

Philosophy and its Recent Critics - A Reply

R. B. Angell

I

In January, 1966, TIME magazine had an editorial essay entitled "What (If Anything) to Expect from Today's Philosophers." In general it was a good summary of the present status of philosophy, with a few journalistic liberties, perhaps; but the interesting thing was that its general conclusion was that not much is to be expected from present day philosophers, and by present day philosophers TIME meant the existentialists and the analysts. The gist of the editorial seemed to be that somehow we should return to the old ways in philosophy - to the "great questions of life" as they called them. And it was looking with hope at what it saw as certain tendencies among certain philosophers to return to these questions. About a month later the New York Times Magazine had another article, this written by Lewis Feuer; and the title of this one was "American Philosophy is Dead." Feuer's article was much less accurate and much less deserving, I think, of study; but still it was an article which indicated a feeling which is rather widespread in this country, perhaps, that technical analytical philosophy and existentialism are not giving answers that they should be giving to today's questions; that it isn't relevant; that somehow philosophers have gotten tangled up in their own narrow interests and that what they have to say is of no importance to people in general. This reaction to modern philosophy is not new. The British journal, The

Economist, wrote in 1959 "Why are modern philosophers hated - if they are? Hardly any of them, despite their diversity, would claim that, as philosophers, they can tell us what to do. When other direction posts are falling down, philosophers are assumed to be the people who ought to be giving us directions about life." Both the philosophical development of contemporary philosophy and the reaction against it came to England before America.

Since 1966, philosophers have been involved in several actions that might raise some questions about whether or not contemporary philosophers have something to say about large issues in the real world. In December 1966, the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association passed an unprecedented resolution deploring our government's military stance and policy of escalation in Vietnam. "The traditions of our vocation make it appropriate," the resolution read, "that we express our concern on issues of great moral urgency. We feel that the war in Vietnam is such an issue." In May, 1967, the Western Division passed an even more specific resolution to the same effect. In advertisements in the New York Times and elsewhere, philosophers were central figures in appeals to stop the bombing of North Vietnam, settle the War by negotiation, and so on. It was ^{contemporary philosophers} Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre who sponsored the mock trial of the Vietnam War in Sweden. In general, if one looks around at the ferment which took place on college campuses, one often finds a philosopher at the center. It was a philosophy major who led the student revolts at Berkeley; it was professors of philosophy

who were the centers of controversy at Yale, at Tufts, and at quite a few other places, in recent years. The controversial philosophy professors, to be sure, are not always analysts or existentialists; but we can be sure that the latter are involved in these controversies. So it hardly seems correct to say that what contemporary philosophers have to say is not relevant or related to contemporary issues; though of course one must not assume that because what they say is relevant, it is necessarily sound or correct. And tenuous as this contention may appear, I wish to suggest that there is a connection between the ^{activities} ~~events~~ alluded to and the new approaches in philosophy; that contemporary philosophy is, in fact, very relevant indeed to problems of our world; and that the trouble is not that philosophers have nothing to say, but that the institutions of government and the popular press are not yet listening.

Thus in this talk I would like to defend the relevance and importance of contemporary Western philosophy. By contemporary or 20th century philosophy I have in mind four schools of thought which have developed within the 20th century and which I believe have certain things in common as distinct from what might be called traditional philosophy. The ~~earliest~~ ^{first} of these is pragmatism; announced and defended by William James in the first decade of this century, and by others since. The next movement which I think ~~as~~ particularly interesting is the movement of logical empiricism, or logical positivism, which came as an outcome of the logical researches of Russell and Whitehead and their propagandizing

activities in the 2nd decade of this century. This began to be developed by the Vienna Circle in the early 20's and it reached a kind of peak of centrality and focus in the philosophical discussions during the 30's and perhaps the early 40's. A third movement, of course, is the movement of existentialism which has not been at the very center of attention in American or British discussions, but which certainly has been the center of attention on the Continent of Europe. Heidegger and Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others have made this a philosophy which has emerged as something distinctly new. It came into its own, generally, in the post-war forties and fifties. And fourthly, there is what we now call ordinary language philosophy, as reflected in the later Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations and the work of Austin, Ryle and many others. This, of course, was in large part a reaction against the assumptions of an underlying ideal language which guided the linguistic investigations of the logical positivists. But all of these four philosophies, it seems to me, are new philosophies in the twentieth century. They all have predecessors, to be sure, and they have great differences; there are certain very distinct ways in which all four of them are different from anything that traditional philosophy said prior to this century. This, at least, is my contention.

