

GOOD SENSE OR PHILOSOPHY

It would be both impudent and imprudent to speak of good sense in relation to philosophy without first of all mentioning Descartes and giving his remarks on the subject. Impudent because we would be depriving a great man of the homage which is his by right and by virtue of long possession; imprudent because we would be depriving ourselves of an opportunity to define our terms exactly. Another equally legitimate motive lies in the fact that if we were to pass over it in silence, someone would be sure to compare our text with the one we quote herewith:

“Good sense,” says Descartes—and the *Discourse on Method* opens with these words—“is the most equally distributed thing in the world: for everybody thinks himself so abundantly provided with it that even those most difficult to satisfy in everything else do not usually desire more of this quality than they already possess. In this it is unlikely that they are mistaken; the conviction seems rather to support the view that the power of good judgment and of distinguishing the true from the false, which is properly called good sense or reason, is by nature equal in all men; and hence the diversity of our opinions comes not from the fact that some are more rational than others, but solely from the fact that we conduct our thoughts along different channels, and do not all consider the same things. For to possess good mental powers is not enough: the prime requisite is to apply them well.”

Translated by James G. Labadie.

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Thus for Descartes good sense is reason, considered as a power or, to employ a term that is more modern because further removed from the underlying Aristotelianism of Descartes, as a faculty of the soul. And this good sense is present as a faculty in every man; without it, the individual would no longer be a man in the full meaning of the word. Of course the words of Descartes are not entirely without irony, and it would be a mistake to attribute to him the opinion that this ubiquitous faculty is in every man to the same degree efficient, present *actu*. Nevertheless *good sense or reason*, this single faculty with two names is the same in each of us, and differences of degree are due not to the gift itself, but to the use we make of it.

It is obvious why Descartes takes the position he does and remains faithful, as he himself says, to “the common opinion of philosophers”: how could he hope to convince men of the unique and universal—unique *because* universal—value of his method if men, all men, were not able to understand it, to accept it, and to follow it? And how could he have opposed the whole tradition on so many points, if his light ran the risk of being dimmer than the light residing in the great men of the past? He declares, therefore, that we have only to turn good sense or reason in the right direction, direct it toward truly desirable ends, for humanity to be able to profit safely, at last, from the fruits of the tree of knowledge, cultivated, finally, with expedience.

But can anyone imagine a more abstract, a more “philosophical” view of man and of good sense? What good is this faculty of distinguishing the true from the false which is so easily misled? Who, then, awaited Descartes in order to be put on the right track? Is our security so much greater since Descartes than before his time? Have discussions lost any of their bitterness? Our own good sense, protesting, does not appear identical with that of Cartesian good sense “according to the common opinion of philosophers.” It is a different good sense which guides us, and which guided our ancestors and those of Descartes, and it did not guide them so badly after all, since their way of living and doing things made it possible for us to be born—and for Descartes to become a philosopher.

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that Descartes was ignorant of or misunderstood this other good sense. All of his provisional code of conduct, his whole life prove the opposite; and besides, he refers expressly to this other good sense when he speaks of the way of life of “sensible men.” But the good sense of sensible men never becomes, to use a current expression, *thematic* for him: his philosophy presupposes it, but is not con-

cerned with it. Now it is precisely the relation between philosophy and this good sense of sensible men with which we are concerned—and so the Cartesian thesis appears as a philosophical thesis, and our good sense declares his definition good, as Descartes would have said, for discussion in “the school”—good, as we would say, for examination questions.

What then is this good sense we are talking about? This is not an easy question to answer, for good sense does not define itself: it leaves this task to the philosophers. It has no need of definitions, it knows, and questions only make it suspicious. The man of good sense has no need of lengthy reflection in order to orient himself in the world; aided by his instinct (to employ the word in an eminently human context), he easily distinguishes, not the true from the false, but the sensible from the senseless—and it is senseless in the highest degree to ask endless questions, because then one misses the moment of action, weakens the instinct, falls into the most trifling sort of speculation, and analyzes what should not be analyzed if one wishes to understand what life and the world are all about.

Consequently we find ourselves faced with a seemingly insurmountable difficulty. To understand good sense is the business of a philosopher; but the business of philosophers is outside the domain of good sense, in the judgment of this very good sense whose authority we cannot challenge. Could we still pretend to be speaking of it if it no longer recognized itself in our portrayal? But if we yield to good sense, we must still explain the existence of philosophy and philosophers—and this we are incapable of doing. Good sense is that which orients men in the world and in life; without good sense life would be impossible; therefore the philosopher must be born of the man of good sense, who refuses to become a philosopher, and must remain, at least to some degree, a man of good sense in order to survive. Good sense declines to accept philosophy, philosophy cannot speak in the name of good sense and cannot even recognize that without it there would be no philosophy.

