

## Chapter II

### A Hillside in Greece

Before us is a low hill, littered with broken marble columns—remnants of antiquity. Halfway up the hill, Socrates sits on the ruined steps of what once may have been a public building. His head is bare, and almost bald above an ample white beard. Set in a round ruddy face, his blue eyes seem to contain an endless space, like the Grecian sky above him.

Another man appears on the right, climbing up the hill toward Socrates. Tall and lean, with dark, penetrating eyes, he is dressed in the costume of a seventeenth century gentleman, with a scarlet cape and a high plumed hat. In his left hand, he holds a scroll. We recognize him to be the philosopher, René Descartes.

Socrates calls out a greeting: “Well, Descartes! Are you late again? One might have supposed that a mathematician would be more precise in his timing!”

Descartes responds: “My mathematics, as you well know, deals with lines and points in space, and not with time. It remained for Einstein to provide the proper relationship between space and time. And, as a practical matter, since you have been dead for more than two thousand years, I didn’t think a minute or so more or less would matter!”

“Dear me! Must you take me so literally?” says Socrates. “You are such a serious fellow. Actually, I have been enjoying myself here in the sun, conversing with the sky. It endures my questions with enviable patience, and never finds fault with my reasoning.”

“Unfortunately, it doesn’t object to anyone’s reasoning! In fact, our friend Thomas even claims to receive some support from that direction,” counters Descartes.

From the left, Saint Thomas Aquinas approaches. His features are smooth, and his face serene. In his monk’s robe, he seems to have stepped unchanged from a tapestry or woodcut of the Middle Ages. Socrates exclaims: “Speak of the devil!”

Aquinas, now within earshot of the others, retorts, “Only if I may be accorded equal time to speak of God!”

“Provided that there is a difference between the two. No doubt the devil found the Inquisition to be a nice piece of work!” responds Descartes.

“Come, come, Descartes,” Socrates offers, “I believe that we can rely on the purity of our friend’s intentions, even if we may disagree as to validity of the purposes his logic was made to serve. As people would say nowadays, Thomas’s speciality was software. The Inquisition was developed by those who preferred hardware. Besides that, the Inquisition never affected as many lives as its modern counterpart, the mathematics examination for university admission!”

“Why Socrates!” retorts Descartes, “I have always heard it said that in the Academy founded by your student Plato, mathematics had a central place—it was the purest of the pure! Surely these reports were not false?”

“No indeed,” replies Socrates. “You have heard truly on this matter. But to value something is to value it for some purpose, but not for every purpose. Mathematics is one of the arts by which we may understand some of the beauty and truth in the universe, and thus is central to learning. It does not, however, follow that we should have used mathematics to decide who shall attend the Academy. On the one hand, there are other disciplines of equal importance, and on the other hand, a true understanding of mathematics requires diligent study over much time; few could afford the luxury of such an activity—or achieve the necessary discipline—before

entering the Academy. Thus reasoned Plato, in the development of the Academy. The only prerequisite for admission, beyond that of the ability to pay the modest fees, was that the candidate have a true desire to learn.”

While Socrates has been speaking, Descartes and Saint Thomas have reached the steps on which he is sitting. A man in a business suit wearing thick glasses has also joined them. His teeth have brown stains from drinking countless cups of coffee and smoking cigarettes in small French cafés. He is the last member of the group, Jean-Paul Sartre. He speaks about the matter of university admissions. As a former professor at the Sorbonne, he is on very familiar ground.

“I’m sorry to say, Socrates, that the prerequisite of a desire to learn is not a practical means for selecting university students these days. All candidates will claim to have it, just as everyone claims to tell the truth. But if we desired to find those who truly wished to learn, we might wander through the streets with a lantern—like your Diogenes—with just as little hope for success! People attend the universities now because they want to make a good living—the degree has become a card of admission to the professions. The demand is very great—we are compelled to select a few from a great many. No doubt mathematical ability is used in the selection process because it can be determined rather precisely. Of course, that’s not a philosophically valid justification!”

