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GENESIS

What is philosophy? If that were really the first question, the answer would be easy. An intellectual research could be initiated to plagiarise someone else's answer as if philosophy itself were an entity and separate from each of us. A Pandora's box could be labelled "Philosophy" and locked away in an ancient house of learning, strangling pursuit that is reserved for the heady and few but is not relevant to the public domain.

But it *isn't* the first question. Philosophy is as much a part of each of us as are breathing, eating, seeing. It is the metaphorical journey in all the children's books, written, ironically, for adults. It is a journey unavoidable and challenging. It is a journey that we embark upon with the young people we encounter every day at school. Between the sun's rise and set each day are held a teaching and a call to choice with the responsibility to realise choice within action, to realise the self within life.

The culmination each of us reaches at the end of this search is no less meaningful or critical than it was for Buddha or Gandhi or Rachel Carson. They were merely doing what we all are doing, not seeking a philosophy but *being*. Is philosophy just being, then? Is this the first question? How to be? Is this being a random journey through choice after choice? Are we merely an audience or are we involved in how we emerge? It must be remembered here that philosophy, the love or pursuit of knowledge, is only a word. A word symbolises a process. A process is rooted in reality, in the now. It is actually the moment-to-moment simultaneous creation and discovery of who we indeed, *in deed*, are. In reality *being* is an active verb (in the highest sense).

Questions are asked and answers found during this process. Some are individual and personal. Some are universal and shared. Who am I? From where does my identity flourish: from myself, from my friends, from my parents, from my profession, from God? What is this God's nature? What is reality? Is reality the same for us all? Does an animal have a soul? What is the soul? What responsibility do I have toward myself, toward society, toward people, toward earth? Can I know all these things in a logical, permanent way? Will I discover my answers as I live? Who I am?

These are the first questions. In asking all this we demonstrate our first step into human consciousness. This is a consciousness that we are indeed alive and aware. We can choose to some extent reality. This is the first motion towards the self-knowledge, the individual self of the universal self, which Socrates bade us to know, rather be. Socrates merely stated the challenge to know the self, but the question is generic to each of us. It is the same self that Buddha, Socrates, Gandhi, Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rachel Carson pursued. They represented the epitome not only of what is the true individual but also of the actor

Socrates, Plato, Aristotle ... a trinity of thought, rather spirit, representing the matrix from which emerged Western consciousness from the world of unexamined superstition and myth. These three men are bound together overlapping not only in the proximity of their lives but also in a maturation process of thought. Socrates was the questioner, teacher to the man Plato, as well as a fictitious character recreated by Plato to expound Socrates' ideas and those which Plato later developed himself. Enter Aristotle, student of Plato's academy, who refined, extended and challenged Plato; thus Socrates.

Though it is still debated and difficult to delineate Socrates from Plato, ultimately it matters little who actually thought of what. It is the idea, content and spirit being exposed which are important to us. Both Socrates and Plato would agree that it does not matter who happened upon the thought first but rather the light itself contained in the words which stand for a reality.

In order to trace the development of this line of thought, though, we must turn to the individual lives of these men, because they help us relate today to the ideas which were set within very real and human exploration.

First on this horizon was Socrates, an Athenian born in the **deme** of Alopece circa 469 B.C. Considered a homely child, born into a common but not poor family, Socrates was raised in a typical and patriotic home. He received a liberal arts education and was an apprentice to his father's craft of sculpture. Though his father was a much admired stone mason and sculptor, Socrates did not have such a **calling**. He did, however, have a calling within himself which he was aware of from childhood. For always he had this voice within, perhaps what we call **conscience**, something integral to him since birth, something not necessarily taught. Socrates was very much interested in questions of right and wrong. He assumed this inner voice was a divine sign and his source of guidance. A curiosity about the human world ensued. In an age of **open inquiry** and great tolerance, Socrates like many others questioned and discussed every issue which arose. But Socrates was more interested in the nature of the human **soul**, and its cultivation, than in the cause of rain as were most of the teachers around him. Whom then could Socrates turn to for teaching?

Looking out into the world he saw many around him in great conflict of opinion about the world and human matters. One, Anaxagoras, born in 500 B.C., made some sense to Socrates. His tenet was that the underlying basis of the universe was **nous** or mind, intellect or order. To understand the universe one had only to understand the mind to discover the natural order. Beyond this assertion, though, Socrates had little affinity for Anaxagoras, who later was brought to trial for **impiety** when Athens' tolerance for questioners began to decline. Anaxagoras was sentenced to death but escaped and went into exile.