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CREDO UT INTELLIGAM

"Credidi, ideoque intellexi appears to me the dictate equally of Philosophy and Religion"—S. T. Coleridge

THE ACADEMIC LECTURE is a strange institution. As a way of transmitting information it is, in the age of the printed book, absurdly inefficient; as a means of provoking thought it is so ineffectual, when compared with the challenges of seminar and tutorial, as barely to merit the name of "teaching". Yet in many subjects at many universities no instruction other than lectures is offered. So it is not surprising that those in this odd trade should often be asked, and often ask themselves, what they are up to. Some, no doubt—those leaders of thought who feel able to do some of their leading from the lectern—feel no unease and should feel none. But in any university the mass of the teaching personnel (no other term seems appropriate) lack that standing. I am concerned for that majority whom a stern curriculum requires to lecture annually for forty years on Plato or Herbert Spencer. If they are neither provoking thought nor imparting indispensable knowledge, whatever can they be doing? Surely a practice so common must have *some* excuse.

Well, what do we do when we lecture? Some of us, having made beforehand notes of what we think should be said about what, use these notes only as insurance and control; in the lecture hall we compose our souls to silence and allow whatever may be in them to well forth—not "We lecture" but "It lectures in us", as Lichtenberg nearly said. Obviously, this is not the only method. There are tales of yellowed and brittle pages read verbatim from generation to generation. And our method is plainly an unreliable one, for the mental wells may run dry, or become muddied, and whatever truth may be in them will then have a hard time to scramble out, and its features when it comes will be neither attractive nor easy to discern. Surely, one thinks, any lecturer expounding an author should be able to state what he said, explain what his words meant, elucidate references to thinkers and events of his day, and point out the fallacies in his arguments as he states them, all in an orderly and systematic fashion. That, it seems, is what some of our colleagues manage to do, and it is clear that many students prefer such a performance to what they get from some of us. But to me at least this method is not open. I cannot bring myself to say in the lecture hall anything whose truth does not at the moment seem to me a matter of interest and possible concern.

The odd method I have been describing, and the odd reluctance on which it rests, are not beyond explanation. They imply a definite view of the nature of philosophic truth; and those who think that they are simply wrong might ask themselves whether their objections and demands are not themselves based on a particular view of the nature and communicability of truth. Our practice is justified if, in philosophizing, the philosopher's whole mind is expressed and his whole personality involved. His ideas and the truth which he believes are his truth and ideas, and no one else's. For example: if I believe, and manage to get you to believe, that truth is in this way personal, my belief and yours are different beliefs. They differ not in the trivial sense that you and I are different persons, nor in the outrageous sense that our beliefs have nothing at all in common, but in the limited though important sense that in each of us the belief in question is one of many beliefs and attitudes which do not sit side by side in mutual isolation but exist only as a compound, the nature of each component of which is conditioned by the rest and by the whole. Thus a belief by which I live can be ignored by you, although you share it, because in you it has no context that makes it effective. It is indeed very common for one person, having said something to another with passionate conviction, to receive the reply "Of course—what of it?"

The cohesion of beliefs makes communication of fundamental opinions and attitudes a very slow and uncertain task. It was for this reason, perhaps among others, that Plato (or his ghost) refused to make in writing a formal and literal statement of his deepest convictions, although he said (in his Seventh Letter, 342 c) that it could be done easily and briefly. For they could not be effectively transmitted without living together, the student working alongside the teacher until he assimilated from him the validating context. So living, the student would at last see the truth "in a flash", for it was a very simple truth whose significance was all in the possibilities of its application. It is also because Plato knew that our minds work in this way that in the imaginary city of his *Republic* everyone is to be taught to believe the "myth" of the four metals. The perfect city cannot thrive unless all acquiesce in certain simple truths. But the uneducated populace lacks the intellectual depth in which these truths could take root: the mental context which alone could give them meaning does not exist and could not practicably be imparted. The myth then acts as a fruit, bearing with it its own context as a pulp to sustain its kernel. Only, since the masses are trained to have fine feelings but not fine minds, the context that the myth supplies is not an intellectual one, but emotional.

All histories and text-books of philosophy, however many their epigrams,

are fundamentally dull. What they offer is a no-man's idea: statements of supposed fact which anyone may accept as true or reject as false as he pleases. I have never yet heard of anyone being persuaded to accept an author's views by what a textbook tells of them. It is quite a different matter when we turn to his own writings. Here we meet what alone in philosophy has value: the person thinking, the lived idea. Only at this stage can we make out the possibilities of an idea as a living force to be seized or abhorred, made one's own as a positive or a negative influence. And our chances of making such real use of what we read are greatly increased by what we can discover of the writer's life and times.