Good sense, we have said, knows what life and the world are all about. The man of good sense declares that he knows what he must do to be successful, what leads to success in the world as it is.¹ The philosopher recoils before this statement; he wants to know what this “success” is. If

1. Good sense thus forms a system, but a system which is always taken for granted and never analyzes itself. It is with this meaning of a system of orientation that we use the expression “good sense” throughout this article, avoiding another meaning, more typical of the language of good sense but which we will rarely encounter in the course of our reflection, which refers to good sense in the individual, the degree of his knowledge of the rules, the values, and the methods of the system of good sense.

success is obtaining the result aimed for, is this result, or was it ever, desirable? To be rich, to enjoy good health or the consideration of one's fellow-citizens, is this *the Good*? Have men possessing all these things never been unhappy? Must we not first seek to know what the Good is, before racing headlong toward ends which may be deceptive? Good sense, it must be admitted, will scarcely be troubled by these arguments; it won't even bother to refute them: doubtless, men are quite easily mistaken about their own true interests; but that proves just one thing, namely, that good sense is the most *unequally* distributed thing in the world, since it is through a lack of good sense that men are misled. To have good sense is, precisely, not to be misled. The philosopher lacks good sense, and in speaking of his doubts and hesitations he admits it. As long as good sense is active, nothing and nobody will make it doubt itself: it acts, it knows that it acts, it knows what it wants, it is ordinarily successful and whatever is not normal, the extraordinary or the tragic, does not interest it. These things happen, but not as a general rule, and good sense is concerned with the normal case.

Now it is by no means sure that good sense is always content to stop at this point; often enough we find it speaking a "philosophical" language. Its natural language is an active one—there is no question of the true and the false, but of the effective and the ineffective; an instrumental one—which leads to success either in dealings with men or in relation to external nature. Occasionally a difficulty arises, capable of shaking the most firmly rooted good sense, from the observation that good sense is not the same thing everywhere in the world. It is true that good sense everywhere knows what to do and how to do it, what counts and how to achieve it; but *everywhere* here means *in every case*, not *in the same way*. Often this fact creates no problem—those who behave differently from us are barbarians, fools, and sinners; they lack good sense. But it also happens that these barbarians, fools, and sinners succeed, sometimes even at our expense. Since they succeed, and since success is the criterion of good sense, we discover that our good sense was not so good after all. Of course, if we remain faithful to good sense we will be able to profit from the lesson: we admit that the good sense of others was the really good one, and we adopt that which brought victory to those of whom we were mistakenly contemptuous. But this is a difficult decision to make and even more difficult to carry out. People do not willingly admit defeat nor can they be sure that the victor will receive them as an equal, enjoying the right to share his good sense, his way of doing things, and especially the advantages gained through his own particular good sense. If our victors do not admit

us into their community, if they fail to recognize us as their equals but treat us like beasts, would it not be too painful to grant them the possession of true good sense? We will therefore say that we have been fooled somewhere along the line but that we cannot have been totally wrong, since we have survived up to this point and have not lived too badly. It is now in our interest to pass from the level where different kinds of good sense struggle with each other to another level, where it will be possible to judge concurrent claims with the aid of some criterion other than that of success. This move is good sense, too.

It is under such conditions that good sense begins to move. No longer sure of itself, it asks questions which it wants to answer in a way that is applicable to everybody. Now to look for what is applicable to everybody, i.e., for a *true* discourse, is to engage in philosophy: philosophy has always affirmed this and here it is philosophy's testimony that counts. The true discourse we are concerned with is one lacking that contradiction which causes good sense to suffer in a world where each human group gives to good sense a content different from that attributed to it by other groups.

To bring this enterprise to the right conclusion is less difficult than it at first appears. If the truth of the discourse is conditional upon its not contradicting itself, it will suffice to rid familiar discourse of the contradictions it contains. I can start, therefore, with that good sense which, in its concrete form, characterizes my community, and by a process of elimination I shall reach something perfectly coherent. I will no doubt be obliged to sacrifice a great deal, to renounce a good part of what I have regarded as solid and useful knowledge; but I will be sure of what I am doing, and if the rest of humanity does not choose to recognize the value of the belief I have established, I shall at least have gained the right to scorn those who, since they do not think correctly, do not really think at all.

Now it is exactly at this point that the conflict between good sense and philosophy breaks out. Good sense is not particularly fond of contradictions; it would prefer to be freed from them since contradiction implies insecurity, and I cannot be sure of myself if two mutually exclusive aims, two irreconcilable procedures, are offered to my choice without my being able to base my decision on an argument resolving this competition in favor of one or the other. But good sense rebels when one proposes that it get rid of contradiction by eliminating everything that permits it to orient itself in the world and in life. It will always be on the side of Diogenes who, far from refuting the Eleates with another discourse,

calmly walks before their eyes to show them that movement exists. No matter how full of contradiction the argument may be, good sense does not admit the denial of movement nor does it contemplate waiting for a satisfactory explanation, that is, one made according to the conventions of noncontradictory discourse. It prefers to accept the movement of men and of things, even if this means renouncing the idea of speaking about movement theoretically.

