DON'T FENCE US IN: The liberating role of philosophy

Professor J.G. Donders

Inaugural Lecture

University of Nairobi
Taifa Hall
10th March 1977
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Professor Joseph Gerard DONDERS was born at Tilburg, The Netherlands, in 1929. He got his primary and secondary school education in his home-town. After the second world war he received an award for his resistance work as a schoolboy during the war.

He studied Philosophy and Theology in The Netherlands, Scotland and Italy. He obtained his B.A. in philosophy in 1958, M.A. in 1960 and Doctorate in Philosophy in 1962 with a thesis on the intelligibility of the evolution theory ("L'intelligibilité de L'évolution", Sint Michielsgestel, The Netherlands, 1962). From 1962 until 1970 he was lecturing in The Netherlands, mainly at the Institute for Philosophical and Theological Studies (GIT), a Faculty at the University of Tilburg. From 1967 till 1970 he made some study and lecture tours in Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi. He was appointed at the University of Nairobi as a visiting scholar in 1970. In 1974 he was appointed Professor and Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

In 1972 he was appointed Warden of Hall 1. At the moment he is the Warden of Hall 10 and 11 as well as acting as Warden of Hall 3. Professor Donders is the Secretary of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK), of which he is one of the co-founders. He is co-editor of "Africa, thought and practice". He is the chairman of the Council of Higher Studies in Religion in Kenya.

He was ordained as a priest in 1957, and in 1974 the Archbishop of Nairobi Cardinal Maurice Otunga asked him to take care of Saint Paul’s Catholic Chapel at the University of Nairobi main campus.

Professor Donders is the author of eight books on philosophical and religious issues in his mother tongue. He has published two booklets in English. 'How to study' (Uzima, Nairobi, 1976) gives the text of his lectures on this subject to the freshmen of the University of Nairobi. It was translated in Kiswahili 'Mbinu za kujifunza' (TMP, Tabora, 1976). 'Expatriate Jesus', a series of fourteen of his sermons in Saint Paul's (Gazelle Books, Nairobi, 1975) became a local bestseller. A new series of 52 sermons will be published at the end of 1977 by Orbis Books, New York, under the title 'Jesus a refugee in Africa'.

Professor Donders is unmarried. His hobbies are talking with people, reading, preparing and giving public lectures and doing his work.
Mr. Chairman, Sir,
ladies and gentlemen,
some years ago my predecessor
Bishop Stephen Charles Neill,
dedicated his inaugural lecture
as Professor of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
to the role of religious studies in this University
under the title:
‘and this should not be forgotten’.
I think it therefore proper
to dedicate my inaugural lecture
to the role of philosophy in this University.

I would like to start,
Mr. Chairman,
by drawing your attention
to the strange name
given to the science
I am responsible for,
through my appointment
at this University of Nairobi.
That name is PHILOSOPHY.
This name does not seem to indicate
anything specific;
and it does not even seem to be very positive
in its content.
It only means
that one is
a philos, that is a friend,
of Sophia, that is wisdom:
that one is eager to be wise;
that one would like to be wise
or something like that.

I think that there is sharp contrast
between this type of science,
and this type of approach,
and the science
and approach
of all the other learned,
and very often very learned departments
at this Institute of learning.
Those Departments, do not say that they would love to know something about human anatomy, and history, about biology and government.

They say that they know. That is at least, Mr. Chairman, the impression they create, when calling their Departments the Departments of human anatomy, of economics, of history, of law, of government, of education, engineering, linguistics, and so on.

Some Departments seem to express this apparent certainty about what they are doing and teaching, by adding to the object of their study and insight, that small Greek word logos, -logy. They speak about their subject, as about sociology, the knowledge of the intra-action in human groups, they speak about psychology, zoology, pharmacology, entomology, geology, sexology, and even criminology.

Mr. Chairman, to a philosopher all this is highly astonishing. How can a man know, and how does a man know that he knows? In their justifications, in their articles and books, those scientists say, that they see, that they observe, that they measure objectively, that through their senses they have access to the things as they are. They maintain, that what they see is verifiable or falsifiable by everybody.

