Roots of the Crisis of Ethical Theory

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Abstract

This essay is an analytical, critical, and evaluative exploration of the roots of the crisis of ethical theory. By crisis, the author means a state of inner separation or alienation. In what sense is ethical theory separated or alienated from itself? What is the self from which it is alienated? The thesis the author defends is that the crisis of ethical theory is embedded in the crisis of philosophy, the crisis of philosophy is embedded in the crisis of culture, and the crisis of culture is embedded in the growth and development of modernity. A theory is in crisis when it is alienated from its function. A theory's reason for being is its function. Thus, an understanding of this kind of crisis should be attained in the context in which it has taken place, viz., the crisis of philosophy and the crisis of culture. This is based on the assumption that ethical theory is an integral part of philosophy and philosophy is an integral part of culture.

Keywords: Philosophy; Science; Crisis; Ethical Theory; Values; Culture; Nature

Introduction

Two cultural forces underlay the rise and development of philosophy in ancient Greece—curiosity and social need or concern. The first was represented by Thales and reached a climax in Democritus, and the second was represented by Socrates and reached a climax in Plato and Aristotle. Although these forces may be distinguished because they are primary in their effect, they are frequently conjoined in the pursuit of a goal, the discovery of a phenomenon, or the attempt to solve or answer a problem. But I think these two forces are inseparable because curiosity is essentially an impulse that signifies a human need and because a human need generates, by virtue of its nature, the urge and curiosity to discover the means of fulfilling it. Curiosity is an ingredient of any pursuit, quest, or search. We may, with Aristotle, view it as an inherent desire, e.g., the desire to know, because desire is a basic urge or drive. However, desire implies lack. We do not desire what we have, but what we do not have, and what we desire may be a personal, social, or human need.

Philosophy came into being as a response to a desire to know the nature of the world or understand the nature of the world: What is its arche? Why does it exist? Why do people exist rather than not? What is the purpose of human life? How can human beings realize this purpose? Does the world exist for a purpose? Again, what is the essence of our humanity—mind, feeling, consciousness, and will? How should people live and die as human beings? What is the best form of social organization? In short, the impetus that underlies the rise and development of philosophy is a desire to know the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human existence in particular. If you delete this desire from the constitution of human nature, you *ipso facto* delete the reason for being of philosophy the way it flourished during the past three millennia.

In addition to science, art, religion, education, art, technology, government, economics, and family, philosophy is one of the basic components of human civilization. The rise and development of civilization are the rise and development

of these and subsidiary institutions. Human history consists of what human beings do and achieve within the domains of these institutions over the course of time.

It is, I think, reasonable to say that the significant developments that happened in the history of human civilization were made possible by what some philosophers of history called "momentous events," viz., significant, remarkable, substantial, life-changing events, events that change the course or direction of the historical development of a society, a culture, or the world. These events may be specific types of creations, discoveries, inventions, ideas, or actions, for example, the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece, the ascendance of physics and astronomy in the 15th century, the appearance of the religious leaders in the different parts of the world, the collapse of the Roman Empire, the invention of the steam engine, the electric revolution, the microchip revolution, or the emergence of the Renaissance from the womb of the Middle Ages. The quest for the origin, author, or roots of any natural or human phenomenon or development is never simple. Regardless of its kins, no phenomenon exists in and by itself, as if it exists as a completely independent world or reality without any relation to anything else but as a part of a complex context, landscape, or environment. It is causally interrelated to the various elements that make up the structure of its context. This interconnectedness is causal in character. It is what it is by virtue of the kind of relations that constitute the structure of this interconnectedness. Any element of any whole, and a context is a whole, influences and is influenced by the unity of the elements that make up the whole. Accordingly, an understanding of the nature or identity of the phenomenon should begin with a comprehension of the dynamics of the context of which it is a part. Can we understand how Democritus arrived at his theory of the atom if we do not comprehend it in the context of the strand of philosophical reflection from Thales to Anaximander? [1]. Similarly, can we understand why the First or Second World War happened, or any war, if we do not comprehend the political, economic, social, intellectual, cultural, religious, and technological forces that conspired to make it happen? Can we understand why or how the humanism movement in Europe emerged in the 15th century if we do not comprehend the history of the Middle Ages in the fullness of its cultural accomplishments, the rebirth of the Greek and Roman ideas and ways of life, the growth and development of science, philosophy, and nationalism, in short, the main forces that made up the cultural landscape of Europe at that juncture of the historical process?.

The discussion I shall advance in this essay centers on *the roots of the crisis of ethical theory*: What is the nature of these roots? What are the main forces that led to this crisis? The thesis I shall propose and defend in the course of my discussion is that the crisis of ethical theory is embedded in the crisis of philosophy, the crisis of philosophy is embedded in the crisis of culture, and the crisis of culture is embedded in the upheaval generated in the 19th century by the gradual implementation of the ideals of the Enlightenment. I shall begin the analysis of this question with a brief account of the vocation of philosophy as it was lived until the end of the 19th century. An understanding of the growth and maturation of this vocation is, I think, requisite for an adequate comprehension of the nature of the crisis of ethical theory. This analysis is based on the following assumption that ethical theory is a main branch of axiology, i.e., theory of values, and axiology is a main branch of philosophy. A crisis that befalls philosophy necessarily befalls any of its branches.

This essay is composed of two main parts. The first part will be devoted to a brief characterization of the vocation of philosophy, and the second will be devoted to a detailed discussion of the cultural and philosophical roots of the crisis of ethical theory.

Vocation of Philosophy

The rise of philosophy in ancient Greece in the 7th century B.C. and its growth and refinement in the Middle East and Europe during the following twenty-five hundred years has been embedded in the rise and development of the mosaic of the cultures that flourished during this period in these major parts of the world. Consequently, its life and destiny have been intertwined with the life and destiny of the cultures from which it derives its very being—its aims, questions, and method of inquiry. This assertion is based on the fundamental assumption that, like science, art, and technology, the emergence of philosophy from the womb of culture is *an existential response to a basic human need*—the need to know the world, that is, to answer vital or urgent questions about the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular: Why does the world exist rather than not? No one asked whether I would like to exist, and yet I exist—why? Should I exist? More dramatically, why should my life be short and vitiated more with pain than pleasure? How should human beings live, love, and die during the short stretch of time allocated to them? Why should I be moral? That is, why should I be honest, courageous, decent, loving, or merciful? Next, what is the best form of government? There is much selfishness, hate, and destruction in human life at the collective and individual levels—why? Why should human beings be constantly threatened by natural catastrophes, diseases, and different types of epidemics? Furthermore, is human nature inherently inclined to be good, neutral, or bad? But first, what is human nature? What is the purpose of human life—happiness? What is happiness? As individuals and societies, people prize freedom, beauty, truth, and justice as supreme values—what are freedom, beauty, truth, and justice? Are these values

social creations, or are they universal ideals? We are told by many philosophers and scientists that reason is the defining feature of our humanity—what is reason? How is it related to our emotions, dreams, and unconscious behavior? Is it a function of the brain, or is it a unique reality that cannot be reduced to brain activity?

Furthermore, as human beings, we do not live only in the realm of nature but also in and as part of the history of civilization. This history is a dynamic, developmental, and accumulative process. The level of development of civilization that we encounter in every part of the world at present far exceeds in abundance, complexity, sophistication, and human exuberance in the areas of science, art, technology, economics, politics, and education the level that prevailed in the recent and distant past—what are the dynamics of the history of civilization? Is this history a progressive process? Does it have an ultimate end? Can people change its course, or does it have logical dynamics of its own? Put differently, do or can the ideas, passions, and desires of human beings change the course of human history? Again, human beings show a strong and sometimes urgent desire to know the truth in the practical and theoretical spheres of their lives. They do not only want to be sure that their friends, relatives, politicians, religious leaders, parents, teachers, and businesspersons tell the truth, they also desire to know that the claims scientists, philosophers, technologists, and artists make about the world and human life, especially the claims that relate to their security and happiness, are indubitably true. How do we establish the truth of the claims people make in the practical, theoretical domains of our lives?