It is interesting, but not surprising, to observe that philosophers have always been preoccupied with this conflict. Good sense prefers contradiction if noncontradiction comes at such a price, and it laughs at both philosophy and at its own conflict with it, being angered, if ever, only when it observes young men whose collaboration would be so desirable for the business at hand being turned aside by philosophers from the serious matters of the world and of life. For the philosopher the problem is more serious. First, he risks a great deal in angering good sense, and martyrdom isn't necessarily his vocation; next, and this is perhaps more serious, he is led to admit that he has not obtained the intellectual security he was looking for: his discourse is without contradiction in itself, but it *is* in contradiction with all the discourses of all men living in the world, acting, orienting themselves, moving in full contradiction and yet in the most coherent way from their own point of view. This point of view shows the philosopher how much he has sacrificed on the altar of noncontradiction. It reveals to him what he, like the rest of mankind, is obliged to call everyday reality, in which one loves and hates, struggles and comes to agreement, strives and rests—reality in which one is moved although movement constitutes the worst of all contradictions; in which one is born, becomes, and dies, although becoming is the thing least comprehensible to a noncontradictory discourse. Worse than this and as if this were not disturbing enough, it is within himself that the philosopher discovers this frightful contradiction between contradiction and noncontradiction, for he himself lives and loves and becomes and moves without letting himself be stopped by his own *first concept*, which reduces the entire content of his life as an individual and as a member of a community to a contradiction and an absurdity.

With the aid of this observation it would be possible to draw up a scheme for the history of philosophy which would be no worse than any other. Thought, born of failure, seeks truth by opposing the very concept of success as defined by the particular tradition of a human group: it invents a unique principle and, starting from this, constructs a coherent dis-

course—what we call a system; it eliminates everything that cannot be deduced from its own principle as nonessential, bad, dangerous, incomprehensible, false; it is aided in this by a method which guarantees the unity of the discourse. But when the principle has been found and developed, the philosopher (not usually the same individual historically, but rather a disciple or an adversary-disciple) observes that his argument is in contradiction with life: therefore he will modify his method, or keep the method while changing the principle, or try to replace both; he will admit that the objections raised by good sense are valid, perhaps not in form—good sense doesn't express itself properly—but in substance, which the philosopher knows how to discover and which is always the same. The philosopher will say that he had been too *theoretical* and that he hadn't given due attention to the practical side of life, and thus he returns to the job of constructing a discourse which will satisfy the exigencies of philosophy *and* of good sense.

For the moment we shall refrain from asking whether such crises of philosophy are recurrent, like those of tertiary fever which terminates only with the life of the patient. What matters to us is the observation that every revolution in philosophy has begun with an appeal to good sense. From Socrates to Husserl and our own time, philosophers have regularly declared that their predecessors lacked a sense of reality: the discourse of the predecessor is without internal contradiction, or can at least be made perfectly coherent by reconstruction, but it doesn't make sense because it is at odds with good sense, with life, with whatever the philosopher must admit as valid if he wishes to remain a man among men. He will say that the previous principle was one-sided; it was not false, for what it taught did correspond to something in reality—so much so that one is perfectly able to understand how its author reached a given point—but because historic good sense itself had acted and especially had spoken as if such-and-such an aspect of reality was negligible, it went down to defeat. But the philosopher, attentive only to this neglected aspect, finishes by seeing nothing else and subordinating everything to the solution (or the elimination) of the difficulty which he had been the first to notice and to name. Let us but re-establish the balance, let us concentrate our efforts on the (we might say opposite) principle, and we place ourselves in direct opposition to our predecessors, doing, thus, the same thing they did, but in the opposite direction.

Let us not think, however, that nothing came out of the history of philosophy except twenty-five centuries of a simple back-and-forth

oscillation. Philosophy has evolved considerably—and good sense has too, perhaps even more considerably and more profoundly. Every failure of a one-sided principle has meant progress in philosophical reflection, and if there has been an oscillation, its amplitude has constantly increased and the extreme points reached have been each time on a higher plane. As for good sense, it learned early the practical value, the “good-sense” value, of the coherent discourse concerned with reality, and it has not hesitated to profit from this knowledge. Perhaps it doesn’t owe this knowledge entirely to philosophy, but it would have been unable to develop it without the aid of philosophy—without that absence of good sense which freed good sense in its concrete form of the chains of that form itself; philosophy taught good sense new possibilities outside the customary ones, and without the abstract, one-sided, *absurd* view (as good sense calls it) of philosophy, good sense would still be right where it started. Without Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato, and Leibnitz there would be no differential calculus, without differential calculus no modern technique and no progress, as today’s good sense uses the term.

There is no doubt that we have progressed in the direction of good sense. We have learned to see ourselves as we are, limited individuals in a world whose details and whose aspects are never entirely disclosed to us, endlessly engaged in seeking and in finding. In other words, we have learned and understood that every truth in life and for life is *our* truth and subject to whatever we are subject to. We have become empiricists, to use textbook terminology, and while we grant to reason a value and a validity not deduced from sensory experience, and declare that sensory experience cannot be understood without reason, that reason makes a coherent experience out of these data, even here we do not admit an absolute knowledge, the knowledge of a Reason which may be substance and force outside our own experience.