But, Mr. Chairman, are they not aware of the fact that the world around them, and that they themselves are changing under the influence of those so called objective observations? Do they not notice that whatever they do is based on suppositions, assumptions and theories, they formed themselves, when formulating their methods?

The great African scholar and philosopher Leopold Senghor, wrote once, that he wondered how anyone could maintain to know about an orange, a simple thing like an orange, after having cut it up, after having prepared it for use under a microscope, and after having analysed it in a way, that destroyed the orange completely during that process. They say that they see, but it seems very often, that they do not see at all, though they are looking.

May I give you two examples of this phenomenon, and let us take the examples from a scientific description of the thing that is nearest to us, our own human anatomy, our own human frame.

In 1628 William Harvey wrote a small booklet of about eighty pages
that would revolutionise our whole medical world:
*Exercitatio anatomica de motu cordis et sanguinis in animalibus.*
In that booklet he compared the heart with a pump.
And as we all know pumps make a noise, they beat.
Therefore, our hearts beat too.
This is, I suppose, common knowledge to all of us, we feel our own and each other’s hearts beat under certain circumstances.
We are all accustomed to count those beats via our pulses.
But before William Harvey and his comparison, no physiologist had ever heard the heart beat.
They did not even hear it beat years after that discovery.

Seven years later in 1635, Emilio Parisano, a Roman doctor living in Venice, with a very extensive private clinic, wrote a booklet: *De cordis et sanguinis motu ad Gulielmum Harveum,* and in that booklet Parisano tried to ridicule Harvey’s argument, writing:

> ‘Who ever heard the heart beat. Nobody overhere in Venice ever heard a heart beat. May be it is because we are deaf, in which case we might be able to hear, when Harvey would lend us his ear’

Why did they not hear? Why had they never heard before? And if such a mistake could be made, accompanied with such a scientific certainty on what is scientific certainty based?
It is then no longer only a question of what we know, but even of what we hear and see.

To give another, my promised second example. It is again taken from a description of that what is nearest to us: our own human frame.
In 1538, about a century before Harvey’s book, Andreas Vesalius wrote a book *Tabulae anatomicae sex.*
He wrote his book, or better he made those six anatomical graphs after having opened the human body, and he saw our liver as having five lobes. How could he have seen five, as there are only two.
Vesalius saw correctly that our lower jaw consists of ONE bone. But all his colleagues were very surprised because up to then, they had always observed that our lower jaw consists out of two bones.
Mr. Chairman, how is it possible that one saw this through all those centuries of human history, with all its skulls on battlefields, in cemeteries, mortuaries and at execution-places?

My co-patriot Antoni van Leeuwenhoek who invented or perfected the microscope looked through it at that mystery of life the human sperm, and he saw, he really saw, because he made a drawing of it, in that seed a very small folded up human being, with its knees under its chin. That little thing.
Mr. Chairman, remained seen for centuries though it most probably never had been there.
Why are we now so sure that we see it all?
I think, Mr. Chairman, that we all might agree on the fact that a dog and a flea on the back of that dog, and a parasite in the stomach of that flea, that a fish and a beetle see a different world from the world we see, although we all seem to be in that same world. They do not see all we see, maybe we do not see what they see, but how can we be sure that we see all?
And further, Mr. Chairman, do we human beings all see the same? Do you think that a pious clergyman, an up-country tailor, and a romantic young man, see the same thing when they visit a town like Nairobi, that city in the sun, for the first time? I doubt that very much, because when they have returned home, they will tell different stories to those who care to listen to them. The tailor will say that Nairobi is unbelievably beautiful, because people overthere are well dressed, and tailors well paid. The romantic young man will say that Nairobi is unbelievably beautiful, because he saw overthere so many nice young ladies. And the pious clergyman in his turn will say that Nairobi is unbelievably beautiful because there are overthere so many churches full with alleluia singing faithful.

