

京大過去問 2006年 第1問

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In the Greek peninsula early in the fifth century B.C., there emerged a group of individuals, many of them with beards, who were singularly free of the anxieties about status that tormented their contemporaries. These philosophers were untroubled by either the psychological or the material consequences of a humble position in society; they remained calm in the face of insult, disapproval and poverty. When Socrates saw a pile of gold and jewellery being borne in procession through the streets of Athens, he exclaimed, “Look how many things there are which I don’t want.” When Alexander the Great passed through Corinth, he visited the philosopher Diogenes and found him sitting under a tree, dressed in rags, with no money to his name. Alexander, the most powerful man in the world, asked if he could do anything to help him. “Yes,” replied the philosopher, “if you could step out of the way. You are blocking the sun.” Alexander’s soldiers were horrified, expecting an outburst of their commander’s famous anger. But Alexander only laughed and remarked that if he were not Alexander, he would certainly like to be Diogenes. Antisthenes was told that a great many people in Athens had started to praise him. “Why,” he answered, “what have I done wrong?” Empedocles had a similar regard for the intelligence of others. He once lit a lamp in broad daylight and said, as he went around, “I am looking for someone with a mind.” (1)Having watched Socrates being insulted in the market place, a passer-by asked him, “Don’t you worry about being called names?” “Why? Do you think I should resent it if a stupid horse kicked me?” replied Socrates.

It was not that these philosophers had ceased to pay any attention to a distinction between kindness and ridicule, success and failure. They had merely settled on a way of responding to the darker half of the equation that owed nothing to the traditional honour code, and its suggestion that what others think of us must determine what we can think of ourselves, and that every insult, whether accurate or not, must shame us.

Philosophy introduced a new element to the relationship with external opinion, what one might visualize as a box into which all public perceptions, whether positive or negative, would first have to be directed in order to be assessed, and then sent on to the self with renewed force if they were true, or ejected harmlessly into the atmosphere to be dispensed with a laugh or a shrug of the shoulders if they were false. The philosophers termed the box “reason.”

(2)According to the rules of reason, a given conclusion is to be deemed true if, and only if, it flows from a logical sequence of thoughts founded on sound initial premises. Considering

mathematics to be the model of good thinking, philosophers began to search for an approximation of its objective certainties in ethical life too. Thanks to reason, our status could — philosophers proposed — be settled according to an intellectual conscience, rather than being abandoned to the whims and emotions of the market square. And (3)if rational examination revealed that we had been unfairly treated by the community, philosophers recommended that we be no more bothered by the judgement than we would be if we had been approached by a confused person bent on proving that two and two amounted to five.