

京大過去問 2003年 第1問

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If philosophy is so close to us, why do so many people think that it is something very difficult and rather weird? It isn't that they are simply wrong: some philosophy is difficult and weird, and a lot of the best philosophy is likely to seem difficult or weird at first. (1)That's because the best philosophy doesn't just come up with a few new facts that we can simply add to our stock of information, or a few new maxims to extend our list of dos and don'ts, but embodies a picture of the world and a set of values; and unless these happen to be yours already it is bound to seem very peculiar — if it doesn't seem peculiar you haven't understood it. Good philosophy expands your imagination. Some philosophy is close to us, whoever we are. Then of course some is further away, and some is further still, and some is very alien indeed. It would be disappointing if that were not so, because it would imply that human beings are intellectually rather monotonous. But there's no need to start at the deep end; we start at the shallow end, where, as I've said, we are all standing in the water already. Do remember, however (here the analogy with the swimming-pool breaks down, the way analogies often do), that this doesn't necessarily mean that we are all standing in the same place; what is shallow and familiar, and what is deep and weird, may depend on where you got in, and when.

We may be standing in the water, but why try to swim? In other words, what is philosophy for? (2)There is far too much philosophy, composed under far too wide a range of conditions, for there to be a general answer to that question. But it can certainly be said that a great deal of philosophy has been intended as a means to salvation, though what we are to understand by salvation, and salvation from what, has varied as widely as the philosophies themselves. A Buddhist will tell you that the purpose of philosophy is the relief of human suffering and the attainment of "enlightenment"; a Hindu will say something similar, if in slightly different terminology; both will speak of escape from a supposed cycle of death and rebirth in which one's moral deserts determine one's future forms. An Epicurean* (if you can find one nowadays) will dismiss all the stuff about rebirth, but offer you a recipe for maximizing pleasure and minimizing suffering in this your one and only life.

*Epicurean: one who makes pleasure the chief object of one's life