

they, or any of the others who deserved their accolades as great classical philosophers, been alive today they themselves would have wanted to share in the continuing inquiries, not to withdraw to some institute for the study and propagation of their own complete and marmoreal revelations.

§2 *What counts as progress in philosophy*

The second main point to be made about the present volume is that it is an expression of the conviction that there can be, has been, and ought to be, progress in philosophy. It seems often to be assumed, it is sometimes in books which purport to be introductory in as many words said, that philosophical problems are as such necessarily insoluble. In particular, and congenially to the spirit of a scientific age, it is suggested that from time to time issues which had previously been unprofitably philosophical become at last definitely settleable; and that these issues then by that token fall within the province of some, usually some new, science.

Certainly there is some true foundation for this last misconception. For the word *philosophy* as an academic label was once used in a far wider sense than it now is. When a writer of the 1600's spoke of "the new philosophy" he was referring to modern science, to work such as that of Galileo (1564-1642) and Newton (1642-1727). This older and wider sense of the word *philosophy* is still preserved, fossilized, in the official titles of some of the older chairs of physics in Old World Britain. Thus the senior professor of physics in the ancient universities of Scotland is by tradition Professor of Natural or Experimental Philosophy. Again, it is only in the last hundred years that psychology has established itself as an autonomous discipline, and the critical interpreter of such earlier writers as Locke or Hume or Kant will find it both difficult and essential to insist on making and pressing unmade distinctions between psychological and philosophical theses. (In Britain this emancipation of psychology as a science from philosophy as philosophy was not universally recognized by university administrations until the decade after World War II. Often previously psychologists were brigaded into Departments of Philosophy.)

However, although there has been this progressive narrowing of the scope of the word *philosophy*, it would be wrong to think that the changes involved have been purely verbal; and still more wrong to assume that the word is now properly so employed that philosophical problems must be insoluble, by definition. The very growth of science, which has been

marked by the development of a series of autonomous scientific disciplines quite separate from philosophy, has forced philosophers to recognize more clearly than ever before that and how philosophical questions differ from scientific. It is not that the former by becoming answerable are transformed into the latter. The questions which can now be answered by the sciences always were scientific; and any question which ever was (in the present, more restricted, sense) philosophical remains what it was, whether or not it can be satisfactorily answered. It is, obviously, one of the vital tasks of the present book to explain this distinction between, on the one hand, philosophical issues, and, on the other, scientific and other sorts of problems. But it is a task which is best performed with reference to particular cases of possible confusion met as we go along. (Compare, for instance, Ch. VII, § 1 and Ch. XII, §§ 2-3.)

A further reason frequently given for believing that there is no progress in philosophy points to the way in which in the sciences matters which used to be in dispute seem to get definitively settled. The findings are put into the archives, and the focus of interest among the professionals moves elsewhere. This observation is indeed one made by Immanuel Kant, who both knew what science is and was concerned that there should be progress in philosophy also. Thus in his *Critique of Practical Reason* he commends "the systematic process by which a science is established . . . matters which have been decided ought only to be cited and not again discussed".

By contrast, it is said, the philosophers continue apparently everlastingly discussing their supposedly great (but really often trivial or absurd) questions without ever achieving consensus about what any of the answers are. Again, it is often urged that in philosophy it is never possible to prove to someone who disagrees with you that you are right and he is wrong; nor yet for him to prove the opposite to you. What may appear to be the same point has been put with more style and refinement by one who was himself a distinguished philosopher: "No philosophic argument ends with a Q.E.D. However forceful it never forces. There is no bullying in philosophy, neither with the stick of logic nor with the stick of language" (Waismann (2), p. 480).

As before there is sufficient truth in these objections to make it instructive to consider precisely how much, and precisely what conclusions must follow. Certainly it cannot be denied that science does make progress in the way suggested; and this notwithstanding that all its findings - no matter how revered their place in the archives - are in principle, and sometimes in practice, subject to revision, amendment, and correction in

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the light of the further progress of enquiry. Certainly too philosophical discussions often seem, and sometimes are, like those of the fallen angels in Pandemonium who, as Milton tells us (*Paradise Lost*, II, 558-561):