“I find this discussion of mathematics a bit boring,” Aquinas interjects, “We have come to talk about Truth, which seems to be in need of clarification. Mathematics, on the other hand, seems very well understood these days, so that we are wasting valuable time discussing it.”

“I understand your feelings,” replies Socrates, “But if, as you say, mathematics is well known—then it might serve us in finding out what is unknown. For how can we even speak of what is unknown, except by means of what is known? Nevertheless, you are right in seeking a more direct and orderly discussion of these matters. Be seated here, my friends, amid the ruins of what was my civilization. But do not be deceived by the rubble around you. These shattered columns are not just the last remnants of a vanished age—as the historians might have you believe—rather, they offer mute evidence that the Truth we seek will outlast *all* the ages!”

“Well spoken, Socrates,” commends Saint Thomas. “If had enough time, I think I could make a Christian out of you.”

“Ah, Thomas, I take that as a compliment from you. Alas, the Athenians took a less kinder view of me. They bade me take the hemlock!” replies Socrates.

“But, of course,” adds Sartre, “It’s not so easy nowadays for a philosopher to be a Christian, as Kierkegaard has shown us. You have to untie a Gordian knot in your mind! From a distance, such behavior may appear to be a form of insanity. However, it’s relatively easy for anyone to *pretend* to believe, and most people do just that. When I was young enough for such follies, I preferred Communism instead.”

Aquinas retorts: “Talk about works of the devil! Joseph Stalin had millions of people executed or starved to death for the ‘good’ of the State! The Inquisition of the Catholic Church was small in comparison. Not that I would have supported the Inquisition, mind you; it came simply because the Church was too concerned with temporal power and too fearful of change.”

Sartre continues: “Of course I didn’t continue to believe in Communism—at least not as a viable political alternative. Quite apart from the obvious shortcomings of its followers, it soon began to reveal itself as one of the many utopian ideas that, while at first appearing to be vehicles for truth, soon stall on the road—becoming no more than massive obstacles!”

“Quite so, Jean-Paul,” adds Descartes. “By the sixteenth century, religion had already

stalled on the road, and we are still trying to move it aside!”

Aquinas appears agitated. He speaks: “As is often the case, Descartes, I disagree with you! Is religion no more than a suit of clothes for you—to be worn for a time, until you fancy that you have outgrown it, and then discarded? No, I say! Our Faith is an imperishable heritage from God. Have we grown so wise that we can learn nothing more from it?”

“Bravo, Thomas!” interjects Socrates. “Though we may lack your religious zeal, and perhaps some of your eloquence as well, we ought to recognize and accept that we may still learn something from religion. But, on the other hand, can we not hope and expect that religion may learn something from us? Even today, religion fears change too much! But it *can* change, and so it *must* change, else truth will overstep it, and leave it behind!”

“Surely what has survived two thousand years and more cannot be in danger!” replies Saint Thomas.

“Why not?” interjects Sartre. “Humanity has survived a few million years, and yet it now faces danger of extinction! The development of science and technology has brought about a rapidly increasing rate of change in our lives. In the past centuries, unreasonable philosophies were costly, but at least tolerable. Today, an error in reasoning might cost a million lives in an hour! *This* is our situation. If religion is to be of value to us, it must be able to help us *now!*”

“I certainly admire your directness, Jean-Paul,” remarks Descartes. “Had I been possessed of such an attachment to existence, I would probably have become a politician rather than a mathematician!”

“We should understand the particular value our friend Jean-Paul places on existence,” adds Socrates. “After all, he has only recently died. At our first meeting, he was still concerned about his publisher! When one has been dead for many centuries, it becomes easy to forget the concerns of the living.”

“It is no harder for the living,” continues Sartre, “to forget these things. *That* is the real tragedy of my age! Yes, perhaps we shall remember the terrible images of the Holocaust; but we shall forget the *philosophy* that made it happen! If we cannot remember the *reasons* why bad experiments fail, we are doomed to keep repeating them!”