If histories and textbooks are as dead as they have just been made out to be, are we to attribute their prevalence to wickedness and perversity in those who compile and use them? We are not. The demand for slogans and summary conclusions which they meet may be regrettable, but it is inevitable. In acquiring the full understanding of which I have spoken, one must start somewhere and follow some route, and neither starting-points nor way-stations need resemble destinations. One must have something to use as a focus or a nucleus for one's thoughts. And the need is especially obvious in an unfamiliar subject, where one's scattered thoughts must be brought from a distance. First steps are bound to be dull, and textbooks are boring in a good cause.

Slogans and summaries serve as mnemonics. That is their true function, and as such even the most earnest thinkers use them. The trouble, since they are thoughts symbolizing (even if also stimulating) thoughts, is that they may come to be mistaken for the thoughts they symbolize. In the case of such a thinker as Thales, where the symbol alone survives, we are victims of a misfortune without remedy; but we have ourselves to blame if we let the slogan stand as conclusion for a thinker whose works are preserved. Textbooks, by their very nature, tend to commit just this fault and to encourage it in others. If my estimate of the nature of philosophical truth is correct, the complacency with which many teachers of philosophy allow such textbook learning to occupy their minds is astonishing and disgusting.

From one who would lecture on a philosopher and avoid the textbook's error, one may ask two things. First, by scholarship and imagination he should re-build his author and present his thoughts as the author would himself have done had he been addressing foreigners of time and place, explaining what they meant to him in his own day among his own people and why it seemed necessary to say just that just then. Then the lecturer should present the ruminations to which his author's words provoke him in his own actual en-

vironment. The former process is necessary to preserve and convey the unique flavour of the presented fact; the latter is necessary because the fact presented is so strange. For the communicated idea requires two contexts. There is the context which it had in its author, but which he neglected to make explicit because his contemporaries necessarily had it from their own experience. This the lecturer recreates and attempts to convey. But his students, who lack some of his years and learning, cannot receive this context effectively: they cannot overnight transform themselves in imagination into Athenian ephebes or Parisian schoolmen. Except for brief flashes of insight, then, the ideas must remain dead for the student unless he can be shown them at work in a context with which he is already at home. So the ideal lecturer will for half his time hide behind his subject, and for the other half obtrude himself. And all the while he presents the disconcerting spectacle of a man thinking. It is because this is believed to be a sight worth seeing that lectures are still given. And the more a lecture resembles a talking book the less it shows of the thinking man.

Some students may well prefer talking books to thinking people. A talking book is more purely useful to the prospective examinee, for a thinking person must be treated not merely as a means to an end but as an end in himself, which is distracting. And for the same purpose a real book may be even better than a talking book, except that the latter may have been more recently revised. So one speaks of *reading* for an examination. One may get a very good degree without ever having heard a thought fired in anger.

Books are almost always better organised and more concentrated than lectures; and one may consult them at one's leisure, and re-read the difficult bits. It really is not surprising that serious students prefer reading to hearing. Just so, many people would rather listen to a gramophone record than go to a concert. The recorded performance is almost sure to be a fine one, and concerts are chancy affairs: indeed, being edited to flawlessness from snipped tapes, the recording will be freer from lapses and errors than even a very good live performance. And one can play it at leisure and repeat it at will. One wonders why people ever attend concerts. But the answer is simple. For one thing, even today, the sound has to be trimmed down before it can be got into the box. But far more important is that a live performance is live, a concert is a real happening with real people in it and a proper beginning and ending. The gramophone record is nothing but the notes. Just so, a man's thought must be cropped before it will fit between covers. The tone of voice has to go, the gestures are discarded, nothing is left but the words. But far more important

is that in a book nothing real is happening, whereas even in the most grindingly dull lecture a real person is really up there droning away to a genuine human slumberer or two. So people keep on going to concerts and lectures, even if they are not very good. Going to a lecture or a concert is doing something, while reading a book or listening to a recording is not doing anything, but just profitably filling in time.

The philosophers about whom we lecture were thinking men themselves. As with any man, the better we come to know them, the less we care whether they were right or wrong. A real expert can go through a work by Aristotle, for example, chapter by chapter, demolishing each of his propositions as mistaken, incoherent, mis-stated, or invalid, and end by reaffirming the supreme worth of Aristotle as a philosopher. His opinions are assigned a value that does not depend on their truth or untruth, and this is not merely his skill in perpetrating fallacies that point toward subtle and important truths, nor his usefulness in providing opportunities for versatility in rebuttal: it is the sheer human worth of a man delicately and passionately thinking just so. Such a delight in the factuality of fact is, naturally, neither shared nor appreciated by most students, for theirs must be a textbook knowledge. They do not dwell on, and scarcely recognize, the fact of the man thinking, and press straight on to the blunt question: is he right or wrong? For, if he is wrong, they do not see why they should bother with him.