*... reason'd high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.*

But that fallen angels, or even people, do or do not fail or refuse to agree is a plain matter of fact about what with fallen angels, or with people, is so; whereas a contention about whether or not agreement would in this case be justified involves a totally different sort of claim, a claim about what ought or ought not to be so. To argue directly from any premise or collection of premises purely of the first sort to any conclusion which is even partly of the second kind must be, as we shall explain more fully in Chapter III, fallacious. The nerve of the argument proceeds from the facts, or the alleged facts, of the existence of a consensus, or the lack of it, immediately to the conclusion that such agreement, or disagreement, is as it ought to be (in as much as this is what is rationally warranted). But any such argument is as unsound, and as common, as the inference which moves from the true observation that there is a great diversity of moral opinion directly to the conclusion that none of these opinions can properly be said - much less be known - to be either true or false. In both cases the factual, or would-be factual, observations about what people happen to believe have to be reinforced by something else before we become entitled to draw these radically different conclusions about the absence or the impossibility of knowledge.

Of course, here and always, to insist upon the invalidity of some form of argument is not at all the same thing as to say or even to suggest that the conclusion being drawn from that argument must be false. Notoriously, a valid argument from false premises may, but does not necessarily, lead to false conclusions; while an argument which is in fact invalid can be employed to support some conclusion which happens to be true. Suppose we were to urge, however implausibly, first, that philosophers are always lifelong bachelors, and, second, that King Henry VIII of England was a philosopher. Then it would follow necessarily from these two false premises that that in fact much-married king must have been a lifelong bachelor. Suppose now we replace the second premise by the claim that

President Buchanan was a philosopher. The form of the argument remains the same. It is, therefore, still valid. The replacement second premise is in fact as false as the original which it replaces. Yet the new conclusion, that President Buchanan was a lifelong bachelor, happens to be true. Again, to argue that because, first, all Communists disapprove of racial discrimination, and because, second, that man disapproves of racial discrimination, therefore that man must be a Communist, is to argue fallaciously. And the argument will remain just as fallacious notwithstanding that the person in question may happen to be an authentic, card-carrying, fully paid up, believing and practising Bolshevik.

A fallacy, by the way, is not just any vagary of belief. Someone who erroneously believed that Henry VIII never married or that President Buchanan did would not, in the strict and economical usage invariably observed in philosophy, be involved in a fallacy. By contrast anyone employing any argument of the second of the two forms just illustrated would be committing what is named officially but not very memorably *The Fallacy of the Undistributed Middle*. This was by some in the heyday of Senator Joseph McCarthy more pointedly nicknamed the Unamerican Fallacy.

It is, therefore, clear that we cannot construe the absence of consensus in philosophy as an independently sufficient demonstration that the subject does not make progress. We have next to consider the suggestion that in philosophy it is never possible to prove to someone that you are right and he is wrong. The essential distinction, here unhappily confounded by the employment of this wretched expression *prove to*, is that between producing a proof and persuading a person. A man may be persuaded by an abominable argument, just as he may remain unconvinced by one which ought to be accepted. In persuasion a second person is always involved; and it is, so to speak, up to that second person whether or not he is persuaded successfully. Yet whether or not some candidate argument does indeed constitute a valid proof is not a matter to be settled by reference to any actual consensus. There might be a proof which no one had ever recognized as such, just as it is possible for a fallacy to be detected in an argument which was once universally mistaken to be sound. Creative mathematicians are for ever discovering proofs which, precisely because they are mathematical discoveries, were never recognized previously; while from time to time, though far more rarely, they also unearth fallacies in what their predecessors had passed as legitimate theorems.

The effect of confounding the notion of proof with that of persuasion in

this talk of proving something to a person is to suggest that no proof can be, much less be known to be, valid unless it is possible to persuade all comers of its validity. Since this never – or almost never – is possible, to accept so irrelevant and preposterous a criterion of validity would be to make not just philosophical but almost any other sort of knowledge unattainable. It may very well be, for instance, that no one can prove to – that is to say persuade – spokesmen of the Soviet Bloc, whether professional or amateur, that Russian tanks were sent into Hungary in 1956, into Czechoslovakia in 1968, and wherever next, in order to preserve the world's largest and most unyielding empire. But that is in itself no good reason for saying that what such spokesmen thus refuse to admit is not both true and known to be true.

This same confusion between the ideas of proof and persuasion can in a more subtle form be seen even in the work of so distinguished a philosopher as Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), albeit in one of his less distinguished books. It may well be, as I shall myself later urge (Ch. III, § 6), that there is something peculiar about moral arguments and moral conclusions. But if this is so it is not, as seems to be the implication of the following very representative passage from *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, that these arguments or these conclusions are uniquely ineffective in winning universal assent:

I do not know how, by any purely logical argument, to refute a man who maintains that only the desires of Germans should be considered. This view has been refuted on the battlefield, but can it be refuted in the study? When I say that it has been refuted on the battlefield, am I admitting that if Germany had been victorious the view would have been valid? I am naturally reluctant to say this, and I do not believe it, so let us see what there is to be said on the other side.

