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***THE HEART OF PHILOSOPHY*****Preface to the J.P. Tarcher Edition**

It is something that appears in the eyes, in the face, in the whole tonus of the body. It is unmistakable: an awakening idea has been received; a question of the heart has been opened. And when this happens in even one student, I remember the meaning of my work as a teacher of philosophy.

Great ideas about the purpose of human life, about good and evil, about truth, the mind and the cosmos, have the power to bring us to an inner stop, to a space within ourselves in which our obsessive habit of “answering” falls away. In that empty space an entirely new experience of oneself appears. Something, *someone* has for a moment awakened in us and is looking out through our eyes and speaking with our voice, while our poor tense body begins to soften into a relaxed dignity.

And at the same time, a new kind of relationship between people becomes possible. We begin to think together, to explore our experience together, to step back from our culturally conditioned opinions which we have until now clung to as though they defined us. These opinions, these thoughts and concepts about everything and anything that have been fed to us by who knows what hand, are not myself, they are not even mine. Suddenly, for a precious moment, I *see* that. I see that I am not this agitated, self-satisfied or anxiety-ridden mind that rides me through my life. And I am not this needful little self, always liking or disliking, never able really to let another man or woman into my being, never able to listen, hardly able to love in any honorable sense of

the word, hardly able to act without the hidden agenda of personal gain, blindly following ethical rules I can honor only in words, not in deeds.

But now, under the light of great ideas that bring me to a state of deep questioning that I share with another, an entirely new sense not only of *I*, but of *we* appears. You and I together have a new kind of governing aim, a new kind of purpose in relation to each other and a new and noble need for each other. Perhaps it is only for a moment, but for that precious moment we are companions in the search for truth. We do not need to “win,” we do not need to get anything from each other except the sharing of a process of deep inquiry. Our passion is quiet; our silence is on fire.

Without this shared purpose, what do our cultures, societies, corporations and governments amount to? Our ability to work together in the search for truth is perhaps the most urgent imperative of our common life today. As previous eras were dominated by the ideals and ambitions of great men, our own time seems to require something different. It may be that the great men of previous generations appear absent today in part because of the withering gaze of cynicism to which we subject our heroes and would-be models. But there is something else, too: The energy of life contained in these individuals of yesterday needs to be sought today in the aliveness of a group of people who possess, however tentatively, the capacity to really listen and share serious questions with one another. Amid the mob-like qualities in our media and even in our classrooms, we must not forget that this kind of sharing is possible—if only we can find within ourselves the real questions that philosophy calls us to.

In this work of thinking together, a new meaning of love begins to show itself, along with—in fact, in actual fact—a new and real basis of morality and ethics. We begin

in fact, in actual fact, to experience each other waking up—just a little perhaps, but a very precious little. We understand that we are not what we have always been told we are by our sleepy, agitated world. We are human beings, beings whose fundamental food is the experience of truth.

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In the years that have passed since the first publication of this book it has become more and more clear that philosophy, real philosophy, is an imperative need in our lives and in the life of our world. The word “philosophy” was coined in ancient Greece, and throughout the ancient world it was understood as a way of living, and not merely as a mental, academic exercise. It was a way of conducting one’s life in which the contemplation of great ideas and the questions they evoke again and again reminded one that we men and women have within ourselves a divine quality of consciousness and love, and that human life on earth is in chaos because this truth about ourselves has been forgotten and because access to this reality in ourselves is blocked. What is clear now, as it was to the ancient philosophers, is that there can be no peace in our world, no genuine ethical action, and not even any real knowledge of nature or the universe, until we remember--through experience and not merely in theory--who and what we really are. We are not animals, we are human beings; but because we have forgotten what a human being is, we have become spoiled animals. We are not machines, we are human beings; but because we have forgotten what a human being is, we have become mad machines.

And therefore our science and technology, as well as our social and economic systems, are powerless to help us to rightfully inhabit our earth and serve the purposes that human beings are made for. Our science and technology, along with our social and

economic systems –being at the mercy of our diminished or exaggerated concept of ourselves—are powerless to bring us anything but confirmation of our fundamental illusions about ourselves and reality. In the same way, over the centuries, our religious practices have sometimes so broken away from the truth about what it means to be human, that through this orphaned religious life, humanity has fantasized that it was either automatically godlike or hopelessly evil.

Real philosophy was born as the effort of the truly independent mind— independent of physical and psychological desires and cultural conditioning—to open to the great Independent Intelligence of the Universe and direct us toward the path of awakening self-knowledge. Neither love, nor community, nor knowledge of nature in the full sense of the word is possible for humanity without awakening from our illusions about ourselves—nor, on the individual level, can any real meaning be found in our personal lives as we stumble, rich or poor, “mighty” or weak, between the twin mysteries of birth and death. Without awakening to the truth about ourselves, both great and terrible as this truth is, there is no good and bad, there is only chaos.

At its real heart, philosophy is one of the monuments left by great spirits to guide men and women toward the path that leads to becoming fully human. It has done this by seeding awakening ideas into the world, furthering the sacred process of inner questioning, a process that opens the heart and mind toward a new experience of one’s Self. It is a role that has obviously and even more pervasively been played by inspired art, by visionary science, by specific forms of objective music, architecture, dance and all that is properly the realm of culture and civilization—real culture and real civilization that sometimes can be perceived even in the midst of the tormented, bent metals of the

ravaged civilization within which we now must find our way. And, of course, the fundamental reminder for humankind has always been religion—but not the religion of violent belief, blind faith, or sentimental ineffectuality, nor the religion of empty theological explanations—but secretly behind all these, set down upon earth by and within the great “messengers” from Somewhere—the religion of the path, the conduct of life that leads us, together, with love and loving rigor, to the ocean of truth and being and joyous service. The ideas and the work of the mind that point us toward that path comprise what is called in this book the heart of philosophy.

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A word about the work with teen-agers that is portrayed in Part II this book: in the last several years our society has been profoundly shaken by the despair of our young people and its manifestation in suicide, self-inflicted illness, widespread clinical depression and even mass murder. Being the most sensitive and vulnerable members of our culture, moving in the unmapped realm between childhood and adulthood, with the torrents of new sexual energy pouring through them, and trapped without a guide in the labyrinthine alleys of moral guilt and incomprehensible permissiveness—alone and lonely whether in their empty rooms or roaming the streets in the nightmarish camaraderie of the gang, taking their ideals and hopes and dreams from violence and pornography whether from the flickering surface of television or pumped into their blood by orgasmic music of rage, resentment and self-pity, they, our children, are more clearly than even we ourselves are or can imagine, starving to death from the loss of meaning that is at the root of our culture’s political, material and spiritual crisis. Much, very much, is needed from us in order to help them. But what, exactly, can we do? Looking back on

my experiment of teaching philosophy to high-school students, I am more than ever convinced that we can and must bring back the ideals of the *search for understanding* to our children—through a new and regenerated vision of the purpose of art, music, scientific exploration, mathematics and real philosophy. This is not the kind of search that aims only for a conclusion in new policies, opinions, doctrines, or even concepts, but the kind that inaugurates one into a life of questioning and seeking, not as a means to an end, but as the very means of life itself.

The need to *act* in service to one's neighbor and the need to *understand* life and reality are the most essential elements in the make-up of a human being. Everything else--biology, material needs, sexual desire, social acceptance--all of that is secondary, and is meant to serve the fundamental transcendent impulses of love and understanding that comprise the true definition of the word *human*. That is what our children are telling us. Can we hear them?