

FOURTH LETTER

Hermias to Aenesidemus

Your remarks concerning the foundations of the critical philosophy have been extremely instructive for me and I hereby thank you most obligingly for kindly sharing them. I must also admit, if I am to make a sincere confession, that your critique of the principles of the newest philosophy has to some extent shaken my faith in their unimprovable perfection, and has made me more aware than ever I was before of the difficulties that are to be overcome if one wishes to fully satisfy the demands of scepticism.

But, despite the fact that I owe you this admission, I must also confess – and I would foster an ignoble mistrust against your way of thinking, which abhors flattery, were I to withhold this confession – that you have not convinced me at all, by means of your examination of the foundations of the critical philosophy, that nothing has been achieved there philosophically, either in terms of the satisfaction of the needs of philosophising reason, or in terms of the refutation of scepticism. Sometimes it seems to me that in your remarks you have quite deliberately aimed not so much at *examining* the principles of the critical philosophy, but rather more that you wish to *refute* and to *dispute* them.

I would like to be in a position already to fully confirm this verdict, and I will do so in the future. For the time being, however, I only wish to mention a few of the thoughts which came to mind in reading your remarks, and which, in the main, pertain to those remarks taken as a whole.

Impartiality, which everyone takes to be good, whatever form and shape it comes in, and which I was otherwise accustomed to encountering in all of your judgements concerning matters of philosophy, seems to have had absolutely no influence on your examination of the critical philosophy on this occasion. Rather, a certain *ill humour*, which only seeks out imperfections and weaknesses and knows how to find them everywhere, is detectable in all of your remarks concerning that philosophy. This ill humour has led you so far into error that you can deny that the critique of reason and the Elementary Philosophy have made any contribution to the culture of philosophy. I am convinced, however, and indeed for good reasons, that you yourself, in moments of calm and unbiased reflection on Kantian and Reinholdian writings, would judge them entirely differently. For surely some dogmatism of the understanding must have blinded one who, even with only a superficial knowledge of the critique of reason and the Elementary Philosophy, can entirely fail to appreciate the great contributions that both have made to the culture of philosophy. The chief result of the critical philosophy, namely, that that cognition that is real for us is neither *solely* dependent on impressions on our mind from actual things outside of us, nor on the original determinations of the mind, but rather amounts to a compound in the nature of which both the impressions of external things upon us and the spontaneous efficacy of the mind play a part, in fact provides a great deal of enlightenment, as you yourself must confess if you wish to be impartial. Namely, it provides enlightenment concerning the most important properties of human cognition, which are inexplicable in empiricism and rationalism, as well as concerning the course that reason has hitherto taken in its speculations concerning the possible and the actual. On this basis alone the critical philosophy can make most just claims to reliability and truth, even if other grounds that have been established in the critique of reason and in the Elementary Philosophy should not be above all doubt. Equally, it is surely undeniable that the Elementary Philosophy, in making consciousness and the facts occurring within it the foundation of all speculation in philosophy,

has not only distinguished itself by way of novelty and originality in the search for the ultimate grounds of all philosophising, but has also indicated the true point from which one really must set out, if a *system of philosophy* is to be brought about at all. For what would be more evident, incontestable, and certain than that which occurs as a fact in consciousness? And from where should one take universally valid propositions, which can uniquely and solely deliver an enduring foundation for the construction of an edifice of philosophy, if consciousness were not in a position to deliver them? Scepticism itself dares not encroach upon and doubt the immediate claims of consciousness. Perhaps all that is required is only a revision to the reasoning of the Elementary Philosophy concerning the facts occurring in consciousness, and in these facts will be discovered that which can underly all philosophy as a secure basis. In any case, to the author of the Elementary Philosophy still belongs the renown of having been the first to have discovered and to have trodden upon the path to the true foundations of philosophising.

As for that scepticism which, in your remarks against the claims of the Kantian philosophy, you defend as completely victorious against the latter, you have admittedly said a great deal that is meaningful concerning its determinations, limits, and its connection to reason; it could hardly have found a better defender of its legitimacy. Whether what you present as scepticism is its true spirit, whether the most ardent of its admirers in ancient and modern times would have recognised it in the way that you portray it, this can remain undecided for now. This much, however, is undeniable, and must be conceded by you yourself, if you wish to be honest: that scepticism, despite all of its claims to rationality, not only puts reason at odds with itself and undermines the foundations of all cognition, but also, by way of the annihilation of all claims to security and reliability in human knowing, causes humanity to revolt against itself. By disputing all the reasons for our faith in the Godhead and for our expectations of a life yet to come it robs human virtue of its most important supports. You, however, in your examination of the critical philosophy, have not taken these natural and necessary effects of scepticism into account at all, and this, I can confess, has made me quite mistrustful of the correctness of what you say against the grounds of that philosophy. And how, my noble friend, can you defend a position that must necessarily inspire doubt against the dignity of humanity, and which threatens to annihilate faith in humanity's highest good? Or again, how can you, with your reverence for virtue and morality, still dispute the sublime contribution of the critical philosophy, to have secured faith in the dignity of humanity on incontestable grounds?

In the end, according to those insights I possess thanks to the critical philosophy, you seem to me to belong to that number of philosophers who, despite the fact that they do not fully *misunderstand* the principles and results of the critique of reason, nevertheless entirely *fail to appreciate* the *true intention* of the investigations and doctrines of this critique. Theoretical speculations about the thing in itself and about transcendental objects have always been the cause of all divisions in the philosophical world. The critique of reason wished to expose the shallowness of these speculations and the meagreness of the fanaticisms of dogmatism, and to thereby bring human understanding back to its true purpose, namely, to search the field of experiences for real cases of knowledge. This intention alone is sublime and great, but it is not the only thing to consider when judging the critical philosophy. By way of the destruction of all empty theoretical speculations concerning freedom, God, and immortality, which have always done so much damage to morality, and which have prompted so many doubts among thinking minds concerning the rational critique of all religion and the possibility of virtue, the critique of reason wishes to furnish a new, firmer and unshakeable support. It wishes to make

room for a foundation for the knowledge of God's existence and for our claims to immortality, which is not only superior to *all* significant objections and doubts, but which must also bring about that conviction concerning God and immortality that is *most advantageous* for human morality. This foundation for knowledge, however, is to be sought in practical reason, in that the demands and needs of this reason are the irreproachable guarantees for the truth of the important propositions: *There is a God; immortality awaits us*. You have entirely overlooked this central goal of the critique of reason in your examination of its principles and results, and this is why you only ever treat that system, as you present its major components in your examination, as a philosophy that merely strives for victory over all other philosophies and pursues this as its ultimate goal. But if one fails to appreciate the relation between the critical philosophy and the essential needs of human reason, then one must necessarily also fail to appreciate the value of this philosophy and its contributions to human culture.