The Duty of a Philosopher

Abstract

In the following article, we consider the dual question of how philosophy has influenced culture, and how culture has influenced philosophy.

A picture is presented of the role of philosophy in human society when it first emerged as a well-defined discipline, and this picture is compared to its standing in our lives today. A historical account of its evolution is sketched out as we attempt to trace the factors behind the changes it has undergone.

We begin by asserting, in light of various suggestive historical pointers, that the original function of philosophy was to teach man how to distinguish between good and bad, and that the ability to do so was considered synonymous and co-extensive with intelligence, philosophical aptitude, knowledge and proximity to truth.

The first historically significant deviations from this theme are identified in the writings of Plato. An emphasis on knowledge and truth as entities separable from moral wisdom is discerned. The path taken over the millennia by this 'reinvention' of the philosopher's persona and its culmination in philosophy as an academic object is charted.

Finally, we offer certain suppositions regarding where and how philosophy may proceed from hereon.

1. The Origin

The introspections we must conduct at the very outset are the following: What provokes us to ask ourselves this question? What do we expect to see in an answer? And what lessons do we hope to obtain from this answer and the analysis leading up to it?

Is it not in part because we feel that the specific significance of philosophy for man, as well as the position it holds in his life, is not the same as what it was once upon a time? Is it not also because this position that it holds now feels like it is, in some sense, ambiguous and vaguely-defined?

Is there also, then, a hint of uncertainty with regards to whether it is progressing in the right direction? Perhaps.

Therefore, we see that we want primarily to uncover precisely what it is that has changed, and also how it has changed. Furthermore, we would like to ascertain the fact that this change is not one that may prove itself undesirable for us.

Having brought these things to the fore in our minds, let us begin.

The birth of philosophy is an event in human history which has proven itself to be nearly impossible to envision. The popular idea that it more or less emerged out of nowhere in Ancient Greece with a man named Socrates is now generally accepted to be an erroneous Eurocentric simplification. This version of the story of philosophy is also due in part to a shift in the very meaning of the word ‘philosophy’, which we shall come to later. But for the moment, let us make the following intuitively palatable observation: That at first glance,

there appears to be for philosophy no well-defined era onto which one can confidently pin down its conception.[1]

In fact, this road happens to be a well-trod one. But rather than taking this idea to the extreme and arriving at fantastical conclusions equating the inception of philosophy with the beginning of consciousness, let us look at the matter obliquely, from another angle.

Our immediate task, then, is to uncover the causes which made man feel it necessary to integrate this entity into life. What is it that lies at the root of the forces which compelled man to involve in his life the discipline of philosophy?

Vain is the word of that philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. Thus spoke Epicurus.[2]

Even God blesses only those who are contemplative, intelligent and the protectors of the weak. Thus speaks a fragment from the Rig Veda.

Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men. Thus spoke Confucius.[3]

An image is formed in front of our eyes of philosophy as it was in its ancient and historically antecedent form. Now, the idea of ancient philosophy being a *way of life* rather than an intellectual exercise is scarcely a new one.[4] Let us go a little further, then, in order to clarify this notion.

[1] Letseka, Matsephe. (2014). Did Philosophy Originate in Greece? An Africanist Response. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. 5. 10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n23p1302.
[2] Hadot, Pierre, and Arnold I. Davidson. 1995. Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 110n15, attributed to Epicurus.
[3] Huang, Chi-chung, trans. (1997). The Analects of Confucius. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[4] Hadot, P. (2002). What is ancient philosophy?. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

We grab this link between modern and ancient philosophy and turn the clock even further back in time to look at the hunter-gatherer, the Paleolithic creature. What significance would the phrase 'way of life' have held for this man?

The answer lies right in front of our eyes: For the early man, it is very likely that philosophy was *essentially* a framework which would help him distinguish what was right from what was wrong—and this in a wholly *moral* sense: good from bad.

The 'wise old man' archetype is a familiar trope in cinema and literature through the ages, especially those which depict the communal life of the early man. Here, this sage is what is symbolic of the philosophical intuition of the society he guides, and he is, in general, accepted as a philosopher. And the important observation to make here is that this wise old man is, above all, someone whose judgement the people defer to specifically in situations of *moral* dilemma.[5]

A variety of other observations point us into this direction. The earliest known written philosophical texts (a fine example would be the Book of Proverbs) do not compartmentalize ethics in the modern sense; do not treat and discuss moral values as disjoint from metaphysics and epistemology. Every discussion appears to be embedded in an unchanging context forming the backdrop—This context being none other than the question of what is the right thing to do in one's life.