In contrast to these four contemporary philosophies

I would mention several others as examples of ^{the} traditional philosophy. ^{sort of} First, I wish to talk in terms of traditional philosophies which have widespread popular support. And one

of St Thomas Aquinas

of these, certainly, is the ~~Theistic~~ philosophy, which, up until very recently, formed the chief framework of discussion within which practically all Catholic philosophers officially pursued their investigations. A large proportion of the six hundred million Catholics in the world are raised on the principles and categories of this philosophical world-view, which was adopted as the official philosophy of the Catholic Church by a papal encyclical in 1879. Even though there is much recent ferment in the Catholic Church, it is very likely that the momentum of the past will continue to impress Thomism upon millions of Catholic communicants for some time to come. Secondly, dialectical materialism, as it has developed from Marx ^{and} Engels, represents a world-view which in one form or another is taught as the official philosophy of the governments of some one billion people - about one third of the world's population. Although this philosophy is not as rigorously expounded as might be demanded by the standards of Western philosophers, and of course is not as monolithic as it is sometimes said to be, it contains certain clear-cut positions with respect to metaphysics, theory of knowledge and even ethics. Although its political impact is a distinctly twentieth century phenomenon, its philosophical development belongs clearly in the nineteenth century, and thus it belongs, from the point of view of the questions it claims to answer and the methods it uses, with the traditional philosophies. In addition to these two widely disseminated world-views we must of course mention the impressive and respectable traditional

philosophies in Western culture like Cartesian dualism, Berkeleyan subjective idealism, Humean Phenomenalism, Hegelian idealism, and the materialism or physicalism inspired by the successes of the nineteenth century science, which are standard fare in our philosophy curriculum.

II
This, then, is the line-up as I see it. The twentieth century philosophies of pragmatism, logical empiricism, existentialism and ordinary language philosophy, ~~contrast in~~ ^{against} ~~certain ways with~~ the traditional philosophies of Thomism, Dialectical materialism, and various dualisms, idealisms, Platonisms, and materialisms.

Now my thesis may be related, first of all, to what might be called a sociological observation. Each of these new, distinctively contemporary, philosophies have arisen and gained currency in the so-called "free democracies" - in America, England, France, and to some extent in Germany. On the other hand, I think we can say, without being biased, that the popular traditional philosophies - Thomism and Marxism - are found predominately, or most effectively, in countries which are more authoritarian, as in the oligarchies of Spain and South America, or of communist states. Both Thomism and Marxism, like Plato, contended that their world-view was the true world-view, and concluded that those who understand this and have the wisdom appropriate to it, are best fitted to rule and guide the destinies of less informed brethren.

~~We must not claim too much here.~~
The other traditional philosophies, not being adopted by any social institution, are less easy to relate to particular

forms of government. Hegelianism gave some support to Nazism and Fascism, but it also inspired political and social radicalism; scientific materialism has been utilized both in ^{the} ~~the Spence's~~ defense of an extreme laissez-faire individualism, and by technocratic engineers of social planning. Furthermore, we can not ignore the debt of contemporary philosophies to the methodologies of traditional philosophers like Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume and Kant. For without the radical inquiries of these men, who tried to ground their beliefs about the world in the immediacies of individual experience, it may be granted that twentieth century philosophy would not be what it is today.

^{Nietzsche}
~~But~~ without wishing to claim too much about the historical influences of these philosophies, or to overstate the correlations indicated, I believe there is a significance in the fact that movements which are vilified today as contemporary philosophy have arisen and caught hold among philosophers in the "free democracies." I say this is significant, because I believe very firmly there is a relevance seldom ^{recognized} ~~seen~~ and seldom ^{affirmed} ~~commented upon~~ - between these contemporary philosophies and the concepts of life and of political processes which are practiced and accepted and valued in free democracies. These philosophies, I believe, are - for all their great differences and detailed intricacies - engaged in tracing out the most fundamental implications, both methodological and axiological, of the methods and values of our culture. They both shape and are shaped by our ideals and way of life.