There is no need for me to extend the preceding list of questions, for it can be longer and extremely intriguing to any person interested in exploring the question of the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular. I have drafted it mainly to explain the sense in which philosophy came into being as a response to a basic human need, viz., the need to provide adequate, reasonable, or to some extent, satisfactory answers to these and related questions. Is human nature inherently philosophical, in the sense that human beings are naturally inclined to ask questions about the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of their lives in particular? Is it unreasonable to say that the existence of philosophy is a necessary demand for leading a human way of life? I am aware that this is a contentious question. I raise it only because, as I shall discuss in the second part of this essay, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the question of the crisis of ethical theory in the modern period without a serious consideration of its reason for being, on the one hand, and its genesis and historical development, on the other. I assume that an answer to these questions is indispensable for the sake of self-understanding and for understanding the conditions under which we can lead the right way of life. This assumption is founded in the generally recognized belief that we as human beings exist not merely to know, although the desire to know is, as Aristotle ascertained, inherent in human nature, but *primarily to live, to live well, always to live better.* I tend to think that we live better, always better, inasmuch as we live from the essence of our humanity. Our individual life is the sum total of what we do in the different spheres of experience—family, social, professional, religious, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and cultural spheres of experience. Accordingly, we lead a human or a better way of life inasmuch as the actions we perform in these spheres originate from the values that express the basic needs of human nature. Adequate knowledge of these values is, I suggest, a necessary condition for leading a human way of life.

I would not be amiss if I said that the quest for this kind of knowledge during the past twenty-five hundred years has been the vocation of philosophy. I say "vocation" because the life of philosophy is an expression of the life of the human spirit; it is a process of constant growth. The attempt to provide answers to the preceding list of questions has been, and remains, the *raison d'etre of* philosophy. The method of arriving at philosophical knowledge is unusually complex. Its growth, refinement, and validation are extremely elaborate and frequently meticulous only because the fabric of human nature and human life is extremely complex. This complexity tends to increase the more we progress in our artistic, practical, technological, cultural, intellectual, and political domains of experience. Understanding the fabric of our humanity is always a corollary to the progress of human civilization.

The philosophical mind is, first and foremost, reflective, and contemplative in character. It seeks to comprehend the whole in the details and the details in the whole. This type of activity is at once critical, analytic, synthetic, and comprehending. The datum of this reflective, contemplative activity is twofold, the facts of nature and the scientific knowledge of these facts. The philosophical mind experiences nature from the standpoint of the knowledge of the scientist, and it comprehends this knowledge as the living reality of nature. The outcome of this *contemplation and comprehension* is what is generally known in philosophical discourse as a philosophical conception, system, theory, or worldview. The structure of this conception consists of a coherent, explanatory, and evaluative analysis of the different types of human experience—intellectual, religious, moral, political, material, social, cultural, metaphysical, and aesthetic experience. It is both (a) ontological and (b) axiological in character. The first provides an understanding of *the nature of reality* in the richness of its diversity as a process and the way this reality reveals itself to the inquiring mind, and the second seeks to comprehend the *meaning* of this reality.

Every basic type of human experience is the basis of a type of value or meaning. The unity of these values constitutes what is generally known in metaphysics or axiology as the "realm of values." The realm of human values is the realm of human meaning. We may categorize these values into six basic types: truth, beauty, goodness, freedom, religiosity, and life. Each one of these categories embraces "sub-categories," i.e., different types of categories of values. For example, truth embraces values such as wisdom, deliberation, erudition, or perceptiveness; beauty embraces values such as grandeur, elegance, majesty, or tragedy; goodness embraces values such as honesty, courage, justice, or love; freedom embraces values such as individualism, prosperity, success, or sovereignty; religiosity embraces values such as mercy, compassion, piety, or faith; and life embraces values, such as health, leisure, rest, or pleasure. From the standpoint of human life, the realm of values is real, if not more real than the realm of nature. As human beings, we simultaneously live in the realm of values and the realm of nature by virtue of our dual nature—our biological nature and our spiritual nature. Biologically, we are integral parts of nature, and we exist and live in it; but as human beings, we live in the realm of values. Every desire we feel and try to fulfill, every objective we pursue, and every action we perform in the world is actuated by a value. If perchance, the realm of values collapses, or if it is deleted by a malignant spirit, humanity collapses and ceases to exist. That is, we cease to be human beings and become brutes. Indeed, we are human inasmuch as we realize these values in our lives. We should always keep a steady eye on the fact that the fabric of the human self is made up of the beliefs and values that underlie our feelings, desires, aspirations, and actions.

What are the essential *dynamics of cultivating human character*? Does this activity not consist of instilling dispositions, habits, or modes of conduct according to the values that are cherished by society, that is, in the sphere of the family, the school, the workplace, the religious institution, and the general social environment? Is this character, which becomes a human individual when it matures, not a realization, or concretization, of the values that are recognized by the institutional structure of society? Do we not recognize the moral or cultural identity of a person by observing the way she makes practical decisions, enjoys artworks, interacts with other people, or behaves culturally? Are we not moral agents by virtue of the types of action we perform in society?

Philosophers do not create, legislate, borrow, import, or discover values. Values arise from the bosom of a culture. More concretely, they arise from its customs, traditions, social norms, practices, economic condition, and historical experience. They emerge and develop gradually over the course of time. The philosopher's task has always been the articulation, analysis, systematization, justification, and evaluation of their role in human life. The outcome of this activity is the construction of theories or philosophies of the various types of values, for example, philosophy of morality, philosophy of art, philosophy of the state, philosophy of religion, or philosophy of human nature. I do not exaggerate if I say that *the primary aim of the philosophical system or conception is to explain, i.e., to shed the light of understanding on the nature or meaning of an aspect or dimension or reality or on reality as an ordered whole*. The artist expresses a certain feeling, experience, or understanding of human or natural reality in a certain type of symbolic form, the scientist seeks to know the nature of matter, life, space, time, and mind or consciousness, but the philosopher seeks to discover the meaning of this reality. This seeking begins, as Hegel remarked in the preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, only after the nature of the reality appears in the fullness of its being to the philosophical mind. "Philosophy," Hegel wrote, "as the thought of the world, does not appear until reality has completed its formative process and made itself ready. Thus, history corroborates the teaching of the conception that only in the maturity of reality does the ideal appear as a counterpart to the real, apprehend the real world in its substance, and shape it into the intellectual kingdom. When philosophy paints its gray in gray, one form of life has become old, and by means of gray, it cannot be rejuvenated but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering" [2].

The flight of the owl of Minerva is the flight of the philosopher; its essence is reflection or contemplation. It begins only after a historical, natural, or human phenomenon steps into the realm of reality. The thrust of this reflection, which may be initiated by curiosity or need, is a thrust for understanding. The "what" or "why" the philosopher or ordinary person asks always aims at understanding the new reality. We attain this understanding when we know its cause, structure, implications, and significance and when this knowledge is true, valid, or reliable. It is not enough to propose a conception of justice or courage. It is equally important that this conception is effective and reliable because values function as guideposts, as principles, or as the basis of action. I here assume that our life is the most valuable possession in this world. We desire and seek happiness. How can we be sure that the principle of our action will be effective in our endeavor to realize this goal? But the question that stares us in the face is, what is justice or courage? Let me illustrate the significance of this question through a brief discussion of the function of ethical theory with a quick look at Aristotle's ethical theory. I choose this theory for two reasons. First, ethical theory is the main focus of this essay, and second, Aristotle was the architect of ethical theory in Western philosophy.