But let me come back to philosophy and philosophers. A philosopher is a lover of wisdom. I admit that nobody seems to know what wisdom is exactly supposed to mean. And yet everybody knows how some among us are called wise, and how some of us are called unwise.
Together with Dr. Henry Odera, a Senior Lecturer in our Department, we have been trying in cooperation with our first generation of philosophy students in the Department, to find out about that wisdom and about the wise men and women in this Republic of Kenya. We have been trying to localise them in the East, the West, the North, the South and in the centre by asking the people of those regions, whom they considered to be wise. A list was made, and thanks to a grant from the Deans’ Committee of this University, those wise people were visited. They were asked not to answer questions but to air their views.
The significant thing about those people thus interviewed, Mr. Chairman, was, that though considered as wise by all the people around them, they themselves very often did NOT consider themselves as wise.
The sage Paul Mbuya from Karachuonyo location, a man as old as this century, told us that he knew that others thought him to be wise and a sage, because they continually came to ask him for his advise and for his ideas,
but he said, that he was rather amazed about all this, and he added, that he himself would be rather hesitant to accept these titles, wise and sage, because, he said, he did not know too many answers. He knew that he did not know.

To come to the origin of this philosophical insight, western philosophers most times refer to a greek philosopher, Socrates. Socrates, too, was very amazed, when a friend told him, that an oracle had informed him, that Socrates was the wisest man in his country. Socrates did not understand, until he understood, that the oracle knew, that he, Socrates, knew that he did not know. And all the others thought they knew.

To know that, to come to that philosophical insight, we have not to refer to him: in this context of ours we could refer to Paul Mbuya. In other words, a philosopher does not know, although it is true, that he knows that he does not know, and although he knows as well, that the others do not really know either.

Or perhaps that goes too far, and I should not go too far at an academic occasion like this, with this beautiful but strange professorial hat on my head. We do know something, we know a lot, we know every day more and more. But at the moment that we start to think that we really know, at that moment we are caught, we are fenced in.

If that idea hits us, we are not only exaggerating, we are not only unwise, not to use the more unacademic word 'stupid', we become as well DANGEROUS. The feeding-ground on which imperialism, colonialism, totalitarianism and dictatorship are based is precisely that mentality in which one thinks that one has the answer to all questions.

Because if someone thinks that he knows all, he will have no respect and no time for anyone else. There will not even be the possibility of communicating with others, A man, or a group or a system that knows all, is caught and imprisoned. It is at that moment that inquisition, purges and persecutions start, religiously, scientifically, artistically and politically.

I think we all know to what kind of situation this leads and led in so many countries of this world. The underlying reason for all this is, I think, clear to all. If anyone is convinced that he knows all, that prejudice, because it cannot be anything but a prejudice will block in him any possible further progress,
it will close him to history and to reality.

A scientist, a theologian a politician, a believer, who knows and who knows that he knows will not ask any question any more. He will not accept any critical remark, he will not even be able to look around himself any more, and if he looks, he will not see, he will not hear he will not touch.

If criticism is out, if any further question is forbidden, not only further human development is threatened, but even humanity itself is gone. Another Kenyan sage William Ayodo from Kabondo stated in his philosophical remarks on man, that man is different from other animals to the extent that he is capable to change, capable to be liberated capable to liberate himself.

May I return now, Mr. Chairman to Socrates. Socrates seems to have been aware of all this. He was not only aware of it as a philosopher but as well because he was the son of a mother who happened to be a midwife, and of a father who was a sculptor.

In both professions in midwivery and in sculpture-making change is necessary to be born, to be delivered.

Socrates insistently and persistently tried to deliver people from the scientific and other myths they had formulated about themselves, about the world, and about the Gods.

I am using here the word MYTH intentionally, because I am convinced, and I will try to justify that conviction, that all human sciences are hardly anything but that. They are not myths in the sense that they are sacred tales although they even have something of that; they are not myths in the sense that they are untrue stories, though they have something of that too; but they seem to me to be myths because they try to explain things, to which we have no direct access, realities that remain mysteries to us.