Let us consider, first, those facets of the "free democracies" which mark them off from other forms of government. They are, most obviously, 1) periodic genuinely free elections and universal suffrage, 2) freedom for discussion of ideas (and thus freedom of speech, of the press and of religion) and 3) respect for individuals, and especially dissenting individuals, in several ways: as persons potentially possessed of dignity springing from honesty, independence and integrity, as loci of individual rights, as sources of new ideas and ultimately significant information, and as the ultimate locus of the values by which the success or failure of our society is to be judged. To some extent these facets of democracy are embedded in and protected by our laws. But more broadly they reflect habits of mind and attitudes which led John Dewey, among others, to describe democracy - in the sense in which we believe in it and are willing to die for it - as a "way of life" which is considerably more subtle and unified than any mere governmental form.

The charges levied against contemporary philosophy are, most characteristically, that, first, philosophers no longer attempt to ask and answer in a formal and disciplined way, the "great questions of life, that ordinary men might put to themselves in reflective moments", that, to quote TIME, "In a world of war and change, of a principles armed with bombs and technology searching for principles, the alarming thing is not what philosophers say but what they fail to say." Secondly, it is said that "philosophy looks inward at its own problems rather than outward at men, and philosophizes about

philosophy, not about life." More specifically, it is charged that the preoccupation of linguistic philosophers with either analyzing words or statements in terms of formal logical systems, or of investigating various "language games" of ordinary language, are irrelevant to life. Thirdly, contemporary philosophy is charged with abandoning objectivity to relativity, subjectivism and skepticism. This charge was first raised against James, when he ridiculed Objective Truth and extolled the search for the useful and the expedient relative to human, and often individual purposes. It is raised again against the existentialists because of their insistence that man is an anguished choosing creature whose decisions can ultimately be viewed only as human commitments chosen without benefit of absolute rational grounds or reasons.

These charges are based in part on firm facts about contemporary philosophies, in part on the misunderstandings of people who do not see and do not try to understand what is going on in philosophy, and in part are sheer mistakes and confusions. The confusions are helped, no doubt, by the fact that the different schools of contemporary philosophy deal with different questions and use different methodologies, by the regrettable tendency of each school to over-generalize its own approach and squabble with other schools, and by the lack of communication between them. But I believe that all four of these schools have certain things in common which provide grounds upon which it is possible to show a certain community of interest, of methodology and of value. And I

further believe that while they differ, each school is making certain distinct and valuable contributions to a common philosophy.

III

[1977] The common thread which runs through all of the four schools is, it seems to me, the rejection^{in a very subtle way} of the traditional approach to metaphysical questions, and the substitution of questions and methods which can be answered by reference to experience alone. Yet the shift which has taken place is more subtle than certain simple dogmas might suggest. It is at once a shift in the reference of philosophical questions, in the methodology of answering philosophical questions, and in the evaluation of the importance of certain questions. In traditional philosophy, the referent was transcendent reality; it was supposed to be the business of philosophy to establish what would remain in the real universe if all human experience were annihilated - would it be God? a world of material entities? some mixture of both, or what? Subordinate questions as to the nature of causality, of mind, of determinism or free will, and of man's destiny were all conceived in this light. So conceived, these were considered the "great questions", the important questions, the most valuable questions posed for philosophy,^{The search for Absolute Truth.} The methodology of philosophy was geared to trying to provide conclusive and rationally coercive arguments grounded in immediate facts or insights available to individual men, which would settle these questions for all time, and in a way which would be compelling for all rational men. All of the great classical