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Imagine yourself in a society in which there are no philosophers and, consequently, no theories or conceptions of values. Regardless of their level of intellectual, social, artistic, scientific, or cultural development, the members of this society share a basic desire—the desire to be happy. We can say that this desire is an essential demand, or urge, of human nature, the way survival or social existence is. In whatever they do, the people would aim at and try to meet this demand. Do they not impulsively, almost reflexively, try to seek pleasure and avoid pain? Do they not do their best to avoid any possible harm to their material and spiritual well-being? Moreover, they would recognize that the attainment of happiness is *the highest good* in their lives; but although they would agree that happiness is their highest good, they would disagree on its nature or on how to attain it.

Now, suppose that a philosopher wonders, and consequently reflects, on this existential fact, that is, on the fact that the people believe that they prize happiness as their highest good, and especially on the fact that they differ in their understanding of this good. This is the kind of reflection Aristotle undertakes in his famous book *Ethics.* In this book, he observes that human beings generally agree that happiness is the highest good, but they do not agree on what happiness is. Some would say we achieve it by pursuing a life of pleasure, long life, knowledge, or wealth. We can add to this list goals such as power, fame, social glory, or objective immortality. People do not usually organize their lives based on a rationally articulated concept or understanding of happiness. Most of the time, they drift into a certain way of life by accident, imitation, necessity, a major social or psychological happening, or based on an intellectual discovery. As many existentialist philosophers pointed out, most of the people, now and in the past, are conformists; they lead the life of sheep, not the life of a shepherd. But suppose we ask, what is happiness? Is there a true or cogent conception of happiness? What is the method of arriving at such a conception? There is no need for me to answer any of these questions now. I raise them for two reasons, first, to underline the fact that people do not agree on a general conception of happiness. What is the source, or sources, of this disagreement? How can we understand this source or sources? Suppose we discover its source. Is it possible to arrive at a general conception of the highest good or happiness? The second reason for raising the preceding questions is to emphasize that the philosopher is preeminently concerned with the well-being of people. It may strike one as strange if I say that the philosopher is a human lover, in the metaphysical sense of the word, for if the essence of love is giving of ourselves materially and spiritually, then we can say that, like the artist, the scientist, the prophet, and the genuine leader, he is a lover *par excellence*, for he gives a special kind of light, the kind that illuminates our minds and hearts in our effort to understand the meaning

of our existence and, more importantly, the happiness we desire more than anything else in the world. He can do this because he is a visionary. Do we not love and profoundly respect a grandparent who plants a seed of wisdom in our mind, a teacher who enables us to appreciate beauty, truth, and goodness, an artist who opens up a world of meaning when we experience her painting, novel, or piece of music, a scientist who discover a cure for a calamitous disease, or a religious leader who explains the way God reveals himself to human beings or in the scheme of nature? Philosophers are reform-minded thinkers; they are not ivory-tower dreamers. Their journey as philosopher is similar to the journey of the airplane, as Whitehead pointed out in *Process and Reality*. It originates from the ground of reality, soars into the sky, and then returns to the ground from which it flew. Likewise, the philosopher lives in the world of human reality and examines this reality in the abundance of its problems, desires, possibilities, hopes, and needs in the different institutions in which beings actually live both at present and historically, and then, speaking metaphorically, he retires to a kind of ivory tower. Unlike the tower of the idler or dreamer, the ivory tower of the philosopher is an intellectual laboratory in which he articulates his grasp, or understanding, of the human reality he had lived into a conceptual framework—system, conception, theory. This framework functions as a model of explanation, as a source of light that illuminates our minds in our effort to live well, always better.

A philosophical system, theory, or conception is a conceptual framework that reflects the essential structure of human experience of a part, dimension, or the totality of reality in the domain of nature, government, art, metaphysics, morality, education, religion, science, technology, or culture. It provides an analysis of these types of experiences not only in terms of their given structure but also in terms of the values that give them direction and meaning. The point, or objective, of this analysis is understanding. How can we design the plan of our lives individually and socially if we do not proceed in this activity from a sound understanding of what we are and what we truly need or desire?

But the philosopher is not only a theoretician, one who contemplates the world or human life and constructs conceptions that promote our understanding. He is also an activist, for what is the use of a conception he constructs if it will not be practicable? How can he be a lover of humanity if he does not express his love in action? Did the prisoner who escaped from the dark cave In Plato's Allegory of the Cave not feel a moral obligation to return to the cave to free his fellow prisoners from the darkness in which they lived? Did Socrates not roam the streets of Athens in his endeavor to teach the young and to implore the adults to care for their souls? Did Plato, Aristotle, and the masters of post-Aristotelian philosophy not establish schools for the cultivation and

spiritual enlightenment of the young and the adults? Were philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Comte, Bentham, Mill, James, and Dewey, to mention a few names, not social reformers? I would not be mistaken if I say that most, if not all, of them, were alive to, deeply interested in, and actively responsive to the existential problems of their societies. I tend to think that social reform was, and remains, uppermost on the mind of the major philosophers, those who devoted themselves to an understanding of the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human life in particular, primarily because they *know,* that is, because they have explored the existential state of the human condition and gleaned the secret that permeates it. Why would they devote the best years of their lives to the study of this condition if they did not feel the urgency to understand it and discover a way to improve it? After all, they are lovers of truth, goodness, and beauty, and they are also lovers of the human as such. A genuine philosopher who is not a lover is an anomaly, a contradiction in terms, perhaps a professional in the social market of success, the pursuit of social glory, or vanity. There has always been an abundance of "career" philosophers. This type of careerism began with the rise of the sophist movement during the days of Socrates and has continued to the present day, in which ideas, values, and human beings are, to some extent, commodified.

Although, as an academic discipline, philosophy is systematized into four branches of inquiry, metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic, it is possible to say that axiology is the primary interest of the philosopher and that metaphysics and epistemology exist as a foundation of a satisfactory conception of axiology. This assertion is based on the basic assumption that, unlike natural objects, values are human creations. They are in urgent need of elucidation, systematization, and justification. An effective or adequate method of knowing the facts that make up the natural and the human dimension of the world is a necessary condition for understanding the potentialities, impulses, and desires of human nature. Why? Because it is quite possible for a philosopher to construct the most adequate conception of our knowledge of the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular and, to proceed from this conception, construct the most elaborate theory of the good, the beautiful, the true, the free, and the religious, and yet the inescapable, elusive question remains: Why should I be moral? Why should I lead a human way of life? Are values a means to a selfish end? Do I respect my fellow human beings because they are useful? Or do I pursue human values because they are intrinsically valuable, desirable, or worthy of pursuit?.

The construction of a metaphysical conception of the world, one that provides a reasonable explanation of the essential nature and meaning of existence, is the most effective way of providing a firm foundation for an adequate conception of human values. Regardless of whether it is religious, idealist, naturalist, pragmatic, realist, or existentialist, this explanation and justification functions both as a principle of explanation and justification. It performs this twofold function because its interpretation of the ground and nature of the essential nature of reality is always founded in a concept of the Ultimate—source, author, creator, or ground of the world. The philosopher establishes his conception of values on this ground. An inquiry into the nature of this ground has been the main emphasis of the major philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead and Heidegger. Let me illustrate this claim with a brief remark on Plato's philosophy.