“The problem of Evil has been with us a very long time, Jean-Paul,” says Saint Thomas. “I fear that neither my Church nor your philosophy can eliminate it. But well I know that Faith has given some people the strength to resist Evil through the centuries. Faith served its purpose in times one can hardly imagine now—when the plagues killed those who survived the wars. Truly, if Faith may not serve us in the future, I know not what enduring power shall replace it!”

“Yes, Thomas,” replies Socrates, “you lived in cruel times. But Sartre’s point is well taken. Time may no longer be on our side. As the sea rises, so must the strength of the vessel and the courage of the sailor! I believe that there are more subtle powers by which we may resist the forces of Evil. Homer told us that the Shield of Achilles was invincible in battle; yet we know it would not deflect an artillery shell. Our purpose here is not to pass judgment on the past, but to provide for the future. The house of your great-grandfather is not as firm as it once was; perhaps it needs repair. So too, the armor of Faith, forged so long ago by craftsmen long dead, may not serve well enough against the evils of the future. Let us proceed, therefore, with our inquiry concerning Truth. Perhaps we should summarize our positions.”

Descartes begins: “First, there are the truths of Reason, such as those of mathematics. These are true because they are part of a logically consistent system. Such truths are derived from postulates, of course, which must be assumed—at least in pure mathematics. In certain other

disciplines, such as physics, for example, the postulates must be consistent with our observations of the world. These truths are not absolute, and can never be complete. However, they are extremely reliable, useful, understandable, and beautiful. The process by which they are improved is an orderly one, upon which there is very general agreement.”

Saint Thomas adds: “There are also truths of Faith, as contained in personal and institutionalized religious belief. These truths may not be so easily characterized, and they are more associated with the heart than the mind. Indeed, the strongest argument for their existence may well be their compelling effect on human behavior, quite aside from logical arguments. Perhaps they are truths of the emotions, or perhaps the emotions themselves are merely reflections of greater truths that Reason is not yet capable of expressing. In any case, even though these truths do not accumulate in an orderly fashion, and are not universally accepted as being verifiable, they follow us as closely as our shadows. The more we accept them, the more we feel their power! The more we deny them, the more we seek their power!”

Sartre replies: “Also, we should remember that the kind of Truth we most often encounter in life has neither the precision of mathematics, nor the transcendent emotion of Faith. Philosophers and theologians have directed our attention toward ideal worlds that exist *only* as ideas. We are *here and now*—we need to understand Truth in order to survive, and to perhaps improve our condition. Man is neither a machine, nor an angel: he is a *dying animal!*”

Socrates concludes: “You have spoken well about these things, my friends. However, I have learned that Truth can be very subtle. Let us look beneath the surface of our opinions. Jean-Paul, would you say that a river is running water?”

Sartre replies: “I suppose so, though I would allow that our subjective perception of it may add additional qualities.”

Socrates confirms; “Very well. So perhaps a river is more than just ‘running water.’ And what is your opinion, Descartes?”

“A river consists of water flowing naturally downhill, toward an ocean or a lake,” responds Descartes. “This is an example of Pascal’s Principle, whereby water seeks the lowest level, thereby reducing its potential energy to a minimum value. One may also say that it moves downward in response to the center-directed gravitational force of the Earth, according to the theory of Isaac Newton.”

“So we may agree that a river is more than running water. It has a subjective existence that depends upon the perceiver, and its behavior must obey certain natural laws,” continues Socrates. “Will you make any objections or additions to this, Thomas?”

Aquinas replies; “In truth, we know *how* the river flows—according to which laws—but not *why*. *How* came the laws of Pascal and Newton to be true? *Those questions* lie beneath the river’s surface—and we cannot drown our curiosity about them!”

“Now, Jean-Paul,” says Socrates. “As a river may be more than running water, so man may be more than just a dying animal. Perhaps he is also an animal who can reason, and one who reaches for the stars! If that be the case, I am persuaded that—as Thomas says—we must ask the questions: ‘*Why? And to what Purpose?*’ Thus I believe that in order to understand Truth we must inquire as to why men live as they do. Most of us would not choose to be defined by death!”

