

**Philosophy as Love of Wisdom:
Its Relevance to the
Contemporary Crisis of Meaning**

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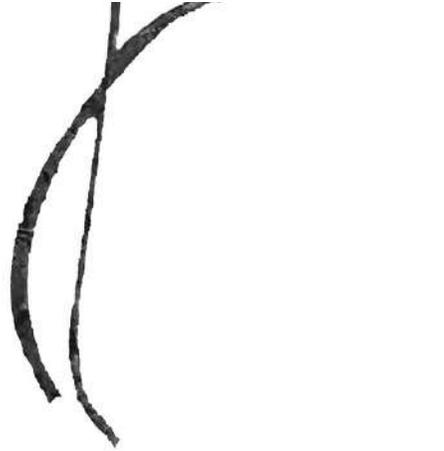
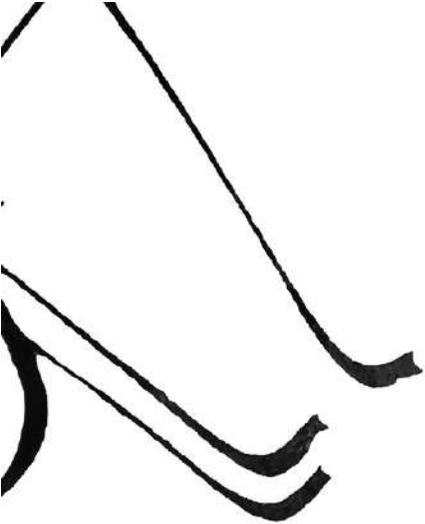
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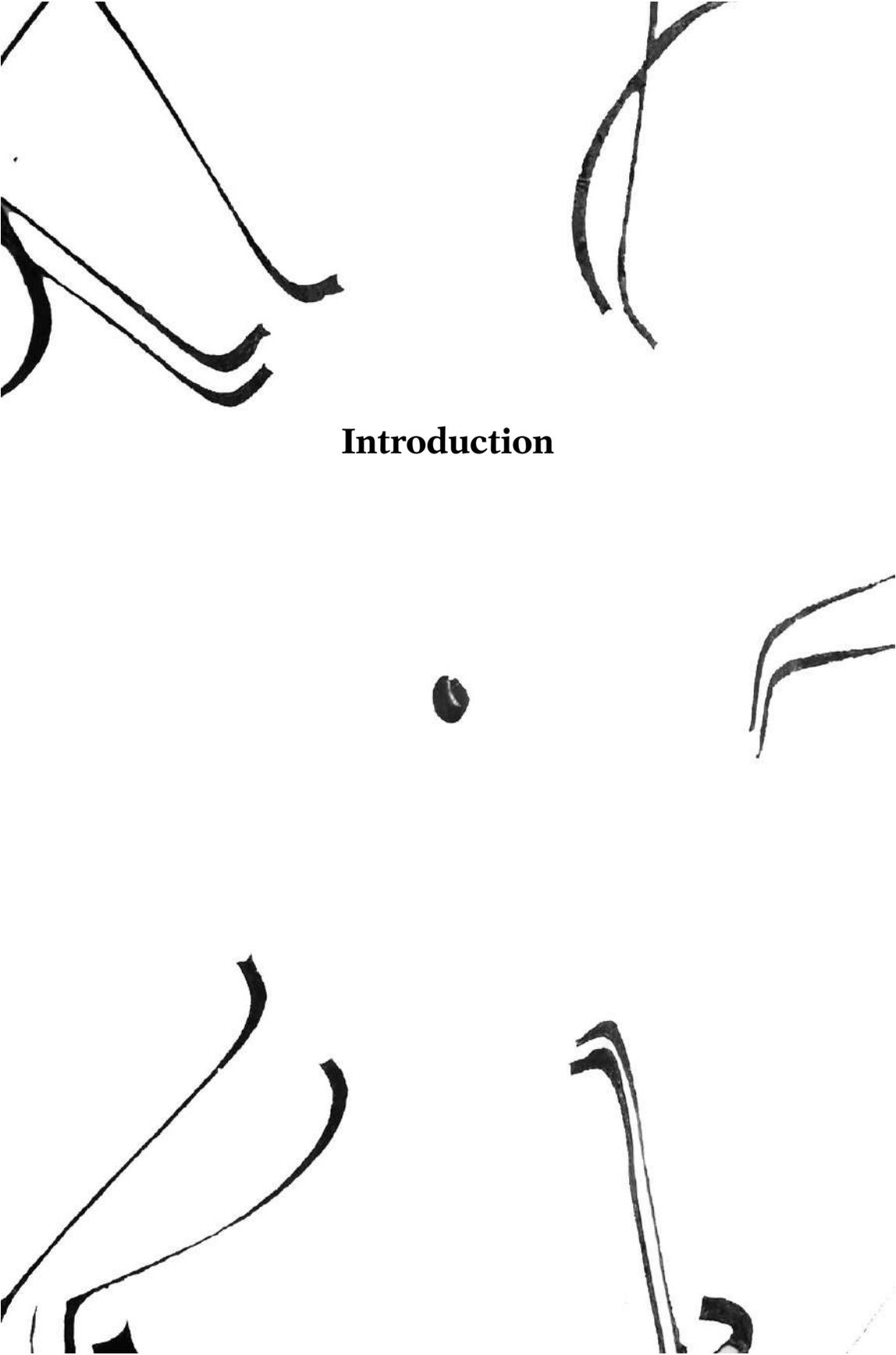
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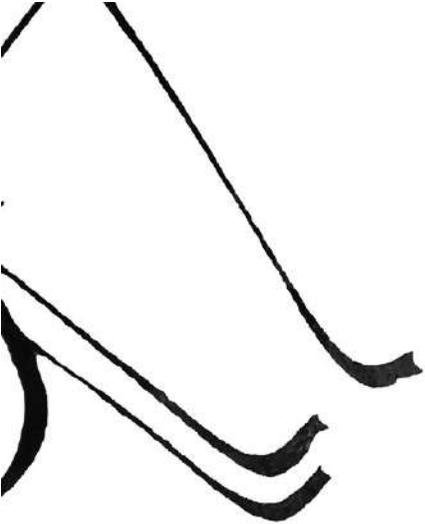


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Introduction



Reflections on Re-Learning to be Human in a Global Age

PATRICK LAUDE

Why should one postulate a need to re-learn to be human? Is not “humanness” a given, which all human beings can claim? And if not, how can we define what makes us authentically human? When we refer to a need to re-learn to be human, our presumption is that the essence of what is genuinely human has been lost. Thus, the lingering questions are: what is this genuine essence or nature, why has it been lost, and how can it be recovered?

It may be that answers to the last two questions are to be found in the specific historical context of our predicament, stated above, i.e. the reference to our “global age.” The expression “global age” has become something of a stereotype. It conjures up a sense of growing unity and interconnection of the planet, if not a uniformization of world cultures, as well as the observation of a correlative collapse or waning of all that used to distinguish different “humankinds,” as it were. The “global ideal” does not necessarily entail an erasure of all cultural distinctions, but it certainly emphasizes unifying and homogenizing factors and means of communication and production over civilizational and cultural diversity. As a response, it has also led to the re-affirmation of cultural identities, including as political movements. So the “global world” is in fact one of tensions and oppositions between concepts of “human universality” and “ethno-cultural” identities. With respect to the “uniformizing” aspect of globalization, communication is indeed the keyword here, without it being always sufficiently clear what the contents of this communication might be. Globalization is in that sense more a form and a process than a clearly identifiable set of philosophical, ideological or ethical principles. Hence the question: what are the challenges and opportunities provided by this globalizing process, and how do those relate to the purpose of re-learning to be human? Such are the simple, yet difficult questions raised by the current volume.

The thirteen contributions included in this edited volume are addressing these questions within different cultural areas and from a variety of points of view. The global outlook and implications of the issues at stake made it imperative to gather essays that involve meditations on the world treasure of philosophical reflections and wisdom traditions. Hence the rich array of civilizational areas that are brought to bear in the reflections that follow. This means that the concepts and practices of wisdom have been considered here beyond the confines of any parochialism. Thus the first part of the book – entitled “Philosophy and Wisdom in Different Traditions” – provides the reader with a sense of this diversity by addressing some of the most central aspects of wisdom within different traditions the world over. Comparative approaches have been particularly highlighted in this respect inasmuch as they open the way to fruitful exchanges and a genuine search for common grounds.

The second part – “Comparative Studies on the Philosophy of Love” – places love at the forefront of the quest for wisdom. In keeping with the Greek etymology of the term philosophy, love must be understood as a spiritual energy that animates, in various ways, the search for meaning. The classical Greek distinction between *eros*, *agapē*, *philia* and *storgē* already suggests, though, that love presents us with a manifold, and sometimes contradictory, spectrum of meanings and modalities. The second part of this volume offers us comparative insights into this epistemological and ethical plurality.

Finally, the scope of this volume would not been fully relevant to the goals of its inquiry had not it included studies of the socio-cultural and political challenges of the day. This is the main focus of the third part, entitled “Socio-Political Challenges.” This final part provides us with attempts at articulating a reflection on the love of wisdom and the lessons that can be drawn from some traditional philosophical teachings with pressing contemporary issues that weigh upon societies, nations and cultures.

The challenges and obstacles of the times that are addressed in this volume pertain to a sense of metaphysical, social and moral “de-linking.” Metaphysically, the age of globalism is the most recent stage in a gradual distancing, not only from the religious and spiritual collective identities of past civilizations, but also from the centrality of metaphysical concerns themselves. The traditional webs of identity and belonging have been eroded or destroyed by the industrial revolution, the colonization of African and Asian lands and cultures, the rise of capitalism and its logic of production and consumption as well as the Marxist Leninist social-engineering programs, claiming of promote a New Man disconnected from transcendence. Moreover, the pervasiveness of information technology and the

social media has contributed further to alter the relationship of humankind with the Divine, nature and fellow human beings. The post-modern humanity of the global age is not grounded in the metaphysical soil of religious faith and ancestral belief anymore; it is abandoned to the evanescent fluidity of unending communication and multisensory experience. Moreover, the relativist plurality of “truths,” or the eviction of the very concept of truth makes it difficult, or indeed impossible, to agree on an objective understanding of reality; the concept of reality has become itself laden with questions and suspicions. Any fixed concept of the human becomes, in such a context, hard to reach and to agree upon. On the other hand, it is all the more paradoxical that our world claims to be keen on defending “human rights” and “human dignity.” Thus, in such a context, taking up again the question “what is the meaning of being human?” hardly sounds like a luxury.

While being adequate within its own context, it is likely that the Aristotelian and Scholastic definition of the human as “rational animal” falls short of an integral consideration of the human phenomenon. Some might opine that it bears the imprint of a stream of Western philosophy whose claim to universality must be debunked. The idea of the supremacy of reason may have corresponded to the priorities and development of Europe and the West, particularly since the Renaissance, but it is far from exhausting the fold of human civilization and from being identifiable as the first principle of all human historical orientations. In fact, pre-modern humanity has proven quite able to make use of the rational faculty in the broad sense of the word in many domains of thought and action without considering scientific reason as the supreme guiding principle or highest character of humankind. Archaic and traditional societies highlighted the relationship with the sacred and the transcendent as the most distinctive feature of human beings, thereby referring to extra-rational or supra-rational means of access to those realms. Still, the Scholastic definition of the *animal rationale* points to both the high grounds and the limitations of humankind. It tells us two things: what makes us human is our endowment with a rational capacity to reflect and plan, this in contrast with other living beings whose life is solely vegetative, and also different from animals whose existence is confined to the realm of instincts. When reason is conceived of as a reflection, or as a manifestation of a transcendent principle that can extirpate human beings from their purely instinctive and sensory affects, then one could conclude, without necessarily subscribing to any brand of rationalism, that to be human amounts to enjoying a measure of inner freedom that is precisely the main horizon of humanity. One does not have to reduce the human reality to the strictures of rationalism to recognize that the ability to think reflectively about oneself and the world is an obvious privilege of humankind that distin-

guishes it from other terrestrial species. Moving a step higher, some traditions, both in the East and the West, see in this “rational difference” the mere reflection of a more elevated faculty that is none other than the very mark of the Transcendent. Hindu teachings on the Divine Self or *Ātman*, for instance, allow us to understand the human as the central terrestrial site of the capacity for a spiritual investigation into the Self as Being, Consciousness and Bliss.

As for the second component of the Aristotelian definition, the “animality” of humankind, although generally connected to the basest characters of its nature, it is not without involving positive implications. For one thing, it points to a commonality with other “animals” and by extension, therefore, with the world of nature of which mankind is part. The “ecological” dimensions of this commonality are quite significant, particularly in our age of degradation and depravation of nature. Thus, to be an “animal” may also be understood as being “animated” by the energies and rhythms of nature, and to participate in the cosmic web of creation. When related to the sense of transcendence that human intelligence entails, this also suggests that humankind occupies an intermediary, or mediating, position between Heaven and Earth, to take up the traditional Chinese ontocosmological pattern.

Taking stock of the global issues and predicaments that have been outlined and the challenges raised by the definition of the human, the main focus of this volume lies in an exploration of the capacity of philosophy to provide answers and ethico-spiritual directions to contemporary mankind. However, the point here is not the ability of philosophy to offer conceptual keys – like the notion of *animal rationale*, but rather an exploration of the deepest implications of the Greek etymology of the word as “love of wisdom.” It is in this regard that philosophy may teach us ways to address our current global predicaments, and provide us with resources that may enable us to overcome the challenges and perils of a new “de-humanization” in the ongoing crisis of meaning.

We must begin here by emphasizing that philosophy as it is commonly understood today does not correspond to the type of philosophy as “love of wisdom” that flourished in pre-modern civilizations, whether in China, Europe, India or elsewhere. In those civilizations, philosophical discourse had no other meaning than to prepare or facilitate an ethical and spiritual transformation. Philosophy is not “art for art’s sake,” but art for the sake of the inner and outer betterment of human beings. Hu Yeping reminds us, in her reflections on Pierre Hadot and Feng You-Lan’s respective contributions, that philosophy is first of all a way of life. Thus, re-learning to be human in the context of philosophy means rediscovering that intellectual abilities and exercises are nothing without the existential founda-

tions that give them meaning and direction. If philosophy is to be faithful to its commitment as a “love of wisdom,” it cannot but acknowledge that its responsibilities are holistic, and not simply intellectual in the narrow sense of a mental activity.

Now, how should we approach the kind of wisdom that was the ethico-spiritual horizon of ancient philosophers? *Sophia* is, of course, the European term that refers to the fundamental object of “desire” of philosophers. It is important to keep in mind that this Greek term itself has a wide extension. It includes the highest range of “divine wisdom” as also engages the more practical, experiential connotations of *phronēsis*. At its highest, this wisdom can be equated with “intellectual contemplation” in the way it is understood by Plato and Aristotle. It refers to the *noûs* rather than to the *dianoia*. However, in contrast with the Platonic and Neo-Platonic orientation of wisdom toward transcendence, Aristotle is reticent to make of this contemplative wisdom the essence of the human; he prefers indeed to postulate a divine character for such sapiential heights: “But such a life [contemplative wisdom] would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him.”¹ The Aristotelian distinction is crucial in that it validates a two-fold view of wisdom as divine *a priori* and human *a posteriori* if one may put it so. In other words, on the one hand, wisdom can be seen as something “higher” than human, a dispensation from transcendence; but it may also be seen as an outcome of experience, the ethical and practical fruits of a life filled with lessons.

Significantly, the Abrahamic world tends to embrace the divine and the practical within the fold of its concept of wisdom. Wisdom was before creation, it may even be seen as the “daughter of God,” it is a divine gift “that will never enter the soul of a wrong-doer,” but its applications are manifold, and the *Book of Wisdom*, in its seventh chapter, provides us with a wide range of its applications in astronomy, zoology, psychology, botany, and other arts and sciences. Analogically, the Islamic *Hikmah* is sometimes equated with a prudential ability to deal with the contingent complexities of existence, as exemplified by the tradition of the Prophet’s words and actions, the *Sunnah*. Here again, while the essential reality of wisdom – which tends to be identified in Islam with Prophecy, pertains to its Divine source – God is *al-Hakīm*, the Wise –, it is also true that the domains of application of wisdom are as wide as human existence itself, and therefore characterized by a complex range of options.

It could be argued that, by contrast, the Indian concept of *prajña* remains radically transcendental, as it befits the primarily “absolutist”

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), x, 7.

context of Indic religions. In fact, etymologically speaking, *prajña* refers to insight and knowledge (*jñana*), a perception of the nature of things, rather than to practical wisdom in the Aristotelian sense. The perfection of wisdom of Mahāyāna Buddhism, or *Prajña Pāramitā*, is none other than the ultimate perfection within the reach of human contemplation. It consists in an insight into the nature of things, a recognition of the emptiness of phenomena.

It is likely that the orientation of Chinese wisdom is more “practical” than that of Buddhism. In her essay included in the first chapter of this volume, Hu Yeping reminds us that Chinese philosophy is characterized by a conjunction of this-worldliness and other-worldliness. Moreover, the connection of wisdom and learning is probably nowhere more strongly emphasized than in the Chinese intellectual and spiritual traditions. Characteristically, the Chinese translation of the word “philosophy” as *Zhe-xue* literally means “learning to become wise,” a compound of “wisdom” and “learning.” The Confucian concept of *jen*, extensively discussed by Pochi Huang in chapter six of this volume, corresponds very closely to this principle of an educational process that is never fully accomplished. Such a concept of wisdom is therefore not “divine” even though it may be deemed to be, from a certain point of view, a human “approximation” of the Way of Heaven.

As we have already highlighted, philosophy is an ethical and spiritual practice. The ideals of Confucian *jen* and Gandhian *Ahiṃsā* illustrate this point quite cogently. In his comparative study of these two concepts, Pochi Huang makes it clear that, notwithstanding their respective civilizational foundations and cultural specifics, the two concepts have been understood by their highest promoters as moral and political universals. Moreover, both *jen* and *Ahiṃsā* make us aware of the relational dimension of wisdom. To be wise does not only mean reaching a certain degree of self-knowledge and understanding of the world, but it also entails an ability to relate with other human beings, and the whole universe of creation, in ways that both manifest and refine this self-knowledge.

The implications of the essential dimension of human relatedness are also developed in Olatunji Oyeshile’s and Ananta Giri’s contributions. In chapter ten of this volume, Olatunji Oyeshile examines the ways in which a central aspect of Yoruba ethics and spiritual identity may serve as a response to the post-modern crisis of meaning. The sense of “relatedness” and harmony, fostered by traditional Yoruba philosophy, can serve as a healing paradigm for treating the ethical and societal illnesses of our times. We can re-learn a sense of moral and communal wholeness through ancestral traditions and wisdom. Moreover, Oyeshile suggests that the critical stance of philosophy, its ability to keep our natural tendencies in

check through examination is key to the task of re-learning to be human. Here to be human is not just a natural given, it is a civilizational acquisition predicated upon the exercise of intelligent judgment in view of objectivity, the kind of objectivity, precisely, that traditional Yoruba ethics of *iwa* and *omoluwabi* fosters.