philosophers attempted to carry through such a program. But the rigorous internal requirements of this classical program for philosophy led inexorably to its own defeat. Starting with Descartes, armed with the critical tools of the method of doubt, the empiricists proceeded through Locke, Berkeley and Hume to skepticism and the egocentric predicament; and the detailed analysis of deductive systems, beginning with non-Euclidean geometries and culminating in the syntactic analysis of contemporary logic cut the ground from under the pretensions of rationalism. Neither the absolute idealists, nor the materialistic world-views based on the remarkable achievements of modern science, could survive the critical insights which developed out of the ^{very} assumptions of ^{speculative} classical philosophy itself. ~~It was not~~ ^{Thus it has not been} perversity or triviality, but simple intellectual and philosophical honesty which paved the way for contemporary philosophy. ^{Contemporary philosophy is the honest and logical outcome of the best efforts to deal with great speculative questions.} Wm James, in a sense, led the way. Presenting not so much an assertion as a new program, he tried to divert philosophers from preoccupation with realities transcending experience, and to get them to look instead at experience itself and find therein the ^{pragmatic} meanings of common sense principles, scientific laws and religious doctrines. The methodology he coupled with his radical empiricism, involved close attention to the relations which obtained between all sorts of experience - sensory experience, practical activity, ideas and values, - ~~identifiable~~ within individual human experience. His criterion of acceptability was only incidently related to the correspondences between ideas and experiential realities; more basically,

it involved tests of utilities. But what was significant was that the focus of interest has shifted from extra-human realities, to the distinctions and relationships identifiable within human experience. Part of the strategy of his program was to declare that "truth" means "what works." This strategy was effective in ^{attracting} bringing about significant shifts in attention, but it also ^{diverted} diverted attention into side issues; for certainly, as Moore and Russell quickly pointed out, ^{to re-define} the re-definition of "truth" as "utility" ^{ran} entailed a serious ^{risk} danger that the very useful, traditional notion of truth as correspondence would be lost.

(1977) The logical positivists, using the new and vastly more rigorous ^{Frege (1879) and} and potent distinctions of Russell and Whitehead's logic, ⁽¹⁹¹⁰⁾ rejected James' definition of truth ^{as mental beliefs} in favor of ^{truth as} correspondence; but the only correspondences between statements and realities they condoned were correspondences with realities embedded in possible human ^{sense} experience. In rejecting the search for absolute reality they went somewhat further than James, rudely declaring that metaphysical questions were nonsensical, or meaningless, and should be banished entirely. This too was a strategy of great importance; for it brought out in a rigorous logical way the sense in which traditional claims to have proved statements about a transcendent reality were ^{all of them} essentially, and incorrigibly, spurious. Few philosophers today would say that the traditional questions were completely meaningless, or even insignificant. But no competent practitioner of contemporary philosophy would try today to substantiate claims about transcendental reality in the same manner of classical philosophers. And logic itself, once viewed as dealing with the most general laws of all reality, is reducible to the certain

manageable activities of syntactical symbol manipulation, by means of which man can learn to manipulate and rearrange his knowledge of experience in the interests of prediction and control.

~~If we grant that~~ The logical positivists engaged in their tasks with certain unexamined preconceptions about ordinary language and its reducibility to the ideal language of modern logic. The reaction of ordinary language philosophers must be viewed as one further advance towards ^{even} a purer and richer empiricism. For here even the pretensions of logic are criticized for inadequacy to encompass the richness and variation of human experience as it is expressed in ordinary language. Wittgenstein's later injunctions to see how language is used in fact, how it interacts with itself and with physical and social behavior in actual fact, ~~puts~~ the task of the formal logician in perspective. For there is no conflict between the intricate and technical researches of formal logicians and ordinary language philosophers. The "language-games" of formal logic, though artificial languages, are as legitimate objects of analytic and constructive investigation as any other language games; but they are now seen not as sub-structures which in some vestigial metaphysical sense are construed as under-girding all of the language of common sense and science, but as new buildings or new suburbs added to the old city of ordinary language to perform limited, but often new and important, functions in life. The techniques and methods of formal logic become adjuncts to ordinary language; they are instruments having uses which go beyond the capabilities, in some areas, of natural languages.