“Why not?” responds Sartre. “The fact that we are—or once were—alive is not of much philosophical value in defining us—it was the result of emotional and biological events over which we had no control whatsoever. We did not choose to be born. On the other hand, we may have control over our death, if we choose to exercise it. You, of all people, Socrates, who drank the

hemlock rather than flee, should be aware of this!”

“I drank the hemlock because I believed in the principle of law, and in the laws of Athens. I had no wish to be a martyr, or to die according to my own will. My own merit, such as it may be, lies in my words—the Platonic dialogs—not in my death.”

Aquinas speaks: “My friends, do you imagine that life and death may be understood as separate things? They are as interwoven as the threads of a tapestry. Christ died so that we might have Eternal Life, but that was *not* merely a *debit* to provide a *credit* for us—the death of God’s only Son for the lives of billions of sinners. It was also a demonstration that God could reverse a natural process. It was the rule that men died, so Jesus said, ‘Whosoever believeth in my Father shall *not* die, but have Eternal Life.’ Yes, I know your skepticism about such things! But consider, my friends: what if someday physicists should find that the arrow of time had reversed direction somewhere—that for even a moment, the future had preceded the past? Certainly that would be called a miracle!”

“Yes,” replies Descartes, “I’m well aware that by Hume’s definition of a miracle—a suspension of the natural order—time reversal would seem to qualify, if observed. But it’s not that simple! Because we don’t know every detail of the natural order, we can’t really be certain as to whether any unusual occurrence is a miracle or just a feature we hadn’t noticed before. I’m not a theologian, so I won’t speculate on whether Jesus lived, or died, or lived again. My philosophy is a dualism of body and mind. The mind is immortal, the body dies.”

“A clever solution to the problem in your age, Descartes,” comments Sartre, “but we have become more empirical these days. The notion of an ‘immortal soul’ proves difficult to verify. Have you noticed what happens to the coffee in a cup when the cup is broken?”

“By Minerva, I would not have thought that my suggestion to inquire as to why people live as they do would have created such a tumult of arguments,” says Socrates. “Even though I cannot agree that my death was an important one, Jean-Paul, I can agree to the importance of the fact that all people die—or so it certainly appears. As to the Catholic Church’s doctrine of Eternal Life, Thomas, I fear that even the possibility of modern ‘miracles’ makes it no more plausible to me. But perhaps this is a cultural matter. We Greeks found it easier to believe that the gods could behave as people, rather than to believe that people could behave as gods! Is death really the last act then? In truth, we do not know. We have been given neither script nor program for this play. The characters are many, the plot obscure, and the conclusion uncertain. We must make what we can of it, my friends,” concludes Socrates.

Descartes remarks: “In our search for the meaning and nature of Truth, I have noticed that we often return to the questions of humanity—the questions of goals and purposes, and of life and death. This is to be expected, I suppose, because, as Jean-Paul has so effectively argued, Truth has an existential aspect. Just as Reason is a method for comprehending certain things, we must come to understand Truth as a method for comprehending our lives, in the fullest sense.”

“Do I understand,” asks Socrates, “that you are asking us to recognize that Truth is neither a Thing nor an Idea, but is in fact a *Process*—whose purpose is to enable us to understand our lives?”

“Just so,” continues Descartes. “The aspects of Truth which we have presented are not really properties of a Thing called Truth; they are methods which we believe will enlighten us about life. There may be other methods, of course, but these would appear to be inconclusive at best, and deceptive at worst.”

Thomas adds, “I assume, Descartes, that the ‘other methods’ you refer to are the methods

of the mystics who will not explain what they claim to understand. By this device, they avoid an examination of their logic. Instead, they provide riddles, such as ‘What is the sound of one hand clapping?’ As in the fable, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, few people are willing to admit what everyone sees—that there is nothing there! Yet such methods are quite popular now, I understand.”