Ananta Giri bases his meditations in chapter eleven of this volume on the concept of *Lokasamgraha*, which means “spiritual well-being and maintenance of the world.” This suggests attention, caring and responsibility toward the world that surrounds us, by “cultivating new movements and circles of meaning.” Such a cultivation includes, among other modes of being and thinking, healing the wounds inflicted by human words, and accessing a renewed understanding of the traditional Hindu notions of *dharma*, *sahadharma* and *purusartha*. In essence Giri proposes a new, relational, intertwined, dynamic, understanding of these principles that do away with the tight boundaries that have tended to fossilize their notions and practices, hence the importance of the notion of “*dharma* of togetherness” or *sahadharma* for the cultivation of a “planetary *Lokasamgraha*.” Here, wisdom is understood as an ability to regenerate the notions inherited from the past and expand their meaning and modes of application in order to address the new challenges and developments of the day and avail oneself of their opportunity.

This attunement to the generation of “new circles of meaning” and action echoes some of the reflections made by Peter Jonkers in the second chapter of this volume; he discusses the “practical” character of wisdom and “philosophy as a way of life” in Western traditions. The main intuition here is that practical wisdom, or wisdom inasmuch as it is practical, can be best characterized as an ability to relate universal principles and particular existential situations. This refers to what Jonkers denotes as the “fragility” of wisdom, a fragility that derives from its relationship with contingencies. Jonkers underlines that wisdom may well be akin to an orientation, whereby the subjective situation of an individual person is related to an objective point of reference. In a global world that is characterized by the transitory, fluid or “normatively uncertain” aspect of those points of orientation, wisdom traditions can still provide guidance in taking us on the path of discerning decisions and lasting happiness.

Chapter twelve of this volume, written by Benjamin Olujohungbe, may be read as a case study illustrating some of Peter Jonkers’ observations on wisdom-orientation and historical contextuality. It provides an examination of the ways in which al Farabi’s view of the virtuous city, which articulates ethics and politics, can offer a model for addressing the socio-cultural crisis of contemporary Nigeria. This is an important consideration in the world of ideological contentions in which we live. The connection

between ethics and politics needs to be addressed through a moral cultivation of knowledge and justice as foundations of the integral and intrinsic virtue of the human soul and society. It is only by a concrete reference to these ethical landmarks that the socio-political order can be shielded from social and political abuses and chronic aberrations.

The relationship between wisdom and love takes a particular turn in the context of the Buddhist tradition. Here the duality of the strong sapiential and ascetic emphasis of early Buddhist discourses and the increasingly inclusive centrality of compassion in later *Mahāyāna* make us aware of some potential tensions between what could be coined “love of wisdom” and “wisdom of love.” Thus, the contribution of Gyu-Eon Jang in the third chapter of this volume revolves around the central question of the relationship between the exclusiveness of wisdom, which bars ignorance, and the inclusiveness of compassion which, in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, involves the salvation of all sentient beings. This question is central in Buddhist philosophy or wisdom, inasmuch as the love of wisdom may appear to contradict the wisdom of compassion. The tension between the two is apparent in the ways Buddhist thinkers have addressed the notion of *agotrasattva*, or the human incapacity to be saved. The question hinges upon whether there are essential limits to salvation within some human beings or, on the contrary, whether the universality of compassion cancels such inherent flaws. It would appear that, in the Buddhist view, compassion ends up incorporating and overwhelming wisdom, or being ultimately identified with it.

The reduction of Buddhist spirituality to technical and psychological factors, constitutes one of the characteristics of our new global spiritualism. In a sense, these views are attempts at making of Buddhism a mere “philosophy,” in the “flattened” sense of the term. Against such views, John Paraskevopoulos argues in the fourth chapter of this volume that Buddhism, inasmuch as it aims at reaching *prajñā* or wisdom, integrates all the elements of the human soul, including the need to worship. Against a desiccating view of Buddhism that favors epistemological decomposition and technical meditation, Paraskevopoulos argues for the need to acknowledge the integrality of Buddhism. *Jōdo Shinshū*, the School of Pure Land, has a central role to play in this respect. This is so inasmuch as this school highlights the limitations and vulnerabilities of the human being. *Nirvāna* is not the dehumanizing endpoint of wisdom, but a recognition of the universal immanence of the Buddha-Nature as source of all wisdom. Its enlightening presence is available to faith, once the frailties of human nature have been recognized and “exposed” to the saving mercy of the *Bodhisattva*.

The recognition of human frailty and limitations is also central, in different ways, in Adrien Leites’s, Martin Lu’s, and Edward Moad’s reflec-

tions on wisdom in this volume. Thus, to be human can also be defined in a minimalist way as referring to epistemological limitations inherent to mankind, as Adrien Leites suggests in chapter five of this volume. In this case, a wisdom of tolerance – a key value in our global world, would derive from a keen sense that we are at best no more than a small part of the whole. By contrast, religious love would reveal an exclusiveness that is far from being equitable with tolerance, since it is based on characters or aspirations that entail discrimination between truth and error, good and evil, as well as references to exclusive communal identity. There is more humaneness to be discovered in the awareness of one's fallibility than in the claims of our zealous love; and it would seem that such an awareness is but the reverse side of the high dignity of self-knowledge, and therefore bears witness to transcendence in its own indirect way.

In a sense, Martin Lu's essay in chapter thirteen of this volume takes stock of an analogous "apophatic" dimension of wisdom. In his essay, what is at stake is not a matter of knowledge or ignorance, but rather one of proclamation and silence. Taking Confucius' reticence to dissert on transcendence as an implicit guiding principle, Lu suggestively weaves threads of meditations and personal experience to intimate practical and spiritual wisdom, assuming they can be distinguished, work within the aura of a same implicit and silent "interiorization" of their guiding principles of action and creativity. Our world today, excessively concerned as it is with proclaimed collective identities and assertive religious mottoes, might learn from such intimations of "discretion" and implicitness, thereby placing back the personal ethico-spiritual agent at the center stage.

To love means to be attracted, and to wish to unite with the object of one's loving attraction. There is, however, quite a distance from desire to possession; and in the search for wisdom, stating that wisdom needs to "possess" us may be closer to the truth than any human claim to possess wisdom. One may draw this lesson from Edward Moad's premise that the desire for wisdom implies the non-possession of wisdom, which he develops in chapter eight of this volume. Transcendence lies at the heart of the notion of wisdom. Wisdom comes to us from beyond, and there is therefore no way for us to appropriate and possess it. It is a principle of ancient thought that the intellect, organ of wisdom, lies beyond the human subject. There is an epistemic humility that must make us weary of the arrogance of philosophical method, and its subjective claim of infallibility. Moad warns that what is sorely missing in philosophy today is love, for only love can reach beyond the compartmentalization and boundaries of intellectual methods and schools. That love may be a philosophical principle and value, may surprise quite a few today. If it is so, it is precisely because we have lost sight of the "existential fullness" of philosophy. In our times, characterized by a disseminated fragmentation of the human mind,

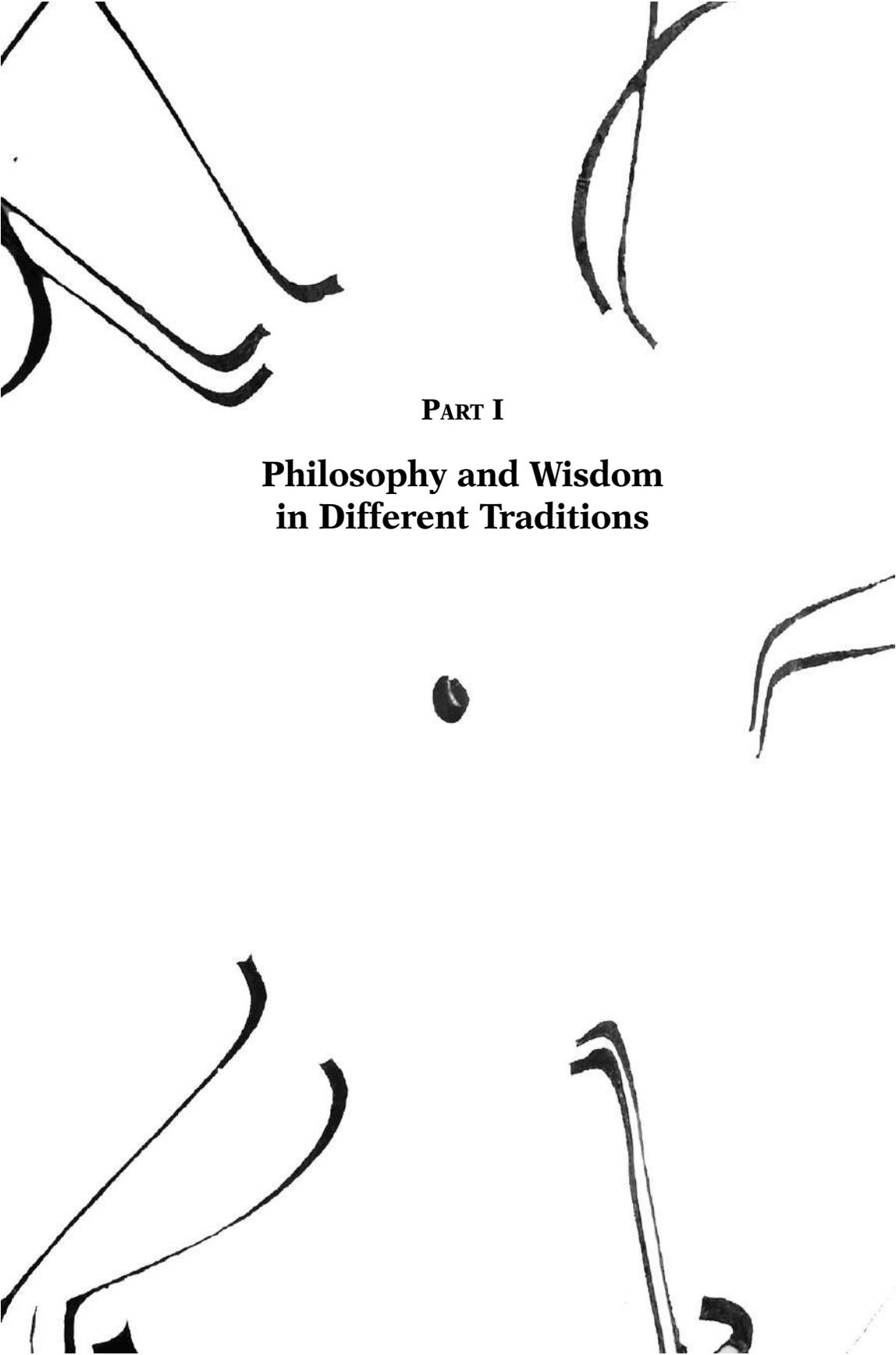
it can be argued that what is most needed is the wholeness of love as the vector of an intuition of unity.

This need for love at the heart of the philosophical life is also one of the various lessons one may draw from João Vila-Chã's erudite meditation, in chapter seven of this volume, on the influence of Ibn Gabirol and Moses Maimonides on Leone Ebreo's thought. Leone Ebreo's *Dialogues on Love* present us with a vision of reality in which all creaturely realities cannot but be drawn back ultimately, beyond "material" dissolution, to their purest essences, which is none other than their contemplation of God: being is love of God. As Vila-Chã concludes his essay: the recognition of God as the final cause of all creatures also marks the "triumph of the purest form of Love." Moreover, on the human side, the Maimonidan principle that "Love must always accompany the intellection of God" lies at the heart of Ibn Gabirol and Leone Ebreo's works. Thus, genuine philosophy is not only love of wisdom it is also love of God. Isidore Fernando's meditation in chapter nine of this volume invites us to reflect upon the primacy of the "love of being," and lead us, by taking a different path, in an analogous direction. If "love of being" is to be preferred to "love of wisdom," it is by reason of its more direct relationship with reality. The "love of being" is wider and deeper than philosophy in the usual sense, since it encompasses and transcends love of wisdom inasmuch as wisdom itself has been conceived as an attunement to being. Furthermore, the love of being embraces all realities from God to humankind and nature: it is all-inclusive; it animates and epitomizes all spiritual and moral perfections.

While the "love of wisdom" may be deemed to be the beginning of philosophy, the "wisdom of love," meaning thereby the "intelligence of reality" characteristic of the highest realms of "love," could be considered its crowning. It is likely, however, that the term "love" needs be understood differently in each of the two expressions. The "love of wisdom" is undoubtedly a desire: the desire of a reality that remains to some degree out of reach. We do not know yet what we desire, even though we know enough *about* it to deem it lovable. By contrast, the realization of wisdom – to the extent that it is accessible, or the actualization of wisdom within us, may be deemed to be no different than love itself, since love is "wise" by virtue of its identity with being and the good. To be in love with pure being, such is perhaps the secret of all profound philosophy; and is not being what gives depth and lasting value to our love? In a world that revels in the surface of ideas and feelings, in the fleeting instantaneity of words, images and affects, re-learning to be human might amount to rediscovering a sense of the "sacredness" of existence, a "loving knowledge" of beings grounded in transcendent Being.

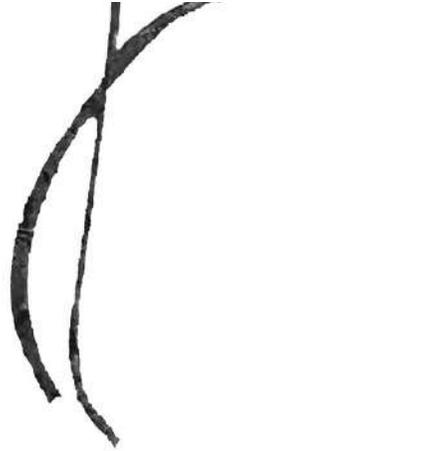
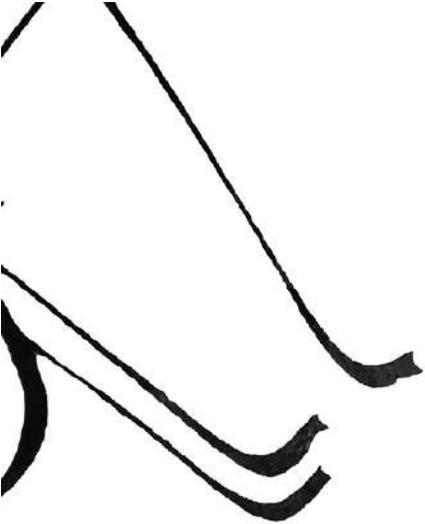
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PART I

**Philosophy and Wisdom
in Different Traditions**



1.

Philosophy as a Way of Life

HU YEPING

According to Joseph I. Omoregbe philosophy has been considered classically to be an activity conducted by the human being “to reflect on human experience in search of answers to some fundamental questions.”¹ It begins with “wonder” about some fundamental questions related to humans themselves, their lives, nature and the world, and then to search for answers to these questions.² That means that what philosophy inquires or “wonders” are fundamental questions related to ourselves, our life, and things we encounter in this world and beyond.

This understanding of philosophy beginning as “wonder” could be traced back to Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece. In *Theaetetus* Socrates says that “wonder” is “the mark of the philosopher”; except for “wonder” philosophy does not have any other origin.³ Aristotle also thinks the same way about philosophy. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle states that “it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”⁴

What are the fundamental questions about which philosophers “wonder”? Aristotle continues “they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g., about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe.”⁵ Notably what

¹ Joseph I. Omoregbe, “African Philosophy: Yesterday and Today,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Maklen, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d, in *The Collected Dialogue of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns with Introduction and Prefatory Notes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 861.

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983b10-15, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited and with an Introduction by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 692.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Aristotle talks about here are objective things, or the natural phenomena which humans experience. As Omoregbe claims, Greek philosophy began from the objective perspective, because it was concerned primarily about two things: unity with diversity and continuity with changes.⁶ Some other philosophies began more with the subjective aspect. For instance, Buddhist philosophy began from the observation of the human experience of suffering.⁷

Nevertheless, all philosophies are concerned and wonder about some fundamental questions and seek answers to these questions. This process is philosophizing,⁸ and begins a philosophical way of life. This kind of inquiry, “wonder” or philosophizing should never be set apart from the social and cultural context, from human existential conditions, and from who and where we are or what we should be. Philosophy as a way of life is then “a mode of existing-in-the-world,” and aiming at transforming “the whole of the individual life.”⁹

Hence, philosophy is not just to accumulate knowledge or to display one’s intelligence or “cleverness,” but rather to promise a genuine transformation which enables people to reexamine their way of understanding themselves, their world and reality so as to have a better orientation of their life goals and their conducts and actions, and to make life more meaningful and happier. Precisely due to the nature of philosophy, the goal of philosophy and the mode of philosophy, philosophy is “a way of life, an art of living and a way of being.”¹⁰

This does not mean that philosophy is only about implementation or application or praxis, philosophy is also an intellectual reflection on the human being, society, the world or universe, etc. The important thing is to distinguish philosophy itself from philosophical discourse,¹¹ as argued by Pierre Hadot (1922-2010). Philosophy itself is not merely ethics, logic, physics, epistemology, etc., which are necessary theoretical divisions of philosophical discourse for pedagogical purposes, rather philosophy as a way of life is “no longer a theory divided into parts, but a unitary act,

⁶ Omoregbe, “African Philosophy,” p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited and with an Introduction by Arnold I. Davidson; translated by Michael Chase (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1995), p. 265. Pierre Hadot was a French philosopher specialized particularly in ancient philosophies. Besides *Philosophy as a Way of Life* as the main source of this paper, he also published such books as *Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault; What is Ancient Philosophy?; The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature, The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius; Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*; etc.

¹⁰ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 269.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

which consists in living logic, physics, and ethics.”¹² In fact, in antiquity, philosophy was an exercise practiced in each instant; it invites people “to concentrate on each instant of life, to become aware of the infinite value of each present moment.” This is the exercise of wisdom and it entails the cosmic dimension.¹³

Discourse about philosophy or philosophical theories are not the same thing as philosophy or the philosophical life, rather the former is in the service of the latter.¹⁴ Philosophy cannot be simply reduced to philosophical discourse or a set of philosophical theories, or a body of philosophical knowledge, but it should be kept as a mode of life and a way of inner living. It should help people find answers to such fundamental questions as what life is all about; what is a meaningful and worthy life; who we are, why we are here, and where we are heading; what is death; what is happiness; etc.