The writings of existentialists seemed for some time to be

quite outside and incompatible with the work of the English-speaking analysts. In part this was because the locus of their work was in the elusive area of personal decision and self-hood. And certainly the methods of existentialists lacked any direct concern with details of spoken or written language. Yet ~~some~~ common ties become increasingly clearer. Not only the fundamental insistence upon the absence of absolute ethics, or traditional props for metaphysical beliefs, with the corresponding ultimacy of individual choice and decision, but also the phenomenological analyses of self-hood in its many aspects, point to areas of agreement. Austin, in his "Plea for Excuses" found the phrase "linguistic phenomenology" less misleading than the phrase "linguistic analysis" and there are points at which Sartre's subtle efforts to specify the phenomenology of the self in Being and Nothingness could without much alteration be translated into studies of the different sorts of contexts and situations in which words like 'I', 'me', 'myself' etc., are used in ordinary language. In Sartre, as in the best of the pragmatists and analysts, there is sustained and dominant effort to set forth distinctions and concepts purely in terms of experiences and facts which might arise "existentially" within the scope of individual human experience.

Thus for all of the schools of contemporary philosophy, there is a fierce determination to focus upon and be faithful to the rich variety of distinctions and relationships which can be found with individual human experience: and a marked ^{refusal} ~~disinclination~~ to ground their premisses, or rest their conclusions, in some supposed domain of transcendental reality.

IV

But this new attention to empirical concerns is badly misconstrued if it is viewed merely as the reluctant narrowing of interest due to the unfortunate failure of the classical program. In the first place, attention to distinctions within experience accessible to individuals is revealing itself as an area of unlimited richness; the new methodologies lead to ever expanding fields of interest. The fascination of exploring these areas often makes the cut and dried ratiocinations of traditional philosophy seen dull by comparison. In the second place, it is increasingly apparent that even the traditional questions - in any sense in which they are genuinely evocative for reflective men - can be treated as human questions - questions within human experience, so that their puzzling aspects and possible answers are themselves also subtle facets of human experience. So treated they are subject to the same methods of analysis, with the same prospect of the new insights, as the more immediate problems of common sense and science.

In view of this turn from transcendental reality to the human experience, it seems odd that critics should accuse contemporary philosophers of "looking inward at its own problems rather than outward towards men" and of "philosophizing about philosophy, not about life." In every one of its phases, contemporary philosophy has been trying to get closer to and become more faithful to the complexities of actual ^{individual} human experience. Whereas the relationships between scientific laws and empirical observations were loosely and vaguely grasped or assumed fifty years ago, philosophical investigation has pressed steadily forward in

spelling out the actual links between direct observation and general laws; where philosophers talked grandly and over-simply about the distinction between Reality with a capital R and Appearance, contemporary philosophers have insisted on attending to the various ways in which, in fact, ordinary people and non-philosophers distinguish different sorts of realities from illusions, hallucinations, fictions and abstractions. Whereas traditional philosophy supposed a sharp dichotomy between logical argument and experience, contemporary philosophers have investigated the ways in which ordinary, intelligent men sometimes do and sometimes do not proceed in trying to ~~arrive at reasoned~~ ^{justify} conclusions on the basis of reasons in various contexts and situations. It is undoubtedly true that the price contemporary philosophy pays for its fidelity to experience is that simplistic categories and methods give way to subtle distinctions and methodologies; but surely the charge that we are getting away from ordinary experience and common sense is ^{thoroughly} a false one.

It is true, too, of course, that to the outside observer the preoccupation of linguistic philosophers with language appears to be a withdrawal from life. But here we must appeal again to the philosopher's age-long effort to escape the charge of subjectivism. For the chief reason, presumably, for dealing with linguistic forms is that language, as distinct from traditional 'ideas', is lodged in the public domain. Appeals to introspective ideas and intuitions come to a dead-end when subjective reports clash. But language and its uses are objective aspects of experience. If the analysts have said that the function of philosophy was to analyze and clarify language, it should take only a slight acquaintance with their actual efforts to see that

what might be described more conventionally - and perhaps less objectionally to classical philosophers - as the clarification and organization of our ideas, has been replaced by a surrogate inquiry which covers much the same ground while avoiding the old pitfalls. Every idea that can be discussed must be discussed with language; and to shift attention from the supposed ideas behind the words, to the words themselves and their relationships to other words and actions, can surely do nothing but gain rigor and precision with no loss of content.