Sartre interjects, “Judging from your example, Thomas, you would include the Eastern religions in your condemnation. But is there any important difference between your example and such questions as, ‘How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?’ Such questions were certainly debated by your church in the Middle Ages!”

“Of course, Jean-Paul,” replies Aquinas, “there’s no real difference between such examples. If my religion consisted only of such debates, I’d be the first to join you in rejecting it! But the difference between these religions and mine is no riddle. I tried to give my religion an intellectual foundation, while the religions of the East appear to be scornful of the mind. To receive enlightenment, they say, ‘Let your mind become blank!’ In my day there were people whose minds were blank—but we thought of them as fools!”

“Well said, Thomas,” adds Descartes. “I think that the converse of my ‘Cogito ergo sum’ is also true—if we refuse to think, we shall soon cease to be!”

“My friends,” says Socrates, “let us not be so hasty in condemning the methods of the Eastern religions. Perhaps many different roads go to the same place. When a bucket is empty, it is also prepared to hold the greatest amount of water. A mind that is full seeks no Truth. I myself have meditated so long on a single problem that I became unaware of anything else! Perhaps the proof is not in the recipe, but in the pudding itself. Nevertheless, you are right in saying that we cannot accept everything that is offered.”

“Possibly, as you say, meditation can be the prelude to constructive thought,” responds Descartes. “But what is the purpose of those riddles?”

“Here I must confess to ignorance, René, for the questions I have considered are in no way riddles—that is, they are real questions, in need of real answers—not artificial ones designed to have particular effects on one’s mind! Like you, I don’t understand why anyone capable of philosophical thought would occupy their time with such matters. What do you think about this, Jean-Paul?”

“These seemingly pointless riddles do serve a function,” replies Sartre. “Suppose a Zen master meets someone who wants to achieve enlightenment. Now, according to his religion, the master can’t just tell the prospective disciple what to do, what to learn, and so forth. Either there’s really nothing that can be explained, or else it can’t be said in words—take your choice. So what does the master do? He could say nothing, and simply hit the disciple (not too hard, of course). The message is: ‘You’ve got to figure this out for yourself, stupid!’ The riddle does much the same thing—it’s a kind of wake-up call. Its function is to show the disciple that awareness isn’t something you can get from other people—it isn’t like the specific knowledge you need to build a house.”

Saint Thomas inquires: “Is this then an awareness of God, such as might make the disciple more pious?”

“Not really,” Sartre continues. Awareness itself is the goal, not awareness as a means to some other end.”

“Do you mean that this awareness has no object whatsoever?” Descartes asks. “I can’t conceive of a more boring occupation than simply sitting around, being aware!”

“Nor can I, Descartes,” concedes Sartre, “though apparently many people feel differently about it. I suppose that they must feel that they are benefiting from this practice.”

“Well, my friends,” comments Socrates, “if many people engage in this activity—or perhaps I should say ‘inactivity’—we ought to inquire about it. As I have said, I tend to regard it more as a *preparation for thinking* than as a suitable goal in itself. But then, I know very little of the Eastern religions.”

“It appears to me,” interjects Aquinas, “that these people are seeking enlightenment—that is, to know the essential meaning of life. In my words, they are seeking to know God, and God’s will. But they do not wish to learn by some regular process of instruction, such as the Catholic Church might provide. Instead, they seek a sort of miracle, or revelation.”

“And what,” asks Socrates, “is the usual result of their search?”

“Some claim to have found it, but none can adequately describe it,” answers Sartre. “Many more simply fail.”

“By what means may we be convinced that some have found enlightenment?” continues Socrates.

“By *no* means, if I understand the matter fully,” replies Sartre. “Because they cannot tell us about it, or show us any new knowledge.”

“But is there not a change in their way of behaving?” counters Socrates.

Saint Thomas adds: “Perhaps they are more content with their lot on Earth, their desires are fewer, and their emotions are more harmonious with Nature—as is the case with Christian monks. Might these not be appropriate indications of enlightenment?”