But it is to be feared that this *rapprochement* which we have effected in the direction of good sense may still not suffice and that philosophers will remain men with one-sided and exaggerated theses, even though they seek contact with good sense. Their empiricism may go much further, even to the most radical skepticism, and we will have dogmatism again: is it not in the highest degree dogmatic to declare that we can know nothing? Can a thesis more contrary to good sense be imagined? Worse than this, we have only to make a *thesis* of good sense, and we succumb to the same danger. What could be more reasonable, more in conformity with good sense than to ask first of all what these words mean? Would this not be a

guarantee against straying from the path of good sense? May we not be sure that both human questions and human answers are couched in the language of men? Will good sense not become the principle of philosophy as soon as we leave behind all these senseless speculations which hinge on pseudo-problems born of an improper use of language? Will we not necessarily succeed in our search for a discourse at one and the same time noncontradictory and perfectly adapted to life if we simply turn the language of everyday life toward noncontradiction? No doubt we will succeed, but neither better nor worse than our predecessors. For we shall have to sacrifice everything that prevents noncontradiction from becoming established, and we may arrive—to choose an example which is surely not envisioned—at a definition of the State which would not differ essentially from that of any sporting club and according to which one might leave the State as one leaves his club, the difference being *solely* one of degree in that the only way to leave the State is to commit suicide: a thesis which may be coherent but which is eminently scandalous in the eyes of good sense. It might certainly be maintained that this thesis which calls itself one of good sense is somewhat metaphysical: does it not presuppose that only individuals of every-day experience are “real” and that every complex formation must be reduced to one at which you can point a finger? But that is exactly the thesis of good sense—only taken seriously, developed to its ultimate consequences and transformed as a calm conviction, such as it was in the theoretic thesis, of the exclusive type which states “there is only. . . .” We are tempted to say that there is no escape from dogmatism once philosophy appears, once we attempt to speak seriously in accordance with the truth, to develop a discourse which is not self-contradictory and does not seek first of all to be effective.

Must philosophy be abandoned? Must we once again pin our hopes on good sense? Everything seems to favor an affirmative answer to these questions, but a doubt remains. Just what have we been doing throughout the above reflections? We have been speaking from the point of view of good sense, but have we spoken the language of good sense? Of this we are less sure. For good sense lives and acts, it does not speak with an eye to truth and from the point of view of truth—and this is precisely what we have been trying to do. We have tried to judge philosophy; but to judge philosophy is a philosophical undertaking: good sense, as everyone including philosophers knows, is not concerned with philosophy, but it is sometimes concerned with philosophers in a way that the latter ordinarily, and justifiably, resent. It must be admitted that our anti-philosophy is still

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philosophy, and that the problem is more complicated than we had at first believed.

Good sense is the sense of the man who has his bearings in the world, in his world. The philosopher is the man who asks questions because he is not sure of his world, because he doesn't know what he should do, whether aims ordinarily pursued deserve to be pursued, whether what is taken for good is really the Good, whether what is taught and learned is true. We may say that good sense is active, the philosopher reflective.

But it may be that this opposition is less clear-cut in reality than it is in the argument of the philosopher. We have already stated: the philosopher wants to live too, and he would be unable to live if every decision had to await the discovery of truth and of the link between the current problem and the principle of truth; he lives like everybody else, content to behave as others do, and only in the quiet of his study or during discussions in market-place or forum does he reflect and doubt everything.

But looking at it more closely, is good sense in a more favorable situation? Haven't we been speaking as if there was but *one* good sense? True, we noted variations of content, but did we take them seriously enough? Is *good sense our* good sense? Let us recall what we said earlier. There are communities, at any rate nothing prevents the existence of such communities, in which everything is regulated, where each finds his own place and where the place indicates to whoever occupies it what he must do and what he may expect from life. But these are also communities in which the problem of the opposition between good sense and philosophy is not raised: there is no place in them for even the most rudimentary philosophy, and the wisdom of such a community, through which it provides direction and content for the life of its members, does not appear as wisdom; the ethnologist and the philosopher discover this wisdom because they know of another wisdom, or rather feel a lack of wisdom and a desire for it; for those who live in the midst of wisdom, the individuals can participate to a greater or a lesser degree in truth, but truth is one, it *is*. Good sense recognizes itself as good sense when it finds itself faced with a thought which it considers as different, aberrant, mad if you will, but which exists and which permits good sense to see itself as it is concretely in opposing this thought. The good sense which struggles against reflection and philosophy is no longer this good sense in which we find a total reconciliation, or rather an absolute unity of man and his world. *Our* good sense has been to the school of philosophy and there been contaminated: it has followed the development which gave rise to philosophy, and, like

philosophy, it has learned that one man's good sense is another man's madness, crime and sin, that the struggle of communities, although decided in certain cases, is not decided without appeal and that it is good sense not to look for the same decision everywhere and at all times. It knows that there is good in noncontradiction, that it benefits good sense, no matter what concrete form of good sense, since all forms have established contact with one another, have confronted each other, and fear the rise of conflicts among themselves. In a word, good sense too wishes to be *one*, and it calls upon philosophy even though it detests philosophy and despises each of its particular forms.

This is due to the fact that it does not wish to be *one* in the way philosophy is: the unity it seeks must be the unity of good sense. What can attaining a unity of discourse mean to good sense if the discourse no longer permits it to act? Good sense is practical, as it well knows ever since it made the acquaintance of philosophy. Now, it has also been brought to realize that philosophy can be useful to it: whoever best knows what *is*, also most often and most easily succeeds in the struggle of all men with nature and with each other, and can best use the forces of nature against those he combats or those who attack him. The question of ends does not arise for good sense, success is an end in itself; but the means of attaining success—there is a question which good sense understands and for which it is quite ready to borrow the answers from philosophy. Philosophy, as good sense readily admits, offers a fine gift, knowledge; a discourse bearing on that which *is*, but so doing from the point of view of one who would dominate, transform and utilize that which is.

