

“Know that philosophy is able to perfect the human soul by bringing it to know the reality of existents according to their proper essences, as well as accurately assessing their existence by way of proofs grasped by the mind; or else accepted by tradition, as befits the majority of human beings.”

Mulla Sadrā, *The Transcendent Philosophy of the Four Journeys of the Intellect, Introduction to the First Journey*, 17th century.

From: David Burrell, ‘Mulla Sadra’s Ontology Revisited’. In: *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6, 2010, p. 54.

From the moment one sets foot in this world, there is always someone, some group of people, close or completely irrelevant trying to persuade one into doing a certain thing, trying to make up their mind for them, as if they are trying to live a life for them, instead of them. It seems too general to say that all of these people represent tradition, what majority believes in, what majority sees fit. However, there is not only one tradition. Each group can have its own tradition, like the school one attends, or club or competition, not to mention peers or how there are always groups with conflicting traditions. And in that world of that never ending list of requests to be something we need to not only survive but also live.

Firstly, the difference between “having a philosophy” and “doing philosophy” needs to be established. “Having a philosophy” is a simple task, only involving having an opinion, usually about a more complex issue, but it doesn’t quite matter as one can “have a philosophy” about everything and anything without breaking a sweat. Whereas “doing philosophy” is a much more demanding, one might say daunting task, that requires thoughtful consideration of arguments and counterarguments, giving both equal respect. It may be using question and answer principle, it might not, as long as it is critical thinking. Therefore further we shall assume that philosophy is doing philosophy.

Secondly, throughout the essay I am going to take the position of indeterminism, such that every action has its causes, as every action has its reaction and vice versa, but those can only be determined after the action has been done, not prior. We determine our strongest impulse, or the one that takes precedent.

Question I ask myself almost everyday, and especially on the days I feel lost or misunderstood or as if I am doing something horribly wrong, is about the self, which has been overtime identified as the human soul. It is a question about my existence, existence of human beings and how I or anyone is supposed to live their life. We are born into society, we are born into certain tradition. We listen to what others see fit before we can even have a thought about any of those things. Before we even think that we can do something they are deeply embedded in us, in our consciousness that for the most part we are oblivious to the fact that they are lurking behind the corner and determining what we do. It is as if society is posing to be a libertarian giving us freedom to do whatever we want, as if it has grown since the middle ages and social groups which never allowed any transitions or growth - where you are born you are there to stay. It gives you a choice. It can be compared to Sartre’s individual asking for advice, where society is Sartre’s individual and the one caught on the

other side is the one being asked for advice. When one asks for advice, when one chooses whom to ask for advice, he is essentially choosing the advice, for we already know what the other person is going to say, just like society knows, expects the individual to do a certain thing without having a second thought, on the grounds that it is tradition. That is a paved road.

“Normality is a paved road, it is comfortable but not flowers grow.”

(Vincent van Gogh)

That could be compared to living on borrowed time. Those are not our beliefs, they are borrowed. Questions are bound to arise, when that happens there are two possible options to try and answer them or run away. Nietzsche said that *übermensch* doesn't back down, but the underman does. I dare to disagree. There is always that person who learns yet doesn't understand and not believing that that is necessary and never hides. However, isn't that just as bad? In order to live by something, in order to call something ours, we need to make it our own, it has to be authentic. Otherwise it's just the same as scraping the surface. Not making it our own is not being able to live by, it is not believing in it. And there is nothing we can do with that, there is simply no beauty in such existence, because there is no understanding of existence.

Moreover, that is all assuming that what we are fed is true, that it has our best interest at heart and that all we have to do is find a way to make it authentic. Here Descartes' request to all of us must be mentioned, at least once in one's life one must question everything one knows, it comes without question with a certain method or it has no purpose whatsoever. That was true when he was alive, and when Socrates was alive, and there weren't things like the Internet or the culture industries such as Hollywood which feed us information about everything promoting what they see fit, and that is molding us like a piece of plastic into society. “Crowd is untruth”, it takes away our responsibility to think on our own, for ourselves, by ourselves, it is either divided or it is next to zero.

Essence precedes existence is a rather deterministic point of view. First there has to be a concept and by that concept something comes into existence. Like making a computer, first there needs to be a detailed concept and purpose that is understood by the mechanic, which can be made by the mechanic and then it is made. Some make analogies between this and making souls, that first a divine being, God, has a concept and only then it is brought into existence. Therefore there is such a thing as human nature. Sartre argues the exact opposite, existence precedes essence. We are born and then we make ourselves, because that is what humans ought to do, because it is thrown into the future and hurls toward the future. In a way that is all that a human can have a future. Past is the past, it is a fact, and it doesn't predict the future. We are able to make ourselves and to construct our own future - *homo faber*. However, Sartre believes that there is no God, no universal truth, no excuse, so we have to feel anguish, abandonment and despair. What if both views can be true? If we are all humans there ought to be something that we all have in common, no matter who we are, where we live or what we believe in. We are all humans. And yet it does not mean that we just go with the flow. Because of the lived experience and the need we feel so deeply for

self-improvement and better tomorrow, or even the feeling of regret, without which responsibility has almost no sense. Yet all of our systems are built upon said responsibility.

“Unexamined life is not worth living.”

(Socrates)

One might replace this with unexamined life is merely a survival on physical basis. It is doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, nothing more nothing less. It is just a bodily life. Examined life is a life, it is soulful, thoughtful life, which works on virtue and perfecting virtue. Here I am taking the position of St. Augustine that soul just like the body changes over time. Everything we perceive or experience stays with us and changes us for the better or for the worse. We have to work to make us better. A way in which we can achieve this is to perceive our surroundings. There is naturally Hume's stance that the mind is a theatre and that everything flies by, concluding that there is no self, because one is not able to perceive it. It is true that in order to understand the self we have probably produced a fictional image, only for it can not be perceived in the outside, as that is not where it is at all. Outside as we said influences it but it is not where it is. Mind grasps proofs is mind perceives and it helps shape the self, as much as the self shapes what mind perceives, just like society shapes the individuals.

To conclude, philosophy sharpens the mind, the self, in it being way to understand and evaluate what is going around. Philosophy is essential to understand the existence, and ways in which we can work with our existence, or shape our existence. Philosophy is in a certain way Socrates, or like Socrates it is a gadfly, it is annoying and never leaves you alone, it bothers you day and night, and you can never find the right answer. There is a pretty good chance it is going to make a fool out of you, because you in many ways are a fool. “But he who knows he is a fool is not a great fool after all.” But it is a midwife also because even though it might not have answers or many of them or any at all, it has the questions, and most days that is the most important thing, for without the right question you can not even dream of finding the right answer, or a one you could be happy with. And with asking the right question it helps create a sculpture. It is hard and takes time and will to power, and it might take all out of you, but the end product, the sculpture is the most beautiful sculpture, and it is solid, because it has foundation and argumentation. The moment when this process ends is when one's life ends.