But while philosophy was being spearheaded by a morally charged front, there was yet, from the modern point of view, far more to it then than just that.

O seeker, know the true nature of your soul,

[5] "The wise old man can be a profound philosopher distinguished for wisdom and sound judgment. This type of character is typically represented as a kind and wise…who uses personal knowledge of people and the world to help tell stories and offer guidance." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wise_old_man

and identify yourself with it completely.

O Lord, (may we attain) the everlasting consciousness

of Supreme Light and Joy.

May we resolve to dedicate our life

to the service of humankind,

and uplift them to Divinity.

An intense theme attains centrality in this verse from the Yajur Veda, which couples so very strongly with the three quotations given previously. An equivalence is unearthed, powerful and mighty, between the morally right and the absolute truth. There was, then, no real separation between the two back then. They were seen as the two sides of the coin that was philosophy and thus defined the entire discipline.

Both these aspects were indispensable and interrelated. Teachings which told you only how to obtain knowledge and disregarded morality would not only not have been considered philosophy but would also have been deemed wholly incorrect. Similarly, the existence of teachings which told you how to know right from wrong but did not impart you with knowledge was a logical impossibility.

At this point, let us spare a few words for a previously hinted-at idea, regarding the origin of philosophy being the same as the origin of thought. This supposition is, in actuality, a result of the confused way in which our modern lenses show us the two original aspects of philosophy.

In the broadest possible sense of the words, the act of conscious thinking itself is conceivably a movement towards the attainment of absolute truth. This is, indeed, nothing but a truism. In the existential sense, consciousness is nothing but the very act of reconstituting the world into

various determinate parts; making sense from non-sense; constructing a coherent reality from the primordial soup. And if philosophy is the search for truth, then this is what the most primitive form of philosophy is.

But in fact, we see that this is a mischaracterization of what philosophy is—or at least, was, in its original form. The idea of truth was inextricably bound up with the idea of the good, and far from attempting to separate the two, the function of philosophy was to find their union.

Even now, to say that a fish or an amoeba philosophizes stretches the meaning of the word 'philosophy' to an unrecognizable extent. The problem arises from a failure to recognize the fact that philosophy had—and to some extent, has—a commitment to morality as severe as and intertwined with its commitment to truth. It is a modern conception of the same which, as we shall see in the subsequent sections, forces a breaking away of these modalities.

The birth of philosophy, then, becomes a partly biological matter. When did Darwinian evolution allow for life-forms to be based on mechanisms complex enough to enable or necessitate the existence of the moral sphere of life? Somewhere between the *Australiopethicus africanus* and the *Homo sapiens,* philosophy began.

2. The Destination

In my first semester in college, we had a philosophy course going by the title 'Introduction to Philosophy'. The general interest initially ran fairly high amongst my peers. What would be taught? What will we learn? Will we be closer to understanding what life is? Will we question what time is? Will we think about what is good, and what is bad? Will we be closer to understanding the true nature of God?

As things turned out, the actual contents of the course subverted expectations rather significantly. Of course, it was undeniably all philosophy by the academician's standards: We went through first-order logic, moved onto a discussion on the Baconian principles, and touched upon Popper's falsifiability; but there was the strangest sense of incomprehension regarding why these things were being taught in this particular course permeating throughout the batch, which was in general unacquainted with philosophy at an academic level.

The anecdote brings into sharp focus all the ways in which philosophy as it is practiced in the modern day and age has diverged from philosophy as it was practiced in antiquity.

In stark contrast to its universal accessibility in the past, philosophy is now largely a many-armed academic discipline which demands significant specialization with regards to various subjects on the individual's behalf before giving him the opportunity to indulge in it.

Undoubtedly, a certain kind of specialization was required even those aeons ago, but its nature, as we will see, was very different.

To begin with, let us recognize the fact that the general *criterion* for being called a philosopher has steadily been undergoing a shift in form. Every job has associated with it a job description defining it, and the one associated with philosophy has undergone a remarkable shift.

There is clear historical evidence for the fact that the qualities defining the archetypal 'wise old man' overlaps greatly with the perceived criterion for being called a philosopher.[6] However, the same can scarcely be said for the present. Such individuals may still colloquially be called philosophers, but only because some remnants of meaning from a previous time remain clinging on to the word: Being a monk-like figure is no longer a necessary condition for being called a philosopher.