That there is a new kind of relativism, and a rejection of old absolutistic endeavors in contemporary philosophy ^{also} need not be denied. It is all to the good. But it is only a relativism of a certain sort, and to describe the new methods and objectives as subjectivistic or non-objective is as far from the truth as it is possible to go. This charge is, I think, a result of trying to transfer the traditional metaphysical conception of objectivity and subjectivity to problems in which they have no place. If we assume, as classical philosophy was led to assume, that our minds are ghostly entities enclosed in impenetrable private domains, ^(i.e. Reality independent of our minds) so that the totality of "external reality" must encompass both all of the so-called real material objects, and/or other minds than our own which "exist"; then, of course, our description of contemporary philosophy as concerned with what is accessible in the individual's experience will be construed as a purely subjective and limited endeavor. By the same token, all that is objective on this ^{old} view - (i.e., ^{as supposedly} the inaccessible "external world") will be merely conjectural and contemporary philosophy will be said to have abandoned the objective. But the words "objectivity" and

"subjectivity", like the words "mind" and "matter" are used by ordinary people in very adequate ways which have no relation at all to the traditional philosophical dichotomy. From the very first, with James' influential essay in 1904, "Does consciousness exist?" contemporary philosophers have been careful to point out that the distinctions of ordinary men between what is mental and what is not, what is objective and what subjective, distinguish aspects within experience which are quite independent of the traditional metaphysical problem. James' insight was reflected in Russell's neutral monism fourteen years later, and was duly incorporated later in the logical positivist reformulation of Russell's logical atomism. More recently, in the work of Ryle (in his Concept of Mind) and Wittgenstein's later investigations, the ordinary language usage of ~~such~~ ^{connected with mental processes} terms has been extensively explored. And ~~indeed~~ ^{the} today ~~such~~ traditional conceptions of subjectivity, based on a dualistic metaphysic, find no significant place in either the phenomenology of language or the existentialists' phenomenology of the self. Sartre's observation that though 'subjectivity is the starting point' the concept of the self develops only in conjunction with the concept of other persons is but one of the valuable new insights illustrating the ways in which old metaphysical dichotomies have given way to distinctions related to particular facts of experience.

Thus only those not yet free of the traditional way of viewing philosophy and its problems, and still using its absolutistic categories, would incline to charge contemporary philosophy with subjectivism. In fact, there is a new kind of objectivism, vastly superior in its rigor and its honesty to the traditional conception.

It is an objectivity tied to methodology, consistency in making distinctions, and in its refusal to inject presuppositions and philosophical constructs into the given facts. The dispassionate consideration of how language is used in actual experience, the inflexible demands of consistency and rigor in working with logical proofs and systems, the fierce determination to examine the phenomenology of the ordinary standpoint without injecting metaphysical or philosophical preconceptions, all illustrate kinds of objectivity and methodological honesty and rigor which are characteristically demanded in contemporary philosophical studies. If the words "experience" and "empiricism" are used to describe contemporary investigations, it is not because these investigations are construed as referring to a private domain known only to introspection, but because these terms, better than any others perhaps, ward off the tendencies to slip back into traditional ^{transcendental} categories and ^{metaphysical} arguments. If 'objectivity' means something close to "impartiality" or "disinterested pursuit of truth", as distinct from pursuit of ontological entities independent of the observer, surely the contemporary philosopher is more objective than the traditional philosopher who insists that experience must be construed as reflecting certain transcendent realities when the disinterested person knows very well that it need not be construed in any such manner. In one very ordinary, derogatory sense, subjective judgments are just those sorts which insist on reading into reality what one wishes to see there whether it is there or not. In this sense, the subjective pronouncements of traditional philosophers are replaced by the greater objectivity of contemporary philosophers.