Most philosophers would agree with me that although his metaphysics was influential during the Christian Middle Ages and the golden age of Islamic philosophy and later on in the modern period, Plato's conception of values was and remains the centerpiece of his philosophy. For example, the early and late dialogues focus on the concept of the good, or justice, and the conditions under which it can be realized. Next, if we cast a critical look at the *Republic*, we discover that it begins and ends with a religious scene. The analysis of justice necessarily leads to a discussion of some of the main human values, which, in turn, lead to a construction of a twofold theory of metaphysics and epistemology. These two lines of inquiry constitute the foundation of his conception of justice. But we see the same focus in the philosophers of the modern period, which reached a high point in American pragmatism and Continental existentialism. Again, what was the fundamental thrust of the European Enlightenment, the seeds of which were planted in the Renaissance but a thrust for social reform according to the ideals of reason, science, and humanism? What was the thrust of Dewey's extensive analysis of human nature in the diversity of its structure but a thrust to discover a solid foundation for his theory of values—morality, art, democracy, culture, and education? What was the thrust of existentialist philosophers such as Marcel, y Gasset, Heidegger, Berdyaev, and Sartre but a thrust to establish the foundation of authentic life? What was the thrust of Marx's theories of history, economics, and human nature but a thrust to explore the conditions under which people can thrive as human individuals?.

Grounding a conception of values in an ultimate, regardless of whether it is the good, God, substance, the absolute, creativity, will, reason, or unmoved mover, functions as a principle of justification. I am willing to live according to the values recognized by society inasmuch as these values are grounded in a solid metaphysical foundation; I am also willing to perform the duties implied by the moral values inasmuch as they are founded in this kind of structure. Why would truly religious people obey the values of their religion

if they do not believe in the existence and wisdom of God? Those who believe in God because they are afraid of going to hell or because they yearn to go to heaven are not true believers. Similarly, those who obey the laws of the state, the rules of their parents, or the morals recognized by society out of fear are not loyal citizens, good children, or loyal members of society. In the 18th century, Dostoevsky made the profound remark, which has been reverberating through the vast space of human life ever since, that if God does not exist, everything is permissible. By "everything," he meant "good" as well as "bad." Dostoevsky's remark was, I think, an active response to Nietzsche's announcement that "God is dead, in the sense that the God of the Middle Ages has ceased to be the foundation and steering power of individual and social life. The point that deserves special emphasis at this point of my discussion is that values will remain a luxury of the few or the spiritual elite if they are not founded in an ultimate or a conception of an ultimate. Like a rudderless boat in the middle of the ocean, human life will be rudderless without a genuine belief in an ultimate.

The preceding remarks are brief and may seem sketchy; I made them only to spotlight the thesis I have been elucidating, viz., the axis around which philosophical activity revolves is human life: What is the essence of human nature not merely as a Platonic essence but as a historically developing reality? What are the values that emanate from this essence? Under what conditions can people lead a human way of life? How can we justify our understanding of these values?.

Concept of Crisis

I began my discussion of the roots of the crisis of ethical theory with observations on the vocation of philosophy for two reasons, the first root is cultural, and the second is philosophical in character. This assertion implies that the crisis of ethical theory is an integral part of the crisis of philosophy and the crisis of philosophy is an integral part of the crisis of culture, which in turn is an integral part of the upheaval created by the attempt of the European and North American states to implement the project of the Enlightenment the roots of which were planted in European culture during the Renaissance. Accordingly, we should inquire into the nature of the crisis of ethical theory with a discussion of its cultural roots. But first, what do we mean by "crisis"? In what sense is ethical theory in crisis?

The word "crisis" is used with different shades of meaning in the different contexts of human experience— political, economic, medical, scientific, artistic, religious, educational, technological, and social contexts. In all of these and similar contexts, "crisis" denotes a negative aspect: stress, tension, collapse, fracture, exigency, climax, alienation, turning point, catastrophe, failure, or risk. In discussing the

crisis of ethical theory or philosophy in general, it is, I think, prudent to define the concept in terms of its etymological root. The word "crisis" comes from the Greek *Krisi,* which is derived from the verb *krinen,* which means "to cut" or "to separate." Broadly, a crisis signifies "cut," "separation," or "alienation." Regardless of the context in which it occurs, when we say that a phenomenon is in crisis, we mean that this phenomenon is separated, cut, or alienated from itself. This separation renders it dysfunctional. Its identity, viz., its structure, and consequently its place in its context, which may be historical, cultural, or historical, is ruptured. This kind of rupture frequently signifies a turning point in its being, the function it performs in its context, course of development, or the activity it ordinarily performs. It usually happens when a serious, devastating, disruptive change befalls the phenomenon. For example, if a corporation is in crisis, it cannot perform its function properly primarily because some rupture happens to it, for example, when an executive dies or when the stock market collapses. Again, a human being is in a medical crisis when her heart, lungs, or spinal cord is ruptured. Similarly, regardless of whether it is in the area of economics, technology, art, culture, or philosophy, a theory is in crisis when it is in some way or some respect ruptured.

Roots of the Crisis of Ethical Theory

Now, what do, or should, we mean when we say that ethical theory is in crisis? "Broken apart?" a critic might ask. "In what sense is it broken apart?" The reason for being of any kind of theory is the explanation of a certain problematic, unusually complex, mysterious reality that resists easy, lucid, or unquestionable understanding. The theory sheds the light of understanding on the reality; in short, it enables us to understand the problematic, mysterious, or intricate within the reality. The means by which it achieves this purpose can sometimes be elaborate, for it frequently involves identification of the problem, clarification of concepts, analysis of implied concepts, assumptions, or related problems, discussion of the method of constructing the explanation, and the lines of reasoning that establishes the validity of the explanation. The point of this type of conceptual structure is to guarantee the cogency and usefulness of the explanation. For example, based on established scientific knowledge and current investigation, a chemist may propose the existence of a new element that has specific qualities. She may indicate certain features that point to the existence of the new element based on chemical data she is investigating. She arrives at the possibility of this new element by what we may call "scientific intuition" or "scientific hunch." She may articulate her intuition into an elaborate hypothesis or theory. I say "theory" because she may be convinced that the new element does actually exist. In a case like this, which is common in all the branches of scientific and human inquiries, the hypothesis or theory exists

to explain a complex, problematic phenomenon the scientist discovered or thinks she has discovered. I say "problematic" because of the proposal that the new elements may or may not exist, and yet, the inquirer has a strong intuition that a new chemical element exists. Suppose, after performing a number of tests, she actually verifies the existence of the new element. If this happens, the proposal loses its character as a hypothesis or theory and becomes knowledge. But not all problematic proposals in scientific inquiry are amenable to immediate solutions. Nevertheless, scientists do not hesitate to offer theories that may shed a light of understanding on them. For example, the physicist and cosmologist Steven Hawkins spent most of his career trying to discover an ultimate—source, force, power, or origin—that underlies the cosmic process, for he was certain, as he said in one of the interviews he gave shortly before his death, that such an ultimate exists, but neither he nor any of his colleagues have, so far, discovered this ultimate [3] Could it be that the source of Hawkins' certainty that an ultimate actually exists is the law of causation, according to which nothing exists or happens without a cause? We encounter similar challenges when we ask questions about the nature or cause of life, mind, consciousness, space, matter, and time. Does this prevent the cosmologist or humanist from proposing a theory the purpose of which is to shed a light of understanding on the source and nature of the universe? Of course not!