This is because of the nature and goal of philosophy as “*philosophia*,” or “the love of wisdom,” or “the friend of wisdom.” Hence, philosophy is a ceaseless effort to achieve wisdom. Real wisdom does not merely make us know things but rather demands “a radical conversion and transformation” of a different way of being. “Philosophy thus took on the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one’s being”; its goal is to achieve wisdom which is “practically inaccessible to mankind.”¹⁵

Feng Youlan (1895-1990) points out that according to the Chinese tradition philosophy is considered not merely as an accumulation of knowledge, but more importantly experience of life. It is not a game of intellect, but a very serious “thing.”¹⁶ Traditionally, Chinese philosophers unite ethics, reflection, knowledge, etc., as a whole, and consider that knowledge and morality always go together. They should live such a philosophy their whole life, because the goal of philosophy is to make humans be humans, not some kind of specialists. Feng thinks that Plato and Chinese philosophers have something similar to say in terms of philosophy, because they believe the mission of philosophy is to help human beings develop the characters of sagehood.¹⁷ For instance, Socrates, Confucius, etc. exemplified what a philosophy should be through their conduct and even their life and death.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹⁶ Feng Youlan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Zhao Fusan (Tianjing: Tianjing Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2005), pp. 9-10. Feng Youlan was a Chinese philosopher who studied both Chinese philosophy in China and Western philosophy in the United States. He played a significant role in introducing Chinese philosophy to the West, especially through his book *A History of Chinese Philosophy*.

¹⁷ Feng, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, p. 9.

Chinese philosophers did not regard knowledge as something valuable in itself nor did they pursue it for its own sake; rather they would not “demarcate clearly the distinction between the individual and the universe;”¹⁸ they prefer to apply knowledge in the actual conduct of life which could lead to happiness, and place more emphasis on teaching people how to become a sage.¹⁹ Thus, philosophy is “a branch of learning” which enables the human being to attain knowledge so as to become a sage or to possess the quality of sagehood. “Therefore what philosophy discusses is what philosophers of China describe as the Tao (Way) of ‘sage-ness within and kingliness without’.”²⁰

Feng distinguishes two kinds of philosophies, a “this-worldly” philosophy which stresses human relations in common activities and daily life; and an “other-worldly” philosophy which emphasizes a sublime realm separated from human daily functions. The two become the antithesis between idealism and realism. However, Chinese philosophy, as Feng argues, is neither wholly “this-worldly” nor wholly “other-worldly,” but world-transcending, because it synthesizes the differences, the dichotomy, and the contrasts into “one whole.” “How can this be done? This is one problem which Chinese philosophy attempts to solve, wherein lies the spirit of that philosophy, while in the solution it gives lies the contribution it makes to the study of philosophy.”²¹

Philosophy as a way of life which both Hadot and Feng discuss is true of both ancient Greek philosophy and classical Chinese philosophy. But what is the situation of philosophy today? Does philosophy still play the same role as it did in antiquity either in the West or in the East, namely, to enable people to transform the “totality of their being”? Is philosophy still able to provide answers to fundamental questions or is philosophy still able to help people find answers to their life puzzles? Why do people think philosophy as one of the most difficult subjects to study and why do some universities intend to close their philosophy departments? Why was the theme “philosophy as way of life” chosen for the 2013 World Congress of Philosophy?

According to Hadot, in contrast to the ancient philosophy as a way of life, since the Middle Ages with the appearance of the university whose purpose was for professionals and professional trainings, philosophy gradually became a “purely theoretical and abstract activity.”²² In modern

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ Feng Youlan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by E. R. Hughes (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

²² Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 270.

times academic philosophy has become simply the “construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists,”²³ a “mere fencing in front of a mirror.”²⁴ Philosophy, thus, has been only linked to university education, and reduced to the philosophical discourse developed in the classroom, in the library or on the philosophy professionals’ desk. Philosophy is identified merely with “the textual practices of reading and writing and oral dialogue.”²⁵ It is no longer considered a way of life, but the form of life of a philosophy professor.²⁶ This kind of professional philosophy cuts one off from “the goal that gave it its very *raison d’être* in earlier times, the goal of achieving a vision of reality that would lead to self-understanding and self-transformation.”²⁷

The criticism of modern professional philosophy does not mean that philosophy needs no textual practices of reading and writing, as Richard Shusterman argues, on the contrary, philosophy needs words for the purpose of “transmission and preservation” of insights, ideas, knowledge, etc. However, it is necessary “to distinguish between philosophy and its modes of transmission and preservation.”²⁸ Philosophy is more than a textual practice, more than a literary genre, and more than words, because its duty is to teach people not how to argue, but how to live;²⁹ not how to compose books, but how to shape moral character.³⁰

Indeed, philosophy includes certain modes of discourse which are an essential part of a philosopher’s life; yet, philosophy is not discourse and must not be reduced to discourse. In the ancient West as in the ancient East, one was regarded as a philosopher precisely because one lived a life philosophically, rather than exercising philosophical discourse. The “perpetual danger of philosophy” is that philosophers are always satisfied with philosophical discourse, hence, living in a life of constructing, clarifying and reconfirming concepts, argumentation and discourse; they dare not

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 271. He quotes from A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (London/Toronto: Indian Hills Co., 1958), ch. 17, vol. 2, p. 1163.

²⁵ Richard Shusterman, “Philosophy as a Way of Life: As Textural and More than Textual Practice,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancient and Moderns: Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, ed. by Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark and Michael McGhee (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), p. 40.

²⁶ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 271.

²⁷ John Cottingham, “Philosophy and Self-improvement: Continuity and Change in Philosophy’s Self-conception from the Classical to the Early-modern Era,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancient and Moderns: Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, p. 148.

²⁸ Omoregbe, “African Philosophy,” p. 5.

²⁹ Shusterman, “Philosophy as a Way of Life,” p. 41. He quotes Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. R. Campbell (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 207.

³⁰ Shusterman, “Philosophy as a Way of Life,” p. 850.

go beyond discourses so as to take up the responsibility of radically transforming themselves.³¹

According to Arnold I. Davidson's analysis Hadot claimed that the reason why philosophy became merely a theoretical activity or discourse was threefold: philosophical, historical and sociological.³² Philosophically, Hadot argues that the "natural inclination of the philosophical mind," which is "connatural to the philosopher," tempts people to take refuge in the satisfaction of discourse or in the working of the mind, rather than going beyond that safe zone into life itself.

Historically, the debate between theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages pushed the latter into a conceptual construction and an abstract theoretical activity, rather than the spiritual exercise it was in Antiquity. "Philosophy's role was now to provide theology with the conceptual, logical, physical and metaphysical materials it needed."³³ It no longer had anything to do with spiritual life which belongs only to religion.

Sociologically, the function of universities in the medieval period was to train professionals, namely, professors who train their students on how to accumulate knowledge, how to learn skills and techniques, how to develop an ability for argumentations, etc., so that students could become qualified specialists and professors themselves: "It gives the natural tendency a social basis and impetus, encouraging the display of a specialized technical language as if philosophical depth was exhausted by one's ability to make use of conceptual abstractions and by one's skill at demonstrating the truth and falsity of various propositions."³⁴

Philosophy as a Spiritual Exercise

If philosophy is a way of life, how should we live it and what should we live up to? Hadot suggests that philosophy is a spiritual exercise in which one develops one's spiritual growth and progression. Feng argues that philosophy exists to enable people to become a sage or to develop the character of sagehood in order to seek the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man. Feng says that the philosophical life is a life-long exercise of mind and heart, body and soul. This should not stop at any moment, lest one lose one's inner tranquility, harmony and peace. Philosophers are always in the midst of search, praxis and action, because the philosophical life unites "wisdom" and "love" in philosophers.³⁵

³¹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 31.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁵ Feng, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, p. 9.

Feng distinguishes human life into four different spheres: (1) the natural as the sphere of human innocence, because human beings act according to their natural instincts; (2) the utilitarian as the sphere of egoistic profit, because human beings try to get the maximum benefits for themselves; (3) the moral sphere, where human beings consider society as a whole so that they act not merely for their own good but for the good of the whole society; and (4) the transcendent sphere, where human beings are aware of not only the society in which they live but also above society the universe as a Great Whole. The awareness of the Great Whole is called “knowledge of Heaven”; the duty to the Great Whole is “service of Heaven”; to rejoice in the Great Whole is to “rejoice in Heaven”; and the unity with the Great Whole is “identification with Heaven.” The highest achievement of the human being as human lies in the transcendent sphere; and the one who can reach this sphere is a sage.³⁶ This is what Chinese philosophers attempt to achieve and set as their life goal. Philosophy consists in enabling people to develop the character of such sagehood.³⁷ This is the lifelong effort of a person’s spiritual development.

The significance of the sage in Chinese philosophy is that he/she is a “heavenly” person who does not separate himself/herself from the absolute, a “spiritual” person who does not separate from the essentials of morality, and a “complete” person who does not divorce from the true. The sage makes Heaven the absolute, spiritual quality the root, the Tao the door gate to reveal it in the changing world. He/she is able to live in both the transcendent sphere as the highest life of all and the common world with all its variety. As Feng states: “The sages were able to synthesize the antitheses between the root and the branches, between the small and the great, the fine and the coarse. The sages were able to be mates to the spirits and the imbued with Heaven and Earth, and they were also able to nourish well all creatures and harmonize the society of men.”³⁸

The unity of Heaven, Earth and Man and the character and personality of “sage within and king without,” as well as the manner to achieve these goals, have been the main focuses of Chinese philosophy. It is both “other-worldly” and “this-worldly”; about both knowledge and praxis; about relationships among humans, humans and society, and humans and the cosmos; and about both moral principles and spiritual attainment. John M. Cooper claims that a real philosophical life is “to live committed to following philosophical reason wherever it may lead.” Only by so doing will one achieve the best possible human life.³⁹ In that sense, what classical

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv, p. 1.

³⁷ Feng, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

³⁹ John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 12.

Chinese philosophers reasoned as the best human life is to search for the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man and to be a sage, because philosophy is not merely about being ethical, about being knowledgeable, or about being contemplative, but about being concerned with one's total being as a whole.

Similarly, as Hadot argues, the sage in the ancient West was also conscious of living in the cosmos, and living in harmony with it through living a philosophical life.⁴⁰ Philosophy as love of wisdom cannot be considered merely a "thought exercise," an "intellectual exercise," or even an "ethical exercise"; but above all it is a "spiritual exercise," because only the "spiritual" reveals the true dimensions of these exercises. Through these exercises one is able to "replace" oneself within "the perspective of the Whole"⁴¹ and to transform all aspects of one's being. Wisdom is not "a human state" but "a state of perfection of being and knowledge that can only be divine."⁴² Wisdom is also a vision about things as they are, about the cosmos as it is in the light of reason, and about a mode of living and being according to this vision.⁴³ As the "transcendent norm" wisdom guides actions, provides orientation in life, and transforms one's total being.

Aristotle suggests two kinds of wisdom: practical and theoretical. He believes that only the way of philosophical contemplation can enable people to participate in the divine way of life, to reach the highest or the "transcendent" state, to actualize the divine wisdom in the human world, and to obtain final happiness. This requires inner transformation and personal *askesis*. As Hadot points out *askesis* does not mean "asceticism" in the modern sense, rather it "designated exclusively spiritual exercises, ... inner activities of the thought and the will" in ancient philosophy.⁴⁴ For Aristotle, pure theoretical discourse or scientific research is not an end in itself, rather the *bios theoretikos*, or the way of life in contemplation or the way of life in intellectual activity, is the exercise of life for the attainment of supreme happiness, namely, the attainment of wisdom.

As Hadot points out, the reason why Socrates was able to be "unclassifiable" (*atopos*) is precisely the fact that he is a *philosopher*, who is in love with wisdom. Plato identifies him with Eros, the son of Poros (expedient) and Penia (poverty), who did not have wisdom, but knew how to acquire it. Philosophy at its origin sets its goal to achieve wisdom, to reach the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man, to be a sage, or to develop the character

⁴⁰ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 266.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

of sagehood. This philosophical process is a spiritual progression, unfolding, ongoing and open-ended. In this sense, wisdom is a way of life which brings “peace of mind (*ataraxia*), inner freedom (*autarkeia*), and a cosmic consciousness.”⁴⁵

This spiritual progress or process to achieve wisdom, this search for the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man, are lived and exercised existentially by concrete persons here and now, who are identified as philosophers, who live both “this-worldly” and “other-worldly,” and who do not separate themselves from the real life and the concrete human condition, who make tremendous efforts to reach out to the top of the “cave” but return back to it at the risk of being ruined, mocked, and even killed.⁴⁶ They know that the “cave” is not only the human condition but also the community where we begin our existence. There is nobody or no law which forces them to return to the “cave,” rather it is their responsibility, commitment, conscientious compassion, and above all their love of wisdom which compels them to bring true light and true happiness to those who are still in the “cave.” Thus, the resource of philosophy is from life, from culture, from humanity, and from reality, rather than merely from someone’s idea, thought, and opinion or from textual activities, as discourse which is obviously an important part of philosophical endeavours.

Hadot argues that the Platonic dialogue is a kind of communal spiritual exercise practiced in the public sphere. Each participant is invited to take part in this process of spiritual exercise through an “examination of conscience and attention” to oneself or to the Delphic oracle “know thyself,” to others, and to the entire *polis*.⁴⁷ “A dialogue is an itinerary of thought,” through which one recognizes oneself not a *sophos*, but a *philosophos*, who is “on the way toward wisdom.”⁴⁸

Hence, spiritual exercise does not separate philosophy from life, rather it aims at transforming people’s souls and changing our outlook about ourselves, others and the world, so that, on the one hand, we are able to become a fully integrated being by harmonizing our internal discourse, will and desire with the cosmos, for “the cosmos is the macrophase of humans; humans are the microphase of the cosmos.”⁴⁹ On the other hand, we acknowledge and fulfill our social obligations and duties in accord with justice and love, for as humans we are conditioned by our concrete

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 517a.

⁴⁷ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁹ Thomas Berry, “Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition,” in *Confucian Spirituality*, ed. by Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), volume 1, p. 97.

existential limitations here and now whence we need to attend consciously and conscientiously to where we are and who we are, and how we should be in the “this-worldly” sphere of being.

Hans-George Gadamer points out that the philosopher should be “aware of the tension between what he claims to achieve and the reality where he finds himself.”⁵⁰ Yet, as a spiritual exercise, philosophy is also concerned with the “other-worldly” reality which is beyond the here and now. In this light, philosophy is an art of life, and a practice of learning how to read, how to dialogue, how to live and how to die so as to be friend of wisdom, or at least closer to it.⁵¹

Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay today we are embraced totally by globalization, and living in a rather complex global age. How to understand our new age? How does philosophy help us tackle many new challenges in our current situation? How to understand philosophy itself today? How can each philosophy make its contribution to our world so that we can enrich or be enriched by one another? Can philosophy still help find adequate answers to these many fundamental questions regarding our life, our nature, our past, present and future?

Gadamer suggests that philosophy in the age of science and technology has become something “chimerical and unreal,” or something “utopian or eschatological”; and that hermeneutic consciousness might help change the present dilemma in which philosophy finds itself.⁵² He proposes to begin with a proper understanding of our culture (*Bildung*). This means not only “formation,” “cultivation,” or “education” of one’s intellectual and moral endeavor, one’s sensibility and character, and one’s capability and talents, on the one hand, but it also evokes, on the other hand, “the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul” the image of the divine,⁵³ the Absolute, and the *Tian*, after which human beings shape themselves, cultivate themselves, project themselves and develop themselves.

In this light, culture is not understood or achieved through technical construction, but through the growth of “an inner process of formation and cultivation; therefore it remains in a state of continual *Bildung*.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second, revised edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. xxxviii.

⁵¹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Part II Spiritual Exercise, pp. 81-109.

⁵² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xxxviii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Through culture we live in time and space, we find a certain moral/ spiritual shape either in activity or in condition; we experience “fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be” in life. This is the place of inspiring power and deep motivation where we achieve peace or wholeness, integrity and generosity, joy and fulfillment.⁵⁵

McLean says that culture is a kind of reliving of the origins in an attitude of appreciation, which can lead us to go “beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.”⁵⁶ The integration of values and virtues forms a culture as a complex whole specific to each people through many generations. As a cumulative achievement culture reflects the deepest wisdom of life passed on from one generation to another through time and space and in history. Such a process of passing on, adjusting and applying the traditional values of a culture is not merely received heritage from the past, but also a new creative experience in contemporary circumstances. This allows us not only to uncover the permanent and universal truth, but also to anticipate and perceive the meaning of values in our future.⁵⁷ In this sense, culture is both synchronic and diachronic, both horizontal and vertical, for culture is the living experience of a particular people in a particular time and space. It is rooted in the Great Spirit or “Great Whole” as Feng claims. This grounding of culture enables diverse cultures, peoples and civilizations to participate in the common search for infinite perfection as the true, the good and the beautiful manifest in each one’s own life here and now in history; through each one’s proper way of life; and through each one’s spiritual outreach toward wisdom.

Thus, philosophy as a way of life and an art of living needs to draw its resources from culture and from life. It must come down from the ivory tower and go back to life, to people and to culture in order to be recharged so as to provide a better service to people and society as good friends of wisdom. As both Hadot and Feng argue, the focus of both ancient Greek and Chinese philosophies was on the issue of “how should one live” or “how to live a better life.” If there is a “crisis” in our contemporary philosophy, perhaps, it is where today’s philosophy abdicated answering this question which should be its point of departure.⁵⁸ It is also at this juncture

⁵⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 5.

⁵⁶ George F. McLean, *Beyond Modernity: The Recovery of Person and Community in Global Times: Lectures in China and Vietnam* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2010), p. 137.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵⁸ Bryan W. Van Norden, “What Should Western Philosophy Learn from Chinese Philosophy,” in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe; foreword Patrick Suppes (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1996), p. 239.

where different philosophies can speak to each other in fruitful dialogue, listen to each other in words or silence, and work together for a better answer about how to live a better life in this new global age. This entails a need to understand the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man, and how to be a real friend of wisdom. From this we can get a better and deeper understanding of who we are as human here and now in history.

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2.

Philosophy and (Christian) Wisdom

PETER JONKERS

Introduction

Many authors have noted that wisdom is making a comeback, after being associated for a long time with old people, tradition, and conservative caution in a culture of youth, modernization, innovation, and risky exploration. The revival of wisdom is especially evident in areas where knowledge and (technical) knowhow come up against questions of ethics, values, beauty, the shaping and flourishing of the whole person, the common good, and long-term perspectives.¹ As will become clear throughout this paper, the resurgence of wisdom can be explained as a reaction against the negative effects of the dominance of scientific rationality, which boasts of its objectivity and its independence from ethical and existential considerations. Many people ask themselves “how the modern world can retrieve a wisdom, i.e. a knowledge, a conscience that is not only based on objects of knowledge, but relies also on life itself as it is lived daily, on a way of living and existing?”²

From a broader, historical and cross-cultural perspective, the unilateral focus on scientific rationality in the West is rather exceptional. Religious and secular traditions around the world, from Hinduism over the mythologies of ancient Egypt and Greece to those of Northern Europe, from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, over Zoroastrianism to Judaism and Christianity, abound with revelations of wisdom. These traditions have permeated the history of humankind with stories and legends about and sayings of wise men and women. This becomes e.g. apparent from the eight “immortals” in ancient China, the seven sages of Greece and

¹ David Ford, *Christian Wisdom. Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

² Pierre Hadot, “La figure du sage dans l’Antiquité gréco-latine,” in Idem, *Discours et mode de vie philosophique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014), p. 176.