V

Let us go back now to the question of the relation of contemporary philosophy to the cultures from which they have sprung. Those persons

who, in fact, demand answers from philosophers on the ^{old} so-called "great questions" concerning the ultimate nature of reality, are seldom the children of Socrates. Rather they are often practical men, looking for a crutch by which to further their practical ends. How useful it is to the Marxists to be able to convince their potential opponents that the nature of reality, quite independently of all human experience, is such that the class struggle will inevitable result in a communist state. Then all questions of whether communism should, or should not, exist can be put aside. How stabilizing for the Catholic Church, as a social institution, to convince its communicants that the Truth and the Ultimate values have an independent existence above, beyond, and independent of their own experience and their own limited perceptions! From the time of Plato the claims of authoritarian systems have rested, if not on brute power alone, on the claim that a favored few had access to knowledge of Absolute realities which were independent of and more important than the experiences and reflections of ordinary men. Even our own country found the metaphysics of Deism and natural rights with its attendant sanctions of revolt to secure human welfare and justice, an admirable ideological instrument of revolution. And today, when TIME Magazine asks for answers to the "great questions", one need not look too far to guess the type of answer they hope for. How nice if philosophers would provide ^{an absolute} rational justification for America's struggle in making the world over in its image! How helpful it would be if philosophers would come forth with a final ethical system which would establish the absolute justice and rightness of our national goals and aspirations. And how earnestly they hope for an answer rooted in a final settlement of the question of the nature and structure of ultimate reality; an answer which would presumably enable them to put the "great questions" aside and get on with

practical matters.

But philosophers in the free democracies, both because they are true to their ancient discipline and because they are children of the purest democracies the world has seen, are not about to provide these kinds of answers. It is no accident that the great philosophers of antiquity rose from the ashes of the democracy in Athens. And it is no accident that the development of great philosophies in modern times has paralleled the development of political and intellectual freedom. Freedom of inquiry is as indispensable to philosophy as it is to democracy. The methods and spirit of philosophical investigation are closely related to the methods and spirit of free democracy itself.

1) In philosophy, as in no other subject, the free investigation of ideas knows no limits; In democracy, as in no other form of government, the free interchange of ideas is permitted and encouraged. 2) In philosophy, as in no other subject, the effort is to find reasons accessible to individuals, upon which an individual can erect an integrated and consistent set of beliefs consonant with his experiences and values; In democratic societies, as in no other societies, each individual is encouraged to find his own values and beliefs, and make his own adjustments in his own way to the social experience he encounters. 3) In philosophy, as in no other subject, there are no ultimate authorities who by fiat can produce indubitable premisses or final and unquestionable solutions; when philosophers relapse into mere scholasticism, philosophy ceases; In democracy there are no final authorities, no ultimate officials, no dogma, that can not be subjected to critical scrutiny and discussion. 4) In no other subject does the intellectual, integrity, honesty, and independence of the individual count for more than in philosophy; ~~and~~ in no other form of government does the responsibility, the dignity and the integrity

of the individual receive more attention than in a democracy.

It has been claimed by some that the free democracies should somehow have a philosophy, a unified outlook to oppose to the philosophies of communism and totalitarianism that it opposes. And well it should. But usually what is looked for is another ^{old-line} traditional philosophy, a metaphysical world-view. Communism, it is pointed out, has its official metaphysics, its theory of knowledge, its ethical and aesthetic theories. Should not democracy also have ^{an absolute} a world-view, an ethics, and a theory of knowledge, so that we can oppose communism more effectively? How contrary this would be to the democratic way of life! Freedom of religion and freedom of ideas means the freedom to hold different views about the world and reality, different views about knowledge and different approaches to ethics. Respect for the individual, both as source of new ideas and a locus of independence and dignity, demands that he be left free to interpret his experience and discuss in his many different ways. One cannot be a member of a democracy, participating in the conflict of ideas and ideals which mark our periodic elections, without learning that men are deeply and seriously at variance in their views of the ends, the realities, and the means, of life. To learn tolerance is to learn to live with the relativity of ideas, and to learn to cherish it. If no authority can long sustain an image of infallibility and unchallenged respect in democracy, it is also true that no man can long continue to live without a certain healthy humility about his own limitations. One cannot live in a free society, where one must make one's own choices and live with the consequences, without learning to accept responsibility for one's failures as well as one's successes. And the dignity of the individual goes hand in hand with his respect for the responsibility for these choices. *This relativism of democracy is reflected in the thorough going rejection of absolutes in contemporary philosophy.*