If the concept of 'objective rightness' is to serve any purpose, it must satisfy two conditions, one theoretical and the other practical. The theoretical condition is that there must be some way of knowing what kinds of act are 'objectively right'; the practical condition is that, at least for some people, the fact that an act is recognized as objectively right must be a motive prompting its performance.

Let us first take the view that *objectively right* is indefinable. . . . I can say: 'Sir, . . . Ethical intuition is a notable faculty . . . it is a faculty which teaches disinterestedness, which requires you to . . . view the world with God-like impartiality . . .'

I can make this speech, with such embellishments as my rhetorical

skill may suggest, but will it carry conviction to my interlocutor? It may do if he already has a profound respect for me, or if he is a schoolboy exposed for years to my subtle propaganda. But if he is a Nazi and I am his prisoner, he will merely subject me to torture and semi-starvation until I admit that he is the best of the argument. For this I may hate and despise him, but I cannot refute him. (pp. 80–81)

The attempt, which we have been examining, to show that there is no philosophical knowledge by simply urging that there is always someone who can be relied on to remain unconvinced, should be regarded as a special case of a remarkably common fallacy. Since it is so common, and hence presumably so seductive, it becomes worth while to have a label for it. Having such mnemonic labels helps us to be on guard against the fallacies so labelled. This particular fallacy involves a changing of the subject, from an original issue of whether what has been said is true or supported by good reasons, to the quite different and here irrelevant question of whether everyone can be convinced that this is indeed so. I therefore docket it as the *But-there-is-always-someone-who-will-never-agree Diversion*.

This Diversion, in the form just considered, constitutes a second attempt to dismiss any idea of progress in philosophy by appealing to a lack of consensus. The third claim, that "No philosophic argument ends with a Q.E.D. However forceful it never forces", is quite different. Most importantly it is different in being relevant. It is relevant because it appeals to what is supposed to be the essential logical character of philosophical arguments rather than to putative psychological facts about the intractability of some people's beliefs. What is wrong with this third objection is, that in so far as it does pick out a characteristic of philosophical arguments it is one which is equally characteristic of all others and, furthermore, that it is anyway not something which rules out the possibility of progress in philosophy and of philosophical knowledge.

It is characteristic, it is indeed the defining characteristic, of a valid deductive argument that if you assert the premises you cannot then deny the conclusion without thereby contradicting yourself. Take, just for once and for the sake of piety, the example hallowed by immemorial tradition. If, first, all men are mortal, and, second, Socrates is a man, then it follows necessarily, third, that Socrates is mortal. This uninteresting argument is, obviously, valid. Certainly too it does force. For clearly it shows, in virtue of the very principle of its validity, that you cannot assert the first and the second propositions and yet deny the third without thereby contradicting

yourself. Yet it does not thereby force us, on pain of self-contradiction, to accept the conclusion. For it is another practically as well as theoretically important characteristic of such arguments that they are always reversible. Allowing, as we must, that an argument of the form of that given is compulsively valid, we are still not thereby compelled to accept it as proof of its conclusion. It always remains theoretically possible, and is often practically correct, to receive it rather as a disproof of at least one of its premises.

The practical importance of this characteristic of reversibility is best illustrated by referring to the logic of the falsification of hypotheses. On the hypothesis that the burglary was an outside job, and granted that the building could only have been entered by the doors or the windows, then it follows that one of these must have been opened. But suppose we know that this conclusion is in fact false. And suppose we also know, as we do, that we have here a valid deductive inference. Then we are in a position to recognize that we have, not a proof of the truth of the conclusion of that argument – a conclusion which is not true but false – but instead a proof of the falsity of at least one of the two premises. It is this pattern of argument which is always and necessarily involved in the testing of hypotheses in the sciences. There the terms will be more technical and less lighthearted than those employed in our illustration. But though the content is different the essential form of the argument is the same.

