

The Metaphysical Vocation of Philosophy

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“Je suis allé au marché aux oiseaux
Et j’ai acheté des oiseaux
Pour toi
mon amour
Je suis allé au marché aux fleurs
Et j’ai acheté des fleurs
Pour toi
mon amour
...
Et puis je suis allé au marché aux esclaves
Et je t’ai cherchée
Mais je ne t’ai pas trouvée
mon amour.”

– J. Prévert, *Pour toi mon amour*

Philosophy is love (or friendship, for friendship alone is purest love) of wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge nor is it merely knowledge in action or knowledge put into good use. Wisdom is not theory or praxis. It is availability for the call of the Absolute, which makes itself heard, in its transcendence in the immanence of man’s finitude and culpability. Only man is capable of philosophy because he is finite and culpable.

The love of wisdom is not *a fait accompli*. It is something to be done. It is an art. It is not a corpus of doctrine already done or a scientific theory. It is an activity, which consists precisely of

loving wisdom. Wisdom is not mere knowledge. Many would identify *sophia* with *phronesis*, but this view is too narrow. *Phronesis* is simply knowledge in action. It is merely prudence. It is measured action, founded upon science.

Sophia is foundational knowledge, knowledge that provides the grund or ground, the very earth which becomes a world or the liveable portion of the earth or the cosmos.

Philosophy is, first and foremost, a calling (*vocatio*), which is heard within the domain of *apophasis*, of *kénosis*, of emptiness in order to claim the plenitude, the fullness of living out of the mere availability or status (or *befindlichkeit*) of mere existence.¹

The title of this exploratory essay apparently demands a discussion about philosophy and metaphysics and their relations. This we will forgo. Instead, we will deal with specific questions, which in turn will transpose us directly into the heart of philosophy and metaphysics in itself. Thus, there will be an unveiling (*aletheia*), the return to the original name of philosophy which in turn is its return to its primordial calling or vocation.

Inquiry and Transcendence: The Question of Friendship

Inquiry is the starting point to the path of transcendence. Man must go forward from this cosmos in order to transform it into a world, a liveable space and time for him. Man must go forward

¹ The following words of J. Maritain are points for reflection, especially from the perspective of history of philosophy: "Let it be said right off that there are two fundamentally different ways of interpreting the word existentialism. One way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as implying and preserving essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and of intelligibility. This is what I consider to be authentic existentialism. The other way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as destroying or abolishing essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme defeat of the intellect and of intelligibility. This is what I consider to be apocryphal existentialism, the current kind which no longer signifies anything at all.' I should think so! For if you abolish essence, or that which esse posits, by that very act you abolish existence, or esse. Those two notions are correlative and inseparable. An existentialism of this sort is self-destroying", *Existence and the Existent*, translated by L. Galantiere and G.B. Phelan, (New York: Image Books, 1957), 13.

from finding himself in the state of existence (*befindlichkeit*) and start to live. His state, speaking a bit like Hegel,² has to be reversed. He has to go beyond the obvious, the apparent and let the vocation, the hidden essence of his very being, manifest.

Inquiry is an anthropological privilege of taking the bull of ontology by the horns and engage in the metaphysical faena, which is the task of listening and responding to the calling to love wisdom by being its friend.

The horns could and should wound us reminding us, with the pain of finitude and culpability that brings about man's inborn restlessness for something that transcends him (hence, metaphysical), that a philosopher should not always be successful. In fact, a philosopher was not born for success. Philosophy is not undertaken for success. At its best, it disappears into the sunset, when the owl of Minerva should not begin its flight. It is too late. Philosophy commences at dawn. The dove flies at dawn to herald a new aurora and disappears into the sunset to await the new sunrise with all those who keep vigil, though they may be at rest.

Too much success is dangerous. We should transcend our penchant for success with faithfulness. Faithfulness is always starting from groundness in a constant self-encounter which is called humility, from the humus or land, the starting point of metaphysics, of the path of transcendence. Faithfulness is starting to take flight, like a dove, on daybreak, amidst the floodwaters of existence to bring back, before dusk, the olive branch; the guarantee of life amidst the sea of violence, death and destruction from which new life is to shoot out.