Good sense is practical, and philosophy, except insofar as it attains results, is theoretical—let us rather say *theorizing*, since our good sense, thanks to philosophy, has its own theoretical side. Good sense wants to live, and live, as it says, in a proper way: the philosopher wonders what he should want to do in order to avoid contradiction between his life as a man and his discourse as a philosopher. Thus the two are truly opposed; but they cannot be separated, either: if good sense were not there to want, man would not turn to philosophy to know what he can do, what he can hope, what he should want; if philosophy did not try to answer him, man would accept the risk of failure of his good sense rather than renounce the only thing left to him, namely, the concrete form of his own particular good sense. The practical has become problematical and developed its own theories since the “good senses” of different traditions have been in combat; theory knows it is practical ever since it realized that it was born of the

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need to know in truth the aims of man, his final, indubitable, irrefutable ends, valid for each good sense. But this union, real though it is, does not bring about the disappearance of the fundamental difference. There would be no philosophy if good sense, at a given moment, had not begun to doubt: happy peoples have a history, but they have no philosophy, and what is true of peoples also holds good for epochs. There would be no good sense, or more exactly, good sense would not know itself as good sense, if it had never met men who doubt it and its values. Philosophy and good sense are inseparable only in their struggle with each other, because they exist only in that struggle.

The nature of this unity in conflict is not seen by good sense. But philosophy cannot fail to see that it is itself born of good sense, that it is, so to speak, good sense itself, but disabled, self-doubting, shaken to its roots, good sense which has lost itself, seeks itself, wishes to find itself. This very curious attitude of philosophy toward good sense is thus explained, this desire to establish an accord with good sense, to appeal to good sense in order to change from an "abstract" to a "concrete" philosophy—and at the same time is explained its undisguised hostility, its contempt for what it calls the blindness, bad will, and vulgarity of good sense and of the experience boasted by good sense. Philosophy retains its nostalgia for good sense, for this good sense in possession of the world where it feels at home, and therefore philosophy fears and detests its strayed good sense, not daring to admit, even to itself, how utterly it is lost in a reality which no longer forms a world, a cosmos, a sane unity in itself and for the men who live in it. Philosophy seeks the one true good sense to replace that which it has lost through a series of failures.

But one thing is too easily forgotten by philosophy: while it is seeking *the one* good sense of the world, the good sense of the current time is obliged to make the current world go round, the world which is not a true cosmos, in which ends are not justified in themselves, where no one feels entirely in his place, where no place is properly determined, where everything is unstable, but which is still the only world we have and which must not cease to go round if we are ever to know a better one. And as the good sense of the day is thus attending to its affairs, which are everybody's affairs, a certain philosophy comes to disturb it, to propose a final truth, a definitive solution: this truth and this solution do not concern good sense, since the difficulties with which it is occupied and pre-occupied are the difficulties of the present moment and since it lacks the time to bring about, even if it believed in them, the rule of absolute ends.

No doubt, if all men were philosophers, if no one pursued an end without being able to justify it in reason, in truth, and universally, all could relax; but given that men are as they are and act as they act, one can only take them as such and do one's best, even if this *best* be only a *least bad*. The philosopher should be grateful if the action and the activity of good sense permit him to follow his bent.

Now, if we speak as we have just been doing, it appears that philosophy *may* at least admit the role of good sense—and this is the most important difference between it and good sense: philosophy knows that without good sense it could neither last nor follow the line of development it has traced thus far, while the practical does not see clearly just how it needs the theoretical—rather, *the* theory, for it is well aware that “theories” are very useful to it. This may not seem very important. As a matter of fact, however, this difference in attitude constitutes a most profound difference between the philosopher and the man of good sense. In philosophical language—and we will not hesitate to employ it, since the whole problem exists only for philosophy—it is the difference between knowledge and self-knowledge; in other words, the difference between the man who reflects on everything except himself and his reflection, and the one whose reflection *is* reflection about himself. Hence the theoretical character of philosophy, the desire to understand the meaning of what he does, rather than to seek the means of reaching what he wishes to attain. Hence also that which constitutes the real scandal of philosophy in the eyes of good sense, namely, the suspension of value judgment, the will to find or to re-find the meaning of the world and of its existence, this refusal to take for granted and as guaranteed that which is ordinarily so taken—just like everybody else. Hence finally the scandal which philosophy sees in good sense, not because it acts, but because in acting it speaks and speaks as if it had a discourse that was coherent, sane, and well-founded, whereas in reality, good sense runs away from its own insecurity, seeks satisfaction because it is not satisfied, desires the Good but settles for goods, and refuses to be aware of its own situation: if it were satisfied, if it satisfied men, there would be no philosophy.