“To be content with one’s situation—is this an indication of enlightenment? What say you about this, Descartes?” asks Socrates.

“I’d say that a wise man improves his life when he can, in the ways that lie open to him. Only a fool is truly content, for he can see no way to improve!” replies Descartes.

“On the other hand,” adds Sartre, “most of the leaders in the world are fools who claim to be enlightened, and people follow them because they need to believe in such a possibility.”

“If, as Descartes has suggested, contentment and enlightenment are not always found together—and may in fact be contradictory—perhaps people are really seeking contentment, and not enlightenment,” suggests Socrates.

“I think that you may have penetrated to the heart of the matter, Socrates,” remarks Aquinas. “Despite the existence of doctrines and some literature, it is really a *state of mind* that most of these people aspire to obtain, rather than knowledge. And unfortunately, they will try to obtain it by any means: drugs, fasting, or whatever!”

“Ah yes!” says Socrates. “The old story of Achilles among the Lotus Eaters! But might not contented people also wish to become enlightened?”

“The problem, Socrates, is in the ordering of tasks!” replies Descartes. “If by some means we might become enlightened, we could, no doubt, also achieve some measure of contentment. But if, like the Lotus Eaters, we *first* become contented—why then it is likely that we will accomplish nothing more! For in contentment is a subtle poison that saps our ambition.”

“And so, my friends,” summarizes Socrates, “you tell me that the leaders of these Eastern religions seek the state of mind of contentment—which, having attained, they exhibit as proof of enlightenment. Then their followers accept this proof because they need to believe in the possibility of enlightenment, and are enticed by the desire for contentment.”

“You have understood it, Socrates,” concludes Sartre.

“And if that is truly the case, Sartre, would you say then these Eastern religions will not lead us toward Truth, and consequently need not be considered further?” asks Socrates.

Sartre replies, “I don’t wish to say that, despite my opposition to their anti-intellectual approach. These religions have existed for thousands of years—longer even than Christianity—they have an ethical and metaphysical literature that is worthy of consideration regardless of how one views current practice. At the very least, they contribute to the study of human history and human psychology.”

“Perhaps when you mention metaphysics, you refer to the ideas of harmony and unity in the Eastern religions,” says Saint Thomas, “where man is seen as only one part of the world, into which he blends as drops of water blend to form the ocean. This view is appealing to those who reject the special status that Christianity gives to mankind. But I ask you, is it wrong to regard mankind as being special? Neither stones, nor drops of water, nor even monkeys can write philosophy or do mathematics, as far as we know!”

“We may grant that human beings are unusual in their talents—for both good and evil, Thomas,” replies Socrates. “But perhaps we have emphasized our differences too much! Are we not all composed of the same atoms that came from the stars? Indeed, perhaps our destiny lies in a common purpose—a natural harmony in which all things participate and benefit.”

“Beautiful words, Socrates, but not practical ones,” counters Descartes. “The predominate order of Nature is one of decay, as physics has shown us. Much of what we have achieved has been in spite of Nature! We have begun the necessary process of learning respect for Nature, but we cannot assume that Nature will respect our needs.”

“Well said, Descartes,” adds Sartre. “When we die, the beautiful ideas of harmony that we may believe in die with us. As quickly and as certainly as raindrops we fall, and if indeed we have a common purpose, we must serve it mostly under the ground!”

“Such a pessimism is characteristic of those who look inward too often, Jean-Paul,” says Aquinas. “This affliction is often seen in philosophers, who seem to find more of interest in themselves than in the rest of the world. Despite your skill in classifying ideas and in identifying human weaknesses, you are surrounded by an entire *ocean* of Truth that you fail to perceive! Since you don’t believe in God, let’s talk about Nature instead. In Nature, all things have a proper role to play and a necessary connection to our lives. In the closed rooms where you live, breathing the foul air of the cities, it may well seem to you that thoughts of your death are important. But these rooms, and the rooms of everyone you know are not one-millionth part of the world! In the country, you can see the flowers bloom in spring! Is *their* message not worth listening to?”