Our groundedness and self-encounter in the cosmos, in the earth (the cosmos of life and groundedness) is ontological. We find ourselves (*befindlichkeit*). We are being-there (*dasein*). We are thrown (*geworfenheit*) towards death (*zum tode*). We have to reverse this as we are headed for a collision course with the possibility that ends all other possibilities: death.

² Cfr. G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. Ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg; Meiner, 1955).

A friend is an uninterested,³ unselfish and totally generous lover and fellow traveler. He does not seek his own gratification, his own pleasure, his own success. The good of the beloved is his own concern even to the point of sacrificing everything. He is one who journeys even beyond what is required of him by the other.

So to speak, a friend transcends everything: boundaries, divisions, interests and benefits. All these belong to the realm of being in as much as being needs attributes.

Being, bereft of genus and specie, has attributes identifiable with it but do not express fully what being is but only a dimension of it. These are what the scholastics call the transcendentals: *unum*, *bonum*, *verum*, *aliquid*, *res*, *pulchrum*, etc. These transcendentals are interests⁴ of being in its truth, they are divisions of being's manifestations, boundaries with nothingness and benefits of the cognitive and epistemological type that make being the most universal and primordial concept.

Friendship transcends.⁵ Philosophy as friendship with wisdom is uninterested love. It is not the love between parents and their offspring which is conditioned by dependence on the parents given the helplessness of the children in their infancy. It disappears when the children become self-sufficient. Nor is it the love between siblings which is determined by rivalry for the inheritance and is only conditioned by permanence under paternal care; it is a tense love that competes for the parent's attention and dominance within the brood, tribe or clan. Neither, in the light of what has been stated above, is erotic love, which is dependent on functionality: the capability to give pleasure and perform the marital act.

These kinds of love are based on interest. They are not transcendental. They are conditioned by circumstances. Man, as

³ "Uninterested" must not be confused with "indifferent."

⁴ Some ontological implications of interest especially in the theory of knowledge and social sciences can be found in J. Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt, 1968).

⁵ Cfr. my study: "Hacia la Trinidad y la Amistad: El camino hacia un redescubrimiento del misterio de Dios" *Philippiniana Sacra* 33 (1998), 73-94.

the sum product of circumstances ("I am I and my circumstance"⁶) is nothing more than a victim of history, an ontological casualty who must discover his metaphysical calling: that he is not just being, but a reality who is real and a real who is reality and conscious of it. And this consciousness is a consciousness of uselessness, of being undetermined by circumstances and becoming creative by overcoming mere facticity, hereness or thrownness (*geworfenheit*).

Friendship is useless love. The authenticity of love consists in its uselessness.

Friendship is not pragmatic⁷ nor does it allow itself to be used. It is metaphysical. It transcends interests or conditions such as helplessness, rivalry (or what Girard calls, *mimetic desire*)⁸ or functionality (determined above all by pleasure which may be simultaneous with the propagation of the species). It is love that does not seek the self in itself, but the self together with the other in faithfulness and not in success.

Faithfulness is going back to the ground to see real value of everything, which consists in that this everything is real as reality and that it is reality which is real.

Friendship is inquiry as reversal. It seeks without asking, without demanding, without being inquisitive. It transforms the earth into a world, the cosmos into a home. It makes totality (which is something to be conquered and speculated about) live-

⁶ "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia", J. Ortega y Gasset, "Meditaciones del Quijote" Idem, *Obras Completas*, Vol. I (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987).

⁷ The following notion of pragmatism must be overcome, though it is expressed in an apparently selfless way. It must be overcome because it is an attack on the classical philosophical and metaphysical vocation of laying down foundations: "Pragmatism must be defined as the claim that the function of inquiry is, in Bacon's words, 'to relieve and benefit the condition of man' – to make us happier by enabling us to cope more successfully in the physical environment and with each other." R. Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency and Pragmatism", Idem., *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 27.