The day may come when good sense will no longer be troubled, when it will rule as sovereign over all humanity, when all its concrete forms will have blended together, when man will be “oriented,” will no longer have to choose among different possibilities of life, among several concrete forms of good sense, when, in other words, he will be able to engage in his sole activity, an activity which would be “taken for granted” by and

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for everybody. When that day comes, there will be no more philosophy, because there will no longer be either quest or question other than technical; there will no longer be change in the foundations of life and the fashions of doing things, and even the question of whether such a state is a good or an evil will have lost all meaning because such a question will no longer apply. But while awaiting this day, we continue to be obsessed by questions.

For us, nothing is taken for granted—an expression full of meaning, since it does indicate the real difficulty. Good sense takes everything for granted, for it knows; the philosopher takes nothing for granted, for he knows that he knows not. Language is just one among the instruments, perhaps among the organs, of good sense; it is everything for the philosopher who does not know how to act, how to speak if his discourse is to make sense, how to establish a place for himself and for every man in this world—a world in the interior of which the different “good senses” combat each other—who does know that without good sense he could not live, much less be a philosopher. He, the philosopher, can then try for adjustment with good sense, with this particular good sense in which he has himself been brought up and which cannot be too bad, since the particular world of which it is the good sense has gone on this long and shows promise of continuing to go on in the future. The problem, the philosopher says to himself, is simply to liberate good sense, this *good* good sense, from the doubts and hesitations which precipitate contradictions that in turn add to the difficulty of good sense. This good sense has been affected, we might almost say infected, by philosophy: it takes the discourse seriously, but not entirely so. Now if someone, and this someone would be a philosopher, took the discourse entirely seriously, good sense and men living in the world could live in peace: the discourse would have freed them from discourse, from the necessity of admitting that there are things which *cannot* be taken for granted. Dogmatic philosophy is born at this moment.

We have already encountered it; but it is not only here that it reveals its nature. Dogmatic philosophy is the philosophy of good sense, and like good sense, it accepts certain things as given once and for all. They are not the same things in the two cases: good sense knows what there is to be done; philosophy knows, or thinks it knows, how to answer the questions of good sense in every case where it is off the track, where it recognizes a contradiction among its values, among the procedures it considers valid, among the structures which appear to it to be fundamental or indis-

pensable. But both presuppose the same world and speak basically the same language: they don't say the same things, they don't ask the same questions, but they use the same concepts and their orientation is the same. Good sense thinks that everything is in order except for a few problems and anxieties; dogmatic philosophy declares that nothing is in order as long as these problems and anxieties are unresolved; but both have the same framework in a single world.

One has only to open any history of philosophy to see the paltry results of this philosophy of good sense—more exactly, the superabundance of nonresults of which it boasts and of which it should be accusing itself. A philosopher can always deal with the anxieties of good sense (which it transforms into questions); but his answers will be in contradiction with those given by other philosophers to this same good sense—at other times and to other forms of good sense. It is never impossible to build for good sense a world without contradiction, that is a world in which man has only to pursue his own activity; but the difficulty is that the number of such worlds is not definite and is certainly more than one: a world of safety is no less possible than a world of wealth, or beauty, or honor—but it becomes extremely difficult to live in a reality within which all these worlds confront each other, a reality of good sense thus dislocated, in which choice is necessary, and to choose an action before being able to “rest” again in well-ordered activity.

Thus the philosophy of good sense clashes most violently with that very good sense to which it was most favorable. Good sense simply does not wish to choose. It desires both worlds equally, and wants them to be able to coexist. Philosophy demands the sacrifice of all but one world, and such an offer does not interest good sense, which rejects it as an abstraction and a purely mental view. The situation is not changed at all when philosophy, realizing its situation, becomes skeptical and tries to free good sense from any feeling of bad conscience by telling it to continue, that it is doing the right thing and that its scruples are superfluous: this takes care of the philosopher, who can now consider himself in the clear because he has denied the sense of the question he knows he cannot answer; but it settles nothing for good sense, which continues to demand an answer because its difficulty is real: it sees no difference in being told to choose one possibility to the exclusion of all others, or to choose *not* to choose at all to the exclusion of all choice. What good sense wants is neither a choice nor the refusal of all choice; it wants to be shown the possibility of reconciling all the possibilities and, at the same time, to be recognized as good sense, as that

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which makes the world go round and enables men to live; it wants to be told that it did these things before there was any philosophy, and that it still does them although, according to most philosophers, they cannot be done.

So it is necessary to return to the beginning of our inquiry. And this time we must answer that philosophy *cannot* give satisfaction to good sense on the level of the latter, it *can* give good sense the satisfaction of self-respect, conceding that it *is* good sense which directs the activity of man in his life and his world. Philosophy is not, and must not become, the handmaiden of good sense, since good sense can only be troubled and interfered with when forced to listen to philosophy. It can well be the counsel of good sense, but only because the advice it gives is not on the level which properly belongs to good sense. Philosophy has nothing to do with activity, except as, first, it profits from activity, and, second, insofar as its reflection, without in the least wishing to do so, presents good sense with theories, ways of speaking (or of thinking, if this term be preferred) which can become the tools of good sense.