A leading figure in modern philosophy who is counted among the greats for his intellectual contributions in spite of openly being a Nazi sympathizer offers a sharp example. And to be clear, it does not matter in this context if he later realized the error of his ways. He would have been called a philosopher even if he never rescinded his bigotry and apologized for it simply by virtue of writing masterpieces such as *Being and Time.*

Nazism, in this instance, is something which has been condemned not only by philosophy's academic circles but universally as something ethically repugnant beyond description. At the same time, we find a man subscribing to it being praised as a great philosopher.

This is the contradiction which would never have manifested in antiquity. It was simply unthinkable for a person who possessed moral values seen as blatantly and unjustifiably evil to ever be a true philosopher and possessor of wisdom.

What qualities does Martin Heidegger have, then, which makes us put him under the category of a philosopher—a great one, at that—regardless of his sins?

The greatest exemplification of the answer to this is found in the ageless allegory of the cave given by Plato.

[6] The *Seven Sages of Greece* offer a sound example.

SOCRATES: Do you think the one who had gotten out of the cave would still envy those within the cave and would want to compete with them who are esteemed and who have power? Or would not he or she much rather wish for the condition that Homer speaks of, namely "to live on the land [above ground] as the paid menial of another destitute peasant"? Wouldn't he or she prefer to put up with absolutely anything else rather than associate with those opinions that hold in the cave and be that kind of human being?

GLAUCON: I think that he would prefer to endure everything rather than be that kind of human being.[7]

It is in this dialogue, familiar to each and every student of philosophy, that the seeds of a cultural obsession are to be found. We see the now-familiar single-minded obsession with truth and knowledge given in a manner quite separate from any moral antecedents. For both Socrates as well Plato, the greatest good, the philosophical tendency, clearly appears to have been defined, first and foremost, by the thirst for knowledge.

We must be careful, however, to not undermine the significance of morality for them, for it remains important both in the Socratic thought and the dialogues of Plato. In the latter, it is known, virtue and justice are often supremely important themes.[8]

And yet, we see a weakening of the bonds between the philosopher, the quest for truth and the aspiration for the good. For notice that in the Socratic ethic, it is always asserted only that *truth* is good, and never the other way round. There are countless statements from the dialogues wherein Socrates declares knowledge and wisdom the greatest good. The

[7] Plato, and Allan Bloom. The Republic. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

[8] Incidentally, the life of Socrates also seems to be filled with anecdotal evidence pointing towards the fact that he was a supremely virtuous man. Most evocatively, his last words, before he willingly poisoned himself, are said to be: *Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Do pay it. Don't forget.*

knowledgeable man will automatically become a virtuous man, they said; but never did they say that the virtuous man will automatically become the knowledgeable man, that the man who always practiced kindness and compassion and gratitude will automatically become a wise and knowledgeable man. An asymmetry broke through; the bi-implication was lost in favor of a new, differentiated relationship.

And of course, the importance of Plato for subsequent philosophy cannot possibly be overstated. British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead expressed the matter succinctly when he said: *"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered throughout them. His personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experiencing at a great period of civilization, his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization, have made his writings an inexhaustible mine of suggestion."*[9]

Thus, the manner in which the path which transformed—and still transforms—philosophy was paved becomes clearer. A two millennia long obsession with truth and knowledge in a manner fundamentally disjoint from moral values commences, culminating for us in the current academic meaning of the word 'philosophy'.

Let us pause at this point and consider the ramifications of these changes.

Today, the philosopher is no longer given his original special status as the practitioner of *"[that which is] in truth, divine; and all other things… but human."*[10] He is nothing but another academician in a world filled with many. And similarly, philosophy in its present

[9] Whitehead, A. N. (1929). Process and reality. Macmillan.
[10] Plato, and Allan Bloom. The Republic. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

cultural position has lost much of that ancient power it possessed of inspiring awe and respect in the individual considering it.

Perhaps the most important consequence of all of this is that philosophy is now largely an *intellectual* activity (in the general sense of the word). In his earlier form, we have seen that the philosopher was seen as relying as much on the counsel of his heart as he did on that of his brain.[11] The transformation of philosophy can now conceivably be seen as an instantiation of a larger movement—the one pulling man as a whole away from prescientific emotive expression and towards abstracted rational quantification.