⁸ Cfr. R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972); Idem., *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1978); Idem., *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

able and effectively lived. Friendship is building home, where there is a hearth, where there is the warmth of nearness, intimacy and selflessness.

The earth, the cosmos is the savage totality and brutality of spatial and temporal coordinates. It is where success reigns as supreme criterion. It is where success means conquering, whether physical, emotional, spiritual or intellectual. It is where everything is acquired.

The home is where everything is given as grace, where everything is shared. Failure is accepted because it is a part of the growth of faithfulness. Success is given its proper place as a desired effect for faithfulness, but not as the totality.

Home is where philosophy dwells and is nurtured. It is beyond the Jerusalem of sacred borders, where true prophets fail, are condemned and are crucified. Neither is it the Rome of sacred and secular powers, where power pontificates. Home is Galilee, beyond the clutches of violence, destruction and death, where friendship and the ministry began, where the once scared disciples become apostles meeting their Resurrected Lord, who is their Friend.⁹ Galilee is home, the bond of family, not by blood but by something transcendental: friendship in the same ideals, in the same vocation.¹⁰

⁹ I am referring to the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark, Mt. 28, 1-7; Mk. 16, 1-11. These two traditions emphasize the encounter with the Risen Lord in Galilee. Jn. 20, 1-2 relates traditions of appearances both in the violent sacred city and in the hometown of Galilee. Cfr. M. de Tuya, *Biblia Comentada. Evangelios* (Madrid: BAC, 1964). Also: D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991); J.R. Donahue & D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002); F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

¹⁰ The notion of Galilee, deep within, is developed within the notion of messianic family in Mark and Matthew. This deserves further study and reflection. Exegetes have emphasized only the break with blood families in the name of the Gospel without emphasizing the return to Galilee after the Resurrection, cfr. S.C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Inquiry and Inversion: From Ontology to Metaphysics

Therefore, by means of inquiry, if it is metaphysical, the world is to be inverted. The world must be inverted to become a home. The world must not make Jerusalem or Rome its capital, but Galilee, rustic Galilee with its mountains, plains, small towns and lake. It is no longer a question between Athens and Jerusalem or Jerusalem and Rome or the great European centers of learning since the so-called medieval times: Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Salamanca, Bologna. It is a question of the Galilee in each and every one who is faithful not because he is successful but because he is successful because he is faithful, even to the point of the cross, of humiliation for making a stand for one's friend, of failure and defeat.

We are bound therefore to ask in all liberty and in the name of liberty: where is Galilee? Where is the rustic countryside with its byways, dusty roads, fields, mountains, lake and coast where the calling was first heard and nourished, where we are ourselves with no masks, tensions, pretensions?

It need not be bucolic or too romantically distant from the hustles of urban living. If indeed it were forcibly bucolic or pastoral, as many of us do not have a rural or provincial background, we might end up again with language being the dwelling of being, wherein man becomes the captive of language games or truth becomes the prisoner of a play of words, which may never tend "*ad rem*."¹¹

In the first place, the inversion is axiological. This would ultimately bring about the inversion of ontology as the goal. Ontology, if metaphysics is to be the fulfillment of philosophy, must be inverted in its rightful place: as the starting point, never the goal.

Philosophy is metaphysical. It is not abstract. It does not seek to propose theories. However, it parts from them, since theories present perspectives which have to be lived out. The path must not only be shown. It must be treaded upon. Otherwise, there would not be any adventure, just charts, just maps. The coordinates must give way to the exact places.

¹¹ Cfr. M. Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt, 1950). Also: *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen, 1959).

It is when ontology becomes the ultimate goal that philosophy becomes abstract, becomes too or totally detached from life. Ontology, the study of being in itself, forgets beings. It forgets life.¹² It forgets what is real (in as much as it is reality), what is reality (in as much as it is real). Being is an abstraction from reality, which we experience. Being is separation, detachment from experience.

From the Forgetfulness of Being to the Memory of Experience

The forgetfulness of being was an immersion into experience.

