

Josef Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1963) 97-99.

It is appropriate to the human situation, as we have seen, not only for man to adapt himself to his environment, he must also address himself to the *task* of seeing the world as a whole. And the act of philosophizing means that he transcends his environment and steps forth into “the world.”

That must not, of course, be understood to mean that there are, as it were, two distinct, separate spheres, and as though man could take leave of one and enter the other. Nor is it true that there are things which could be defined as belonging in his environment and others that do not occur in his environment, but occur in the other sphere, “the world.” Obviously, our environment and the world (in the sense we have given these terms) are not distinct and separate spheres of reality—as though by asking a philosophical question one moved from the first to the second. A man philosophizing does not look away from his environment in the process of transcending it; he does not turn away from the ordinary things of the workaday world, from the concrete, useful, handy things of everyday life; he does not have to look in the opposite direction to perceive the universal world of essences. On the contrary, it is the same tangible, visible world that lies before him upon which a genuine philosophical reflection is trained. But this world of things in their interrelationships has to be questioned in a specific manner: things are questioned regarding their ultimate nature and their universal essence, and as a result the horizon of the question becomes the horizon of reality as a whole. A philosophical question is always about some quite definite thing; straight in front of us; it is not concerned with something beyond the world or beyond our experience of everyday life. Yet, it asks what “this” really *is*, ultimately. The philosopher, Plato says, does not want to know whether I have been unjust to you in this particular matter, or you to me, but what justice really is, and injustice; not whether a king who owns great wealth is happy or not, but what authority is, and happiness and misery—in themselves and ultimately.

Philosophical questions, then, are certainly concerned with the everyday things that are before our very eyes. But to anyone raising such a question the things “before his eyes” become, all at once, transparent, they lose their density and solidity and

their apparent finality—they can no longer be taken for granted. Things then assume a strange, new, and deeper aspect. Socrates, who questioned men in this way, so as to strip things of their everyday character, compared himself for that reason to an electric fish that give a paralyzing shock to anyone who touches it. All day and every day we speak of “my” friend, of “my” wife, of “my” house, taking for granted that we “have” or own such things; then all of a sudden we are brought to a halt: do we really “have” or “own” all these things? Can anyone have such things? And anyway, what do we mean here by “having” and “owning” something?

To philosophize means to withdraw—not from the things of everyday life—but from the currently accepted meaning attached to them, or to question the value placed upon them. This does not, of course, take place by virtue of some decision to differentiate our attitude from that of others and to see things “differently,” but because, quite suddenly, things themselves assume a different aspect. Really the situation is this: the deeper aspects of reality are apprehended in the ordinary things of everyday life and not in a sphere cut off and segregated from it, the sphere of the “essential” or whatever it may be called; it is in the things we come across in the experience of everyday life that the unusual emerges, and we no longer take them for granted—and that situation corresponds with the inner experience which has always been regarded as the beginning of philosophy: the act of “marveling.”

“By all the Gods, Socrates, I really cannot stop marveling at the significance of these things, and at moments I grow positively giddy when I look at them,” as the young mathematician *Theaetetus* impulsively declares after Socrates has brought him to the point of admitting his ignorance, with his shrewd and kindly, but staggering and astonishing questions—questions that stagger and astonish one with wonder. And then follows Socrates’s ironical answer: “Yes, that is the very frame of mind that constitutes the philosopher, that and nothing else is the beginning of philosophy.” There, for the first time, in the *Theaetetus*, without solemnity or ceremony, almost “by the way,” though fresh as dawn, appears the thought that has become a commonplace in the history of philosophy: the beginning of philosophy is wonder.

It is at this point that the thoroughly “unbourgeois” character of philosophy emerges—if I may for a moment, and without an altogether good conscience, make use of a terminology that has become all too common. Yet wonder really is unbourgeois. For what do we mean by saying, in a spiritual sense, that something is bourgeois? Above all, in the first place, that a man accepts his environment defined as it is by the immediate needs of life, so completely and finally, that things happening cannot any longer become transparent; the great, wide, not to say deep, world which is at first sight invisible, the world of essences and universals, is not even suspected; nothing wonderful ever happens in this world, and wonder itself is unknown or lost. The narrow insensitive mind, that has become narrow through being insensitive, takes everything for granted. And what, in truth is to be taken for granted? Are we to take our very existence for granted? Is the existence of “sight” or “perception” to be taken for granted? No one imprisoned in everyday life *can* ask such questions because in the first place he is unable to forget his immediate needs.