Rome, the wise men from the East who came to adore the child Jesus,³ the rishis of India, and the five Sufi sages in the Islam. Finally, and on a more implicit level, there is a lot of wisdom present in the literature of all cultures of the world.⁴ In our days too, people are often taking the advice of wise people and words of traditional wisdom to heart when making difficult existential decisions or simply in giving orientation to their lives.

These examples show that, in all cultures around the world, wisdom is bound up with bodies of tradition, which are preserved, adapted and passed on by wise people to the new generations. In sum, wisdom strikes us as an extraordinary kind of knowledge, resting on human experience, but also having a divine origin. Moreover, wisdom is not a purely theoretical affair, but rather a spiritual way of life, consisting in a combination of theoretical insight in divine, i.e. eternal and unchangeable truths (the Greek word “theoria” means “beholding the divine”), and practical and political knowhow. This way of life is the object of an education in a school of wisdom by a master, whom the pupils see as the transcendent norm of this way of life.⁵

When we focus on the development of wisdom in ancient Greek philosophy, it turns out that the introduction of the word “philosophy,” in the fourth century BC, meant a decisive turn in the understanding of the sage, and brought about a deep suspicion against all pretended incarnations of wisdom in the sage. In particular, people became aware of the superhuman character of true wisdom, and the immense distance that separates their ordinary wisdom from divine wisdom.⁶ Plato makes a sharp distinction between the perfect knowledge of the Gods, who possess true wisdom, and humans, who can only strive for wisdom.⁷ One of the consequences of this evolution was that wisdom came to be identified more and more with “*epistèmè*,” i.e. with a certain and rigorous knowledge of eternal and unchangeable things, which comes closest to divine knowledge. For Aristotle, ideal wisdom consists of a perfect knowhow based on total and certain knowledge, not only of the things themselves, but also of their

³ For Barton, the adoration of Jesus by the magi is a paradigmatic story of the quest of the nations for wisdom and of the revelation of true wisdom in a place, where no-one expected it. See Stephen C. Barton, “Gospel Wisdom,” in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World*, edited by Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 95.

⁴ For a broad, cross-cultural, historical overview of wisdom see Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom. A History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015).

⁵ Hadot, “La figure du sage,” pp. 177f. See also Idem, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 334.

⁶ Hadot, “La figure du sage,” p. 178f.

⁷ Plato, *Symposium* 204a f.; Idem, *Phaedrus* 278d.

causes and principles.⁸ By contrast, ordinary wisdom, which is compatible with human nature and crucial for daily life, is a practical knowhow of things that are by nature contingent and changeable. In between these two kinds of wisdom we see the emergence of philosophy, which is the essentially *human* exercise to attain *divine* wisdom.⁹

Given the intermediate position of philosophy, the task of the philosopher consists in the exercise, during her whole life, to become wise herself and to describe, in a philosophical discourse, the ideal sage. This description constitutes the object of numerous treatises, and is the theme of oral practical exercises, aimed at training pupils of wisdom in the different philosophical schools.¹⁰ Aristotle gives an excellent example of what a truly philosophical way of life is: by leading a life of wisdom, the human fulfils her condition in the most superb way, while at the same time realizing that wisdom is, because of its divine nature, beyond the human condition.¹¹ Since the most superb objects are eternal and unchangeable, it is no wonder that, for Aristotle, the highest form of wisdom consists in leading a contemplative life. Yet, this example also shows that wisdom confronts humans with a paradox: “Wisdom corresponds with what is the most essential to man, namely living according to reason and spirit, and at the same time it strikes him as strange and superhuman.”¹² A final important characteristic of leading a philosophical life is that practical exercises in wisdom are not something *added* to the philosophical praxis, complementing an abstract theory or discourse, but a philosophical life as such has to be conceived as a spiritual exercise. These exercises can be defined as “a voluntary, personal praxis, meant to realize a transformation of the individual, a transformation of the self.”¹³ This shows that the final aim of these exercises and, hence, of the schools of wisdom, is not so much to *inform* the disciples about philosophical theories and insights, but to *(trans)form* their lives, that is to educate them.

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I 1, 981b 29.

⁹ Hadot, “La figure du sage,” p. 179.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, x 7, 1177b 26ff.: “But such a life [of wisdom] would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of excellence. If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. [...] We must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.”

¹² Hadot, “La figure du sage,” p. 186.

¹³ Pierre Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), p. 144. See also: Idem, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 276ff.

These characteristics connect the schools of ancient philosophy with most religious and secular wisdom-traditions. Their ultimate goal is not so much to present a philosophical theory of reality or a religious doctrine about the true nature of the divine, but to teach their disciples a method and to train them practically to orientate themselves in thinking as well as in acting. Hence, the link between ancient philosophy and other wisdom traditions is that both are exercises in spiritual ways of life.¹⁴

In this paper, I want to draw the attention to an important aspect of these spiritual exercises, namely that they educate people in *practical* wisdom. The reason for this choice is that practical wisdom specifically deals with contingent human affairs, so that it can be expected to contribute to finding a solution to the current crisis of meaning. Furthermore, the focus of this paper will be on two very influential wisdom traditions or schools of wisdom, namely Aristotle's philosophy and Christian faith. In the next section, I will examine the nature of practical wisdom as developed by Aristotle. In particular, the question will be how practical wisdom succeeds in establishing a relation between universal principles and particular situations, and why this relation is inevitably fragile. Next, the role and importance of practical wisdom in Christian faith will be shown. The section thereafter critically analyses the fate of wisdom in modernity. The final section explores if and how a retrieval of practical wisdom can offer a response to the ongoing loss of substantial meaning, and how Christian faith can contribute to that.

Aristotle's Idea of Practical Wisdom

Although, as argued above, ancient philosophers do not separate the theoretical aspects of philosophy as a spiritual way of life from the practical ones, some of them distinguish between theoretical and practical wisdom. In particular, Aristotle defines theoretical wisdom, which is its highest expression, as a demonstrative knowledge of the universal and necessary principles of all things, which by definition cannot be otherwise. Practical wisdom, by contrast, is a true and reasoned capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man, and which are, consequentially, contingent.¹⁵ Therefore, in order to qualify as true wisdom and not merely as technical knowhow, practical philosophy has to connect this knowhow with a profound insight in what is truly good for all humans. This shows that wisdom, theoretical as well as practical, is not be identical with an enormous amount of factual knowledge, or that a

¹⁴ For a further exploration of philosophy as a way of life and an analysis of Pierre Hadot's ideas on this topic, see the contribution of Hu Yeping in this volume.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1 1, 981b-982b; Idem, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi 3-7, 1139b-1141b.

wise person would be someone who could give all the correct answers to a hypothetical quiz about everything. Rather, wise people are those who can see the bigger picture, whose horizons are broadest, whose vision is clearest, in other words who live in the light.¹⁶

In the case of practical wisdom, there is a crucial additional aspect: wise people not only have a broad vision, but also are able to relate it in a meaningful way to contingent situations that can be brought about by human action. In other words, practical wisdom is a spiritual exercise, aimed at giving a proper orientation to human acting. This orientation being based on a correct, deliberative assessment of contingent, existential situations. In order to examine this aspect of practical wisdom in more detail I take Martha Nussbaum's book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, as my guide.¹⁷ Aristotle holds that moral or practical wisdom is concerned with the ultimate particular fact, and can therefore never become universal knowledge.¹⁸ Furthermore, the appropriate criterion of correct choice is that the person of practical wisdom is a thoroughly human being, i.e. someone who does not attempt to take up a stand outside of the conditions of human life, but bases her judgment on a long and broad experience of these conditions.¹⁹ This shows that Aristotle assumes the meaningfulness and value of our everyday human lives, and tries to discover an account of our underlying moral commitments that does justice to our moral experience. He does not downplay the importance of the common good and the universal moral rules that follow from it, but recognizes that these rules cannot and should not be conceived as the only standard for moral decision in contingent situations. Rather, universal rules are like the leaden ruler of Lesbian architecture, which was not rigid but could be adapted to the shape of the stone.²⁰

Moreover, the values that are constitutive of a good human life are plural and incommensurable, and therefore they cannot be measured univocally, as if morals were a kind of *technè*. There is no single common notion of the good that practical wisdom only needs to apply in order to pass a correct moral judgment in specific situations. Instead, the best human life should be conceived as a life inclusive of a number of different constituents, each being defined apart from each of the others and valued for its own sake; each virtue is defined separately, as something that has value in itself. To put it concretely: "If I should ask of justice and of love

¹⁶ Curnow, *Wisdom*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness. Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi 8, 1142a 23-4.

¹⁹ Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 290.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, v 10, 1137b 29-32.

whether both are constituent parts of *eudaimonia* [...], I surely do not imply [...] that we are to hold them up to a single standard, regarding them as productive of some further value. [...] Something can be an end in itself and at the same time be a valued constituent in a larger or more inclusive end." To choose a value "for *its own sake* (for the sake of what it itself is) not only does not require, but is actually incompatible with, viewing it as qualitatively commensurable with other valuable items."²¹

All this means that one cannot give a correct orientation to one's own or someone else's actions simply by applying principles alone, since they fail to capture the fine detail of the concrete particular. The particular must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself, by a faculty that is suited to confront the situation as a complex whole.²² This faculty is practical wisdom or prudence; its task is to balance the universal rule and the particular situation until one reaches a moment of equilibrium. In order to do this balancing properly, a wealth of practical experience of particular situations is needed,²³ and this cannot be provided by general principles as such. Yet, although their usefulness is limited, these principles too are essential for practical wisdom. As summaries of the wise judgments of others, these principles are guidelines in moral education for the pupils of the schools of philosophy. On a more general level, these rules guide virtuous adults in their approach to the particular, helping them to pick out its salient features. When there is no time to formulate a fully concrete decision, scrutinizing all the features of the case at hand, it is better to follow a good summary rule than to make a hasty and inadequate concrete choice. Furthermore, rules give constancy and stability in situations in which bias and passion might distort judgment. In sum, rules are necessities because we are not always good judges.²⁴ Finally and most importantly, "the particular case would be surd and unintelligible without the guiding and sorting power of the universal. [...] Nor does particular judgment have the kind of rootedness and focus required for goodness of character without a core of commitment to a general conception – albeit one that is continually evolving, ready for surprise, and not rigid. There is in effect a two-way illumination between particular and universal."²⁵

²¹ Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 297.

²² Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, pp. 300f.

²³ Robert Song, "Wisdom as the End of Morality," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, pp. 300f. This conclusion is in line with Aristotle's definition of moral virtue: "Moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a *logos*, the one by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it." See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b36-1107a2.

²⁴ Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 304.

²⁵ Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 306.

The result of the above examination shows in which way practical wisdom is indeed a spiritual exercise in the ancient schools of philosophy, since it aims at giving a proper orientation to human acting on the basis of a correct assessment of particular, contingent situations in the light of general moral principles. This means that the person of practical wisdom is someone who is educated as a thoroughly human being, in particular as someone who realizes that, especially in moral matters, a view from nowhere is impossible. What makes the deliberations of practical wisdom even more complex is that the different virtues do not only not constitute a cohesive whole, but are to a certain extent incommensurable, as the never-ending tension between the virtues of justice and love illustrates. Yet, these virtues are essential because practical wisdom needs them to interpret and orientate human life in particular situations. In sum, the exercises of practical wisdom are meant to educate people in such a way that they are able to find the right balance between the universal rule and the particular situation, and that they realize that this balance is inevitably fragile, always open to reconsideration.

Christian Wisdom²⁶

In his book on Christian wisdom, David Ford describes Christianity as “at present the largest global wisdom tradition.”²⁷ Characteristic of Christian wisdom is that it is God-centered, has the whole of creation as its context, is immersed in history and the contemporary world, and is constantly sought afresh with others in a community whose basic trust is that the Spirit will lead them into further truth. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God’s only son, he is not only a teacher of Godly wisdom, the title by which he is most frequently addressed and referred to in the New Testament, but also wisdom incarnate, a theological claim regarding Jesus which first appeared within the early history of the transmission and development of the traditions regarding Jesus.²⁸ This means that Jesus was not just an enlightened “wisdom teacher,” memorable for his subversive parables and startling figures of speech, since such a reconstruction fails to do justice to the messianic, eschatological dimension of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, and overlooks the extent to which the wisdom which Jesus teaches is a hidden heavenly wisdom, not reducible

²⁶ I developed the question of the nature of (Christian) wisdom in more detail in: Peter Jonkers, “Serving the World Through Wisdom,” in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, edited by Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), pp. 73-105.

²⁷ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 2.

²⁸ James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?,” in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, pp. 79, 83.

to matters of empirical observation or existential need. Rather Jesus' wisdom points to a transcendental reality discerned only by faith and in the context of obedient discipleship. Christian wisdom is not primarily a matter of existential, let alone technical or empirical knowledge, but has much more to do with mystery and revelation. It is a manifestation of the hidden life of God made known in the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God.²⁹

Christian wisdom is primarily gained from reading scripture alert to both its origins, reception, and current interpretations, as well as to contemporary understanding and life. Much of scriptural wisdom is narrative, i.e. lies in the way the story is told, the narrative pattern and detail, the encounters and images, and the key events and statements, as becomes manifest in a paradigmatic way in the book of Job and the stories about Solomon, as well in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The narrative character of scriptural wisdom, and more in general the fact that Christian wisdom has its source in God means that it is inexhaustible and even elusive, and hence can never be fully grasped by a rational interpretation, be it theological or philosophical.³⁰

The essentially divine character of Christian wisdom explains why Paul is so critical of its opposite, namely all manifestations of human or worldly wisdom and human's boasting of it as if it were the result of human knowledge alone. Therefore, Paul qualifies all worldly wisdom rather as folly in the eyes of God, thereby marking its incommensurability with Christian wisdom. In Paul's view, Jews nor Greeks will get the answers they seek, since they ask the wrong questions. Only by believing wholeheartedly in the story of Jesus, and accepting that one's whole life is reframed by it, one can become open to the revelation of God's wisdom.³¹ Beyond doubt, the fact that true wisdom can only be reached through God as the radical, personal Other and through Jesus as wisdom incarnate, and that wisdom is, eventually, the salvific effect of God's grace distinguish Christian wisdom most explicitly from the ancient schools of philosophy.³²

Although these differences are essential, there are also some important similarities between Christian wisdom and the wisdom schools of ancient

²⁹ Barton, "Gospel Wisdom," pp. 108f.

³⁰ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 190.

³¹ Richard B. Hays, "Wisdom According to Paul," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, pp. 122f. See also: Colin Gunton, "Christ, the Wisdom of God: A Study in Divine and Human Action," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, p. 260.

³² Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 372f. See also Paul van Tongeren, "Philosophy as a Form of Spirituality," in *Seeing the Seeker. Explorations in the Discipline of Spirituality. A Festschrift for Kees Waaijman*, edited by Hein Blommenstijn a.o. (Leuven/Paris/Dudley: Peeters, 2008), pp. 109-121.

philosophy. Just like these schools, Christian wisdom is primarily a spiritual exercise, aimed at a transformation or, according to the Christian vocabulary, conversion of the self. Furthermore, just like in ancient philosophy, the final goal of Christian wisdom is inevitably elusive, because the faithful are convinced of the immense distance that separates God's true wisdom from the seeming wisdom of the world. In order to overcome this gap to some extent, Christians need spiritual exercises under the guidance of a spiritual master. Finally, Christian wisdom is not primarily a doctrine of the true nature of the divine, but a spiritual way of life that orientates the lives of the faithful, i.e. their thinking as well as acting.

On the basis of the analysis of Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom in previous section, one can ask if and how Christian wisdom educates people to deal with the contingencies and particularities of individual human lives. A case in point in this respect is Catholic social teaching, which manages to relate this aspect of the Christian wisdom tradition to the heterogeneous realities of persons, societies, and political regimes all over the world. The way, in which Catholic social teaching realizes this is by conferring to prudent individuals and groups in society the responsibility to establish a balance between the universal rules of the Christian wisdom tradition and the particular situations in which people live.

In order to show how this approach works, let us take the social encyclical *Deus caritas est* as an example. It states that "the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live."³³ This quotation shows, first, the ambition of the Catholic Church to orientate the contingent lives of contemporary societies on the basis of the universalist principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and human dignity, which are concretizations of Christian wisdom, in particular, of the Catholic view on the common good. But, second, the Church also recognizes "the autonomy of the temporal sphere," and therefore it refrains from imposing these principles directly on modern, by definition pluralist societies. Hence, when it comes to interpreting the contingent sphere of day-to-day politics in the light of the Church's social teaching, and directing political action on the basis of this teaching, the Church relies on the deliberative capacities of (Christian) politicians and members of civil society at large. Their task is to find a balance between the fundamental principles of social teaching and the contingent opportunities and constraints of civil societies, thereby accepting that it will differ from society to society.

³³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 27.

The Fate of Wisdom in Modernity

In the previous sections, it has become clear that ancient philosophy and Christian faith, notwithstanding their substantial differences, have served throughout antiquity and a major part of the Middle Ages as schools of wisdom, educating people, through corporeal and above all spiritual exercises, in a specific way of life in pursuit of wisdom. Besides educating people in the contemplation of the highest truths (theoretical wisdom), the aim of these exercises was to train them in practical wisdom, which according to Aristotle comes down to finding again and again the right balance between general rules and contingent, particular situations. In the light of these illustrious and longstanding wisdom traditions it is all the more surprising that (practical) wisdom has lost so much of its respectability and plausibility since the rise of modernity. It is crucial to examine the causes of this development if we want to retrieve the role of wisdom traditions as a response to the global crisis of meaning.

A first, partial explanation of the declining impact of the ancient schools of wisdom has to do with the success of Christianity. "Since the end of antiquity, and with respect to pagan philosophies, Christian revealed theology has replaced philosophy and it has absorbed at the same time ancient philosophical discourse and ancient philosophical life."³⁴ Christian theology employed philosophical concepts that had been studied throughout antiquity, in particular by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic commentators. These concepts were needed to solve the theological problems that were raised by Christian doctrine, such as the notions of essence and hypostasis (for the doctrine of the Trinity), of nature (for the doctrine of the Incarnation), and of substance (for the doctrine of transubstantiation). As a result of this employment, Christian theology reduced ancient philosophy to its purely theoretical aspect, so that it gradually lost its character as a spiritual way of life. Instead, Christian faith became the only one and true philosophy, and adopted the existential aspects of ancient philosophy. In other words, Christian faith became a spiritual, more specifically ascetic and mystic way of life, thereby recapturing a Christianized version of the spiritual exercises and certain mystical themes of ancient philosophy.³⁵

However, the above does not account for the fact that, in the course of the middle ages, Christian theology too became more and more a theoretical affair, and lost contact with practical wisdom. For a concrete example

³⁴ Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 181. See also Idem, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 379f.