“And what do they say, Thomas?” asks Socrates. “Though I have wandered much in the country, I have never heard a flower speak to me! There may be wisdom in their silence, but there may also be some ignorance.”

“Your reply surprises me, Socrates,” retorts Saint Thomas. “I would have supposed that you could make even the flowers reply to your questions, because you are so persistent! But, of course, the flowers have no need of language, and thus avoid making logical fallacies. Rather, they speak by example, showing us how to live in harmony with Nature. And if this seems a trivial feat to you, consider what would happen if people had to bloom yearly like flowers: We would argue about who should bloom first, we would bloom out of season, and perhaps we might fail to bloom at all! In short, we would make of it as big a folly as we make of most of our activities.”

“Thomas,” says Sartre, “I believe that I finally understand the main difference between us, and it is not the fact that you believe in God and I don’t. You believe that human beings are, for

the most part, sinful (or simply incompetent) and so you recommend religion. I, on the other hand, feel compassion for humanity because I realize that there isn't any salvation. Actually, I don't completely reject the idea of God—only the poorly formed ideas of God that religion has tried to foist on us!"

"Come now, Jean-Paul," Socrates interjects. "I don't think you are being quite fair to Thomas. It appears to me that he tried mightily to get people to reason about their lives and about God at a time when few people had either education or compassion. For this alone, he deserves our respect. As for his idea of God, perhaps the times demanded it. Even Hercules could not have cleaned out *that* Aegean Stable overnight! In any case, I should like to return to our discussion of the Eastern religions, because I do not believe that we have considered them in a complete and unprejudiced manner."

"Why, Socrates," says Descartes, "did not each of us express our views in a clear and definite way?"

"Well," Socrates replies, "because our views represent Western philosophy, and not the whole of philosophy, it could be argued that we have condemned the Eastern philosophies solely on the basis of the standards developed in the West. And even more regrettably, we have done so on the basis of hearsay evidence. Even the Courts of Athens would have permitted the accused to speak in his own behalf! We have decided that, as philosophers, we do not need these philosophies—but as Sartre has so ably pointed out—we are also human beings. Can the needs of the spirit really be separated from the needs of the mind? In all our discussions, these Eastern philosophies have remained *on the outside*; I think that we must bring them *inside* in order to fully understand them!"

"I understand you, Socrates," says Saint Thomas, "because those who have not thought deeply enough about God are not able to take Him seriously. Pilate, who condemned Christ, thought him to be a political opponent, only in search of power. But how shall we get to the inside of these Eastern philosophies?"

Socrates replies: "It happens that I am acquainted with the person who is called 'Buddha.' If you agree, I would like to invite him to our next meeting. While he does not represent all Eastern philosophy, his presence in this area is a substantial one. Furthermore, he is a fine teacher, and will respond thoughtfully to our questions."

Sartre responds: "I have read the stories about his life and I appreciate the fact that his philosophy was developed through personal experience, and that he rejected the false ideas of his own privileged class. Thus, even though I may disagree with it, his philosophy is at least 'authentic.' So I'd like to hear from him."

"I haven't any political standards to apply here," says Descartes, "but I can't resist the opportunity to question him. He was a man even though his followers seem to have deified him! I'd like to know how he reasons—like a man or like a god?"

"Although his philosophy was regarded as more primitive than Christianity by my Church," adds Thomas, "I personally regard him as being of special interest. One legend has it that Christ traveled to the East. What if he had met the disciples of Buddha? What would they have said to each other? And what was the significance of his vision? Perhaps God had more than one Son! Certainly I welcome him."

"Very well, then," concludes Socrates. "Let us bid goodbye until we meet again. Thomas has promised to provide the next gathering place."

Slowly the philosophers make their way down the hill. Behind them, the remnants of

marble pillars frame the setting sun. Having come from different times, they depart in different directions.