So, Mr. Chairman, I do suggest that all sciences should be considered as consisting out of ‘myths’. They tell us stories. To illustrate my point I would like to give some examples.

My first example is the western classical scientific consideration of the material world around us. Mr. Chairman, may I point out that all the terms used in the last part of this statement world, material world, matter, world around us, call for philosophical questions. That whole idea of ‘matter’ in which there are in this world all kinds of things next to me is a HELLENIC look at reality
that is rather new to mankind, and I wonder whether it is the point of view of the majority of the people in this world. But let us overlook that type of philosophical issues.

That surrounding material world, with its strange noises, sounds, smells, light-effects, and all the other going-ons inside and outside us had to be explained. It had to be explained in one way or another to allow us to survive in it.

As long as I cannot explain a noise that I hear during the night, I will not be able to sleep. If I find the explanation of that noise my fear will be over, and I will know how to handle that noise in future.

Mankind had to explain its world, but we do not seem to have a direct access to the world we want to explain. That world is not our making, it is a ‘given’, it is a collection of ‘data’, it is a mystery. We cannot reach it in our explanations except via a detour. We cannot understand it directly, because we are part of it. We cannot even take distance to have a good look at it, we cannot escape it. We are never only observers, we are always participants, we cannot even measure it without influencing it.

We only can try to understand it by saying things like:
- ‘let us suppose that . . .’
- or ‘let us do as if the material world is composed out of things’, the things the Greeks called ‘atoms’.

That theory, or that tale, that story, is known to most of us. It is rather old, and in a way it is even old fashioned and overtaken by complementary theories, but it is not older than about 2,500 years. It is a Greek myth about reality, that apparently never had been thought of before.

Why did the Greeks take the example of ‘THINGS’ in their scientific explanation? Why did they not say instead of:
- ‘let us do as if reality is composed out of things’;
- something else, like:
- ‘let us do as if reality is composed out of persons’
or;
- ‘let us do as if reality is composed out of spirits’

Because that kind of scientific explanation is given too, that myth has very often been told overhere in Africa.

When we try to find the reason for this difference, we must probably look at the type of societies that produced those scientific explanations. Both societies were facing the same problem, viz. to explain the ins and outs of the world in which they lived.
Both societies wanted to explain the regularities and the interactions they observed. Both societies could only do that via a detour, via examples or models.

The Greeks who started the atomic theory lived in towns. And when they looked for models of a regular behaviour pattern, they did not take 'persons', and they did not think in terms of 'spirits' as their older up-country colleagues did.

Why was this? Why the difference? Was it because the traditional social very regular interhuman behaviour pattern had already broken down in town? And did the up-country scientist take as his model 'personified spirits' because the interhuman relationships in his society were the best examples of regular behaviour?

Some philosophers of science, e.g. Robin Horton at Ife University in Nigeria think so. Those philosophers do not only say that the African 'spirits' theory can be compared to the western 'atom' theory, but as well that their scientific validity is equal.

They are both 'myths', or 'stories', they both function as explanations, they are both man-made items, they are both fruitful, and they are both harmful if misinterpreted. They are misinterpreted at the moment that one starts to overlook the fact that 'atoms' and 'spirits' are only 'stories' or 'myths'.

They become harmful at the moment that those atoms or spirits are considered as true and real. It does not make very much difference in that case whether man is sacrificing himself to a thing, a golden calf, or to a spirit, he is sacrificing himself and even his children.

At first sight we might be inclined to think that the Greek 'atom' approach has been more successful than the 'spirit' or 'person' approach. Is it not thanks to that approach that we have our cars and our concorde, our hotels and computers, our hair-straighteners and radiograms, our sophisticated hospital equipment and ball-pens? Is it not because of all this that we live comfortably and fine.

But who live comfortably and fine? Is this approach not as well the reason that nature is plundered, that human dwellings are polluted, that one third of mankind gets more than 85% of the world income. Didn't it even become obvious that this planet of ours would not be able to provide for all the iron and the water, the copper and the oil, those few, who seem to feel comfortably, need in order to do so?