In contemporary philosophy, for all its technical intricacies,

we find an overwhelming fascination with distinctions that individuals can draw within the scope of human experience. In a very real sense, the deliberations of modern philosophers center on decisions and distinctions that individuals can or must make to get about in ordinary experience. The move is not so much away from abstractions, as towards the effort to see the relation of abstractions to human experience. The locus of modern philosophy is not the totality of reality, but the decision-making processes of individual men. Its aim is to explore the kinds of experiences and reasons which can or, ordinarily do, provide grounds for individual decisions. The realities it is concerned with and count as important are human realities, not transcendent ones. The great questions for modern philosophy are questions about realities within the scope of human experience, not about realities lying beyond it. Words like "world communism", "democracy", "freedom", "responsibility", "human dignity", "law", "Justice", "right" are not accepted as symbols of simple reified abstractions; they are viewed as words used by individuals, often in many different ways and in many different contexts, and great effort is expended to distinguish the many ways in which they are or could be used ^{significantly} in actual individual experience. This sensitivity to and respect for the variety of distinctions associated with these terms in individual experience, and the determination to avoid the inaccuracies which result from over-simple imagines and accidental non-functioning usages, make philosophers, I think, rather unsympathetic to simplified pictures of the world and its troubles. *Democracies respect for individual differences, is reflected in these aspects contemporary philosophy.*

The recent actions of philosophical associations, and many philosophers (along with other intellectuals) in criticism of American philosophy in Vietnam is, I think, not unconnected with the evolution of modern philosophy itself. The simplified imagery of a nation at war

where such terms as "communism", "democracy", and "freedom" are used uncritically as excuses for bombing and killing run counter to the philosopher's sensitivity to the rich variety and subtlety of individual experience. Wars may indeed be justified; but the ways of justification differ. In some wars the relationships between justificatory statements and the realities of human experience to which they supposedly relate are closer or more veridical than others. When Hitler had conquered eight countries by military might, and evidence of his annihilation of the Jews had leaked out, there was a closer relationship between the ordinary use of "aggression", "injustice", "evil", and "wrong" than seems to obtain with respect to America's purported enemy in the present war in Vietnam. In the present situation the words used seem to be more out of gear with experiential reality; at times it seems that communism is a reified abstraction, an almost metaphysical reality or evil, which has lost its ordinary connections with human experience. Certainly in some quarters, it is plain, that the war is ideological, associated with the refusal of the enemy to believe in the Gods and world-view that many Americans happen to believe in. This, and the reliance upon sheer force, with its lack of respect for either that which binds the experiences of individuals together, or that which individuals have a right to differ in, its lack of sensitivity to what is real in human experience, as distinct from differences in modes of verbal expression, may account in part for philosophers reluctance to offer the kinds of answers that TIME magazine and practical statements ^{called} ~~hope~~ for.

Contemporary philosophers have much to contribute to the philosophy of democracy. But it will not come in the form of a worldview, or an absolute ethics. It will come, and is coming, in a heightened sense of individual decision-making within the subtleties and

varieties of human experience. So far, truly, its revolution has been partly destructive - destroying the traditional pretenses and claims and the methods which supposedly supported them. But, too, it has made great constructive progress in developing new methods, and by these new methods arriving at new and more refined insights. Neither the methods nor the insights have really reached the public, nor has the public seen their import. But this is not, in my mind, unusual. Philosophical ideas take about fifty years to seep down through the disciplines into ordinary speech and thought. And the greatest accomplishments still lie, I believe, in the future. What has been done, has been done piecemeal - as is frequently charged and admitted. The future, I believe, will see a synthesis which is even now beginning to form. It will not be a new metaphysic of transcendent philosophy, but it will be an integrated methodology, centered on the decision-making processes of man. And in this methodology, immensely more sophisticated and variegated and open-ended than traditional philosophy, the outlines of reality as individuals can experience it, and of the role of rational discourse and intellectual disciplines and of the integrity of individual decision-making, and of the subtle and crucial uses the words 'freedom' and 'responsibility' play in our democratic societies, will stand out more honestly and more clearly than ever before. *Democracy will get its philosophy, and it will be at once more earthy and more rigorous and precise, and more tightly related to* Ohio Wesleyan University *real human experience than any traditional philosophy has ever been. Yet it will be rich and full. And it will grow out of the very movements of contemporary philosophy which are now so little understood.*