³⁵ Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 382f. According to Hadot, the Christianized spiritual exercises have been adopted by the monasteries, and partly by the laity; examples are the examination of conscience, the meditation of death (*memento mori*), the exercises to imagine hell etc. See Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 182.

of this development, one only has to compare the existential and autobiographical character of many of Augustine's writings, especially his *Confessiones*, with the theoretical, academic character of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Important factors that contributed to turning theology into a theoretical discipline were the foundation of the universities from the late eleventh century onward and the introduction of (translations of the works of) Aristotle in Western Europe, a century later. In the academic philosophical curriculum, which had to be completed before entering the faculty of theology, students familiarized themselves with philosophical concepts that served as instruments for the theoretical clarification of Christian doctrine, mostly through studying commentaries on Aristotle's works. This scholastic method of teaching philosophy, which had already separated philosophical discourse from philosophy as a way of life,³⁶ had a similar effect on the nature of theology and the way in which it was taught. In sum, this evolution turned not only philosophy, but also theology into a primarily theoretical discipline. Because a (neo-)scholastic kind of theology remained predominant till mid twentieth century, and had a special status in many faculties of philosophy and theology,³⁷ the theoretical, c.q. doctrinal character of these disciplines was strengthened and solidified further. In general, this situation led to an ever stronger emphasis on the doctrinal aspects of Christian faith as such.³⁸

Yet it has to be noted that the idea of philosophy as a spiritual way of life was not lost completely in modernity, but continued to be practiced, although this was done by philosophers who did not have a formal position at a university, and often as a reaction against academic philosophy. One can think of Petrarch, who refused to call the professors at the university philosophers, and reserved this name for those who authenticated their teaching with their deeds. Other notable examples of people who continued to do philosophy as a way of life were Erasmus, Montaigne, and Spinoza,³⁹ and in the twentieth century Heidegger and Wittgenstein.⁴⁰

³⁶ Hadot notes that, in the medieval *facultas artium*, philosophy continued to enjoy a relative autonomy, which led some philosophers to rediscover, through their commentaries on Aristotle, the idea of philosophy as a spiritual way of life, independent from theology. However, these ideas were not well received by the theologians and the ecclesiastical authorities, since they opened the possibility that humans could become blissful through a purely philosophical contemplation. See Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 183.

³⁷ Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, p. 388.

³⁸ See Peter Jonkers, "From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, edited by Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), pp. 168-172.

³⁹ Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 394ff.

⁴⁰ Even Hegel, who was the strongest protagonist of the systematic character of philosophy in the history of Western thinking, explicitly defines philosophy as a way of life in one

In the context of this paper, I especially want to draw the attention to the philosophy of Descartes. The simple fact that he gave his most important philosophical work the title *Meditationes*, well aware of the fact that it referred to the illustrious examples of ancient and Christian spirituality, shows that he considered philosophy not as a purely theoretical, academic discipline, but as a spiritual exercise. Moreover, the direct and personal way in which Descartes addresses his readers shows that he wanted them to engage in the spiritual exercise he was undertaking. Let me, by way of illustration, quote the first sentence of the third meditation:

I will now shut my eyes, block my ears, cut off all my senses. I will regard all my mental images of bodily things as empty, false and worthless (if I could, I would clear them out of my mind altogether). I will get into conversation with myself, examine myself more deeply, and try in this way gradually to know myself more intimately.⁴¹

In a similar vein, Descartes' letters to princes Elisabeth of Sweden are exemplars of spiritual guidance. Yet, on the other hand, Descartes rejected all ancient and medieval schools of wisdom, and wanted to start "from scratch" with his philosophical explorations. In his *Discours de la méthode* he is very explicit about this: he likens

the moral writings of the ancient pagans [...] to very proud and magnificent palaces built only on sand and mud. They praise the virtues, making them appear more admirable than anything else in the world; but they don't adequately explain how to tell when something is a virtue, and often what they call by this fine name 'virtue' is merely an instance of callousness, or vanity, or despair – or pesticide!⁴²

This takes us to a final and perhaps most decisive factor that determined the fate of philosophy as a pursuit of wisdom in the course of modern philosophy, an evolution that I propose to label as "the scientification of wisdom." Again, the philosophy of Descartes is paradigmatic in this respect. The wider context of above quote from the *Discours de la méthode* shows that Descartes not only wanted to start philosophy from scratch

of his (early) course manuscripts: "As regards the general need for philosophy, we try to clarify this need in the form of an answer to the question, which relationship has philosophy to life? This question is identical with the question: to what extent is philosophy practical? Since the true need for philosophy comes eventually down to that one learns to live from it and through it." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band 5: Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), p. 261.

⁴¹ René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes [Edition Adam et Tannery]. Tome vii: Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), p. 34.

⁴² René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes [Edition Adam et Tannery]. Tome vi: Discours de la méthode* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), p. 8.

and on his own, but also that his aim was to found it once and for all on a solid, unshakeable basis, this in contrast to the sandy and muddy foundations on which the ancient schools of philosophy rested. In other words, Descartes wanted to get rid of the contingency and fragility, which characterize practical wisdom, and replace it by a new kind of wisdom that is the product of robust, scientific knowledge, founded on the mathematical method. Hence, he takes the fundamental decision, with far-reaching consequences, to expand the mathematical method to all other disciplines (an approach called “mathesis universalis”). This leads to a radical redefinition of philosophy as scientific in the strictest sense of the word. Because it rests on an indubitable and absolutely clear foundation, philosophy is able to produce a knowledge that has the same degree of certitude and clarity as mathematics. Hence, it can serve as the groundwork of all (other) sciences.

For the fate of wisdom in modernity it is vital to note that Descartes redefines the word wisdom and identifies it with scientific knowledge.

By wisdom is to be understood not merely prudence in the management of affairs [which was the habitual definition of practical wisdom], but a perfect knowledge of all that man can know, as well for the conduct of his life as for the preservation of his health and the discovery of all the arts, and that knowledge to serve these ends must necessarily be deduced from first causes.⁴³

Therefore, if one wants to reach the highest degree of wisdom, one needs, first of all, a perfect knowledge of all things, and this can only be obtained if one starts from the principles, taking into consideration that they “are very clear, and [...] that we can deduce all other truths from them.”⁴⁴ This shows how the Cartesian method of the mathesis universalis has affected the very nature of philosophy, including practical wisdom. Descartes compares his new, strictly deductive idea of philosophy with

a tree, of which metaphysics is the root, physics the trunk, and all the other sciences the branches that grow out of this trunk, which are reduced to three principal, namely, medicine, mechanics, and ethics. By the science of morals, I understand the highest and most perfect which, presupposing an entire knowledge of the other sciences, is the last degree of wisdom.⁴⁵

The above shows that Descartes follows the line of thought, defined by Aristotle and followed by Thomas Aquinas and other medieval philoso-

⁴³ René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes* [Edition Adam et Tannery]. Tome IX/2: *Principes de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Descartes, *Principes de la philosophie*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Descartes, *Principes de la philosophie*, p. 14.

phers and theologians, according to which theoretical philosophy, in particular the scientific knowledge of the first causes and principles of things, is the highest form of wisdom. Yet, at the same time, Descartes distinguishes himself from Aristotle, because he rejects the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom, and reduces the latter to the former. Descartes' comparison of the whole of philosophy with a tree shows that practical wisdom has indeed become a derivative of scientific knowledge. The implication of this reduction is that a crucial aspect of the Aristotelian idea of practical wisdom, namely to find a balance between universal rules and contingent, particular actions, and the acknowledgement of the inevitable fragility of practical wisdom fades away. Descartes is convinced that the certainty and univocity that characterize the *mathesis universalis* also count for the whole of reality, so that, eventually, there is no contingency anymore. This means that practical wisdom is meant to be elevated to the rank of scientific knowledge. In Descartes' view, this results eventually in a so-called definitive science of morals, which consists in a direct and univocal application of a limited number of absolutely clear and indubitable scientific principles to all particular existential situations, basically in the same way as the laws of motion apply to the interaction of all physical objects.

The Cartesian program to reduce practical wisdom to scientific knowledge remained paradigmatic in the course of the history of modern philosophy. Prominent examples in this respect are Leibniz' definition of wisdom as "a perfect science of all those things that are in the reach of the human heart,"⁴⁶ Fichte's project to replace philosophy as the love of wisdom by the doctrine of science,⁴⁷ and Hegel's programmatic statement that "to help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title "love of knowing" and be actual knowing [...] is what I have set myself to do."⁴⁸ In twentieth century philosophy one can refer to the project of the Vienna Circle to develop a "scientific worldview".

The practical translation of this paradigm was scientism, which was a dominant trend in Western societies during the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, and which continues to be quite influential in our times. Scientism's central claim is that scientific rationality is able to solve

⁴⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Von Glückseligkeit," in: Idem, *Philosophische Schriften, Band VI:3* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980), pp. 645f. It deserves to be noted that, in this text, Leibniz refers approvingly to Descartes' comparison of wisdom with the fruits of the tree of philosophy.

⁴⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie," in Idem, *Werke, Band 1: Zur theoretischen Philosophie I* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 38f.

⁴⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band 9: Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980), p. 11.

all moral and existential questions of humankind in an objective, scientific way, from how to define and evaluate social progress to offering a solution to the more fundamental problems of human freedom and destiny. This shows that scientism styles itself as the definitive instantiation of practical wisdom on a purely scientific basis, claiming to be able to answer all the questions of substantial meaning. However, in the course of the twentieth century, it became more and more evident that scientism failed to live up to its expectations.⁴⁹ Its claims turned out to be overly optimistic because of the enormous complexity of all major societal and existential questions, such as how to solve the ecological crisis in a fair way, how to divide wealth justly, how to prevent mass-killings, how to evaluate the practical implications of fundamental existential notions like freedom, respect, solidarity, love etc. Moreover, scientific and technological developments have confronted people with a lot of new existential problems, which cannot be solved in a purely scientific way, as the intricate moral questions about the beginning and end of human life show. Finally, scientism's redefinition of all kinds of existential problems in a so-called objective and scientific way turned out to be disruptive for the life-world, which is precisely the domain where the need for practical wisdom is most acute.⁵⁰ In sum, scientism's claim to serve as the definitive answer to all questions of substantial meaning turned out to be not only unfeasible, but also fundamentally wrongheaded.

Practical Wisdom as Response to the Loss of Substantial Meaning

After the disillusion about the promises of scientism, the fundamental question crops up whether a retrieval of wisdom traditions can be a response to the above problems. In order to introduce this response it is first of all necessary to examine the nature of the loss of substantial meaning more closely. It comes as no surprise that this loss is the flipside of the success of scientism, in particular of the fact that scientism has led to a marginalization of all wisdom traditions, reducing them to contingent opinions because of their non-scientific character.⁵¹ Important factors that

⁴⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 16ff.

⁵⁰ See Peter Jonkers, "A Reevaluation of Wisdom to Reconnect Philosophy with the Life-world," in *Philosophy and the Life World*, edited by He Xirong, Peter Jonkers, and Shi Yongze (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2017), pp. 49-51.

⁵¹ See Peter Jonkers, "Contingent Religions, Contingent Truths? A Philosophical Analysis of the Role of Existential Truth in Religious Ways of Life," in *Religions Challenged by Contingency. Theological and Philosophical Perspectives to the Problem of Contingency*, eds. Dirk Martin Grube and Peter Jonkers (Brill: Leiden, 2008), pp.167-170; Peter Jonkers, "Religious Truth in a Globalizing World: New Challenges to Philosophy of Religion," in *Religion*

have contributed to the loss of substantial meaning in our times are the processes of “bricolage” and consumerism. The term bricolage refers to the fact that the life-styles of many people are the result of tinkering, of fitting elements of various wisdom-traditions into an individual religious patchwork. Whether or not this bricolage is successful only depends on one’s subjective preferences, on whether one feels good with them. The term consumerism is used to refer to the fact that many people’s attitude towards wisdom traditions is similar to that of consumers in a supermarket: in the enormous shopping-mall of today’s globalized culture, they pick and choose what meets best their personal needs. Obviously, all these life-style products try to seduce the consumer into buying. The result is a generalized eclecticism, in which people not only have lost contact with traditional schools of wisdom and the substantial meanings that they foster, but also are reluctant to let themselves influence by these schools.⁵² Instead, they are constantly busy constructing and reconstructing the content and meaning of their lives, gaining information about whether there is anything attractive in the latest new trends, desperately hoping to get likes” from their peers for their lifestyle, and always afraid of being out of vogue.

Although most people welcome these developments, the loss of substantial meaning confronts them from time to time with the feeling of being uprooted, of living in a fragmented and continuously changing world void of stable orientation-points. In other words, many people in our times have a strong, but indefinite longing without substantial belonging. They express this by using keywords like *conversion* and *pilgrimage* to characterise their existence. However, in my view, this restlessness only shows that they are caught between their aversion to commit themselves to substantial traditions and their longing for such commitments for the sake of giving orientation to their lives.

In order to explain this restlessness further, one can refer to Durkheim, according to whom normative uncertainty is latently present in all modern societies. Individual and societal moral norms are not derived anymore from an eternal divine order or an immutable natural law, but depend on societal recognition. Moreover, the rise of expressive individualism has further strengthened the idea that moral norms are nothing but (social) constructions, thus enhancing their instability. Therefore, it is no surprise that the great variety of norms and values and the speed, with which they are changing cause a dominant experience of normative uncertainty. Another important cause of this experience has to do with the fact that some of the predictions of the modernization theory on moral issues have

and Politics in the New Century: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives, edited by Ph. Quadrio and C. Besseling (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009), pp. 189-197.

⁵² Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p.165.

not come true. This theory predicted the emergence and diffusion of an ethos of individualism and instrumentalism in all modern societies, as well as the rise of a procedural, rational, and universalist ethics, combined with the fading away of all kinds of social discrimination. This would eventually lead to a society, in which cultural and religious differences would be irrelevant, so that conflicts over substantial values would belong to a distant past.

However, in contrast to this prediction we see that traditions, religious and secular ones, continue to leave a lasting imprint on the lives of people in all European societies. These traditions are especially important in those domains where modernization has eroded the functional basis of traditional moral rules, without being able to provide plausible new ones, such as the care for the sick and elderly. Another persisting problem of modern societies is that moral rules, which seem at first sight universal and rational, lose their self-evidence when people try to apply these rules in particular moral dilemmas.⁵³ What has made this problem even worse is the fact that these universal principles tend to become ever more formal (or abstract) and procedural, while the moral decisions that people have to take in particular situations become more and more entangled. Finally and most importantly, even the strongest defenders of liberal, modern democracies have recognized that procedural moral principles lack the motivational potential that people need to act in accordance with these principles.⁵⁴ In sum, there is a widening gap between the universal, but formal moral principles of modernity and the substantial values that people need as guidance in their concrete moral behaviour, while at the same time it becomes clear that the former have not been able to replace the latter.

This explains why the question of the crisis of substantial meaning is an acute and topical one. As a response to it, Hadot proposes a reevaluation of schools of (practical) wisdom, religious and secular ones; they are a sort of “experimental laboratories,” whose results can be very useful to orientate ourselves in life.⁵⁵ In my view, the reason for their importance in our times is that these schools not only educate us in discovering and critically examining the principles of practical wisdom and their specific implications in different contexts, but also train us to find the right balance between these principles and the particular situations, in which we have

⁵³ Hermann Dülmer, “Modernization, Culture and Morality in Europe: Universalism, Contextualism or Relativism?,” in *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe*, edited by Wil Arts and Loek Halman (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 257.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in der Öffentlichkeit. Kognitive Voraussetzungen für ‘öffentlichen Vernunftgebrauch’ religiöser und säkularer Bürger,” in Idem, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 137.

⁵⁵ Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 166.

to act. These schools also “employ” so-called masters of wisdom, who are essential in training people to make the transition from book learning to lived wisdom. It goes without saying that Christian faith, just like many other religious and secular traditions, is a school of wisdom. Yet, just like was the case in ancient times, the contemporary schools of wisdom have to operate in a competitive field, so that they have to substantiate that the orientation they offer is trustworthy. Only then they will be accepted as contributing to solving the crisis of substantial meaning.

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The Soteriological Meaning of Buddhist Wisdom with Regard to the Opposing Views on *Agotrasattva*: Based on Woncheuk's View

GYU-EON JANG

One of the central themes in Buddhism is the problem of salvation. And like all other great texts, Buddhist texts have riddled the scholars, for millennia, with contradictory remarks that lead to various interpretations. As a scholar, I believe that studying these conflicts help us to better understand the teachings held within these great texts. One of them is the theory of *gotra*. The problem of *agotrasattva*, beings deemed incapable of salvation, informs one of the fundamental questions in Buddhism; can all human beings achieve salvation? In this essay I would like to introduce this fascinating debate, riddled with tension, and, in the process, Buddhism in general. This debate raises fundamental questions as to what it means to be human from a Buddhist perspective, that is the extent to which the capacity to be saved is inscribed in human nature itself. It also hinges upon the parallel question of the relationship between the human norm, its loss, and the possibility of its recovery. In this sense, the theory of *gotra* may provide our contemporary world with expedient intellectual and spiritual tools to deal with some aspects of the current crisis of meaning.

I will divide my essay into three parts: A brief introduction about the life of Woncheuk as a Buddhist thinker who developed a significant view of *gotra*, general remarks on *gotra* theory, and the opposing views on *agotrasattva* and their philosophical implications. The former two are preliminary explanations for the last one, the main topic.

Life of Woncheuk as a Buddhist Thinker

Profound thinkers, I believe, are especially sensitive to such contradictions. One such thinker was Woncheuk. Woncheuk (圓測, Ch. Yuance

613~696) was born in Ancient Korea and traveled to Tang China at the age of 15 to study Buddhism. During his early period in China, he studied the thought of Mind-Only school, or Yogācāra, of Buddhism translated and transmitted to central China by the Indian monk Paramārtha by Fachang (法常) and Sengbian (僧辨), two famous masters of *Shedashenglun shi* (攝大乘論釋, Vasubandhu's Commentary on Asaṅga's *Summary of the Greater Vehicle* translated by Paramārtha). Many years later, he also studied the new tradition of the Mind-Only school as transmitted by Xuanzang (玄奘) who returned from his studies in India. It also included some different interpretations from those of Paramārtha. *Gotra*, discussed in this essay, is a typical example of them.