The Greeks took things as models in their scientific theories.
Their world was composed of ‘things’. They danced around ‘things’ and while this dance went on in the west, the overlooked human relations broke up and human society atomised over very lonely individuals, who in their turn developed the most outrageous weapons that ever existed in human history. I think that this ‘development’ and I stress the word ‘development’ because that is what this type of process is often called, is another myth, another assumption, that should be put in question. And I am of the opinion that that other scientific intuition, more indigenous to this continent, the intuition that this material world should be seen in the light of our interpersonal relations, should be worked out very seriously. Every criticism of society is a criticism of its science, and every criticism of science is a criticism of the type of society it produced. Speaking about our human society, the philosopher in the tradition of Socrates and Paul Mbuya is confronted with another set of myths. The stories and tales we use to justify the existing distribution of the world and its goods over its human population, and the maintenance of that order by law, Economics and law. The Government of the United States of North America is at the moment trying to fight in its courts a property right theory that is different from the one most of us would believe in. Most probably they will loose the case. The question is this:

great tracks of land were acquired by immigrant ‘Americans’ from the original American so-called Red Indian population. Contracts were made up, and title-deeds were signed. The prices paid for the land were ridiculous but that is not the issue.

The issue is that the children of the sellers say that their forefathers never sold their land, because landownership was to them a blasphemy, a sacrilege and unthinkable. Those Red Indians considered the earth as their mother and the land itself as the skin of their mother. It is obviously impossible to own part of the skin of your mother, and it is even more unthinkable that it could be sold to a foreigner.

Heimot Tooyalaket, Chief Joseph, said: ‘The earth was created with the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was. The country was made without demarcation-lines and it is no man’s business to divide it. And Tashuka Witko, Crazy Horse, remarked: ‘One does not sell the earth on which people walk’.

When those people signed those papers they were thinking about something totally different. They were thinking of a peaceful co-existence or something like that. Land property rights were in their mythology inconceivable. They did not sell.

Where does our actual property right myth come from? A French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau described the origin of that myth in 1754.
in the following way:

'The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, bethought himself of saying: 'this is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society'.

This story was most firmly, and maybe as well most naively, believed in Britain. Around 1690 John Locke wrote:

'The great and chief end of men uniting in commonwealths, and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property'.

Property rights were the reasons of the organisation of the State, they became the foundation of law and order. This right overruled all, and John Locke explained, that anyone who catches a thief, stealing even the smallest item from his property, may kill him on the spot. In this myth the State is nothing but a 24-hour night- and day-watchman. These stories were exported with the Empire, and while the Empire and its myth dissolved in history, this type of myths and stories seem to live a longer life.

And the philosopher wonders, where man's certainty comes from: how does he know that he knows. What does he know about himself? Who is he?

And here we come to the myths man tells about himself. One of the actually more generally accepted tales is that man is the result of an evolutionary process.

This theory is more often than not explained within the context of another myth, the one of 'progress'. Mankind is on the move towards a better, a more just world. A world that will be more comfortable and more human. This belief and this hope are the driving-forces behind much man is willing to do and to suffer.

Mr. Chairman, a philosopher will not deny the validity of this kind of built-in dynamism. He will not deny the possibility of this type of interpretation of human history.

But, once more, he will wonder, where the certainty that very often accompanies this myth comes from.

Mr. Chairman, is it not true that in this world the items that are called less developed, such as stones and minerals seem to be the most lasting and in a sense as well the most healthy. The highest developed item: man seems as well to be the being that has developed the greatest variety of bodily and mental diseases. And therefore, Mr. Chairman, would it not be possible to come to a completely different type of diagnosis when speaking about the evolutionary process?

A diagnosis in which the human being is nothing
but an animal that got sick,
very sick.
An animal that became over-sensitive
and hyper-nervous.
And, Mr. Chairman,
Isn't that what we are telling each other
every day:

the world is getting worse,
the world is getting sick.
And when we speak in this context about the
world, the stones, the plants
and the animals are not that world:
it is man
and his influence.