What this brief but fundamental consideration of the essential nature of valid deduction should bring out is that every sound argument 'forces', in the sense that it limits the available options even though no argument can ever be 'completely compulsive', if by that were to be meant – what never is meant – that it blocks up literally every alternative to accepting its conclusion. For, in the first resort, any valid deductive argument can as such be either a proof of its conclusions or a disproof of one of its premises; while, in the last resort, however sound and however complete the argument offered, no argument can of its nature force men to be rational. Every argument always leaves at least one alternative of irrationality, the acceptance of the penalty of self-contradiction. In this, incidentally, there is an important analogy between the compulsions of a compulsive argument and other less metaphorical pressures. When the bank manager excuses his action in opening the strong room for the bank robbers by saying, 'I had no alternative. They would have killed me had I refused', he is not claiming, what would not be true, that he had literally no alternative at all. He could and, had it been a life-and-death matter of the survival

of his country or his family, should and perhaps would have told them to shoot away and let his knowledge of the combination die with him. When he claims that he acted under compulsion, that he had no alternative, what he means is that in the particular circumstances there was no alternative which it would have been reasonable for him to accept. But of this more below (Ch. VII, especially § 1).

We must not, therefore, be led to despair of making progress in philosophy, either by the seductions of the But-there-is-always-someone-who-will-never-agree Diversion, or by the fact that arguments in philosophy are not compulsive in some way in which no other argument is either. Yet to beat off some suggestions that progress in philosophy is impossible is not to show that there can be, much less that there has been, such progress. To show this is, as I have indicated already, a main aim of the present book. The very fact that it is so widely believed that progress in philosophy is impossible, either practically or in virtue of the implicit definition of the expression *philosophical problem*, makes it vital to demand of any introduction that it shall provide evidence to the contrary. For what is the reader supposed to be reading it for if it is not in order to know more at the end than he did at the beginning? This basic requirement could, of course, be met by an introduction to a subject to which the idea of progress was scarcely if at all applicable. We could learn a lot from a good introduction to sculpture without its having to labour to establish that the work of Michelangelo somehow rendered all Cycladic carvings obsolete. But whatever could be the point of puzzling our heads with philosophical problems if such problems were inherently insoluble, and if even the notion of making progress towards a correct resolution were entirely out of place?

This is a demand which we have to concede unreservedly to be legitimate. However much and however rightly we shall want to emphasize the differences between progress in philosophy and progress in the sciences, we cannot jettison the idea of progress here without thereby abandoning all claims to be furthering a genuine subject of enquiry. In particular there has to be some difference, and some difference relevant to the advancement of philosophical investigations, between the man who has and the man who has not had the benefit of a good grounding in philosophy. So in composing the present book I have constantly asked myself what would be, or what should be, the elements of the intellectual equipment of a person so trained. Of what fundamental distinctions must he be aware, what special ideas and vocabulary does he need to have mastered, of what

insights should he be seized, of what important arguments must he have taken the measure, against what mistakes will he be most on his guard? It is my answers to questions of this sort which have largely determined my decisions on what had to be included within the treatments of the different areas selected for attention in the present book.

Some very pedestrian examples of such philosophical rudiments have appeared already in this chapter. I have, for instance, found occasion to bring out the essential nature of deductive argument; to insist on the distinction between questions about the validity or invalidity of arguments and questions about the truth or falsity of their premises or conclusions; to indicate the strict usage of the term *fallacy*; to identify, to elucidate, and to label the But-there-is-always-someone-who-will-never-agree Diversion; and to say something about what compulsion is and what it is not. Before I proceed to mention a third feature of the present book let us consider another and more exciting specimen, which also constitutes an illustration of the way in which it is possible to take philosophical profit from the classics.

This example comes from what must surely be one of the earlier dialogues of Plato (*circa* 427-347 BC). This dialogue, *Euthyphro*, is devoted to the typically Socratic question: 'What is holiness (or piety)?' The character 'Socrates' plays a leading part in all these earlier Platonic dialogues, dominating most. Plato certainly knew, and was in some way influenced by Socrates (469-399 BC). But it is, as might be expected, a matter of scholarly dispute how closely the historical Socrates resembled Plato's Socratic persona. However, we do have Aristotle's word for it that the quest for definitions was authentically Socratic (*Metaphysics* 1078B27 ff.); and Aristotle (384-322 BC), who studied for many years in Plato's Academy before founding his own Lyceum, should have been in a position to know. The passage quoted begins where 'Socrates' has led 'Euthyphro' to recognize the definition implicit in what he has been saying:

EUTHYPHRO - Well, I would say that the holy is this, what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is unholy.

SOCRATES - We shall soon know better, my dear fellow. Just consider this argument. Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved?

EUTHYPHRO - I do not understand what you are saying, Socrates.

