upon things; we have neglected the rest. The brain seems to have been constructed with a view to this work of selection. That could easily be shown by the way in which the memory works. Our past, as we shall see in our next lecture, is necessarily automatically preserved. It survives complete. But our practical interest is to thrust it aside, or at least to accept of it only what can more or less usefully illuminate and complete the situation in the present. The brain serves to bring about this choice: it actualizes the useful memories, it keeps in the lower strata of the consciousness those which are of no use. One could say as much for perception. The auxiliary of action, it isolates that part of reality as a whole that interests us; it shows us less the things themselves than the use we can make of them. It classifies, it labels them beforehand; we scarcely look at the object, it is enough for us to know to which category it belongs. But now and then, by a lucky accident, men arise whose senses or whose consciousness are less adherent to life. Nature has forgotten to attach their faculty of perceiving to their faculty of acting. When they look at a thing, they see it for itself, and not for themselves. They do not perceive simply with a view to action; they perceive in order to perceive, --for nothing, for the pleasure of doing so. In regard to a certain aspect of their nature, whether it be their consciousness or one of their senses, they are born detached; and according to whether this detachment is that of a certain particular sense, or of consciousness, they are painters or sculptors, musicians or poets. It is there-
fore a much more direct vision of reality that we find in the different arts; and it is because the artist is less intent on utilizing his perception that he perceives a greater number of things.

Well, what nature does from time to time, by distraction, for certain privileged individuals, could not philosophy on such a matter attempt, in another sense and another way, for everyone? Would not the role of philosophy under such circumstances be to lead us to a completer perception of reality by means of a certain displacement of our attention? It would be a question of turning this attention aside from the part of the universe which interests us from a practical viewpoint and turning it back toward what serves no practical purpose. This conversion of the attention would be philosophy itself.

At first glance it would seem that this has long since been done. More than one philosopher has in fact said that in order to philosophize he had to be detached, and that speculation was the reverse of action. We were speaking a few moments ago of the Greek philosophers: not one of them expressed the idea more forcefully than Plotinus. "All action," he said (and he even added "all fabrication") "weakens contemplation."

And, faithful to the spirit of Plato, he thought that the discovery of truth demanded a conversion of the mind, which breaks away from the appearances here below and attaches itself to the realities above: "Let us flee to our beloved homeland!"--But as you see, it was a question of "fleeing." More precisely, for Plato and for all those who understand metaphysics in that way, breaking away from life and converting one's at-
tention consisted in transporting oneself immediately into a world different from the one we inhabit, in developing other faculties of perception than the senses and consciousness. They did not believe that this education of the attention might most frequently consist in removing its blinders, in freeing it from the contraction that it is accustomed to by the demands of life. They were not of the opinion that the metaphysician, for at least half of his speculations, should continue to look at what every one looks at: no, he had always to turn toward something else. That is why they invariably call upon faculties of vision other than those we constantly exercise in the knowledge of the external world and of ourselves.

And precisely because he disputed the existence of these transcendent faculties, Kant believed metaphysics to be impossible. One of the most profound and important ideas in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is this: if metaphysics is possible, it is through a vision and not through a dialectic. Dialectics leads to contrary philosophies; it demonstrates the thesis as well as the antithesis of antinomies. Only a superior intuition (which Kant calls an "intellectual" intuition), that is, a perception of metaphysical reality, would enable metaphysics to be constituted. The most obvious result of the Kantian *Critique* is thus to show that one could only penetrate into the beyond by a vision, and that a doctrine has value in this domain only to the extent that it contains perception: take this perception, analyze it, recompose it, turn it round and round in all directions, cause it to undergo the most subtle operations of the highest intellectual chemistry, you will never get from your crucible anything more than you have put into it; as much vision as you have put into
it, just so much will you find; and reasoning will not have made you go one step beyond what you had perceived in the first place. That is what Kant brought out so clearly and that, it seems to me, is the greatest service he rendered to speculative philosophy. He definitively established that, if metaphysics is possible, it can be so only through an effort of intuition. --Only, having proved that intuition alone would be capable of giving us a metaphysics, he added: this intuition is impossible.

Why did he consider it impossible? Precisely because he pictured a vision of the kind--I mean a vision of reality "in itself "--that Plotinus had imagined, as those who have appealed to metaphysical intuition have imagined it. By that they all understood a faculty of knowing which would differ radically from consciousness as well as from the senses, which would even be orientated in the opposite direction. They have all believed that to break away from practical life was to turn one's back upon it.

Why did they believe that? Why did Kant, their adversary, share their mistake? How is it they one and all had this conception even if they drew opposite conclusions from it,--they constructing a metaphysics, and he declaring metaphysics impossible?

They believed it because they imagined that our senses and consciousness, as they function in everyday life, make us grasp movement directly. They believed that by our senses and consciousness, working as they usually work, we actually perceive the change which takes place in things and in ourselves. Then, as it is incontestable that in following the usual data of our senses and consciousness we arrive in the speculative order at insoluble contradictions, they concluded that contradiction was inher-
ent in change itself and that in order to avoid this contradiction one had to get out of the sphere of change and lift oneself above Time. Such is the position taken by the metaphysician as well as by those who, along with Kant, deny the possibility of metaphysics.

Metaphysics, as a matter of fact, was born of the arguments of Zeno of Elea on the subject of change and movement. It was Zeno who, by drawing attention to the absurdity of what he called movement and change, led the philosophers—Plato first and foremost—to seek the true and coherent reality in what does not change. And it is because Kant believed that our senses and consciousness are in fact exerted in a real Time, that is, in a Time which changes continuously, in a duration which endures; it is because, on the other hand, he took into account the relativity of the usual data of our senses and consciousness (a relativity which he laid down, furthermore, long before the transcendent conclusion of his endeavor that he considered metaphysics impossible without an entirely different kind of vision from that of the senses and the consciousness,--a vision, moreover, no trace of which he found in man.

But if we could prove that what was considered as movement and change by Zeno first, and then by metaphysicians in general, is neither change nor movement, that of change they retained what does not change, and of movement what does not move, that they took for an immediate and complete perception of movement and change a crystallization of this perception, a solidification with an eye to practice--and if we could show on the other hand, that what Kant took for time itself was a time which neither flows nor changes nor endures;--
then, in order to avoid such contradictions as those which Zeno pointed out and to separate our everyday knowledge from the relativity to which Kant considered it condemned, we should not have to get outside of time (we are already outside of it!), we should not have to free ourselves of change (we are already only too free of it!); on the contrary, what we should have to do is to grasp change and duration in their original mobility. Then we should not only see many difficulties drop away one by one, and more than one problem disappear; but through the extension and revivification of our faculty of perceiving, perhaps also (though for the moment it is not a question of rising to such heights) through a prolongation which privileged souls will give to intuition, we should re-establish continuity in our knowledge as a whole,—a continuity which would no longer be hypothetical and constructed, but experienced and lived. Is a work of this kind possible? That is what we shall seek to determine, at least as far as the knowledge of our surroundings is concerned, in our second lecture.

SECOND LECTURE

You gave me such sustained attention yesterday that you must not be surprised if I am tempted to take advantage of it today. I am going to ask you to make a strenuous effort to put aside some of the artificial schema we interpose unknowingly between reality and us. What is required is that we should break with certain habits of thinking and perceiving that have become natural to us. We must return to the direct perception of change and mobility. Here is an immediate result of this effort. We