

On the Satisfaction Sought by Philosophy

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Who is wealthier? The man with sufficient financial resources to purchase a \$1 million home, but who finds little satisfaction from occupying it, or the man with sufficient financial resources to purchase (just) a \$100,000 home, but who finds great satisfaction from occupying it? The analytical philosopher will quickly focus on what I mean by the concept “wealth”. But setting aside linguistics for the moment, we still may note that one man was unable to purchase satisfaction for one million dollars while one purchased it for just one-hundred thousand dollars.

What are we buying with our philosophical endeavors? Luc Ferry argues that “one of the principle errors of the contemporary world is to reduce philosophy to a straight-forward matter of “critical reflection.’ Further; that this is only a “means to an end.”¹ Ferry breaks philosophy into three distinct stages: theory (an explanation of the world), moral (an account for the “good-life”), and salvation (a means of addressing our finitude).²

Whether one completely agrees with Ferry or not, he does outline the concepts that have occupied much of the philosophical project. Ferry’s distinction leads me to an essential question: *Is the end of all this intellectual work truly a “knowing” that leads to a way of living?* I suspect that these philosophers were seeking something deeper; they were seeing a particular form of satisfaction derived from their “knowing”.

Perhaps they were satisfied by finding personally plausible answers, even enjoying to some extent the process by which they search for them. Perhaps they were satisfied by relieving some of the anxiety associated with our limitations, specifically our mortality. Whatever they were seeking, we might define it ultimately as a form of satisfaction, and further we might reflect on how this definition points towards two fundamental questions (and hopefully a new degree of clarity):

(Q1) What is my objective? (We need to get absolutely clear about what it is we are aiming for with all of our intellectual activity)

(Q2) What is the best way to achieve it? (We need to defer an adequate answer in favor of the best answer)

Q1 reminds us that we are not just seeking an answer, but rather the satisfaction derived from it. In the final analysis, this satisfaction is a mental/physical condition (I hesitate to call it purely mental). For clarity's sake, we may designate this condition as MPR.

¹ Luc Ferry, *Learning to Live: A User's Manual* (Great Britain: Canongate Books Ltd, 2010), 2.

² *Ibid*, 14.

Q2 reminds us that we are not seeking a way; we are seeking the best way. The question is not how can I achieve MPR; the question is what is the best way to achieve it? For me, this query leads to another "working" question with dramatic implications: *Can I produce MPR via some intentional mental process?*

And if at first these nine words seem less than profound, it may be that I have not fully considered their import. For this question changes the locus of philosophic inquiry. It transcends method and result, so that on at least one level the end becomes the means. And in doing so it may enable one to buy MPR at a steep "discount".