SOCRATES - Then I will try to say it more clearly. We speak of being carried and of carrying, of being led and leading, of being seen and

seeing; and you understand in all such cases that and how the one thing differs from the other?

EUTHYPHRO - I think I do.

SOCRATES - Then there is being loved, and loving is something different from this?

EUTHYPHRO - Of course.

SOCRATES - Then tell me, is what is being carried what is being carried because someone is carrying it, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO - No, for that reason.

SOCRATES - And what is being led is what is being led because someone is leading it, and what is seen is what is seen because someone is seeing it?

EUTHYPHRO - Certainly.

SOCRATES - Then someone does not see it because it is being seen but, on the contrary, because someone sees it it becomes something which is being seen. Again, someone does not lead something because it is being led but it becomes something led in virtue of the fact that someone is leading it. So is it quite clear, Euthyphro, what I want to say?

EUTHYPHRO - Certainly.

SOCRATES - Now then, what shall we say about the holy, Euthyphro? It is, according to your account, what is loved by all the gods?

EUTHYPHRO - Yes.

SOCRATES - For this reason, because it is holy, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO - No, for this reason.

SOCRATES - It is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved?

EUTHYPHRO - So it seems.

SOCRATES - But surely, that which is loved and that which is god-beloved is loved and god-beloved in virtue of the gods loving it?

EUTHYPHRO - Of course.

SOCRATES - Then the god-beloved is not the holy, Euthyphro, nor is the holy the god-beloved, as you were saying, but the one is different from the other.

EUTHYPHRO - How is that, Socrates?

SOCRATES - Because we agree, do we not, that the holy is loved because it is holy, rather than that it is holy because it is loved?

EUTHYPHRO - Yes.

SOCRATES - Also that what is god-beloved is god-beloved because it is loved by gods, that is, by reason of this love, rather than that they love it because it is god-beloved?

EUTHYPHRO - You are right.

SOCRATES - So if the god-beloved and the holy were the same thing,

my dear Euthyphro, and if the holy were loved in virtue of being holy then the god-beloved would be loved in virtue of being god-beloved; and if the god-beloved were god-beloved in virtue of being loved by gods, then the holy would be holy because it is loved. But you now see that the opposite is the case, in that both are entirely different from each other. For the one is beloved in virtue of being loved, whereas the other is loved because it is worthy to be loved. And it looks as if you, Euthyphro, when you were asked what the holy is were unwilling to reveal its essence to me, but instead mentioned an accident of this the holy – being loved by all gods. You have not yet said what it really is. If you please, then, do not hide it from me but begin over again from the beginning and tell me what the holy is. Forget about whether it is loved by gods or any other accident, for that is not the point at issue. Now, tell me frankly, what is the holy and what the unholy? (§§9E–11B)

To this question the dialogue never succeeds in finding any satisfactory answer. The passage quoted is nevertheless one to reread, and to take to heart. For it can serve both as a paradigm of distinctively philosophical argument and as an illustration of the way in which definite progress can be made in philosophy, even without settling the question originally raised. ‘Socrates’ is labouring to distinguish between possible accidents, and the essence, of the holy. The former is a matter of what may or may not happen to be true of holy things, even perhaps true universally of all holy things; but which even if it were thus universally true it would still be possible to question without actually contradicting yourself. The latter is a matter of what is part or the whole of the meaning of the word *holy*, and which therefore could not be denied to the holy without self-contradiction. To see why the distinction matters in this sort of case we have to turn from Plato to the German Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716). Although Leibniz was concerned not with gods but with God, and not with the holy in particular but with goodness in general, neither of these differences diminishes the crucial relevance to him of the challenge: “Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy or is it holy because it is loved?” Like any question which matters it matters because of what hinges on the answer. In his *Discourse on Metaphysics* Leibniz brings out one of the things which is at stake, while himself firmly opting for the first of the two alternative answers:

Thus I am far removed from those who maintain that there are no rules of goodness and of perfection in the nature of things . . . and that

the works of God are only good by definition, because God has made them. For if that were so, God, knowing that he was the author of things, had no need to look at them afterwards and to find them good, as Holy Scripture testifies that he did. It seems to have employed this anthropomorphic expression in order to teach us that their excellence can be known by looking at them as they are in themselves, and even when we do not consider at all under this bald description who it is who causes them. . . . So in saying that things are not good by any rule of goodness, but sheerly by the will of God, it seems to me that one destroys, without realizing it, all the love of God and all his glory. For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing exactly the contrary? Where will be his justice and his wisdom if there only remains a certain despotic power, if will takes the place of reason, and if, according to the tyrants’ definition, that which is pleasing to the most powerful is, as such, just? (§ 11)