Being must only remind us of experience:¹³ the mediation of the real as reality and reality as real. Being is the universalization of reality, but it is not reality which we experience as real and it is not the real that we experience as reality. Here, reality and real become substantive and quality or adjective.

¹² The following words of C.G. Jung are worth pondering upon in this regard: "For the more a theory lays claim to universal validity, the less capable it is of doing justice to the individual facts. Any theory based on experience is necessarily *statistical*; that is to say, it formulates an ideal average which abolishes all exceptions at either end of the scale and replaces them by an abstract mean. This mean is quite valid, though it need not necessarily occur in reality. Despite this it figures in the theory as an unassailable fundamental fact. The exceptions at either extreme, though fundamentally factual, do not appear in the final result at all, since they cancel each other out." *The Undiscovered Self*, translated by R.F.C. Hull (New York: Signey, 1958).

¹³ At the conclusion of his influential essay on metaphysics, H. Bergson comes close to what I am referring to. Presupposing the Aristotelian cognitive theory, he speaks of integral experience. However, this is only the sum total of experiences in the empirical sense and not experience as metaphysical mediation which is more than the sum total of its empirical moments. It is the meeting point of transcendence and immanence in life as narrated by history. Here are Bergson's words: "But metaphysical intuition, although it can be obtained only through material knowledge, is quite other than the mere summary or synthesis of that knowledge. It is distinct from these, we repeat, as the motor impulse is distinct from the path traversed by the moving body, as the tension of the spring is distinct from the visible movements of the pendulum. In this sense metaphysics has nothing in common with a generalization of facts, and nevertheless it might be defined as integral experience." *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by T.E. Hulme (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 62.

Being is existence, it is being there. It is an abstraction, if when it becomes absolute, becomes irrelevant. It is not life. Life is what matters. Existence is only the starting point.

Science begins with existence. Science is certain knowledge that must bring about that which is relevant. Being is not that which is relevant. It is life. Some personalist philosophers proposed the *Other (autri)* as the transcendental alternative to being. Even to the extent of proposing ethics as first philosophy, as the true metaphysical philosophical discipline.¹⁴

This radical alternative is incomplete in the sense that it forgets that the *Other* is just the concrete moment of that which underlies everything: reality in as much as it is real and the real in as much as it is reality.

It is necessary to be cautious because the *Other* could be as tyrannical as *being in itself*, the *autri* could be as dangerous and xenophobic *like sein des seindens*. Ethics is not first philosophy, neither is ontology.

To simply and innocently substitute *totality* with *infinity* is tyranny. There can be no substitute except for faith, hope and love, which are experiential coordinates towards the Absolute and traces of the Absolute in man thus, in his very constitution man is metaphysical, to give infinity its true meaning.

To merely and naively substitute totality with infinity is to be equally forgetful of the pain and suffering caused by the tyranny of the *One*. The *Other* could be just as tyrannical, since it seeks to replace, since it seeks to be the *Other One*.

Experience is the memory of this painful lesson. It is the continuous evocation, provocation of history as the experiential narrative of life. Experience is mediation. It makes present, concrete. It makes the narrative palpable. It goes beyond the *One* and the *Other One* in the pretension of being the Absolute.

It is a must to avoid the extremes or proposing extreme alternatives. It is imperative to go to the heart of the matter.

¹⁴ I am especially referring to E. Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague, 1974); Idem., *Totalité et infini* (The Hague, 1961).

Totality and *Infinity* are two extremes. The heart is what we have just labeled as experiential coordinates towards the Absolute: faith, hope and love. They are traces (vestiges) of the Absolute in man's finitude and culpability, making him capable of the Absolute, constituting him as metaphysical.

This is what philosophy is all about: man's metaphysicality. Man has a philosophical calling. This calling is metaphysical. Thus, philosophy does not just have a metaphysical vocation. It is a metaphysical vocation. It answers faithfully to this calling by going to the immanence of the matter by (re)discovering metaphysics as truly the first philosophy, going beyond Aristotle's ontological or ontotheological project. By doing so, we go back to the ancient (and ever new) philosophical vocation of seeking the Absolute. It does not seek to simply overcome *Totality* with *Infinity*, *Ontology* with *Ethics* in the pretense of first philosophy. It seeks salvation. Philosophy is the struggle for salvation. It is soteriological.