But this larger theme is, indeed, perhaps too large to be the direct focus of this article. As far as the philosopher is concerned, his job is no longer that of a moral beacon but just that of a mere beacon. Tell us what you think the truth is, but do not tell us what you think we should do with it; for that would overstep the limits of your profession. And now, the possible dangers associated with the change begin emerging.

Another worry stems from the fact that, as a result of these changes that have taken place, the very idea of—the very notion of— 'truth', so absolutely fundamental to philosophy today, is susceptible to dissolution. A movement has been made by us towards isolating Truth from all else. But an object without any connections to other objects drifts away into meaninglessness; this is merely an application of Occam's razor. Once, the idea of truth and knowledge had been grounded—so to speak—in the moral field of the individual's life. This no longer holds. We have systematically been severing the ties between Truth and morality, and we may now be finding that Truth itself threatens to sever all ties from us.

There was once a phenomenally grounded purpose to our quest for truth: *To know what is the right thing to do*. By eliminating this, we are, so to speak, pulling the rug from under our feet.

[11] In Nietzschean terms, the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

For human beings such as we are, is not this phenomenal grounding, in the final analysis, our only instrument for distinguishing sense from non-sense?

3. The Journey

Let us briefly sum up the assertions of the article so far.

The hypothesis of philosophical detachment: Philosophy first emerged not as a necessary aspect to conscious thought but as a byproduct of the social aspect of life. Its initial direction and aim were twofold: To show man the right way of life, and to take him by this path to the ultimate truths of life. But due to various sociopolitical and cultural factors, the nature of philosophy has changed. The importance of the journey has been lost via an emphasis on reaching the destination, and philosophy has consequentially been unmoored from its aforementioned path, leaving the duties of the philosopher in an ambiguous state.

At this point, it might be prudent to clarify that this is not a *criticism* of this transformation. There is, by and large, as much reason to be repulsed by our cultural past as there is to romanticize it. To allow an individual to yield ethical authority is always a double-edged sword, and to lay judgement upon a phenomenon like this is akin to laying judgement upon stone. These are merely the aspects that one must take into account and be aware of.

The time has come for us to take a closer look at the aforementioned factors. In other words, how did this happen? From where does come the force pulling us in this direction?

In his 1939 *Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, Joseph Burgess had the following account to give of Indian philosophy:

"The Western spirit … is inclined to regard this Nirvana business as a lot of twaddle, unbecoming a man of common sense and sound judgment."[12]

Eurocentrism has had an undeniable influence in catalyzing this shift; in one fell swoop, more than half of the world's contributions to the body of philosophy were nearly entirely

[12] Burgess, Joseph B. (1939). Introduction to the History of Philosophy. Mcgraw-Hill Book Company.

eliminated. But this fact alone does not give us the whole answer yet. As such, Eurocentrism could just as well have pulled philosophy away from its current path rather than towards it.

It is historically known to us that a large amount of Western Medieval Philosophy tends to be intrinsically theological in nature; in fact, most of the men of the Middle Ages we now refer to as philosophers did not think of themselves as philosophers at all. Much of their now-recognized philosophical advances were performed against a theological background which modernity has subsequently removed. In any case, it seems clear that during this period, the morality-truth dynamics of original philosophy was generally being maintained.[13]

To a certain extent, this arguably excessive linking of Christian theology with philosophy was something which had been forcibly imposed as a result of political conditions—the phenomenon of Christianization looms large over the Middle Ages.

Clearly, then, while the Socratic teachings seem to pull us towards isolating truth in earnest, the path was not a straightforward one. But an important fact to note here is that until nearly the end of the Middle Ages, the dialogues of Plato were not a part of philosophical discourse at all; only in the mid-fifteenth century, coinciding roughly with the end of the Middle Ages and Medieval Philosophy, were the majority of them translated and made accessible.[14]

And so perhaps unsurprisingly, it is in the cultural periods succeeding the Middle Ages, when society collectively gave the thought of the ancient Greeks utmost importance, that we see philosophy take up a form akin to its present one.

It is not that the philosophers of the Renaissance actively wished to undermine Christianity. However, from the moment Aristotle and Plato's distinctively secular thought heroically jumped to the fore, these Greeks were held in a sort of *tension* with the pervasive, politically

[13] In fact, these philosophers themselves appear to be vaguely aware of this fact; the duality of faith and reason was a matter which loomed large over the philosophies of those times.
[14] Equally notably, the works of Aristotle also remained lost until the Middle Ages approached their end.

induced, theological motivations lying behind Medieval Philosophy. Reconciliatory attempts were made, with people working to use philosophy as a 'tool of theology'[15], but we know now that this tightly-wound string eventually snapped and pushed us all directly away from theology in philosophy.