The way in which Leibniz employs Holy Scripture, even with its careful cautioning about “anthropomorphic expression”, may strike some modern readers as quaint. Nevertheless he does decisively make his point that if you choose to define the word *good* by reference to the wishes or affections of God, then in your mouth the attempt to praise your God for his goodness becomes empty. It must be empty because, on the definition suggested, to say that what God does is always good is to say only and precisely that God always does exactly what he wants, while to say that he loves the good is to say nothing more nor less than that he loves just what he does love. These remarks may very well be true. Indeed, in so far as on the definition suggested they become tautologies, they must be true. But they scarcely constitute grounds for praise, much less worship; and this, surely, is not all that believers have intended in worshipping their God as perfectly good. In his horrified rejection of the implications of choosing this sort of answer to the challenge Leibniz was representative of the dominant tradition in Christian thought; even if he was, unfortunately, by no means equally representative in his seeing and never forgetting what these implications are.

Here, if not sooner, someone may want to protest that all this is not philosophy but theology. It is a fair objection, to which it is instructive to reply. The first and less important part of the answer is that the antithesis employed is false. Something can be, and this is, properly classifiable as both philosophy and theology. Indeed there are whole books in the area of what is called philosophical theology which librarians – who have to

make decisions on these often unrewarding jurisdictional issues – may equally well shelve as either philosophy or theology. Again, and perhaps slightly more interestingly, there are stretches of theoretical argument within the sciences with the same ambiguous status. Einstein, as usual, knew what he was talking about when, speaking of the key step required for the development of his Special Theory of Relativity, he wrote: “The type of critical reasoning which was required for the discovery of this central point was in my case advanced above all by reading the philosophical writings of David Hume and Ernst Mach” (Einstein, p. 53).

The second and more important part of the answer to the complaint that what has just been going on is of merely theological interest appeals to that same distinction between the form and content of arguments which was tacitly employed earlier to excuse the seeming irrelevance to the serious business of philosophy of some rather lighthearted illustration. Just as the challenge originally raised by ‘Socrates’ in terms of the holy and gods remains relevant to those who are thinking, instead, of goodness and God, so it survives even a total de-theologizing. The crux is the general form, not any particular content of the argument. Thus any attempt to define *good* or any other general word of commendation in terms of the actual or possible wishes, decisions, likes, or dislikes of any human person, or group, or institution is equally exposed to an appropriate particular version of the same general challenge. Suppose, for instance, that you want to say that for you the word *justice* simply means *what the law prescribes*, then by this token you waive all rights to denounce as unjust any arrangements whatsoever which may happen to be legally laid down. Or, again, suppose that – with or without some reference to the alleged teachings of sociology or anthropology – you maintain that the word *good* is straightforwardly equivalent to *what is socially approved*, then you thereby abandon the privilege of being able on occasion to reject as bad some established norm of your own society.

The alternative which Leibniz rejected with a shudder was brazenly embraced by his older but bolder contemporary, the Englishman Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). With his usual lack of inhibition Hobbes urges in Chapter XXXI of his *Leviathan* that

the right of nature whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his laws, is to be derived not from his creating them, as if he required obedience as of gratitude for his benefits, but from his irresistible power. . . . To those therefore whose power is irresistible the dominion of all men adhereth naturally by their excellence of power;

and, consequently, it is from that power that the kingdom over men and the right of afflicting them at his pleasure belongeth naturally to God almighty, not as creator and gracious, but as omnipotent. And though punishment be due to sin only, because by that word is understood affliction for sin, yet the right of afflicting is not always derived from men’s sin but from God’s power.

This question, ‘Why evil men often prosper and good men suffer adversity?’ has been much disputed . . . and is the same with this of ours, ‘By what right God dispenses the prosperities and adversities of this life?’ and is of that difficulty as it hath shaken the faith not only of the vulgar but of philosophers, and, which is more, of the saints, concerning the divine providence. ‘How good’, said David, ‘is the God of Israel to those that are upright in heart, and yet my feet were almost gone . . . for I was grieved at the wicked, when I saw the ungodly in such prosperity.’ And Job, how earnestly does he expostulate with God for the many afflictions which he suffered notwithstanding his righteousness. This question in the case of Job is decided by God himself not by arguments derived from Job’s sin but his own power. For whereas the friends of Job drew their arguments from his affliction to his sin, and he defended himself by the conscience of his innocence, God himself taketh up the matter; and, having justified the affliction by arguments drawn from his power, such as this, ‘Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?’, and the like, both approved Job’s innocence and reproved the erroneous doctrine of his friends.

