

### *43. My Earliest Experience of Concordia University (1994)*

“What I bring to the fore here is essentially my experience as a graduate student at Concordia University. It is the experience of one who, having come from another province, based his expectations upon the information offered by the philosophy department of this university and the communication he had with it. In other words, I came to it nearly blind and without the more trustworthy information only to be had by first-hand experience. Only after I had gained this experience and talked with a few students did the scales fall from my eyes.

“Talking to these other students, I quickly came to realize that the Department was for the most part not held in high esteem. On the contrary, it seemed that many bright students had a poor opinion of both its general performance and the performance of certain of its professors. Now while I readily admit that there were dissenting voices with respect to these same professors and the Department as a whole, the overall impression I received was nonetheless negative. At the same time, students tended to view the situation as something simply to be accepted. Their specifically philosophical education was taken to be a trial to be endured, a test to be passed, and a means to an end. Nothing of the inspirational, of the sheer joy in the enrichment and deepening of the mind entered the picture. Or if it did, it was muted, a bare fragment of the whole. It struck me as a case of young people growing old before their time. Their loss of enthusiasm, their implicit or open distrust of that which fails to live up to what it purports to be induced cynicism and the strictly practical outlook.

“Suffice it to say that here is not the place for me to explain why I take it upon myself to address this matter. A full explanation would almost amount to an autobiography. Rather I shall limit myself to saying that I am one constitutionally incapable of being indifferent to whatever passes itself off as the high or the highest and yet betrays itself in many ways as being low and mean. Thus began my problem with one professor who, while taking his thought to be of the highest order, nonetheless grew peevish, impatient, and even insulting when I challenged him to defend it. Thus also began my problem with another professor who, seeming to be the initiator of deep and mysterious rites, proved to be a man with a paucity of energy, motivation, and conviction. Thus also began my problem with yet another professor, the Chair of the Department, who treated me very cordially at first but then later demoted me to the level of a misbehaving child. Moreover, nothing ever came from these professors (save perhaps the second) which indicated they were in the slightest way alive to my concerns and criticisms. What could account for this state of affairs other than the fear that any reciprocity of thought would have undermined their authority or been an intolerable

affront to their dignity?

"It is necessary for me at this point to give at least a thumbnail sketch of my approach to Academia. It is simply the one of wanting to have the experience of it on my own terms. Principally this means doing as well as I can in my studies without forfeiting my practised and high-level honesty. Without letting it slip even a few degrees to accommodate the not-so-high-level honesty of institutions and respectable society. This not-so-high-level honesty is not so much a matter of what is said but what is *not* said. Briefly put, it is the barely detectable because almost universal practise of not being true and pure in one's heart, of not having it in the same place as one's head. To all this I hold myself hostile and think that whatever is wrong or excessive about my approach finds its excuse in the wrong that it opposes.

"To conclude, it is not my objective nor could it hardly be my successful mission to demoralize the Department or any member of it. Rather I look upon this confrontation more as a forcing open of locked doors and windows. For Academia locks doors and windows and draws curtains despite its conscious display of having the multifarious world as its object. It too can grow inward and incestuous, no longer in a favourable position to subject itself to greatest scrutiny. At least so it seems to me and so I strive to make an experiment of myself. An experiment within and alongside the philosophy department in the name of greatest self-scrutiny."

*– Perhaps there were a few rotten apples in his department. But that doesn't mean he should tar them all. I remember a couple of professors in my own graduate studies who were not at all to my liking. But you had a choice how to deal with them. You could either run up against them and cause yourself a lot of grief or else choose a topic to write about that would allow you to express your opinions without contradicting theirs.*

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