It would be logical now,
If I would spend some considerations
on our myths
on sickness and health.
And indeed we are here confronted
with some of the most interesting myths
man has developed.
Time does not allow,
and people interested in these problems
might register with our Department.
Let me allow myself only some remarks.

In general mankind is inclined
to value health as a higher good
than sickness.

But why is it then
that we have developed in almost all human groups
such an awe and respect
for the sick ones amongst us.
The Romans called epilepsy
*morb*s ac*er, morb*s divinu*s,*
the sacred, the divine disease.
The Greeks depended in all their decisions
on the oracle I mentioned in the beginning of this lecture,
and in as far as we know now about her,
she must have been a hysterical medium.

And Mr. Chairman,
Isn't every man of genius
by definition abnormal,
and are abnormalities not called diseases?

And speaking about health and sickness
in a context that is nearer to us,
why is it

that a pregnant lady,
carrier of a new human life,
is supposed to queue up
at the 'health-clinic','
that is to say,
the place where the sick gather?
What is sickness,
what is health?

This might lead us to another group of theories
the ones on
'who are we?'
and on
'how are we to be'?

When the reformer John Calvin
came into power in the Swiss town of Geneva,
he forbade any entertainment in that town:
   no dancing,
   no singing,
   no theatre,
   no games,
   no reading of novels.

According to his idea
man was born to work
and to pray and nothing else:
*ora et labora.*

Work that up to then
had been generally considered
as something very unpleasant,
and as something very undignified,
as something not really meant for human beings,
as a curse and a punishment from God,
became suddenly something very sacred.

Aristotle had noted in his book 'Politika'
that work should only be done by slaves.

Cicero wrote that nothing good
or noble
can come out of a workshop.
Calvin's new interpretation
had definitely not very much to do
with the attitude of his great model
Jesus Christ either.
In as far as we know
Jesus never seems to have worked.
There is nothing about that
in as far as the reports on him tell.
He even convinced his disciples,
the twelve,
to give up their jobs to follow him. He even went so far as telling them: look at the birds, they don’t sow and they don’t harvest and yet they are fed by my Father. Calvin sanctified labour and introduced in this world a whole new interpretation of man. Karl Marx in a sense followed this lead given by Calvin. Marx convinced his followers that man is different from an animal because he works, because he produces, man is HOMO FABER.

When Calvin wanted to introduce this new myth in Geneva, he only could do that by trying to overcome that other interpretation of human nature, that man is here to enjoy himself, to get as much pleasure out of life as possible, dancing, eating, drinking, playing and loving as much as possible.

People caught in illegal love-affairs in Geneva were executed. Pleasure for the sake of pleasure was frowned upon, it was a waste of time, it costs money. Both myths that of man as worker and that of man as a hedonist, are products of other societies than our modern one. Both myths would bring us nowadays in serious difficulties.

If human life is really meant to be a working life, where does modern man find that work?

The structural unemployment, that is unemployment that is due to the actual structure of society, makes it impossible to provide work for everybody. To ask everybody to work seems therefore to be impossible and unfair. And to say that those who have no work should not live, seems grossly unjust. The working myth does not seem to hold, and should no longer be necessary.

If human life on the contrary is only meant to be fun, a similar problem seems to pose itself. How would we be able to organise this world in such a way that this supposed destiny of man is reached.

Our prevailing concept of man is most times a kind of combination of the two views mentioned. The difficulties inherent in those two theories are, of course, found again in the combination of the two. Besides another problem arises, the problem of what to do with that part of our time that cannot be filled with either work or pleasure, that part of our time in which we have nothing to do, and nothing to enjoy either. It is that new and modern problem of our so-called free time or leisure. A problem created by the theories on man’s nature mentioned.
Leisure becomes boredom,
and boredom is terrible.
It is so terrible because mankind
is not accustomed to it.
Boredom becomes frustration.
A bored and frustrated child is capable of
anything
and even bored adults
might start throwing stones.

That frustration, however,
seems only to result
from our belief
in the work-myth
and the fun-myth.
Human life should be lived
all of it,
as it has been lived by mankind
for so long.