The breakdown of the bi-implication in Socratic thought, as noted in the previous section, is mirrored once again. Descartes' attempts to rationally demonstrate the existence of God are a grand exhibition of this inversion: God was no longer a 'given'; theology no longer forms the axiomatic backdrop against which philosophy is practiced.

From this point onwards, there was no turning back. The theological and moral dominion which had been the head of philosophy's body had been decapitated. The modern obsessions with truth and knowledge commence in earnest. In this trend, subsequent philosophy tried harder and harder to separate itself from the general theological mode of expression. So it came about that the tradition of analytic philosophy as it is employed today find itself in vogue; the ideology behind Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* can be clearly defined by the aforementioned process of disconnection.

Is not Nietzsche's famous proclamation utterly unsurprising, given this background?[16]

In Nietzsche, this statement was, it is known, a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment. Therefore, it is in the Enlightenment that we seem to find the pioneering force behind the displacement from Descartes overthrowing God's axiomatic position, where it began, to Nietzsche's declaration, where it ended.

"If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it

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16 "God is dead."

contain any experimental reasoning, concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."[17]

These words uttered by David Hume, a central figure in the Age of Reason, show us the remarkable extent of the change in man's disposition towards all that fell outside the so-called 'language of reason'. Once fundamental, now shunned. If we were to look into the origin of the Age of Enlightenment, we may find also the most clearly-defined triggers behind the great recategorization of philosophy.

The sociopolitical forces which paved the way for the onset of the Enlightenment are well-documented, often referring to the centuries of injustices towards the European man doled out by the Church, and to other associated events.[18]

Perhaps, then, this opposing movement has, to some extent, been a reactionary one, an implicit form of protest towards the manner in which political forces subjugated philosophy under their predetermined theological ends for many centuries. Perhaps all those centuries of injustice to philosophy under theological domination has plagued the present with a sense of historical fear, a fear out of which it deliberately tries to push the theological (and with it, its associated moral) mode of expression away from the discipline.

[17] Hume, D., & Millican, P. F. (2007). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Sect. 12, part 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[18] https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-enlightenment

4. Conclusion

A few years ago, I was visited by a vision. Under an evening sky, a personalized idea expressed itself about its nature and purpose.

I was given to understand this idea was a vicious, ruthless, merciless thing. But all that it would do, would be in an attempt to achieve its ultimate goal.

And it wanted this one thing and this one thing only: It wanted *knowledge.* It wanted an understanding of the way things worked. It wanted an explanation behind the way things are. And it would go to any lengths and any cruelties (even upon its own self!) to obtain it.

At the same time, another character slipped into my psyche, very different from the first.

I was given to understand that it was an utter fool, an idiot incapable to comprehending the most elementary things and blundering about in its every move.

However, it proved to be unshakeable in one particular aspect: No matter how much pain and suffering was inflicted upon it, it would never compromise on its morals. It would always do that which was virtuous and good; it would never, ever, fall astray into evil.

I stared at the two and tried to understand. Which one of these could be representative of the true philosopher? The one who would do anything to know the reality? Or the one who followed the path of good, and tried always to act righteously?

What is the duty of the philosopher? Is it to know the truth? Or is it to do the right thing? Mankind has now opened itself up to an entirely novel domain of many difficult questions.

If we travel far back enough in time, we found find that such questions would be deemed incoherent by the original practitioners of philosophy. It is now entirely evident that the ancient ways of thinking would refuse to consider the two options as mutually exclusive. It would declare that no man can increase his knowledge by cruel means; and no man who

refused to exercise his intellect will be able to do that which is right, and nor may he even know what it is.

Let us here recognize the fact that in our society an important linguistic category has been lost—or at the very least, divided up—for better or for worse.

We respect the scientist to a certain extent for his intellectual toiling, and we honor the judge to a certain extent for his moral tasks, but the true and absolute union of the two, originally found in the philosopher, is no more.

Once, there existed a formal place for such men. By viewing them as the apotheotic combination of emotion and intellect, thus capable of wielding the complete solution to any upsetting aspect of the human condition, the average citizen could in full faith approach them for all manners of advice.