The first of these two relations between philosophy and good sense is not difficult to grasp: *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* expresses it perfectly. The second has caused numberless misunderstandings, the most serious of which is just that one which gives rise to what we have called the "philosophy of good sense." It is a fact that philosophy does have to do with *action*, choice, and the reconciliation of possibilities in the world where good sense is wavering; and this is why, in order to understand its problem, philosophy sees itself obliged to develop the various possibilities one by one, tracing each of them to its ultimate conclusions and to its earliest beginnings: good sense, by understanding what it seeks *basically* in either of these directions, by seeing what is implied in its techniques and how these techniques can be perfected, purified, made coherent and more effective, can profit and has always done so, since philosophy itself is a fact in the world of this good sense which gave birth to philosophy. But what is thus the essential part of philosophy for good sense (and the philosophy of good sense) is not essential for philosophy, and if philosophy is deceived on this point, it falls into the difficulties we have encountered.

Philosophy recognizes the role of good sense because philosophers are men and they know that man needs effective activity in order to live. The philosopher knows only too well that man is a creature with *work to do*—there is no expression which better describes his situation and his condition: he is in need, and his need gives him work to do. But man not only has

this work to do, he also wants to understand his need, and his work, once the work is no longer a matter of course—and this, too, the philosopher knows only too well. It is that man does not merely feel his need and fail to give himself entirely to his task: he sees the need, and performing the task should, if possible, free him from need as such, not simply satisfy this need, and that one, and so on *ad infinitum*. So man has the possibility of acting upon himself: realizing that there is no end to need, he seeks satisfaction in two opposite directions: he tells himself that he will be satisfied as well by reducing the need as by pursuing the satisfaction of needs, and that action will provide him just as much satisfaction in the world of needs as self-transformation would provide within himself; he is ready, if necessary, to renounce a great deal of what good sense considers natural satisfactions whose value is taken for granted. If he chooses the second way, that of self-transformation, he becomes a philosopher—in the philosopher's sense of the word, but also in the meaning of good sense, for which the philosopher is someone who doesn't take seriously what is done in the world, someone ridiculous or disturbing, according to the particular case. The philosopher has elected to act upon himself, he has made his choice, which consists precisely in raising the question, not of this form of activity or that, but of activity itself. For all that, he does not scorn activity, but recognizes its decisive role: he simply wonders whether he can find satisfaction in activity, in any activity whatsoever of good sense.

So philosophy is of value only to the philosopher. Good sense is perfectly right in refusing it: good sense has chosen something else, and its choice is such that it cannot understand the possibility of any other choice—it is so completely right that the philosopher, if he understands himself, also understands and approves the choice of good sense. And if the philosopher understands himself while understanding good sense, he will no longer wish to interfere in the work of good sense: each matter must be handled on its own level. But on the other hand, the philosopher knows full well that these matters are important and that he can disengage himself from them only on condition that others become engaged in them. He will admit the simple truth that the job cannot wait and that he himself is among those who need to see it accomplished. But this is also why, without interfering otherwise, he will not remain silent if he sees that the activity of the world is not adapted to the needs of the world, that it will not bring about the satisfaction that the world expects from *him*; he will often do this with much good sense—sometimes with more good sense than others, because all the action and the immanent (but invisible to good sense) meaning of

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this action are visible to him. He will intervene because he insists on the conditions necessary to his own activity, and he knows that it will no longer be possible for him to think if the world does not enjoy a certain minimum of security and calm. He turns to the activity of the world only when necessary and in case of danger, and, knowing well enough what philosophy is, he will not require the good sense of the world to expect from the philosopher the solution of the world's problems—much less will he promise a solution. He, the philosopher, will be content to point out to good sense that it is not properly stating the problems which it alone can resolve, in, and through, action.

Thus the philosopher is freed from the philosophy of good sense—as unacceptable to the man of good sense as it is dangerous for the philosopher, whom it prevents from understanding himself. But we must now bring to light what has been lying under the surface: to tell the truth, the philosopher no longer even has anything to do with action, this choice among the various “good senses” interspersed in a world where, for him at least, choice had become necessary. The choice had been inevitable; but now he has chosen, and his choice has brought him right to philosophy. Choice, without doubt, has been an act in the world, an action in the strongest sense; philosophy would never have presented itself as a possibility if the world in which it offers itself hadn't been off its hinges, if the concrete good sense of this world had been at peace with itself, if its activity had really been a matter of course. But the choice, once it is made, no longer depends on the conditions of its possibility: on the contrary, it is only the result of the choice which reveals the conditions of the choice, a comprehensible choice, but comprehensible only after it has been made and to him who made it. The philosopher has chosen to understand—not this or that according to the criteria which distinguish *this* and *that* in the framework of the world of all “good senses” and of philosophy—but to understand his understanding of this world. This is the way he answers the question of good sense; but since the question of good sense is a question only when it is addressed to the philosopher (*by* the philosopher), he answers all the questions of all “good senses” at the same time—and thus does not answer within the meaning of good sense: he answers *himself*, himself who asks the question about the meaning of good sense. This answer—if he ever finds it—will satisfy him: his need is to find the meaning of what is, and as soon as this meaning is revealed to him, by himself, he will have no more needs *or* have need as a philosopher; the philosopher will be satisfied in having a view of sense, in theory. But theory will not satisfy good sense.