But, of course, that is another myth
the one of paradise lost
and paradise to come.
In all the foregoing considerations
on who we are,
on how we should be,
on how we should divide this world amongst ourselves,
on how society should be organised
and so on.
there was a critical element.
Any criticism is based
on a criterion,
on a norm.

If I say: this is no good,
I must have an idea
of what, according to me,
is good.

When we criticise our society,
our fellowmen in that society
and ourselves,
where do we get our criterion from?

Mr. Chairman,
we all say
that justice is the first virtue
of social institutions,
just like truth is the first virtue
of systems of thought.
How do we know,
where do we get it from?

This question is so baffling
and the variety of philosophical,
and religious answers to this question
so great.
that I only would like to indicate
ONE ELEMENT that seems to be found
in all those answers.

When trying to answer that question,
"what should mankind be reaching for?"
Most answers.
if not all,
and they are all in the form of myths,
connect the state
or situation we are heading for,
with the state or situation,
we are coming from,
The Bible does this,
Marx does it,
Buddha
did it
and so on.

This element is as well clearly
expressed in many an African tradition,
when the child to be born
is called after a family member
who died.
The end and the beginning
are connected.

Where do we come from?
Where do we go to?
Let me try to illustrate my point.
On the 17th of May 1838
a man died who had been ruling
the whole of European politics for
about thirty years.
His name was Talleyrand.
His mind had been a real mastermind.
After his death some doctors
came to embalm him.
They emptied his belly from its bowels,
they lifted his skull-cap
and emptied his head too.
They put the brains from that head
in a pot.
They forgot that pot
with the brains
that had concocted two successful revolutions,
and that had deceived twenty kings and queens. They left the room.

The servant of Talleyrand was the next one to come into that room. He saw the pot, and knowing what its content was, he threw the whole lot out of the window in a street-gutter.

The man who noted all this down in his diary two days after the death, Victor Hugo, finished the entry in his diary with the Latin words **FINIS RERUM**: the end of the affair.

But Mr. Chairman, when that servant was throwing away those brains from that pot was he at that moment throwing away Talleyrand? Is that gutter where he went? And if he went there was that where he came from? Who would believe such a story.

Mr. Chairman, we human beings have become over-aware of our possibilities in shaping the future and our destiny. That future seems to be open we can see and organise the world in different ways, and yet there is one point where we are not free, where we had no control.

It is at that point that each one of us suddenly found himself in this world, without having asked for it, without having been asked about it.

We suddenly find ourselves in this very strange land, in this foreign existence, a kind of refugee, not knowing where we came from. Did we bring our criteria and the norms with which we criticise this world, in which we live now, from there?

Many think so. But even that remains a mystery. Many think that it is a divine one.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I am almost at the end of this lecture. I think that many of you might think that I confused you, like all philosophers seem to do. It is not true.

A philosopher does not confuse, he asks questions. He asks questions where people think they know. And in that process the philosopher tries to point out that what we know is not SO sure, that we should be fenced in by that knowledge.

That means liberation, and liberation means to be introduced into a larger and more spacious living-space than the one we are accustomed to. And that is, I admit, rather confusing, because we were not accustomed to it. It might make us feel a bit dizzy. And yet, the philosopher only asked questions. He wants to know what we mean. I hope that it became somehow clear what role philosophers should play in a University.
Again and again they should put into question the assumptions we all work with and live under. And this is especially useful and necessary when different cultures and therefore different sets of assumptions meet.

I have, Mr. Chairman, to correct an impression I might have given, I hope sufficiently playfully, in the beginning of this lecture. It is not true that at this University the Departments neglect this very fundamental type of research and questioning. They bend over the philosophical issues in the field of their learning. It is therefore correct that in practically all those Departments the final degree is a DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY. The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies should, however, be organised in such a way that the Department of Philosophy will be able to assist more efficiently in this fundamental research, in this type of questioning. Because this questioning is the stepping-stone, the foundation and the backbone of knowledge, academic freedom, tolerance and hope.

Thank you.