But what would happen if a natural or human problem faces an inquirer and creates a need to explain, understand, or solve it? Next, what would happen if the theory proposed to understand, explain, or solve the problem does succeed in shedding a light of understanding on it or solving it, and what if the theory proves useful for a while? Next, what if the problematic reality undergoes a change of identity due to natural, social, cultural, or technological factors in a way that paralyzes the theory, renders it dysfunctional, and prevents it from being a source of understanding or explanation or what would happen if for some theoretical or practical reasons the theory recedes into the world of oblivion? If this happens, the theory will be in crisis mainly because it is separated or cut from the problematic phenomenon that gave rise to it, for the theory exists because the problematic aspect of the phenomenon exists. That is, the theory exists to explain this problematic aspect. The relationship between the two is causal. If one of them ceases to be actively causal, the other would necessarily lose its function. They would be separated from each other. A theory that does not actively explain or shed a light of understanding on a problematic reality loses its relevance; it is like a purposeless, functionless conceptual construct. We may also liken it to the views, visions, or conceptual system of the world or human life an ivory tower thinker constructs in the sphere of his or her imagination. We may treat this state as an example of intellectual schizophrenia because, like the schizoid, the theory would

be separated from the reality that gives rise to it. As I shall presently explain, internally, it is broken apart, and externally it is cut from the problematic situation that gives rise to it.

In the area of psychiatry, the psychoanalyst investigates the causes of the malady of the schizoid by studying the mental history of the patient, that is, by studying the kind of experiences that led to his or her schizophrenia. The doctor understands the dynamics of the malady by an adequate comprehension of the genetic, educational, and social forces that influenced the development of the patient. Similarly, we understand the crisis of contemporary ethical theory by comprehending its source or the dynamics that underlie the development of morality: What are the cultural and historical factors that fostered this development? But, as we shall see, ethical theory is a part of philosophy. Its purpose and method are part of the purpose and method of philosophy. Accordingly, we should inquire into how the cultural and historical factors that influenced the development of philosophy. It is extremely difficult to understand the nature of the crisis of ethical theory apart from a comprehension of the dynamics that underlie the crisis of philosophy and the cultural and historical conditions that led to it. Let me elaborate this claim in some detail.

Cultural Background of the Roots of the Crisis of Philosophy

If the crisis of ethical theory is embedded in the crisis of philosophy and the crisis of philosophy is embedded in the crisis of European culture, it would, I think, be appropriate to begin the discussion of the crisis of ethical theory with some observations on the main factors that distinguish the cultural crisis as a historical development. What are these factors?

First, although modernity as a philosophical project reached its highest point of conceptualization at the end of the 18th century when the project of the Enlightenment was clearly articulated, its central ideals, viz., reason, science, and humanism—or more concretely, the values of truth, beauty, goodness, individual and political freedom, material and moral progress, and education—were not completely or satisfactorily realized on the ground of reality, at least not yet. They remained ink on paper or in the minds of the intelligentsia awaiting realization. It is possible to characterize the 18th and the 19th centuries as a period of transition from the medieval to the modern way of life. The Enlightenment values became the foundation of this new way of life.

It was not easy for the medieval way of life that thrived in the minds and hearts of the European peoples for more than eight centuries to change in a short period or in one or a few events; you may change the behavior of a human being

or an object such as a house or a machine in a short period, but you cannot change a culture in a short period. Culture is a spiritual reality and cannot be created or made by one or a few people. It evolves gradually over the course of time. The pace of this evolution may vary according to the material and spiritual condition of the people who live the spirit of the culture. A culture is composed of basic beliefs and values, translated concretely into customs, traditions, rites, practices, social norms, habits, and various modes of behavior. These beliefs and values constitute the fundamental structure of a people's worldview—*weltanschauung;* it is the basis of the institutions that make up the fabric of society. Any change in the being and development of a culture entails a change in its basic beliefs and values. This is the main reason why it is reasonable to say that the project of modernity has been, and remains, a project in process. This gradual change is frequently developmental; it is still underway. One of its main results was what Nietzsche would call the trans valuation of the values that steered the existential life of the people during the medieval, Renaissance, and modern periods. For example, the implementation of programs of a universal system of education, a democratically organized government, an economic system based on social service and not merely profit, enactment of laws that are mindful of the rights of the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, the aged, the uneducated, the underprivileged, and women and children, yes, these programs did not begin until the first half of the 20th century. On the contrary, in some cases, as in the economic and democratic areas of life, we witness a reversal of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Second, as an academic field of inquiry, philosophy was, until the second half of the 20th century, the main source of our knowledge of nature and humanity. Sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, and psychology were in the process of emerging as independent disciplines. This emergence was gradual, but it reached an advanced level of independence at the end of the last century when it became clear that the empirical method of inquiry, which was inductive in contrast to the deductive method used by the majority of philosophers until then, was more successful than the traditional philosophical method. As Descartes pointed out some years earlier, philosophy was a tree, and the various types of knowledge were branches of the tree. Now, these branches have separated themselves from the tree. The scientific method was first employed in our knowledge of the solar system and the facts that make up the fabric of nature. Chemistry was the next discipline that separated from the tree. It was followed by biology and then by the social sciences.

The success of the empirical method of inquiry in arriving at reliable knowledge of nature and some human phenomena generated a kind of cultural euphoria. Many thinkers in the different areas of investigation felt that the empirical method was the best possible means of obtaining adequate knowledge not only of natural but also of human phenomena. Why not? Did Darwin and the positivists such as Comte and Spencer not argue cogently that human beings are, like plants and the rest of the animals, *emergent* from the natural process? Did the materialists not view human beings as complex machines? It was assumed that, since human beings are natural phenomena, human nature can, in principle, be studied by the empirical scientist.

In his inquiry into the nature of the world, the philosopher used a blend of deductive and inductive methods in his analysis of nature and human nature. He did this because the construction of a philosophical system, in which metaphysical thinking is an essential ingredient, indeed its foundation, rests on primary, first, or generally accepted propositions. These propositions were assumed as valid or established. The remainder of the propositions that make up the structure of the system are either deduced from or consistent with the primary propositions. The system is treated as a process of logical deduction. The work of philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Hegel, and Schopenhauer are obvious examples of this method of philosophical thinking. Accordingly, if this process is conducted correctly, the system would be treated as cogent or authoritative. We can add that the adequacy or explanatory power of the system is commensurate to the truth or validity of the primary propositions on which the system rests. Once a system was constructed, it was treated as a conceptual framework within which the different types of human experience are analyzed and understood. We encounter this feature in the philosophical systems of the major traditional philosophers, e.g., Aristotle, Hobbes, Spinoza, or Hegel, but not in the systems of the major philosophers in the 20th century, e.g., Whitehead, Bergson, Dewey, Heidegger, or Sartre primarily because these and similar philosophers take into serious consideration the most recent scientific knowledge of the day; in fact, they begin where science stops.

Roots of the Crisis of Philosophy

I began my discussion with general observations on the nature of the vocation of philosophy, and I made the preceding short excursus into the historical and cultural background or conditions that led to the rise and development of modernity—one fruit of which was the gradual separation of the sciences from the body of philosophy in Europe—only to focus attention on the forces that underlie the gradual emergence of the crisis of European culture, which reached a climax in the 20th century. This discussion is intended to shed light on the proposition I have been elucidating that the crisis of philosophy is embedded in the crisis of culture, and the crisis of ethical theory is embedded in the crisis of

philosophy; put differently, *the alienation of ethical theory from itself is embedded in the alienation of philosophy from itself*. Now, what does it mean for philosophy to be alienated from itself?.