We have taken away the philosopher's moral capacities, and thus, his status, from him. And by doing so, have we given the average citizen too much freedom and authority over the moral sphere in society? Or have we safeguarded ourselves from the dangers of giving one category of individuals so much influence?[19]

His commitment to society as a moral compass has been sublimated and dissolved equally between the functioning members of society. In the formal sense, the court of law took up sole dominion over the moral aspect of societal life.

(It is worthwhile to notice how the philosopher was, once upon a time, an indispensable participant in this process of administering legal justice[20]; observe how, in contrast, he has no such direct relevance to it today.)

[19] One may infer from his arguments for a state governed by philosopher-kings that Plato would declare the answer to be the former—and yet, paradoxically, we have seen that he was crucial in that very shift which prevented the implementation of his ideology.

[20] A brief analysis of the history of the philosophy of law supplies one with ample evidence.

As a result of the recategorization of philosophy that we have described, today, philosophy sits, to a large extent, in the shadow of science. It is, in a way, losing its identity. *"Philosophy of science is philosophy enough"*[21]*:* In the words of W.V.O. Quine, perhaps the most important philosopher of the twentieth century, we find a sharp expression of this idea.

In other words, its primary relevance to us is more and more in the position of a tool of science. The philosopher is now perennially part of a framework larger than him: "*...the day of the philosopher as isolated thinker – the talented amateur with an idiosyncratic message – is effectively gone."*[22]

And so finally, we are faced with the most momentous question of all: Where is our rejection of this linguistic category and its phenomenal counterpart leading us? Towards which future is philosophy hurtling?

The fundamental motivation behind the creation of philosophy was never the desire to understand the universe. It was always the desire to know man's own self, to *know thyself*, and to understand the human condition.

Today, philosophy is the attempt to explicate the world. It is the means by which man brings to articulation this ambiguous assemblage he finds himself thrown into. But as things have turned out, the idea of philosophy has, at the same time, retained some semblance of its original vision. I experienced this retention in action when I saw the gap between the philosophy course which was actually taught in college and the philosophy course everybody expected would be taught in college.

Is this not why philosophy still possesses strong linguistic associations—even for those practicing it academically—as a means of knowing oneself?

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[21] "Mr Strawson on Logical Theory". WV Quine. Mind Vol. 62 No. 248. Oct. 1953.
[22] Nicholas Rescher, "American Philosophy Today," Review of Metaphysics 46 (4)

Therefore, one may say that often, the manner in which philosophy now searches for the ultimate truth is analogous to a man asking for an explanation of the phenomenon of electromagnetic attraction and repulsion in zoological terms. The language does not quite relate to the nature of the phenomena. By confining itself within the domain of pure reason, it is a language with a finite vocabulary, and it is continuously attempting to express the infinite.[23]

But the original, primordial goal of philosophy can never be entirely forgotten by man. One may explain it biologically if one wishes to, or psychologically if one wishes to, or under any other framework, but an invariant central fact holds: As long as he lives, man will always strive to obtain a better life. If philosophy ceases to be man's guide in this quest, something else will replace it, differing from it only by name.

And as we have seen, broadly speaking, philosophy seems to have been able to *retain* something of this task—even more so outside of the intellectual groups at the frontiers of the discipline. And slowly but surely, the limitations it suffers from (with respect to this task) in its present form are surfacing due to this persistence in remaining in the position of the urge which guides man in his phenomenal life.

We catch an early hint of this in Nietzsche's violent reaction against the Age of Reason; we see a later version of this in Wittgenstein declaring ethics and aesthetics to be beyond philosophy, and philosophy to be capable of expressing nothing but tautologies.

There exists a taut web of tensions, and philosophy lies right at its center. To a large extent, the word 'philosophy' remains associated with man's tool to find meaning in his life. At the

[23] This is hardly a radical thought. No philosopher seriously believes it possible to obtain a final answer to end all questions.

same time, the experts in the field seem to be taking it into some entirely different directions.[24]

Once upon a time, the man of religion would redirect philosophy to align with his preexisting aims. Today, it is the man of science who does so.

In which direction will the string snap this time?

Perhaps it does not really matter. Philosophy itself may turn into an object of science, but as long as there remains a drop of humanity in our souls, something else will always develop to take its place, something else which will truly express our desire to transcend the illusion of the world and touch the heart of reality.

[24] As we mentioned earlier, perhaps still being propelled on by the force of the recoil in philosophy's movement away from theology during the Enlightenment.