Thereafter, Woncheuk became well-known as a scholar for writing annotated commentaries mainly on Xuanzang's newly translated scriptures such as *Banyasimgyeong chan* (般若心經贊; Ch. *Boruoixinjing zan*; Commentary on *The Heart Sutra*), *Haesimmilgyeong so* (解深密經疏; Ch. *Jieshenmijing shu*; Commentary on *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*), and *Inwanggyeong so* (仁王經疏; Ch. *Renwangjing shu*; Commentary on *Sutra for Benevolent King*) while staying in Ximing Temple (西明寺) in Chang'an (長安).

When Wuzetian (武則天) held power, he also participated in the translation of Buddhist canonical texts under her command. Before Woncheuk's life came to an end, he lived at the Foshouji Temple (佛授記寺) in Luoyang (洛陽). There he gave lectures on the eighty volumes of *Huayan jing* (華嚴經; Flowers Ornament Sutra) in the translation of which, led by Fazang (法藏), the actual founder of Huayan school of Buddhism, he himself participated.

His works were widely read in his days as well as having been transmitted to, and studied in, central China, Dunhuang (敦煌, a frontier of Tang dynasty), Tibet, Korea, and Japan in later generations. In particular, the entirety of *Haesimmilgyeong so* in Classical Chinese was translated into the Tibetan language (Tib. *Hphags pa dgoñs pa zab mo ñes par hḡrel paḡi mdo rgya cher hḡrel pa*; Skt. *Ārya-gambhīra-saṃhinirmocana-sūtra-ṭīkā*; henceforth SNST) by Chos grub (法成; Ch. Facheng) around 820 A.D. during Tibet's occupation over Dunhuang (circa 786-848) and surrounding areas (nowadays Gansu 甘肅 Province). It was widely read and appreciated by Tibetan Buddhist thinkers including Tsong Kha pa (1357~1419), and transmitted as part of the *Tibetan Tripiṭaka* to these days; this is an exceptional case. His works, written in Chinese, were translated into Tibetan; a rare phenomenon since Tibetan monks at the time translated their texts directly from Sanskrit. This testifies to his genius in that they found his teachings worthy of translating.

Woncheuk as a Deliberate Interpreter or Coordinator of the Opposing Views on *Gotra*

His biography shows that Woncheuk studied the doctrines of both the Paramārtha and Xuanzang lineages of the Mind-Only school as transmitted to central China. Contemporary scholars consider Woncheuk's scholarship to contain both depth and scope in that it has synthesized in detail the two different traditions of thought in the Mind-Only school, including the so-called *gotra*-theory.

In *Haesimmilgyeong so*, Woncheuk summarized the main controversial points between the Paramārtha and Xuanzang lineage thinkers on *gotra* and quoted essential passages selected from various Buddhist scriptures as their canonical evidence. In the wake of these works, he ultimately endeavored to reconcile the earnest conflict between the two groups of thinkers through his own hermeneutical framework.

Meanings of *Gotra*

As Ruegg points out, the word *gotra* either designates, *extensionally*, a soteriological and gnoseological category or class; or it designates, *intentionally*, the spiritual factor or capacity that determines classification in such a category or class. Its meanings are then associated with a socio-biological metaphor (*gotra=kula, vaṃśa* "family," etc.) and a biological or botanical metaphor (*gotra=bīja*, "seed, germ").¹ Interestingly, each of these two implications is specified by different translations in Chinese. In the extensional sense the Chinese word Zhongxing (種姓), "caste," was used primarily, as was also Xing (姓), "family name," and other terms. The word Zhongzi (種子), "seed," or Xing (性), "nature," was employed to designate the intentional implication.

Categories of *Gotra*

The chief *gotras* or spiritual categories usually mentioned in the classification of Mahāyāna literature are the Auditors who make up the *rāvaka-gotra*, the Individual Buddhas who make up the *pratyekabuddha-gotra*, and the Bodhisattvas who make up the *bodhisattva-gotra*. These three categories coincide with the three separate Vehicles (*yāna*) as recognized by the Mind-Only School. Each of the three categories is thus comprised of persons capable of achieving a particular kind of maturity and spiritual

¹ David Seyfort Ruegg, "The Meanings of the term *gotra* and the textual history of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, v. 39, n. 2, 1976, p. 341.

perfection in accordance with their specific type or class, the Auditor then attaining Awakening (*bodhi*) characteristic of the *rāvaka*, and so on.²

Does the difference in their spiritual perfection imply a hierarchy among them? In Mahāyāna literature, the former two categories, which are generally classified by their spiritual disposition, are only included in “the Lesser Vehicle” (*hīnayāna*) while the last one represent “the Greater Vehicle” (*mahāyāna*). There is therefore definitely some kind of hierarchy among the three separate Vehicles.

In addition to these three Vehicles, certain sources, especially those of the Mind-Only tradition, add two further categories. These are the undetermined (*aniyatagotra*), the category made up of persons not yet definitively attached to one of the three preceding classes, and the non-*gotra* (*agotra*), the category made up of persons who cannot be assigned to any spiritual class.³

It is by including these two categories in the “actual” *gotras* of the Indian tradition, that Xuanzang, who is believed to be a founder of the Chinese Mind-Only school, constructed the so-called “Five-*Gotra* System.”

Opposing Views on the Ontological Status of *Gotras*: Are the Differences among *Gotras* Absolute or Temporary?

The *gotra* functions as a spiritual or psychological “gene” determining the classification of sentient beings into the specific categories.⁴ There have been opposing views on the ontological status of the “gene” in the Mind-Only school tradition in India.

Some thinkers consider the difference among separate *gotras* as absolute. According to them, the three Vehicles are ultimately and absolutely separate because they lead to three quite different kinds of Awakening in accordance with their respective group: *rāvaka* (the Auditor), *Pratyekabuddha* (the Individual Buddha), and *Bodhisattva*. On the contrary, others argue that the difference between the three Vehicles are temporary; the Vehicles are ultimately one because all sentient beings will finally attain Awakening and Buddhahood which are essentially one.

The two opposing views on *gotras* in India were also transmitted to the East Asian tradition by Paramārtha and Xuanzang respectively. In Woncheuk’s eyes, by approving the former position, Xuanzang challenged the latter view supported by Paramārtha and his followers. This would lead to the controversy between the two opposing groups, which persisted

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

throughout his own time and during that of the following generation. In order to highlight the difference between their positions, employing Woncheuk's perspective, I shall hereafter refer to Paramārtha and his followers as "One Vehicle lineage thinkers," whereas Xuanzang and his successors will be referred to as "Three Vehicles lineage thinkers."

Why Do *Agotrasattvas* Matter?

Especially conspicuous in the controversy is the non-*gotra*. This category of persons seem to have been considered, at least by certain Indian Mind-Only School thinkers interpreted by Xuanzang, as spiritual "outcast," lacking the capacity for attaining spiritual perfection or Awakening of any kind. Since they achieve neither *bodhi* nor *nirvāṇa*, they represent the same type as the *icchantikas* to the extent that the latter also are considered to lack this capacity.

Xuanzang generally called this category of persons "*wuxing youqing*," (無性有情 *agotrasattva*) which was understood as the sentient beings without Buddha-nature; his use of this category was taken by his contemporaries as a recognition of the "real" existence of a kind of persons who could never attain Buddhahood. For this very reason, his acceptance of *agotrasattva* faced a strong opposition from most Chinese Buddhist thinkers, including One Vehicle lineage thinkers. In this sense it is said to be a defining characteristic of his school.

But why does the existence of *agotrasattva* matter? In the eyes of most thinkers, it seemingly conflicts with the teaching of Buddha's Great Compassion, which never retains the hope for salvation of "all" sentient beings; how can we reconcile the existence of those forever damned if Buddha's Great Compassion aims at saving all sentient beings?

Soteriological Meaning of Buddhist Wisdom as Reflected in Interpretations of *Agotrasattvas*

As is easily assumed from the opposing views mentioned above, *gotra* theory is like a textile. As in an intertwined fabric, there is a vertical view that there exists an actual difference among *gotras* and a horizontal view that Buddha's *nirvāṇa* transcends their differences. Interpretations of *agotrasattva* not only highlight this feature, but also imply a characteristic of Buddhist Wisdom related to the salvation of human beings: the contradiction or tension between Buddha's Wisdom and his Great Compassion.

To expose the soteriological meaning of Buddhist Wisdom in relation to the opposing views of *agotrasattva*, I will focus on two conflicting views of *agotrasattva* among the East Asian Buddhist thinkers presented by

Woncheuk, and examine him as a negotiator who tried to reconcile the conflict between them. I will then discuss the philosophical implications of Buddhist Wisdom reflected in the opposing views, including Woncheuk's interpretation thereof.

Two Conflicting Views of *Agotrasattva* among East Asian Buddhist Thinkers

The View of One Vehicle Lineage Thinkers

One Vehicle lineage thinkers, who still appreciate the unity among sentient beings or Buddhist practitioners regardless of their actual differences, are characterized by their appreciation of Buddha's Great Compassion, which never gives up the hope for the salvation of *agotrasattvas*. Their position is closely associated to the doctrine that all sentient beings will attain complete Awakening, which, aside from Xuanzang and his successors, is traditionally supported by the majority of East Asian Buddhist thinkers.

The endless hope for the salvation of *agotrasattvas* based on this doctrine, is well-presented in the passages from *Rulengjia jing* (入楞伽經; Skt. *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*), as shown as follows:

Mahāmati, who are the non-*gotra* practitioners? They are *icchantikas*. ... *icchantikas* are divided into two kinds. ... One kind is comprised of those who destroyed all the root of Awakening, the other of the persons who are compassionate toward all sentient beings and prays that all their worlds of cyclical transmigration would completely cease to exist. ... *Bodhisattva-icchantikas* for ever do not reside in *nirvāṇa*. Why? Because they know so well that all phenomena including the worlds of cyclical transmigration are by nature *nirvāṇas*, and therefore do not need to seek and reside in *nirvāṇa* outside them. But it is not the case for *icchantikas* who destroyed all the root of Awakening. Why? If *icchantikas* who destroyed all the root of Awakening would encounter with Buddhas, Sages, etc., they could immediately decide to devote themselves to Awakening, maturing all the root of Awakening, and end up attaining *nirvāṇa*. Why? Because all the Buddhas would never desert all sentient beings, therefore *Bodhistva-icchantikas* for ever do not reside in *nirvāṇa* (T16 527a29-b20; paraphrase).

Here we can find two remarkable points with regard to Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion. One is that Buddhas (*Bodhisattva-icchantikas*) do not reside in *nirvāṇa* "forever" not only because of his Awakening or his Wisdom regarding the reality of all phenomena, but also because of his Compassion for all sentient beings who lack the root of Awakening (*icchantikas*). The other point is that the latter ones are the *raison d'être* of the former ones. Buddha's hope for salvation of all sentient beings must remain for as long as they exist.

The View of Three Vehicles Lineage Thinkers

On the contrary, Three Vehicles lineage thinkers, who emphasize actual differences among *gotras*, reveal the ambiguity between the Buddha's hope and desperation for the salvation of *agotrasattvas*.

Sometimes they pay attention to the Buddha's effort to save the sentient beings without *gotra*, which is depicted in *Pusadichi jing* (菩薩地持經) as follows:

Even in the case of persons who have no gotra, Buddha helps them mature their spiritual potentiality by leading them to practice for attaining the same root of Awakening as the residents of good destinies in cyclical transmigration like humans and heavenly gods have (T30, 900a7-8, paraphrase).

Here we discover Buddha aiding them with the hope that they will recover their potential for Awakening and start cultivating themselves toward the path of perfect Awakening.

However, Three Vehicles lineage thinkers are more likely to emphasize Buddha's desperation. This point is made most explicitly in the passages from *Dashengzhuangyanjing Lun* (大乘莊嚴經論; henceforth *Zhuangyan lun*; Skt. *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṅkāra*; The Ornament to the Mahāyāna Sūtras), as in the following verse

Some have solely ill conduct, ... and *some also lack the cause*. This [verse] refers to those who are without *gotra*, those who lack the qualities associated with *parinirvāṇa*. And this is, to put it briefly, in two ways: lacking the qualities associated with *parinirvāṇa* at the present time (*tat-kāla* 時邊) and for ever (or "absolutely"; *atyantam* 畢竟). ... But *those who for ever (or "absolutely") lack the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa – those who lack the cause – simply do not have the parinirvāṇa gotra* (T31 595a21-29).⁵

Here we see that the author of the text clearly distinguishes between the sentient beings "absolutely" lacking the potentiality of complete Awakening (*parinirvāṇa*) and the "temporary" (at the present time) *agotrasattvas* – the very persons for whom Buddha has hope for salvation.

Interpretation of Woncheuk as a Negotiator between the Opposing Groups

Let us now consider Woncheuk's view on the controversy between the aforementioned opposing groups. Woncheuk tries to answer the apparent

⁵ English translation of the Skt. text taken from Mario D'Amato, "Can All Beings Potentially Attain Awakening? Gotra-Theory in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, p. 125.

contradiction between *Rulengjia jing's* encouragement, namely the view that even *icchantikas* who lack the root of Awakening could end up attaining *nirvāna*, and *Yujiashidi lun's* (瑜伽師地論; Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-sāstra*) confirmation, namely that the non-*gotra* is the person who lacks any seed of Awakening held by the Three Vehicles of practitioners. Woncheuk's solution to these canonical incompatibilities is as follows:

The persons lacking *gotras* can be divided into two kinds: *those who lack them at the present time* and *those who lack them forever*. This point is supported by the passages from *Zhuangyan lun*, as follows: "Those who lack the qualities associated with *parinirvāna* are divided into two kinds: lacking them at the present time and for ever." Therefore *Rulengjia jing's icchantikas* who lack the root of Awakening can be included in the first kind, while *Yujiashidi lun's*, the persons who lack any seed of Awakening, belong to the second one; they are compatible. Moreover, apart from these two kinds of *icchantikas*, *Rengjia jing*, mentions another kind as follows: "The persons lacking *gotras* can be divided into two kinds: the first one is the *icchantika* who destroyed all the root of Awakening. He is the person who lacks them temporarily. The second one is *the person who lacks them for ever because of his own Bodhisattva's Compassion*." Therefore this person (= *Bodhistva-icchantika*) is not the same as those who lack *gotras* for ever, as mentioned in *Zhuangyan lun* (ZhT68.79.4-80.8; P106.38a4-b4; for a critical revision of this quotation, see Jang 2013: 261-263, paraphrase).

It seems that Woncheuk could answer the question by classifying the non-*gotras* into three kinds: (1) "temporary" sentient beings without Buddha-nature; (2) "definitive" sentient beings without Buddha-nature; and (3) Bodhisattva with Compassion for them.

Hermeneutical Predicament of Woncheuk as a Buddhist Commentator

In sum, Woncheuk is a negotiator between these two conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, he appreciates the possibility of salvation of *agotrasattva*, as supported by One Vehicle lineage thinkers, on the other hand he accepts the existence of "real" *agotrasattva* who could never attain Awakening, as approved by Three Vehicle lineage thinkers.

Nevertheless, why didn't he either positively assert or absolutely negate the potentiality of *agotrasattva's* Awakening? Why did he take such an ambiguous attitude toward the most serious controversial point? In a sense, Woncheuk's ambiguous and multifaceted view on this issue is fundamentally connected with the "hermeneutical predicament" of Buddhist thinkers or commentators; they must accept all kinds of Buddhist teachings as absolute Truth while recognizing them as seemingly contradictory.

Philosophical Implications of Buddhist Wisdom with Regard to the Salvation of Human Beings

This predicament or ambiguity on the possibility of *agotrasattva*'s attaining Awakening ironically presents a multi-level characteristic of Buddhist Wisdom itself, namely, the contradiction or tension between Buddha's Compassion and Wisdom. Buddha's Wisdom as Awakening perceives the reality of human beings who suffer from the bondage of egocentric desire, based on the ignorance of "Non-Self." It is therefore exclusive of the latter, and reveals the extrinsic and provisional "limits" of the scope of salvation. Buddha's Compassion accompanied by Awakening, on the contrary, could be symbolized as an "unceasing heart," motivated by the hope of guiding human beings to attain Awakening, provided that they could be inspired by Buddha's teachings. There is no limit, here, to the soteriological power of Compassion.

From this tension we can read that Buddhist Wisdom is intrinsically oriented to the salvation of human beings. As is well-known, Buddha himself originally pursued the liberation from his own bondage of cyclical transmigration by recognizing the fact that all tragedies of human beings come from the attachment to the Self, which, in reality, is no more than a fabricated fiction. But significantly enough, after the Awakening, with his Compassionate heart, the Buddha accordingly embraced his neighbors who suffered from the same affliction as he, and started to teach his own truth, with the hope that it would liberate them from their own bondage. The Love of Wisdom epitomizes by the search for Awakening may be deemed to be but the other side of the Wisdom of Love as Compassion toward all sentient beings.

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ZZ: *Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō* edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon (electronic text from CBETA)

WX: *Man Zokuzōkyō* edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon (reproduced in Taipei, 1977)

ZhT: *Zhonghuadazangjing* edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon (collated edition published by China Tibetology Research Center in 2001, comparing the *Peking*, *Narthañ*, and *Cone* editions against the *sDe dge* edition)

P: *Peking* edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon (reprinted under the Supervision of the Otani University, Kyoto, 195).

WONCHEUK (圓測), *Haesimmilgyeong so* (解深密經疏; Ch. *Jieshenmijing shu*; Commentary on *Samādhirāsmocana-sūtra*) (ZZ21; WX34-35) *Ḥphags pa dgoñs pa zab mo ñes par ḥgrel pañi mdo rgya cher ḥgrel pa* (ZhT68-69)

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Wisdom and Compassion as Enduring Values in Shin Buddhism

JOHN PARASKEVOPOULOS

The Buddhist tradition represents, perhaps, the only major Eastern religion that offers itself to all aspirants, regardless of circumstances or caste. As a living faith with approximately 500 million adherents, it promises spiritual emancipation, not only for monks, but for lay people as well. In its Mahāyāna phase, especially, the “Greater Vehicle” caters to every conceivable human disposition and temperament, thus opening a path to a truly universal approach to awakening. The particular focus of this presentation – Shin Buddhism – represents the consummation of the “Pure Land” current within the Mahāyāna and offers itself as a compelling option for ordinary individuals living in the midst of worldly distractions away from the serenity of monastic enclosures.