The alienation of philosophy from itself is existentially an alienation from its vocation—the vocation it pursued from the days of Plato and Aristotle to the turn of the last century. This alienation was prompted by two factors, first, the gradual transvaluation of values, which was caused by the gradual *recession* of the medieval way of life and the gradual *procession* of the modern way of life, or the displacement of the basic beliefs and values of the Catholic church or medieval worldview by the basic beliefs and values of modernity or worldview. The pillars of modernity were the ideals of the Enlightenment—reason, science, and humanism. They became the guideposts that guided the thinking and life of people in the 19th and 20th centuries. In time, they became the foundation on which the institutions of government, culture, art, science, education, technology, and economics were erected. When the various sciences acquired their independence from philosophy, the question that called for an urgent answer was, what is the vocation of philosophy? If physics, chemistry, and astronomy inquire into the nature of physical reality, biology inquires into the nature of life, and if the social sciences inquire into the structure of human nature, what is left for philosophy? The traditional vocation of philosophy seems to be handed over to the scientist! Philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes, and Hegel, to mention a few representatives of traditional philosophy, viewed themselves as inquirers into the nature of the nature and meaning of the world. Their systems were treated as conceptual frameworks of the world. If anyone desired answers to questions about the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human experience in particular, all he had to do was delve deep into these or similar systems. As I explained earlier, a philosophical system is a mine of insight, understanding, and analysis of the main questions people ask about the meaning or purpose of their lives. The alternative to a philosophical system was a certain type of theology or religion. But the majority of the philosophical systems, even those of the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods, were friendly to, consistent with, or attempts to justify God's ways to human beings. But with the establishment of the different sciences that study not only nature but also human nature, philosophy seemed to be bereft of its vocation, or put differently, of its reason for being. Can the kingdom of philosophy, which governed the life of the mind for so many centuries, tumble on the ground of the various sciences? Not necessarily! A group of scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers came to the rescue. Some of the influential members of this group were Ernst Mach, Bertrand Russell, Moritz Schlick, Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Henri Poincare, and Pierre Duheme.

If science proved to be the most reliable source of our knowledge of nature and human nature and, consequently, of human life, this group argued, the only way to revive, rehabilitate, or fill the cultural vacuum philosophy left behind was *to make it scientific.* How? This was possible, first, by abandoning the traditional method of philosophical thinking and replacing it with the method of empirical science and consequently adopting the *principle of empirical verification* as the criterion by which the truth of any claim about reality is established and, second, by relegating questions concerning nature and human nature to the various scientific disciplines. Thus, the "datum," "why," and "what" of any question we raise about the natural or human world should be identified and clarified before we attempt to provide an answer to the question. The first important victim was metaphysics, which, traditionally, sought to provide an account of the essential nature of human and natural reality and to explain the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular. If we view the metaphysical conceptions of philosophers from Plato in the 4th century B.C. to Bradley and Bosanquet in the early part of the last century as metaphysical monuments, we can say that these monuments tumbled down on the ground of European culture under the ax of the principle of verification. The next philosophical area of inquiry that fell under the same ax was ethical theory and, along with it, all value theories. In time, it seemed that the vocation of philosophy was undergoing a complex process of transformation of identity in its aim, method, and role in human life. One central element of traditional philosophy, viz., conceptual and logical analysis, emerged as the identifying feature and function of philosophy. The philosopher's objective is no longer to know reality but to analyze logically, i.e., to clarify the concepts and methods of inquiry of the various scientific disciplines, art, theology, and even common-sense language. It is no accident that the analytic school of philosophy dominated the world of philosophy in North America and a large part of the European continent during the 20th century. This domination was frequently dramatic or extreme, to the extent that any metaphysical conception about any dimension of reality and any epistemological conception were excluded from philosophical discourse. In short, the vocation of philosophy was not anymore reflection, conception, explanation, justification, or theorizing about the nature of any dimension of reality but therapy—logical and linguistic therapy. The means of this therapy were conceptual and logical analysis.

Evaluative Remark

One may assert that the principle of empirical verification is the most effective criterion in our attempt to establish the truth of any claim we make about physical reality. Therefore, one may laud the rise and independence of the sciences from the body of philosophy, for any advancement of our knowledge

of the world is an intrinsic good, one we should always pursue, but making this assertion does not necessarily imply that philosophy can or should abandon its traditional vocation primarily because, as I explained in the first part of this essay, the primary aim of this vocation is to understand the world, to make sense of it, or to understand its meaning. In building their systems, the major philosophers from the Hellenic to the present period availed themselves of the most recent knowledge of nature. Their interpretation of the meaning of existence in general and human existence, in particular, was always based on up-to-date scientific knowledge. Did philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Spencer Leibniz, Locke, or Hume not take this methodological step seriously? In fact, the title of Hume's major work is *"A treatise of Human nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning in Moral Subjects*." Even the idealist Hegel constructed his larger and smaller logic based on the most up-to-date scientific knowledge of nature. The major philosophers who punctuate the landscape of the history of philosophy were neither negligent of nor oblivious to the importance of the scientific knowledge of nature. As I emphasized more than once, their primary purpose was to understand the meaning of existence. Knowledge of the nature of reality is a necessary condition for discovering this meaning. How can we comprehend the meaning of light, life, or mind, if we do not know what they are, and how can we claim to possess true knowledge of a phenomenon if we do not directly and empirically experience it and apprehend it as it is given to this experience? Again, Socrates was a social philosopher, but he was versed in the mathematics, science, art, athletics, and government of his day. His mind was encyclopedic. He assumed this knowledge in charting his way of life. He did this only because he discovered the pursuit of wisdom in the widest sense of the word. This applies to all the major philosophers.

The first, if not one of the first, major philosophers who reacted constructively and systematically to the aims and ideals of the Vienna Circle was, as far as I know, Alfred North Whitehead. In a lecture he delivered at Harvard University in the 1920s when members of the Vienna Circle were still holding their meetings on the destiny of philosophy, he asserted that the scientist seeks to know the facts that make the scheme of nature, while the philosopher seeks to know the *meaning* of these facts. This statement implies a distinction between two realms of reality, the realm of nature and the realm of meaning. The realm of meaning is the realm of values. This claim is based on the assumption that, regardless of its type, meaning is realized value. We do not create the facts of nature; we recognize or discover them when the faculty of reason blooms in our minds. They are given as readymade realities. But the realm of meaning is not given either to our minds or to our senses as a readymade

reality; it is human creation. Since the facts that make up the natural realm are numerous and varied, since human life is an abundant diversity of experiences, which are facts inasmuch as they are given, and since we can classify these into types and sub-types of facts, we can say that the realm of meaning consists of types and sub-types of meaning. Every type of meaning signifies what is called in axiology a "value." Accordingly, the realm of meaning is a realm of values, which I have discussed in the first part of the essay.

Values can be grouped into two classes, human and natural. As human beings, we desire to know the meaning of the facts that make up the realm of nature as well as the order of nature as a whole; we also desire to know the meaning of our lives as individuals and as societies, that is, how we should live, love, and die. As I discussed earlier, these values embrace goodness, beauty, truth, freedom, and religiosity. This essay focuses on the value of goodness, viz., morality or morals: What makes a situation, a law, a policy, a person, or an action moral? Why should we do our duties? What is the source of moral obligation? How do we justify the validity of any moral claim we make about any kind of moral action or moral obligation? Ethical theory aims to explore these and related questions.

The central question, which was, and remains, the centerpiece of the analytic school of philosophy, revolves around the meaning and truth of the claims we make about the world and human life: How can we verify the truth or falsity of these claims? It is assumed that the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification, and the method of its verification is the empirical method. Accordingly, since metaphysical statements are not verifiable by the empirical method, they are meaning-less, not in the sense of "nonsense," "absurd," or "trivial" but in the sense of "unverifiable," for they may have emotional, therapeutic, or useful effects in some areas of experience. We cannot take these claims seriously because they are not a reliable basis for action or explanation.