It would be wrong to imply that the students' question is out of place, or shows immaturity or vulgarity. To be as indifferent to truth as the connoisseur of philosophies whom I have described is to be a dilettante, and a paid expounder is scarcely justified in indulging in such an attitude in business hours. So some kind of answer must be given. But the question turns out to be not quite so simple as it may sound. For the statements of which it is asked may be value judgements, and the philosopher may have been quite right to formulate in his place and time an evaluation which it would be quite wrong for us to make in our own. And he may have been quite right to draw certain conclusions from certain beliefs which he had good reason to think true but we have better reason to think false. But let us suppose that the question is one of fact, and that what we are asked is: Is this true, or is it not? And let us suppose that we do not call a statement true just because it follows logically from a system of beliefs that its author happens to hold, unless we have sufficient reason to think that he rightly held them—that we refuse to call it "true for the Kwakiutl and false for the Navajo" if it happens that the Kwakiutl believe it and the Navajo do not. Then, so long as its reference is

unambiguous and sufficiently precise, the truth or untruth of the statement will not depend on its context of belief in author or reader but only on its relation to some state of affairs to which it refers; and we will be able to say confidently that it is either definitely true or definitely false, however difficult it may be to find out which it is. If this is what the students are asking, it is not unreasonable of them to expect a downright answer, even if the answer be only a confession of ignorance. But now it appears that what can be true or false is not the lived idea, mine or yours, but a no-man's idea, one abstracted from these and considered in abstraction; for its truth is not to depend on its membership in this or that set of lived beliefs. This abstracted idea, which of course is what textbooks and textbook-style lectures traffic in, is much easier to handle. It is held in common: if my belief is true, then your belief, if it would normally be called the same, is also true. Such beliefs can be readily passed on, without loss, from person to person. But we must remember that this abstraction, this no-man's belief to which alone the concepts of truth and untruth can be directly and strictly applied, is neither my belief nor yours as we hold them and live by them. It is for this reason that the category of truth-or-untruth seems inadequate for religious beliefs and other kinds of belief that tend to be passionately held and to be "hard to put into words". In such beliefs, what is most immediately important is just their relation to the lives of their holders, just the part they play in the economy of an individual mind; and that, of course, is what the question of truth leaves out of account, just as the pawnbroker ignores the "sentimental" value of the trinkets put before him. It would be helpful in heated discussions if disputants could bear in mind that what is true or false is not the idea as it is believed in, but the lifeless doctrine that can be abstracted from it.

Scientific theories cannot be believed in the same way that religious beliefs are held, without ceasing to be science. The possibility of science depends upon its propositions being treated as abstractions. The propositions that go to form a scientific theory do indeed depend upon a context, but in a different mode: they take their meaning and importance from the theory of which they form part, but the theory itself is supposed to be public in the sense that it means the same to all who understand it. Only while it is being formed or challenged is a scientific theory of vital concern, when it is contaminated with the emotional attachments of those who labour to establish or destroy. And at such times it may become unusually hard to discern just what a theory asserts or denies. It may be that without an intensity of involvement that

makes the risk of such confusions inevitable no one would care enough about the sciences to keep them going. But that belongs to another enquiry.

Augustine said that faith in religion must precede understanding: if one does not believe, one cannot understand. To many readers this seems obscurantism of the worst kind, a shameless attempt to evade the duties of explicitness and rationality, allowing the theologian to say whatever he pleases without heed to any objections save the superficial ones of other theologians as deeply prejudiced as himself. To others, what Augustine says seems obvious truth, borne out by their own finding: he is not claiming a privilege, but stating a truth about the working of the mind. It is possible, say Augustine's friends, that his opponents take him to mean by "belief" a purely intellectual assent, as to a demonstration in geometry. But the faith of which he speaks is not this. he describes it as a trust, a confidence as in a person's word. The "I believe in" of a creed is not the "I believe that" of an opinion. We are not asked to assert to propositions that we do not comprehend, but to forget about propositions altogether until we have experienced for ourselves the kind of living to which they refer. Now, if the argument about beliefs that I have put forward is sound, Augustine's demand is justified. The affirmations of a theologian will then serve less to persuade, convince, or instruct than to articulate an attitude already held. And certainly we may allow Augustine this much truth: that believers talking of religion with unbelievers often feel that they are discussing different things. But if theologians have been misunderstood by unbelievers who subject them to inappropriate criticism, they are themselves to blame; for they often insist that what they say is true. And we have seen that what is true is an abstraction. Insofar as what a theologian says is meant to be true, it is open to the same public discussion and criticism as any common coin of discussion; insofar as it claims exemption from such criticism as the symbol of a rich inner experience, the category of truth or untruth is inappropriate to it and there is nothing in it for the unbeliever to unbelieve.