This essay will focus on some key features of the Shin school – the largest denomination of Buddhism in Japan – that distinguish it as an important exemplar of the cardinal Buddhist virtues of wisdom and compassion. By demonstrating a holistic metaphysical vision that is philosophically rich and readily accessible, it will be shown that it also has much to offer contemporary seekers looking for a deeper form of spiritual and intellectual sustenance, without having to sacrifice the need for devotion. In doing so, we hope to serve another objective and that is to challenge the widespread misconception that Buddhism is not, in fact, a religion but rather a variety of atheism – broadly considered – in that it does not subscribe to a higher reality. Many in the West take the view that Buddhist beliefs are essentially compatible with secular rationalism insofar as they lack any religious or mystical elements; in other words, that they are bereft of a transcendent dimension. In dispelling such misunderstandings, we will come to see that Buddhism firmly belongs to the great family of world religions within which it rightly holds its place as a beacon of profound and unique insights into spiritual truth and the human condition. Given that a number of Western Buddhists have come from Christianity (often

having fled from unhappy or disappointing experiences), it is difficult to broach the topic of a “divine” reality without provoking a strong reaction, inasmuch as anything that smacks of “God-talk” is resentfully dismissed as un-Buddhist. This is rather unfortunate and surely a case of throwing out the baby with the bath-water. Let us be absolutely clear about this: Buddhism does not abandon the notion of an ultimate reality although it does refine it in order to avoid many of the troubling limitations that so bedevil certain theistic notions of God. Even from its earliest days, Buddhism recognised a realm that transcends this world, blissful and free from suffering; a sphere of enlightenment possessed of the highest happiness, described (in the early *Samyutta Nikāya*) as:

... the far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unageing, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge ... (SN 43:14)

This is no earthly reality to which one can point. There is nothing in our world of flux, uncertainty and unhappiness that corresponds, even remotely, to such a description. It is quite deliberately depicted as *other-worldly* in that it offers the strongest possible contrast to our situation in this life. In that sense, the earlier Theravādin tradition was strictly dualistic – there was Nirvāna (our final goal) and there was this world, with no connection between them whatsoever. With the emergence of the Mahāyāna, this hard dualism was gradually abandoned and its understanding of Nirvāna became more nuanced as it began to be viewed under the various aspects through which it was experienced: Suchness, Emptiness and Buddha-nature. No longer was this reality viewed as distant and merely transcendent. It was also envisaged as dwelling at the heart of all things, in that the plenitude of life and its teeming forms were seen as a reflection of it; as its embodiment in the transitory phases of the material universe. Nāgārjuna even went so far as to equate Nirvāna with *samsāra* in order to make the point that they were inseparable. We are never divorced from this reality as it encompasses all things while remaining beyond anything we can conceive.

In the Pure Land tradition, the attributes of Nirvāna developed even further such that it became invested, not only with the qualities of wisdom and blissful liberation, but active compassion as well; a reaching out to suffering beings that are only so many aspects of itself, which is what accounts for the indissoluble bond between them.

We are able to respond to this compassion in everyday life through a form of awakening embodied in the practice of *nembutsu* (or invocation of the Buddha’s name) which, at the end of our lives, becomes the vehicle for

returning to our true state. Such a realisation cannot be generated within the confines of our cramped and petty egos or through the ephemeral concerns of this passing world. This is why one should not simply identify Nirvāna with the world without any qualification. The world both “is” and “is not” Nirvāna (“not” in the sense of being riddled with ignorance and suffering of which Nirvāna is free and “is” in the sense that it is a manifestation or “crystallisation,” at a lower level, of this same reality).

In any event, to dismiss a belief because it resembles (in part) something you have already rejected, does not make it false. Yes, Shin does indeed have features in common with other religions – how could it not? – but it also distinguishes itself from them in very important ways that are unique to it. The renowned Buddhist thinker, D. T. Suzuki, once remarked that all religions have their origin in the Absolute which has dispensed their saving teachings in a way that conforms to the countless needs and frailties of ordinary people. He also remarked that: “The highest reality is not a mere abstraction; it is very much alive with sense and intelligence and, above all, with love purged of human infirmities and defilements.”¹

Once that which is formless takes on salvific forms to express itself, it must also assume the shortcomings that come with it (and in a plethora of ways according to the endless varieties of human nature) such that differences – often deep-seated – are inevitable. If ultimate reality is truly compassionate, it will leave no sector of mankind without guidance and illumination, despite the strife, conflict and mutual incomprehension to which the varied religious forms often give rise. In this sense, much more separates Buddhism from contemporary atheism than it does from other faiths, which – at the very least – recognise the primacy of the spiritual.

It is quite apparent that Mahāyāna Buddhism openly acknowledges the existence of a supreme reality that, as we have seen, is not only known as Nirvāna (being the state of complete liberation from ignorance and suffering) but also the *Dharmakāya* (or “Dharma-Body”), characterised by the attributes of “eternity, bliss, true self and purity.”² The Dharma-Body is transcendent in the sense that it cannot be identified with the world of the senses or the rational intellect; that is, it lies beyond anything we can perceive or apprehend. However, it is also immanent in all things, which is what allows us to have experiential knowledge of it (in that we become aware of its existence through that part of us which shares in its nature). To put it another way, we gradually come to know it as the very act of this reality knowing itself through us. The Hua-yen school, which arose in China and was founded on the famous *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, provides one

¹ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *The Essence of Buddhism* (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1948), p. 47.

² *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Asvaghosha*, Yoshito S. Hakeda trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 65.

of the most explicit understandings of the highest reality in Buddhism in which all phenomena are “expressions of an originally pure and undifferentiated mind.”³ According to Hua-yen:

The full diversity of sentient experience and the experienced world – the subjective and the objective, the true and the false, the pure and the defiled, the latent and the manifest – is seen to rest upon, or to grow from, a common noetic source.⁴

This view of reality became very influential in the development of doctrines that subsequently flourished in China, Korea and Japan. One can see the genesis of this doctrine in the Eternal Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Buddha of Infinite Light (Skt. *Amitābha*; Jp. *Amida*) of the popular Pure Land sūtras and the cosmic “Great Sun” Buddha (Skt. *Mahāvairocana*; Jp. *Dainichi*) prominent in the esoteric school of Shingon. The latter, in particular, views all reality as a manifestation of this Buddha – which it identifies with the Dharma-Body itself – considered as: “... the centre of the cosmos... the point toward which all integration moves and from which the multiplicity of the phenomenal world comes into form.”⁵

So how is the Dharma-Body different to theistic conceptions of God? Without wishing to be comprehensive, it would be fair to say that, according to the Mahāyāna, the world is a spontaneous expression of this reality – there is no conscious design or willed creation *ex nihilo*. This manifestation is an eternal and cyclical process that does not have an origin in time. Similarly, *samsāra*, which is ultimately grounded in the Dharma-Body, is also without beginning. Some might argue that the two realms should not be linked in this way but if one is committed to non-dualism (which I think one must be as far as the Mahāyāna is concerned) then, logically, we cannot avoid the conclusion that *samsara* – as an impermanent realm – must, in some way, be dependent on the Dharma-Body as an eternal reality. There really is no other option. Short of considering *samsāra* as a completely separate reality (which only a Theravādin could do) or as somehow identical as Nāgārjuna claimed (but in a way that is, arguably, incomprehensible to the unenlightened), one is compelled to acknowledge this dependence. Furthermore, it is this very non-duality that also renders intelligible the central Mahāyāna notion of the interconnectedness of all things, for beneath the deceptive and dream-like world of appearances, we

³ Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), p. 7.

⁴ Robert M. Gimello, *Chih-yen (602-668) and the Foundation of Hua-yen Buddhism* (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1976), p. 411.

⁵ E. Dale Saunders, *Buddhism in Japan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), pp. 161 & 168.

find that there is nothing substantial that truly separates one being from another.

At this point, one could ask: If Buddhism goes down this path, is it not also in need of a “theodicy,” so to speak, or an explanation of how a world riddled with unfathomable suffering has arisen from a realm of purity and bliss?⁶ If the Hua-yen formulation can be allowed to serve as our standard, it would appear that the world is, in some sense, a reflection or disclosure of the Dharma-Body itself. It is as if this reality manifests itself in a mode that is limited and fractured but one that remains, nevertheless, a dimension of its own boundless essence. The Absolute, as a consequence of its infinite nature and the dictates of karmic necessity, adopts countless finite forms through which it expresses itself as the world. Suzuki has stated:

The Dharmakāya, being “emptiness” itself and having no tangible bodily existence, has to embody itself in forms and is manifested as bamboo, as a mass of foliage, as a fish, as a man, as a Bodhisattva, as a mind. But these manifestations themselves are not the *Dharmakāya*, which is something more than forms or ideas or modes of existence.⁷

However, this comes at a cost. By unfolding itself in this way, the Dharma-Body also assumes the forms of imperfection and evanescence as the price to be paid for this manifestation. On one level, therefore, the need for a theodicy is avoided because this process is seen as spontaneous and not a deliberate divine act. The reality of evil and suffering is a direct consequence of living in a finite and disfigured world where things are incomplete, fragmented, not fully realised and “empty” as Nāgārjuna would say; that is, not possessed of “own-being” (*svabhāva*), always dependent on other causes and conditions for their existence and thus in a constant state of unstable flux.

Furthermore, as the Dharma-Body is not omnipotent (as God must be in theistic religions), the conditions of *samsāra* as we experience them cannot be other than what they are; neither can they be changed arbitrarily by divine *fiat*. *Samsāra*, by definition, is restless, fugitive and unsatisfactory – it can never become an earthly paradise for it does not possess the attributes of Nirvāna; namely eternity, bliss and purity which are reserved solely for that which is unconditioned. The real question for Buddhists, therefore, is not “Why is there evil?” but “Why is there manifestation?” Why did the immutably serene state of Nirvāna, a realm of pure being, become this vale of tears? Beyond replying that it is in its nature to

⁶ Peter N. Gregory, “The Problem of Theodicy in the *Awakening of Faith*,” *Religious Studies* (nr. 22, 1986).

⁷ D. T. Suzuki, “The Buddhist Conception of Reality,” *The Eastern Buddhist* (Vol. VII, nr. 2, October 1974).

express itself as the infinitely varied and complex world of *samsāra* with all its joys, horrors, beauties and perplexities, there is no answer that can readily be given, for how does one account for essential spontaneity and its consequences? Notwithstanding its illuminative power, how can the sun also not burn? How can snow resist being cold or a rose withhold its scent? Indeed, how can even nightmares not arise – involuntarily and as a universal possibility – from a latent impure consciousness. The implication, of course, is that this unwillful manifestation of the Absolute is a necessary corollary of “Infinite Life” (*Amitāyus*, one of the names of the Buddha in the Pure Land tradition) and not the outcome of divine contrivance. One could say, then, that this is the ultimate mystery that Buddhism leaves unresolved rather than the problem of evil (which is largely addressed through the doctrine of *karma*).

After all, a major stumbling block for theistic faith is the difficulty of reconciling the goodness and omnipotence of God with the incomprehensible suffering and unhappiness we find in the world. In fact, one could argue that it is well-nigh impossible. Buddhism offers the distinct advantage of not positing an all-powerful deity that brings creation into being through a conscious act of will. And yet, in the non-dual scheme of the Mahāyāna, the supreme bliss of Nirvāna is not severed from the miseries of *samsāra* but, clearly, neither are they identical. To be sure, this is a profound mystery at the heart of reality but it cannot be avoided. A conclusion we can reach is that this world is, in some respects, a broken image of a better one (that cannot be fully realised in this life and of which the reality of *dukkha* or suffering is a constant reminder). Its unsatisfactory nature reflects an estrangement from our origin while the joy, love and beauty we do find in it reveal Nirvāna’s luminous presence at the core of everyday life, prompting us to pursue a higher awakening. Evil is a consequence of living in a flawed reality that is evidently not a realm of bliss; however, this world is not entirely bereft of its light either. The ubiquity of suffering is no reason, therefore, to doubt the reality of Nirvāna – our very capacity to recognise suffering as such, and to want to free ourselves from it, is proof enough of its opposite.

So far, our discussion may seem a little one-sided or even negative. We have focused more on the features of transcendence and little, it seems, on the perspective of immanence. Both, of course, are required in order to maintain a balanced and orthodox view despite the challenges that this might present, so what are we to say about immanence? This concept was largely absent from Theravādin doctrine but the Mahāyāna insisted on the presence of the Buddha-nature in each sentient being as the means through which enlightenment was possible. According to this view, one cannot become a Buddha except through the agency of the Buddha within. If the infinite did not dwell in the heart of the finite, then

the latter cannot be liberated and attain realisation of its true self as Nirvāna. However, there are some other dimensions to immanence that need to be addressed and they concern our experience of love and beauty.

While an extended discussion of these aspects is not possible within the constraints of this paper, the key thing to note is that, from the perspective of non-dualism, the *Mahāsukha* (“Great Bliss”) of Nirvāna cannot but permeate the realm of *samsāra*. In *The Awakening of Faith* – a deeply influential Mahāyāna text – we find an important distinction made between the “essence” of Suchness which is immutable, inconceivable and eternal, and the “attributes” of Suchness which serve to infuse the opaqueness of *samsāra* with the radiant influences and qualities of Buddha-nature. Accordingly, it is possible to consider all those instances when we are confronted with an experience of profound love, joy or beauty in life as traces of Nirvāna’s bliss in our everyday world: “For Kūkai (founder of the Shingon school), what is beautiful partakes of the Buddha.”⁸

Such experiences compel us to transcend the infirmities of our brittle nature by seeking union with a higher reality at the heart of existence, as well as serving to remind us of the extent to which we are also often alienated from it.

In summary, the doctrine of non-duality enables the reconciliation of two seemingly contradictory notions in that it preserves the ultimate transcendence and inconceivability of Nirvāna while, at the same time, stressing – not so much the strict identity as Nāgārjuna claimed – but the “non-difference” (to use an awkward expression) between it and *samsāra*. In *The Awakening of Faith*, we read:

Just as pieces of various kinds of pottery are of the same nature in that they are made of clay, so the various magic-like manifestations (*māyā*) of both enlightenment and non-enlightenment are aspects of the same essence, Suchness.⁹

In other words, the world is “not other” than Suchness or the Dharma-Body and this by virtue of it being an extension of this very same reality; yet, paradoxically, it must also remain “remote” given its impermanence and manifold imperfections.

We now need to address, albeit belatedly, the connection of the foregoing discussion to Pure Land Buddhism. The rise of this school of Buddhism was in response to a number of factors that would have weighed heavily on people during the time of its inception, namely: (a) the need to make the Buddhist Absolute as accessible as possible to ordinary people

⁸ Saunders, *Buddhism in Japan*, p. 161.

⁹ *The Awakening of Faith*, pp. 45-46.

through the use of a wealth of rich and positive symbolism designed to heighten the aspiration for enlightenment; and (b) an acute recognition of the difficulty of attaining full enlightenment in the present life during the Decadent Age of the Dharma (what the Hindus call the “Age of Kali”).

More than any other Buddhist tradition, the Pure Land school has been the most sensitive to the implications of suffering and samsāric life for sincere individuals who are struggling with personal weakness and the seemingly insurmountable barriers of anger, greed and ignorance in the pursuit of enlightenment. In the face of the ineradicable shortcomings and paradoxes of the human condition, these teachings offer hope to those for whom spiritual perfection seems hopelessly elusive. It does so through the assurance of ultimate liberation and enlightenment via the agency of Amida Buddha – the personal and active dimension of Nirvāna – which is manifested in us through the invocation of His Name as the activity of what the tradition calls “Other-Power” (*tariki*); that is, a force that transcends the debilitating confines of the ego and which constitutes the well-spring of all spiritual endeavour.

The world is, indeed, a reflection of the ultimate reality (*Śūnyamūrti*, “Manifestation of the Void”) but it cannot, by virtue of this fact, be considered as merely identical with it. This may very well be the key to unravelling the mystery of non-duality. *Samsāra* is “not other” than Nirvāna for the Mahāyāna only recognises one reality which manifests itself through infinitely varied forms and possibilities but *samsāra* cannot be experienced as Nirvāna because of the inherent limitations of everything that is other than the Unconditioned. However, direct experience of this reality – in the midst of *samsāra*’s turbidity – is still possible while remaining bound to our status as ordinary unenlightened beings (Skt. *prthagjana*; Jp. *bombu*). This experience, known as *shinjin* (“true heart/mind”), marks the entry into our deluded consciousness of the Buddha’s “Infinite Light” (*Amitābha*). Far from turning us into completely enlightened individuals, such an awakening reinforces the deep awareness of our own turpitude while permitting us to experience something of the joy and illumination of Nirvāna in this very world of birth-and-death. Perhaps this is how we might understand Shinran (founder of the school we are considering) when he says: “When Faith is awakened in the minds of deluded and defiled ordinary people, they are made aware that ‘birth-and-death is Nirvāna’.”¹⁰

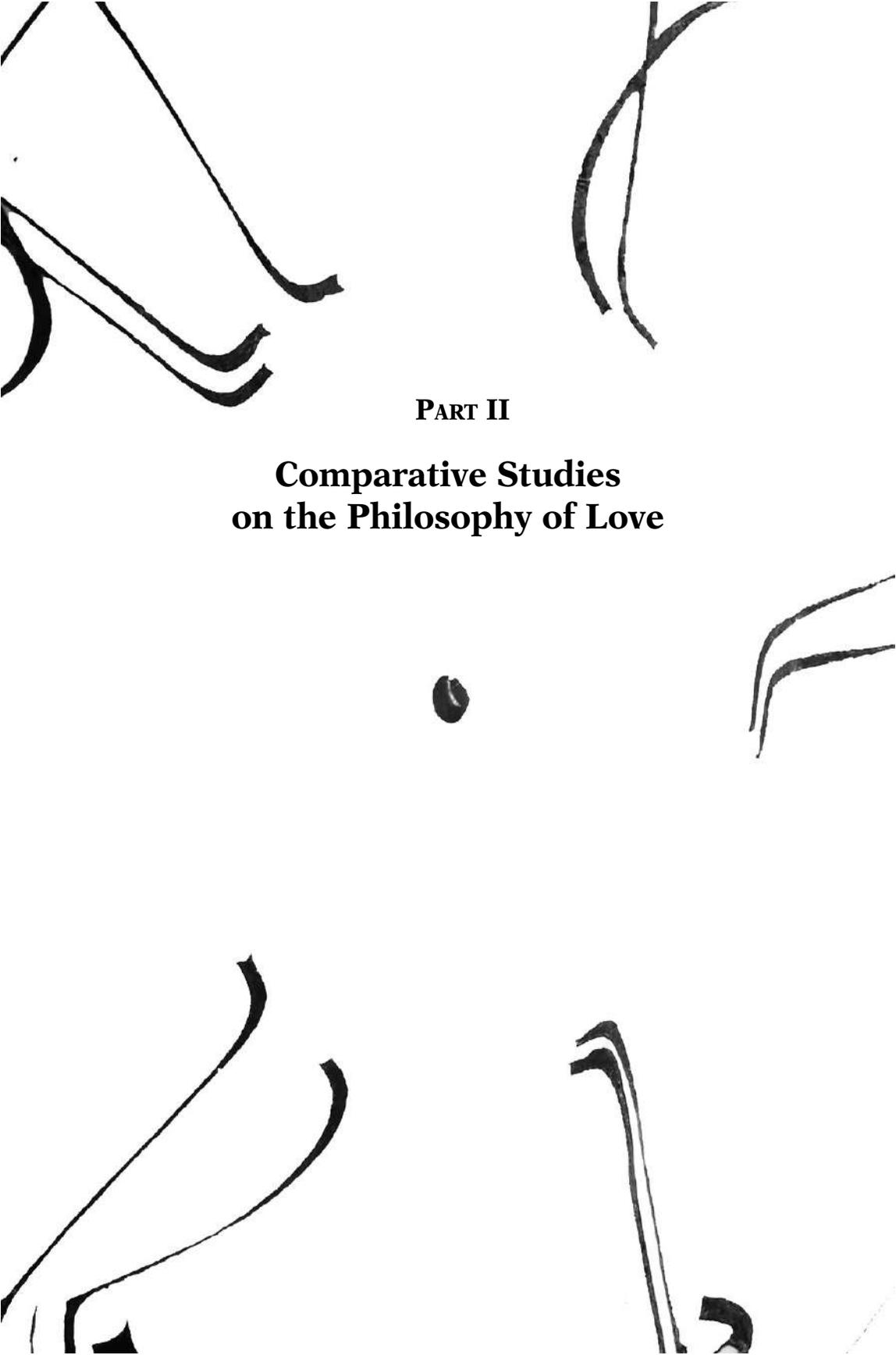
At this point, we find ourselves at an impasse as we approach the very limits of what language can convey, where paradox is inevitable and at which point it is, perhaps, best to remain silent in face of the ineffable.