Metaphysics is first philosophy. It contains that which underlies everything: reality in as much as it is real and the real in as much as it is reality. The meeting point of reality and the real is experience. We meet the *Other* in and through and as *experience*. The Other cannot be an absolute. Experience opens up man for the Absolute not just as an Other. It is an opening to being *Together*. The Other must be openness to being *Together* and the dynamicity of this is of being *One Another*.

The *Other* is the concreteness of experience, which is always the point of encounter between the real and reality, wherein the real is reality and reality is real. It is only the point of departure for *One Another*. Being and becoming *One Another* is the constant harmonization of history as *Memory*, as presence that transcends all absences. *One Another* is the continuity of the narration, in dialogue, in the word of two, in the shared word, in the word that crosses the solitary confinement of the ego and transcends, reaches us to make history, to make present, to make *Memory*.

Experience and the Metaphysical Path from Science to Religion through Art

Experience is not to be taken in its empirical form. Experience is above all encounter, mediation. It is the sacramentali-

zation. It is when the Absolute, in as much as it is real in itself is reality and reality in itself in as much as it is real, becomes present in the coordinates of finitude and culpability. It is when Absolute in its transcendence becomes Mystery in the immanence of said coordinates. Experience is when transcendence and immanence meet. Experience is when reality and real coincide.

Science only seeks certitude (*episteme* as opposed to *doxa*). It is selfish, self-reducing and reducing. Certitude is absolute selfishness which is an extreme in itself. It can only be a point of departure. Self-love is only a staring point. Science only understands experience as an empirical data thus reducing experience as an aid to its formulation of theory, whose result is being in itself: the primordial concept. Thus, experience is criteriology and is reduced to be the foundation of *theory*, which is expressed as *concepts*. This is, however, only a starting point.

Art is the dynamism of certitude. It is action and facility for action (*tekne*). This dynamism, left to itself demands absolute selflessness, which is unacceptable since the starting point of the self is totally forgotten in the pretense of reaching Absolute Otherness. It is the growth of experience into creativity, into praxis, into action. Creativity is always a practice that consists in transforming the images, which are the memory of certitude, into symbols. Experience here becomes the movement of certitude in its quest not for certainty anymore but for realization. Through Art, concepts give way to symbols, which are in fact texts that speak of the presence, of the sacramentalization and the experience that is behind it. Experience here is not just empiricism; it is the act of presence. Presence, which is acknowledgement of the Other, is a path that must go beyond, transcend the Other. Presence is not just having the word or expressing it nor giving it, but sharing the Word as the discursive power of mediation.

Religion is the terminal point of this acknowledgement. Religion goes beyond concepts and symbols. Religion goes beyond texts though its parts from them. Religion is seriousness, diligence by going beyond linguistic texts and entering into the living texts of life (*"ad rem"*). This is religion as *relegere*, of rereading language, of which the supreme and primordial instance is being, and going to the things in themselves in the concreteness of experience.

Religion is experience in the rootedness of the Mystery, which is the coincidence of the Absolute with the Finite and Culpable. Mystery is the experiential ambience of the realization of religion as *religare*, relinking with the Absolute, rebinding with the rootedness of reality and the real in its immanence stretching out to its transcendence. Mystery is the root of experience in as much as it is sacramental mediation for the real in as much as it is reality and reality in as much as it is real. This rootedness is what is in fact mysticism for it is rootedness in the Mystery, in as much as it is the presence of the Absolute in the categories of the Finite and Culpable. Religion goes beyond the unacceptable extremes of Absolute Selfishness and Absolute Otherness, of Totality and Infinity with *Absolute Sharing*.

Philosophy is the path of Science to Religion through Art. Philosophy is an experiential path in as much as it is response to the metaphysical vocation. And the response is always a calling, an invitation to the rest of the journeyers to enter into the same adventure. Hence, the response is initiation, accompaniment, solidarity in the paths of the Absolute and its traces as Mystery. It is mystagogy.