Alas, is or can scientific knowledge be absolutely certain or reliable? This is a huge question in the philosophy of science, and it has been the subject of an ongoing debate since the turn of the last century. There is no need for me to participate in this debate here. Suffice it to say that a historian of science would remind us that the history of science from the time of Aristotle to the present is a history of rising and falling theories. Unlike scientific conceptions or theories, philosophical conceptions or systems cannot be proven true or false. As Hegel remarked some time ago, they die of old age primarily because a philosophical conception is not a scientific proposition but an expression of a vision, intuition, or apprehension of the meaning of

a reality or reality as a whole. The conception born in this kind of vision, reflection, intuition, or apprehension is not amenable to empirical verification. Its validity or relevance to human life is determined by its practical utility to human beings individually and collectively or by the extent to which it illuminates the meaning of the individual or certain types of experience. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that some people or philosophers view themselves as Platonists, Cartesians, Marxists, Hegelians, pragmatists, or materialists? For example, a Platonist uses the Platonic conception of the world as a principle of explanation, one that sheds a light of understanding on the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human life in particular.

It is important to point out that the majority of philosophers and scientists aver that, no matter its kind, human knowledge cannot, in principle, be absolutely true or certain because the facts of nature and human nature and its works are constantly changing and frequently developing. This is why most, if not all, philosophers and scientists tend to subscribe to William James's conception of meaning and truth, which he articulated based on his philosophical and scientific studies, viz., the truth of a statement, or a belief, is its cash value in experience: What difference does it make in our experience, or what results will ensue, if we were to act on it? Accordingly, a statement is true inasmuch as it yields good, significant, or satisfactory results. It does not matter what kind of method we employ to arrive at the statement; what matters is the extent to which it yields satisfactory results. This approach to the meaning of truth does not necessarily entail relativism, for we can, as scientists and philosophers do, construct criteria by which we can establish a conception of truth that transcends personal or idiosyncratic interest.

Now we can turn our attention more directly to the dynamics that underlie the crisis of ethical theory. The purpose of the preceding discussion in its entirety was to provide the historical and cultural framework within which the crisis happened. This framework is an element of its roots.

Basis of the Crisis of Ethical Theory

In a conversation I had in 1985 with Dr. Fouad Zakaria, a distinguished philosopher and chair of the philosophy department at Kuwait University, he asked me the following question: "How would you explain the rise and dominance of the analytic school of philosophy in the 20th century in North America and many European countries?" Frankly, I was surprised by this question, and I was speechless for a moment, but my eyes were actively focused on Dr. Zakaria's. He smiled, and his smile softened the tension of my surprise. It enabled me to gather my thoughts and deliver an answer to his question. It was a synopsis of the preceding discussion.

"The rise and separation of the sciences from the body of philosophy," I said, "is the main source of the crisis. The members of the Vienna Circle, who were enamored and impressed by the success of the sciences, and who happened to be influential in the practice of philosophy as authors and teachers, acted as the custodian of philosophy. They charted its new aims, method, and role in human life, in short, its new vocation. They were convinced that if philosophy was to survive, it had to be scientific. But this assumption, generally accepted at the beginning of the last century, gradually degenerated into different approaches to the new vocation of philosophy. The present landscape of philosophy, which is predominantly analytic in its orientation, is now very diverse and very competitive. If someone desires an understanding of the vocation of philosophy, he would not be able to have a clear notion of it. I hosted a meeting of some philosophers in my home a few years ago. They discussed the problem of the dominance of the analytic school and the need to promote at least philosophical pluralism, especially the fact that philosophy is essentially tolerant of a different way of thinking. I can assure you that this landscape is getting more diverse and complicated because many philosophers strongly desire to revive the traditional vocation of philosophy."

"Thank you for your answer. But it is academic, and some would say historical, in character." Dr. Zakaria said with two questioning eyes. I stared into those eyes for a few long seconds. They were long because I was trying to determine whether I could add other reasons for the dramatic rise and dominance of analytical philosophy, but I could not. I frowned, and my frown clearly expressed helplessness.

"You are right," Dr. Zakaria said, "but I think this is not the only reason." My frown was suddenly transformed into an expression of curiosity. "We should also look at this phenomenon as a part of the institutional structure and life of the European way of life. "What do you mean?" I interjected.

"As you pointed out, the datum of philosophical thinking has traditionally been human life: How can it be improved? How can we enact just laws and create the material and spiritual conditions for human growth and development? An answer to these and many related questions necessarily entails knowledge of the world and human nature. This knowledge was usually organized into a system or conception. Let me emphasize that the betterment of human life has always been the aim of the philosopher *qua* social reformer. But the eyes of the analytic philosopher have moved away from the sphere of human life to the sphere of the logical and conceptual analysis of the language of science, religion, art, and ordinary life. This move has created a separation of philosophy from its function. What is philosophy without its function? The eyes of the philosopher are no longer focused on the concerns of human beings. Philosophers used to be

omnipresent in the various domains of human experience—art, politics, economics, education, culture, and society. Now, let me ask, where are the philosophers now? Where do you see them if you can? Who reads their books? Oh, my goodness, who *can* read their books? What students pay any serious attention to their lectures in the classroom? What do they teach? To whom do they write?" Dr. Zakaria said with a cynical chuckle, "They write about each other's ideas. Suppose an ordinary person tries to read their books; would he or she understand them? Their language is an "in" language. Again, suppose one understands it. Would he find it relevant to his life or the life of his society? The analytic philosopher is not a participant in the rite of human life. Where are the analytic philosophers when people face epidemics, wars, natural or social catastrophes? Do you find them in the dwellings of the poor, the dying, the aged, the sick, and the disenfranchised? Do you find them in the boardrooms of the executives of the different corporations and organizations?

"Suppose the issues they discuss are value concepts such as piety, friendship, justice, beauty, or love— what would, or can, analytic philosophers say about these issues? In principle, they cannot say anything new because knowledge of any aspect of the world of human nature is the specialty of the scientist. They may express personal interpretations or suggest hypotheses or possibilities, which they learned from reading the books of the philosophers, theologians, artists, or the sages, but they cannot do this as analytic philosophers. But what worries me is not merely the fact, which you underlined, that philosophy changed its aims and method of inquiry but that this change was encouraged by the capitalist and military establishments of the big powers. The aims of these establishments are quite different from the aims of the social reformers. Neither the capitalist nor the militarist would look kindly on the philosopher's moral, cultural, and intellectual activities; on the contrary, they view them as rivals. They prefer Hollywood to the books of the philosophers. Did they look kindly on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, or Bruno? They prefer to see philosophers spending their time on the analysis of esoteric, abstruse, unrealistic subjects than on the social and cultural reality of society, and certainly, they do not wish to see moral and intellectual humbugs hovering around their minds." "But how do they achieve this purpose?" I interjected. Dr. Zakaria smiled.

"By supporting their research, teaching, and publishing their books. One philosopher, a disappointed traditionalist, told me in a conversation on this subject that he teaches philosophy because this way, he can earn a living the way the carpenter or engineer earns his living. Philosophy is a useless profession! The humanities, in general, comprise a huge economic market. The military establishments promote a smooth-running economic, political, social, and cultural machine. They smoothly try to silence any voice or power that complicates the work of this machine. The philosophy that gave rise to the contemporary culture does not exist anymore.

"I do not advocate socialism, militarism, or any kind of ideology. I simply wanted to emphasize that the rise and dominance of analytic philosophy signified the first major crisis of philosophy in the history of human civilization because philosophy strayed from its vocation."