If one wished to sum it up, it would not be incorrect to say that philosophy is *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Or, since it is perhaps better not to make philosophy the subject of any action or activity, even theoretical, we might say: the philosopher is a man in the world, a man like other men except that he takes seriously the conflict of good sense with itself, that historic conflict in which good sense has lost its bearings; the philosopher is a man who suffers from this conflict, more often and more deeply than good sense itself, a man who has decided to seek, not the satisfaction of needs, but the satisfaction of his own need. He is in the world; but the solution he seeks is not *of* this world since it is based on the very question of good sense, of every good sense in every possible world. His quest makes sense only in the world; but it is situated outside the world of activity and even outside the world of action.

Let us realize once and for all that the philosopher is not detached from the world; far from it. It is always the world, this concrete world in which he lives and searches, that interests him, preoccupies him, keeps him going. He wants to understand this world, he knows that he can find satisfaction in the comprehension of this world. The good sense of this world provides him with material and turns him toward philosophy. He knows this, and he also knows that any answer which puts his thought into conflict with the reality of good sense, and of the world of good sense, will be a false one. So he is reconciled with good sense—but not with every form of good sense: good sense may go off the track, it is necessarily off the track before philosophy can appear, and the philosopher alone recalls it to reason. But if the philosopher understands himself, he will recall good sense to the reason of good sense, not to the reason of philosophy. He will indicate to it not what the philosopher wants (which is simply to have the chance to be a philosopher) but what good sense itself wants. He will show it where the techniques it employs may be expected to lead it, he will teach it the price it must pay if it really wants to attain a given end, but he will not teach it what to choose: he will show it the necessity of choice and the possibilities among which choice must be made, telling it also that it, good sense, must itself choose. And he can give these indications because philosophy has shown him—insofar as philosophy has shown him, if you prefer—the structure of the world of men, the essential structure of all human worlds.

It is by no means certain that philosophy, even in this form, will be well received by good sense. On the contrary, it is highly improbable. Good sense wants answers within the framework of the world. It does not want answers applying to the whole of the world and to the understanding of

this whole. It has, besides, had bad experiences with the philosophy of good sense which tried to teach good sense its own business without understanding it. Finally, good sense has no desire to become a philosopher, even in terms of a philosophy which would be theory of action and of activity, theory of the human world, theory which would contain, but well-comprehended, the multiplicity of good sense in all its contradictions: good sense feels that all this would still be theory, both beyond its comprehension and outside its scope; it feels that philosophy is proposing such comprehension as *the Good*.

So peace between philosophy and good sense will always be one-sided, if such an expression makes any sense: philosophy will agree with good sense which will never agree with philosophy, hoping for answers which philosophy could only provide by renouncing self-knowledge. The philosopher will be content with this precarious peace, since he knows that it cannot be otherwise and that every man can choose or refuse philosophy only because there exists a tension between good sense and the comprehension of the whole. He knows, therefore, that he is a philosopher by choice and that man is free to make this choice. But he will not ask good sense to recognize this freedom, which can be seen within the world of good sense only as the despair of good sense despairing of its own good sense. The only thing the philosopher will call to the attention of good sense—for all his advice can be thus summed up—is that it should arrange its world in such a way that every man *can* elect to choose theory, this view of things which is contentment in, through, and for itself, which raises man above his workaday world and permits him no longer to wish himself needful for the sole end of having, in the feeling of his need, a content for his existence. The philosopher calls to the attention of good sense its task, which is to free man sufficiently from need so that he may be enabled to choose something other than the satisfaction of his needs, so that he may have the time, quite simply, to engage in philosophy, to understand his world and himself.

So philosophy is not without usefulness for good sense: the less it leans toward utility, the more useful to good sense it will be. After all, good sense gone astray, our own good sense, that of a world which doubts its own good sense, is what produces philosophy. So it is not surprising if good sense always tries to take refuge in philosophy, but always turns away from it full of distrust. It is uneasy; but it has difficulty in seeing its uneasiness, which is hidden from it by other anxieties and the cares involved in being in need; and it would like philosophy to help it in its

tasks—philosophy has done so rather often, and good sense does not see that it did so unwillingly—but good sense does not for all that want to be directed to the source of its anxiety: it wants philosophy to provide it with a new *science*, a new *theory*, and it prefers not to understand that all *science*, even *social science*, presupposes activity, along with the anxieties and the aims of activity. Philosophy cannot cure good sense of its anxiety; all it can do is to help it face up to this anxiety. Philosophy is particularly unable to turn good sense away from its anxieties; good sense alone makes the world go round, and its anxieties belong to it alone. But philosophy can show good sense that all its anxieties are but a search for the meaning of the world, and that they are important, if good sense wishes to understand, only in relation to this last question.

Thus the conclusion will be, as is fitting when philosophy addresses good sense, an ironical one. Philosophy is good only for philosophers: but every man is a philosopher in a world which doubts its own good sense, every man who searches the meaning of his life and his world—and it would make sense for every man proceeding in this search to know what it is about, or rather, to proceed with full understanding of the problem, instead of running like a blind man in a dense forest, fleeing some terrible unknown thing.