To anyone who follows Hobbes in choosing this alternative there can be no theological Problem of Evil; or, if you prefer it, there is a problem but one which has a simple Gordian solution. The theological Problem of Evil is to show, or to try to show, that there is really no inconsistency: between asserting, on the one hand, that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect creator God; while on the other hand admitting, as we must, that our world – his supposed creation – is far from flawless. To Leibniz who, as we have seen, accepted the other alternative, and who also insisted upon believing in a God with the characteristics specified, this Problem of Evil was inescapable. He presented his treatment in his *Theodicy*. Although we shall not in this book be much concerned with this Problem of Evil, which only arises for the theist or the would-be theist, it is worth mentioning by the way that the key notion in the candidate solution proposed by Leibniz is – as in any competent treatment it surely must be – that of all actual evils as somehow the logically, as opposed to causally, necessary preconditions of higher goods. The idea is that all the

actual evils of the world are necessary to the occurrence of more than compensating goods: in the way in which there necessarily has to be an injury if there is to be forgiveness; and not in the way in which, in the world as it in fact is but might not have been, there has to be hard training if there is to be a first-class athletics team.

The paragraphs to be quoted now from the *Theodicy* provide some variations on the theme of the earlier citation from the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. For those who have no time for theology, and even for those who have, it will be a salutary exercise to adapt the arguments of Leibniz to some parallel secular case, such as that of the Nazi "Right is what is good for Germany":

Those who believe that God has established good and evil by an arbitrary decree . . . deprive God of the designation *good*. For what reason could one have to praise him for what he does, if in doing something quite different he would have done equally well? I have very often been surprised that various Supralapsarian theologians, as for instance Samuel Rutherford, a Professor of Theology in Scotland . . . could have been involved in so strange an idea. Rutherford . . . says positively that nothing is unjust or morally bad in God's eyes before he has forbidden it. Thus without this prohibition it would be a matter of indifference whether one murdered or saved a man, loved God or hated him, praised or blasphemed him.

Nothing is so unreasonable as that. One may teach that God established good and evil by a positive law, or one may assert that there was something good and just before his decree, but that he is not required to conform to it, and that nothing prevents him from acting unjustly and perhaps condemning the innocent. But it all comes to the same thing, offering almost equal dishonour to God. For if justice was established arbitrarily and without any cause, if God came upon it by a kind of chance, as if it were a matter of drawing lots, then his goodness and his wisdom are not manifested in it and there is nothing at all to attach him to it. If it is by a purely arbitrary decree, without any reason, that he has established or created what we call justice and goodness, then he can annul them or change their nature. The result would be that one would have no reason to assume oneself that he will observe them always, as on the assumption that they are founded on reasons it would be possible to say that he will observe them. The same would hold good more or less if his justice were different from ours, if, for example, it were written in his code that it is just to make the innocent eternally unhappy. Also, according to these principles nothing would oblige

God to keep his word or would guarantee us its fulfilment. For why should the law of justice, which states that reasonable promises must be kept, be more inviolable for him than any other laws? (§ 176)

All this consideration of the nature and implications of the challenge put by 'Socrates' was introduced – it may easily have been forgotten – to show how something becomes part of the progress of philosophy. Interesting and important as it is in itself it also is a good illustration for this purpose. For it is the sort of point which, once well and truly made and developed, cannot properly be ignored. No one with any pretensions to philosophical competence now has any business to argue in any of the areas to which it is relevant without recognizing this kind of challenge, and trying to come to terms with it. This is not to say that mere competence now by the same token also demands some one particular response. Leibniz, as we have been seeing, was scandalized at any suggestion of an answer other than that God approves of what is good for the reason that it is good. Hobbes, on the other hand, unflinchingly accepts the implications of the opposite position. What they have in common is that both see that the challenge first put by 'Socrates' in the *Euthyphro* is relevant, where it is, and both see that the opposite answers carry the implications which they do carry.