I rehearsed my conversation with Dr. Zakaria, informally and in my own words, only to spotlight the proposition I have been elucidating in the preceding discussion, viz., the crisis of ethical theory is embedded in the crisis of philosophy, and the crisis of philosophy is embedded in the crisis of culture. This claim is based on the assumption that the crisis of ethical theory is implied in the crisis of philosophy, and it is implied in it because ethical theory is an integral part of the theory of values, which in turn, is a branch of philosophy. Accordingly, ethical theory's fate is intertwined with philosophy's fate. Now we can ask, in what sense is ethical theory in crisis? Ethical theory's crisis consists of losing its function, or vocation, which has been its reason for being, viz., inquiry into the nature of morals or morality. Its present function is not the pursuit of ethics but metaethics. What is metaethics? Although there are many accounts of the aim and nature of metaethics, we can generally speaking, say that it is the study of ethics. What is ethics, or what is morality? Broadly speaking, "morality" signifies the unity of the moral values that govern the moral life of a people. The task of the ethicist is the analysis, systematization, and justification of these values: What makes an action, a law, or a situation moral? In his attempt to answer this question, the ethicist articulates a principle in terms of which he defines moral values. Again, how do we translate the general concept of a particular value into concrete judgments in the diversity of moral situations? How do we establish the validity of our conception, not only the moral as such but also of the various moral values? Again, what is the basis of moral obligation? Why should we be moral? What is the relation between the concept of morality and the concept of happiness? Is a moral life a condition of a happy life? My purpose in this essay is not to discuss any of the ethical or metaethical theories but the roots of the crisis of ethical theory. A necessary condition for this discussion is a clear understanding of the aim or function of ethical theory. The purpose of the preceding remarks on the nature of morality is only to show the line of separation that discloses the ontic locus of the crisis. We can see the line of separation only if we grasp the task of metaethical theory [4-10].

The metaethicist steps out of the sphere of ethical theory, places it on the table of discussion, and then proceeds to analyze it. He examines its concepts, assumptions, and

method of explaining the nature of morality. His aim is not to examine a certain conception of moral values, the fabric of moral life, how people should be moral, or the method of verifying the validity of the principle of moral behavior but to examine the concepts and ethical theory. He cannot propose a conception of morals, for this is the task of the ethicist. He can only analyze the concepts and logic of ethical theory. But ethical theory is a mosaic of types of ethical theories. The most important types are virtue ethics, Kantianism, utilitarianism, contractarianism, feminist ethics, and religious, ethical theory. These constitute the field of inquiry of the metaethicist. One may wonder, as some philosophers did, whether one can, in principle, examine any ethical theory without basing one's examination on, or assuming, a moral position or conception, put differently, whether one can do metaethics without at the same time doing ethics, which most if not all major ethicists did. The question the metaethicist should consider is, what is the basis of analyzing any basic concept of morality?

The recession of ethical theory from the domain of philosophical inquiry paved the way for the procession of metaethical theory. The procession is consistent with, indeed implied by, the aims the Vienna Circle recommended. The general objective of philosophy is not anymore to inquire into the nature and meaning of natural and human reality. This means that the vocation of the philosopher is not anymore the vocation of the traditional philosopher but the vocation of the meta-philosopher, which, as I explained earlier, is the logical and conceptual analysis of the various sciences, including the language of theology and ordinary life. Implied in this radical change of the vocation of philosophy is a change of the vocation of ethics to metaethics, viz., the study of ethical theory. Ethical theory is in crisis because it lost its vocation. The nature of metaethical inquiry has undergone unusual development and sophistication during the past century. It is as diverse in its understanding of the main questions, method, and aims of metaethics as ethics is [11-15].

Regardless of their ideological, religious, or metaphysical orientation, no social, cultural, or political critic or reformer can either ignore or underestimate the significance of the crisis of ethical theory for at least two reasons. First, the distinctive feature of the mind that contemplates, analyzes, evaluates and articulates a conception of the nature, principle, or role of moral life is the philosophical mind. The study of the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human existence, in particular, is, as I argued in the predesign discussion, the specialty of the philosophical mind. The mind of the scientist sees, observes, and tries to comprehend *what is*, but the domain of meaning, or values, is a domain of *the possible*. This domain is the datum of the imagination, of the creative mind. In the area of the moral

life, the objective of the creative mind is the discernment of the values that express the essential urges and needs of human nature. But this area is as vast and complicated as the life of human beings *qua* human is. It takes a synoptic, critical, discriminating, rational, affective mind to glean the values and give a conceptual form. But how can this kind of mind undertake this task if it lives in an ivory tower with a library composed of meta-philosophical works? It cannot be either versatile or interested in the metaphysical or value conceptions of the philosopher because it is neither versatile nor interested in the reality of the moral life. It is difficult, if not impossible, to do metaethical analysis without intellectual and moral immersion in the actual of living human life.

Second, suppose the task of theorizing on the nature of the moral life is not an integral element of the vocation of philosophy. To what discipline or authority can this task be relegated? As we saw earlier, the scientist cannot perform this task because values are natural facts; yet, these facts can be an object of genuine knowledge. But, as I emphasized earlier, scientific knowledge is not the paradigm of knowledge, and consequently, the scientific method is not the only means of obtaining knowledge. It is quite reasonable to construct a method, as many axiologists did and still do, for exploring, analyzing, and verifying the kind of knowledge we articulate of human values. However, if no recognized discipline assumes responsibility for this task, there will necessarily be a cultural vacuum. But suppose such a vacuum is created. Who will be in charge of moral enlightenment, education, and moral behavior? I tend to think that if this were to happen, and this seems to be happening, at least to some extent, the moral life of a society would be like a rudderless boat drifting in the tumultuous sea of social life. The dominant social, economic, political, and ideological powers would compete in promoting their values. The family, which used to be in charge of the moral cultivation of the young, cannot perform this function at present, not only because it is weakened but especially because it cannot perform it. In all its levels, the school can no longer promote or teach moral or any other kinds of values because of the prevalence of cultural, social, moral, religious, and ethnic pluralism. The task of the school is to transmit knowledge and cultivate critical thinking, communication, and professional skills. Next, although religion is a major institution in all the societies of the world, its educational role is, to a large extent, marginalized. It is in active competition with Hollywood, the internet, the fashion industry, social media, and cultural ideologies. At the end of a lecture on why I believe in God I delivered to a religious community in Kuwait about three years ago, a large number of the audience gathered around me and wondered with a deep feeling of concern, "The question is not why we should believe in God but how we can teach our children to believe in God and live according to the word of God." Why does a

religious family feel impotent in cultivating its children in religious values and practices? How can it help its children in the absence of adequate support and understanding of the nature of moral values and teaching? [16-20].

But the scope of moral questions and problems that face contemporary society is rapidly expanding in depth and complexity: How can we establish a world order on valid moral principles? How can we care for the natural environment wisely? How can we humanize technology? How can the system of education be, or become, a minaret of intellectual, moral, aesthetic light? How can we change work from being a means of survival to a means of human growth and development? How can we promote the spirit of cooperation instead of competition between the big powers in the world? We may ignore these and many related questions and problems, but we cannot ignore the fact that we are human beings and that the environment in which we live should be built on spiritual foundations, nor can we ignore the fact that, as human beings, we are moral by nature. It is not an accident that the analysis of moral values occupied a prominent place in the various systems of the major philosophers. The scope of the moral problems and questions in the different areas of human experience is expanding at an amazing rate. How can we understand the dimension and implications of these questions and problems, much less solve them adequately, if we do not proceed from an adequate conception of the moral as such? The crisis of ethical theory is not merely theoretical. It is also practical. Could it be that the crisis of ethical theory is a correlate to the crisis of the moral fiber of society? [21-32].

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