In effect, Science, Art and Religion are the three moments of experience in its quest for the fullness of realization in the metaphysical plane, going beyond empirical and actual (or practical) planes in order to be mediation of the real in as much as it is reality and reality in as much as it is real. Only in this mediation can the Real and Reality be attained in its Absolute instance.

Religion in its most perfect realization, which is eschatological, becomes a relational current with this Absolute thus revealing that this Absolute is a Person, with whom a Personal Relationship is possible and even desirable. This is the unveiling of the face, not just of the Other, but of One Another. Eschatology is this very process of unveiling. It is tense. It is tension that is openness to *Beatitude*. Beyond the polarity between Totality and Infinity, Metaphysics tends towards Beatitude: the encounter (definitive) between the Real and the Real, wherein the Real is (truly) Reality and wherein Reality is (truly) Real.

The Continuous Realization of the Vocation

Metaphysics, as a vocation, is in continuous realization as an art, striving for religion, parting from science. It is a call that continuously fulfills itself in the experiential narrative of history as an act, striving to reread and to relink. This art takes the form of religion in this contingent historicity, in this contingent stage of experiential narrative. Thus, becoming a consistent eschatological struggle to the fulfillment of religion, which is imperfect in this contingent stage.

In this contingent historicity, art may take the forms of religion. These forms are necessarily institutional and thus confessional, but they are contingent only to be perfected eschatologically in the purest and most inhibited sharing with the Mystery unveiled, which is the Absolute in itself, face to face.

Philosophy is the journey towards the Absolute in itself, face to face, beyond the limitations of Totality and Infinity because it goes to the soteriological level. Soteriology is simply beatitude. Thus, philosophy fulfills itself as the search for the "beata vita."

Philosophy assimilates both Selfishness and Selflessness, correcting the limitations of the former by qualifying it as not as self-centeredness and establishing the self as firm and foundational subject, thus qualifying selflessness as the constant memory of the self in its act or art of self-transcendence. And the result is not a synthesis. There is no dialectics involved in reaching Absolute Sharing.

Love and Sharing: Beatitude as Fulfillment of the Metaphysical Vocation

Sharing is being oneself and being another without abandoning the self and neglecting the other. Totality and Infinity, Being and the Other are forms of enslavement. Only Absolute Sharing brings about true freedom, true liberation from oppressive systems of thought and action and of their opposition as ontology-ethics within the context of the pretense of being first philosophy, abolishing metaphysics in the name of pragmatism and the postmodern dream of having no foundations.

Love of wisdom (*amor sapientiae*) is being and becoming together, one another. Sharing is the meeting point. It is mediation. It is sacramentalization. It is metaphysical response to a metaphysical calling.

Love, given the fact that it is beyond extremes, is not in the totality of selfishness nor in the infinity of selflessness. Love is in sharing. Sharing is salvation. Sharing is beatitude. Sharing is faith, hope and love in the opening up of the self, in finitude and culpability, to the Absolute, who is already the constituting presence, as the Mystery, in faith, hope and love. And love is where faith (groundedness in confidence) and hope (action in awaiting amidst history) converge and become perfect. This convergence and perfection is nothing less than Beatitude.

Science and Art, when left to themselves, create markets of many theories, styles, techniques. In themselves they produce, creating gaps between One and the Other, between Totality and Infinity in an ever growing market mentality or competition ("homo homini lupus"). Only Beatitude could eliminate all these.

Religion corrects all these by sublimating thought and action, concept and creativity in the journey towards the Absolute who is not just Totality nor Infinity, who is not just the One (of Plotinus) or the Other (of Personalism). The Absolute is always in sharing, in One Another: *One* being the Absolute *in itself* and *Another* as the Absolute by *participation*.

Sharing is not monopolizing. It is being Absolute in itself who is open to giving and it is being Absolute by participation who is open to receiving and there is a continuous interplay of giving and receiving. And this interplay is the dynamics of love. □