It is precisely and only because it is in this and other ways possible to assess philosophical expertise independently of any judgement of the truth or falsity of some particular position that we are able to conduct non-partisan university examinations which set questions in philosophy as opposed to questions asking only what some philosopher as a matter of fact said. Nevertheless, although generally distinctions can be seen to be relevant or irrelevant and arguments to be valid or invalid independent of any categorical assessment of the truth or falsity of premises or conclusions, in a particular case a collection of premises may be known to be true; and then, given also suitable valid arguments, we may claim to know the conclusions thus derived from these premises. If from this and that the other follows necessarily, then we may have a choice of taking the argument as either a proof of the other or a disproof of either this or that. But suppose the other is known to be false, then no similar choice remains. It is for this sort of reason that it is possible to hope not just to make progress towards, but actually to reach, some philosophical answers.

I conclude the present section with a passage suggesting an analogy. The image sketched here illustrates the way in which in philosophy there may be progress without finality. Also, to cite a passage containing such an

image is to suggest another albeit relatively minor way in which progress is made. Hume in his first *Inquiry* remarked: "In all abstract reasonings there is one point of view which, if we can happily hit, we shall go further towards illustrating the subject than by all the eloquence and copious expression in the world" (§ VII(ii)). Certainly no one could claim to have been sufficiently initiated into philosophy who had never met and felt the power of – say – Plato's great image of The Cave (Ch. II, § 2). The example which follows does not approach that in haunting fascination, but it does satisfy Hume's specification. The passage comes from *The Blue Book* of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). This was the first work, printed only posthumously, of the second period of one of the two or three most influential philosophers of our own century:

Imagine that we had to arrange the books of a library. When we begin the books lie higgledy-piggledy on the floor. Now there would be many ways of sorting them and putting them in their places. One would be to take the books one by one and put each on the shelf in its right place. On the other hand we might take up several books from the floor and put them in a row on a shelf, merely in order to indicate that these books ought to go together in this order. In the course of arranging the library this whole row of books will have to change its place. But it would be wrong to say that therefore putting them together on the shelf was no step towards the final result. In this case, in fact, it is pretty obvious that having put together books which belong together was a definite achievement, even though the whole row of them had to be shifted. But some of the greatest achievements in philosophy could only be compared with taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side. The onlooker who doesn't know the difficulty of the task might well think in such a case that nothing at all had been achieved. – The difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know. E.g., to see that when we have put two books together in their right order we have not thereby put them in their final places. (pp. 44–45)

§ 3 *An introduction for the lay majority*

In the first section of this chapter I explained how I proposed to compound two approaches to the problem of effecting an introduction to philosophy. In the second I confessed that the whole book is an expression of the

conviction that there can be, has been, and ought to be, progress in philosophy; and I developed and defended this perhaps paradoxical notion. The third main point to be made about the project is that I have throughout tried to keep it in mind that the vast majority of those who are introduced to philosophy will not in fact be pursuing this first acquaintance much further, if at all. If the introduction is made publicly in a university or other institution of tertiary education then the chances are, that it will be through some course forming one element in a programme which is not primarily philosophical, and that the inclusion of an element of philosophy in this programme will be justified largely by references to the sharpening of wits and the widening of horizons. If on the other hand the introduction is made privately it will, again in most cases, presumably be to someone who wants to learn something about philosophy in much the same way as he might also want to learn something about astronomy or something about biology. If so he will not be aspiring to be a philosopher, any more than he is hoping to be an astronomer or to be a biologist.

Granted that this is right about introductory courses and introductions to philosophy, and surely it is, then there are several morals not all of which are always taken to heart by everyone responsible for the design and operation of such courses. In the first place, a very obvious but none the less important point, it must be wrong to include more than a strict minimum of material the benefits of which can only be enjoyed by those who go further. One should not ask people laboriously to lay foundations for a building which will never be erected. It is, for instance, as sensible as it is necessary to demand that students starting to learn another language should do a lot of hard memory work of a kind which no one in his senses would try to justify as worth while in itself; and to point to the rewards to come once the initial grind is done with. It becomes perfectly preposterous if – with the defenders of the elementary Latin admission requirement of the older English universities – you demand this of people who you know will not be continuing to collect the post-dated rewards.

In the second place, a deliberate and constant effort needs to be made to ensure that the people concerned, and above all precisely those who will not be nourishing their first acquaintance with philosophy into a lifelong friendship, do actually get some of the advantages which advocates of such courses claim for them. Thus it is said of philosophy, as it is said of every other not obviously utilitarian and career-oriented study, that it can be a mental training invaluable in any walk of life whatever. This claim is in fact made with equal assurance for all such studies, and for others too. It is