Does Augustine's thesis hold for philosophy as it does for theology? If it is true that philosophy proceeds from the whole man, then it seems to follow that the thesis must hold, that commitment to a philosophy is necessary to its understanding. And it is certainly true that most professional philosophers have succeeded in understanding only what they believe. But one had taken that for mere weakness. If it is no weakness, but the inescapable condition of the philosophizing mind, it seems that there can be no rational comparison or

choice between philosophies: the way in which one philosophizes is to be explained only by the mysterious workings of conditioning, reaction, and conversion. Well, it may be so. But it need not be so. Faith is not the only theological virtue: there is also love. Just as one does not need actually to become another person in order to understand how he feels, but by sympathy may imagine himself in his shoes, so there seems no reason why one should need to make an intellectual position one's own before one can understand it, so long as one can sympathetically abandon oneself to it in imagination. Large phrases such as "Philosophy proceeds from the whole man" may mislead; what the argument demanded was not that one must be wholly committed to the truth of every philosophical proposition that one effectively entertains, but that philosophical propositions make effective sense only in connexion with each other and only from the standpoint of a believer. But there is no reason why such a standpoint should not be taken up out of sympathy and provisionally, by a person of supple mind and good will. To adapt another of Augustine's sayings: *Dilige et quod vis dic*. No doubt something of the position thus sympathetically taken up will remain as a permanent part of one's own thinking, and thus impair one's bigotry, just as a person given to sympathy may find it hard to relapse into pure selfishness. But this risk is probably already inherent in understanding itself.

Augustine may still have been right about theology. No doubt to a theologian all opinions but one are heretical, and it must be wrong to sympathize with heresy, so that it may even be sinful to understand a theological position other than one's own. But that is a question for theologians to decide.

There is still a third theological virtue: hope. While we are at it, can we find a place for hope in the strategy of philosophical understanding? Indeed we can: without hope one would never embark on the long task of understanding at all. There is both the plain sort of hope, that the effort to understand will be rewarded by something worth having given one's mind to, and the more subtle hope of which M. Marcel speaks, hope which is akin to faith but less determinate, being no more than the refusal to believe that apparent nonsense is as nonsensical as it looks. So now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the most significant of these for the philosophical understanding is love.

In my youth I was nurtured by a school of analytical philosophy whose twin breasts may be seen, in the light of the present argument, to have been giving milk of quite different colours. By taking one side or the other, one would err by attending exclusively to the private or the public aspect of thought. On one side were G. E. Moore and his followers, who seemed never to deal with actual thinking but only with the textbook abstraction: they ignored what people meant and dissected what their words seemed to say. Their work thus failed to be (what some of them claimed it to be) the whole of philosophy. It did not, in fact, come to grips with philosophy at all, but only with what textbooks make philosophy out to be. It therefore had a great vogue among those who were able to confine their knowledge of the attacked philosophies within those limits. Ranged against them were a mysterious and perhaps quite imaginary band called "therapeutic positivists", who refused to consider ideas at all outside of their personal context. The philosopher was to remove the muddles of an individual's confused thinking, by talking to him and letting him talk until he realized that there was really nothing for him to be puzzled about. Such philosophers thought it proper to undertake the cure or conversion of only one puzzled person at a time, and for preference one whom they knew well. They would not admit that their nostrums had any common curative property. And that surely was wrong of them. Logical refutations may be valid, and common confusions may be demonstrated. Surely there is a place for refutation and demonstration. And on professional philosophers (a type of being on whose peculiarities it may be that the therapists had not sufficiently reflected) their emotional impact is often considerable. After all, the ideals of lucidity and rationality are not so esoteric as to defy exposition, nor so private that they can be pursued only on the couch or in the confessional.

Both wings of the analytic movement (if I may thus vary its anatomy; and there was always something sphinxlike about it) shared the belief that when verbal tangles and their consequences had been cleared away whatever might be left was no concern of the philosopher. They differed in that the Mooreans thought that the tangles always existed in isolation, the therapists that it was virtually impossible ever to isolate them. Both were mistaken, alike in what united them and in what divided them. Although the tangles do not exist in isolation, they can be abstracted and treatment prescribed for them; and some people can dose themselves. Then, when the tangles are cleared up, one must look at the context from which they were abstracted and see what is left. What we may find, my argument has suggested. Whether we shall like what we find is another question.