¹⁰ *The Shōshin Ge*, Daien Fugen a.o. trans. (Kyoto: Ryūkoku University, 1961), p. 36.

In conclusion, we can see that this tradition offers a compelling response to the challenge posed by the pernicious tide of contemporary nihilism. It does so through urging us to re-discover and assert our spiritual nobility in seeking the deepest truth there is despite our all-too-human flaws and vulnerabilities. The paramount crisis afflicting the modern world today is the absence of meaning, a lost awareness of the transcendent and a corresponding diminution of our dignity as beings who must fulfill their true vocation as wayfarers on a journey back to our divine source. This quest for who we really are lies at the heart of this liberating wisdom, our love and yearning for which is not merely a philosophical pursuit but a response to the beckoning call of the ultimate reality whose inconceivable yet steadfast compassion makes us come to know it as immeasurable light and unending life.

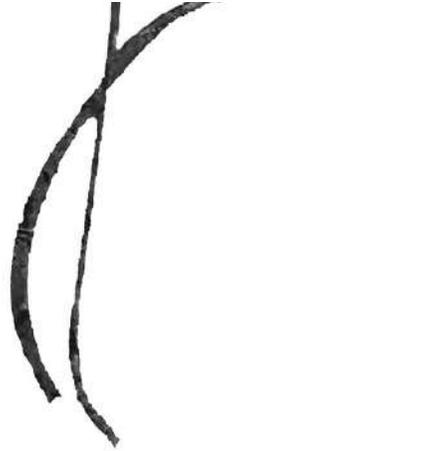
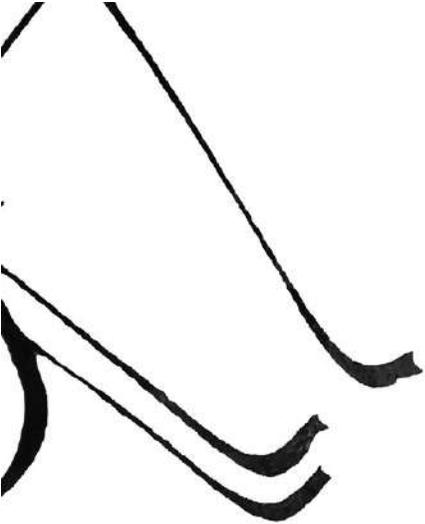
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PART II

**Comparative Studies
on the Philosophy of Love**



Can Love Be a Principle of Tolerance? Confronting Locke, Augustine and Ghazālī

ADRIEN LEITES

*To Djamila Rahmani,
a defender of tolerant love and
a knower of harmful love*

A feature of the current “crisis of meaning,” as far as I can understand this phrase, is that the definite meaning of words tends to be replaced by their emotional output. Consider the following sentence: “Love is a value shared by the great religions, in particular Christianity and Islam, and thus provides a principle of universal tolerance.” This sentence or the like¹ will not sound strange to you. Indeed, you are likely to have heard it from those who feel that humanity is going astray, that our societies are plagued by the multifaceted evil of extremism. If you have not heard the sentence before, you might spontaneously adhere to it because, to you, it conveys a message of hope in a growingly distressful world.

But can love actually be a principle of tolerance? The present article will ask this general question through more specific ones, and will give only tentative answers. We will start with John Locke’s *Letter on Toleration*, written in Latin and published in 1689.² When reading the *Letter*, I noticed

¹ A more learned, though messy, version appears in *A Common Word between Us and You* (“Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders” sent in 2007 to the heads of the various Christian Churches, and available on www.acommonword.com): “[...] for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an: *Let there be no compulsion in religion....* (Al-Baqarah, 2:256). This clearly relates to the Second Commandment and to love of the neighbour of which justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part” (p. 14). In the assimilatory picturing of the letter, “love of the neighbour” is shared by Christianity and Islam.

² John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia, A Letter on Toleration; Latin Text edited with a Preface by Raymond Klibansky, English Translation with an Introduction and Notes by J. W. Gough* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1968).

that love is often mentioned, but never regarded as a principle of tolerance. So the first question I wish to ask is: What accounts for this simultaneous presence and relegation of love?

Locke

Love or “charity”³ occurs twelve times in the *Letter*. These occurrences may be divided into four groups. In the first group, love just appears as a distinctively Christian quality.⁴ The second group associates love with qualities such as meekness (*mansuetudo*), benevolence/good will (*benevolentia*), peace (*pax*) and toleration (*tolerantia*).⁵ In the third group, pretended love is exposed. One passage shows the inconsistency of the persecutors, who target followers of other religions while neglecting their morally unfit coreligionists. The author wonders when he will see the persecutors “remonstrate their love and desire for the salvation of their [corrupt brethren’s] souls by the infliction of all kinds of cruelties and torments,” and adds:

For if it is out of charity, as they pretend, and care for men’s souls, that they deprive them of their property, mutilate their bodies, torment them in noisome prisons, and in the end take away their lives, all to make them believers and procure their salvation, why do they allow fornication, deceit, malice, and other vices, which according to the Apostle (Rom. i) so plainly smell of paganism, to run riot among their own people?⁶

Another passage shows a further inconsistency:

If anyone wishes to make a soul, whose salvation he heartily desires, expire in torments, and that even in an unconverted state, I shall be greatly

³ Etymological translation of *caritas* in the Latin text of the *Letter*. *Caritas* is, with *amor* and *dilectio*, the Latin word for “love.” On the distinct uses of these words, see Adrien Leites, *Amour chrétien, amour musulman* (Paris : Fayard, 2015), pp. 179-181 (Glossaire). The translation of *caritas* as “charity” seems to be justified by the fact that Locke also uses *amor*, and that “charity” meaning “love” is attested at least up to the mid-nineteenth century (see *The Oxford English Dictionary*; Second Edition, Prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner; Volume III (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 42). I assume that, in the related English works of Locke, “charity” retains this meaning, and should not be understood in the mere modern sense of benefaction.

⁴ “[...] no man can be a Christian without charity, and without the faith which worketh, not by force, but by love [*amor*]” (p. 59, allusion to “faith which worketh by love” in *Galatians*, 5 : 6), “contrary to the laws of the Gospel and the precepts of charity” (p. 147).

⁵ “charity, meekness and good will” (p. 59), “devoid of charity and meekness” (my translation; corresponding phrase on p. 65), “benevolence and charity” (p. 79), “peace and Christian charity” (p. 85), “charity, meekness and toleration” (p. 87).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

surprised, and so, I think, will others also. But nobody, surely, will ever believe that such an attitude can proceed from love, good will, and charity.⁷

The inconsistency appearing in this passage concerns the motive of persecution already mentioned in the previous passage, and thus completes Locke's argument. The persecutors say they act out of a desire for the other people's salvation and, with the same meaning, out of love. If they really do, how can they despise the worldly interest of these people, including their life? The conclusion is that the persecutors merely pretend to act out of a desire for the other people's salvation, out of love. Their real motive is, to anticipate the next passage, a desire for dominion.

In both passages, pretended love is pictured as a pretended desire for the other person's salvation. A picture of true love, however, is provided by a last group of occurrences. Let us consider, out of the two passages that make up this group, the more developed one:

It follows that as a man does not violate anyone's right by his own wrongful worship, or injure other men by not sharing their correct religious views, and as his perdition does not prejudice the prosperity of others, the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself. But I would not have this understood as if I meant to rule out all admonitions of charity,⁸ and endeavours to refute men's errors, which are indeed a Christian's greatest duty. Anyone may employ as many exhortations and arguments as he pleases for another man's salvation; but all force and compulsion must be forborne, and nothing be done for the sake of dominion.⁹

The charity pictured by this passage, a true love indeed, corresponds to the pretended love of the persecutors. It is likewise a desire for the other person's salvation. Since, as Locke says elsewhere, "there [is...] only one way to heaven,"¹⁰ and since I necessarily follow the way I believe to be this single one, love is the desire that the other person join me on my chosen way. It is, in short, a desire for the other person's assimilation.¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁸ Gough translates *charitatis monita* as "charitable admonitions". My more literal translation is justified by the fact that Locke also uses the adjective *charitativus*, and that the two phrases have distinct connotations. "Admonitions of charity" may suggest that charity is the source of the admonitions, whereas "charitable admonitions" merely suggests that they have the character of charity.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125. The other passage runs as follows: "We have already proved that the care of souls does not belong to the magistrate. Not a magisterial care, I mean (if I may so call it) which is exercised by laying down laws and compelling by punishments: for a charitable care [*charitativa cura*], which works by teaching, admonishing, and persuading, cannot be denied to anyman" (p. 91).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹¹ Love as a desire for the other person's assimilation appears in an earlier work of Locke. In an addition to the *Essay concerning Toleration* (dated 1671-1672 by the editors), Locke

As such a desire, love is close to the desire for dominion, and should be kept distinct from it. It should not employ the means of force and compulsion, which infringes on other people's rights.¹² It should, on the contrary, be limited to admonitions, endeavours to refute men's errors, exhortations and arguments for another man's salvation. With this limitation, love is a Christian's greatest duty. This duty counterbalances the right of the other person, whether Christian or non-Christian, to follow the way he or she believes to be the one to heaven.

The tolerance practised toward followers of other ways, then, coexists with the belief that such people are erring. This picture of tolerance is close to the etymological meaning of the word, namely bearing (*tolerare*) the other person. Love, however it is pictured, can hardly be a principle of such tolerance. In Locke's overall picture, tolerance rather acts as a bridle of love, allowing it the means of exhortation and argument to the exclusion of that of force and compulsion.

When picturing love as a desire for the other person's assimilation, Locke speaks as a Christian. So is this picture of love actually rooted in the Christian Tradition? To answer this second question, we will turn to Augustine of Hippo (354-430). It is common knowledge that Augustine richly contributed to the Christian Tradition. This contribution was achieved through contact with Neoplatonic philosophy, the charge of a local community and engagement in polemics across the Christian world. It survived, moreover, the confessional divisions of later Christianity.¹³

complains that the clergy "doe not endeavour by the meekness and tender methods of the gospell and by the soft cords of love to draw men to them" (John Locke, *An Essay concerning Toleration and other Writings on Law and Politics, 1667-1683. Edited with an Introduction, Critical Apparatus, Notes, and Transcription of Ancillary Manuscripts by J. R. Milton and Philip Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 310). When engaged in a polemical exchange with Jonas Proast, Locke seems to have dropped this picture of love. The pretended love he directly ascribes to his contradictor, however, appears as a true desire for the other person's assimilation: "But if you are still of the mind [...] that in England none but *resolute obdurate sinners* ever forsook or forbore the communion of the church of England, upon reasons and arguments that *satisfy or convince* them; I shall leave you to enjoy so charitable an opinion" (John Locke, "A Third Letter for Toleration [1692]," in Idem, *Letters concerning Toleration by John Locke* (London: 1765), p. 270).

¹² The main argument of the *Letter*, according to which force is inapt to produce the belief necessary for salvation, does not seem to be involved in the present passage. On this argument, see Jeremy Waldron, "Locke: Toleration and the Rationality of Persecution," in *John Locke: A Letter Concerning Toleration in focus*, edited by John Horton and Susan Mendus (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 103-115.

¹³ For the presence of Augustine in Locke's context, see M. Goldie, "The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, edited by O. P. Grell, J. I. Israel and N. Tyacke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 335-348. Goldie summarizes Augustine's role as that of "lifeblood of Restoration Anglican polemic" (p. 336).

Augustine

Before we look at our first text, taken from Augustine's *Against Gaudentius*, let me briefly give you the context.

Gaudentius is the Donatist bishop of Thamugadi (Timgad in present-day Algeria), the Donatists being a group of African Christians who broke with the Rome-based Catholic Church. At the outcome of the Carthage conference of 411, the Donatist Church is outlawed, and its repression entrusted to the Roman imperial power. In 420, the tribune Dulcitus promulgates two edicts summoning the unruly to give their churches back to the Catholics. Gaudentius then closes himself up in his basilica with his flock, and threatens to burn the whole thing. The *Against Gaudentius* is a response to this threat. We will now read the passage in my translation:

We confess it to you: our greed is called charity (*cupiditas nostra caritas uocatur*). In us, it is this charity that seeks you. It is this charity that longs to find you, to set you upright and to join you to us in the unity of Christ. If we fear to see you burn at your stakes, it is because we burn with this fire. This is the fire that kindles us and that moves us, not only not to covet your goods, but to wish that you possess with us ours. Acknowledge it and come and do not want to be lost. Or else if you blush to come on your own initiative, we are at the service of your infirmity, so that charity will suffer no loss (*ne quid pereat caritati*).¹⁴

Love as a desire for the other person's assimilation clearly appears in this passage. The passage also shows how the means of compulsion, to use Locke's word, is related to this desire. The desire to set upright those who broke with our communion, and eventually to join them to us in the unity of Christ, excludes that we desire the loss of these people, even if they desire it themselves. We fear, on the contrary, this loss because it would prevent us from reaching our goal, the common possession of the eternal goods we own. If, making useless the life they have kept, the communion breakers refuse to come to this goal, we will constrain them to do so "so that charity will suffer no loss." This love to be kept intact is obviously not a principle of tolerance. It is rather a principle of unity or, to go a bit beyond the context, a principle of intolerance.

Though ill-suited for tolerance, one will surely object, the picture of love we have just encountered is determined by a specific context. Augustine was then engaged in a conflict, where the unity of the Church was at stake. If we take a broader view of his work, we will get a different impression.

¹⁴ Latin text in *Bibliothèque Augustinienne 32: Traités anti-donatistes, volume v, introduction et notes par E. Lamirande* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), p. 626 and 628 (*Contra Gaudentium*, I, 50).

We will see that the love he pictures is, in accordance with a general trend of the Christian Tradition, a universal one. Universal love stands out as principle of tolerance because it goes beyond the differences that separate people and tend to provoke conflict among them.

The phrase “universal love” commonly expresses love of a universal object, that is, loving all human beings. Another picture of universal love, however, appears in Augustine. Let us first consider this picture, and look at a passage from the earlier and more doctrinally minded *True Religion*. We will read the passage in John Burleigh’s translation:

Man is not to be loved by man even as brothers after the flesh are loved, or sons, or wives, or kinsfolk, or relatives, or fellow citizens. For such love is temporal. [...] It is more inhuman to love a man because he is your son and not because he is a man, that is, not to love that in him which belongs to God, but to love that which belongs to yourself.¹⁵

The picture of universal love appearing in this passage is love with a universal motive, that is, loving human beings for their humanity. This love is an exclusive one. We should love our “brothers after the flesh,” our sons, our wives, our kinsfolk, our relatives, our fellow citizens for their mere humanity, and not for the link we have with each kind. The universal love pictured by Augustine, on the other hand, involves a new meaning of “man.” A man is not a being that has certain features, possibly designed by God. It is a being that has a link to God. Loving human beings for their humanity means loving them for this link. In our love, the different links we have with other human beings are replaced by the link we all have to God. This replacement undermines two basic principles of tolerance: the acceptance of the differences that separate human beings, and the reliance on the actual features they share.

We may now turn to the common picture of universal love, namely love of a universal object. For this picture, we will look at a passage of the pastorally oriented *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, given in my translation:

Let all men, even your enemies, be the object of your love, not because they are your brothers, but so that they become your brothers. Thus, you will always burn with brotherly love, whether for a brother made such or for an enemy, so that he is made a brother through the love you bear him [*siue in fratrem factum siue in inimicum ut frater fiat diligendo*]. Wherever you love

¹⁵ Augustine, *Earlier Writings. Selected and translated with Introduction by John H. S. Burleigh* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 270. Latin text in *Bibliothèque Augustinienne 8: La foi chrétienne. Introductions, traduction et notes par J. Pegon; mise à jour par G. Madec* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1982), p. 154 (*De vera religione*, 88). The word translated as “love” is *diligere/dilectio* before the break, and *amare* after it.

a brother, you love a friend. He is already with you; he is already linked to you in Catholic unity. If you live well, you love a brother made such out of an enemy.

But you love someone who has not yet believed in Christ or, if he has believed in Christ, believes as demons do; you blame his carelessness. You, love him and love him with brotherly love. He is not yet a brother, but you love him precisely so that he becomes a brother. Our whole brotherly love, then, is toward Christians [*Ergo tota dilectio nostra fraterna est erga Christianos*], toward all members of Christ.¹⁶

Love as a desire for the other person's assimilation reappears in this passage, and is extended to the similar person. The enemy and the brother are encompassed in the same "brotherly love," with which we are ensured to always burn. This enduring intensity is permitted by desire, which targets the brother as well as the enemy. The brother, indeed, has not always been one. He has, at least in his stock, been made a brother out of an enemy, in whom we then desired a brother. As to the enemy, he is the current object of such a desire. This indistinction of two objects of love in desire is carried further by the use of the language of Paul, who pictures the Church as the body of Christ.¹⁷ The brother as well as the enemy is member of Christ, the first one actually and the second by vocation. We thus have a single object of love, the Christian, whether he has the face of the brother or that of the enemy. This fusion of the similar and the different under a confessional naming marks love, clearly and regardless of context, as a principle of intolerance.

Let us now turn to the Muslim Tradition, and ask whether it provides a picture of love that is better suited for tolerance. An answer to this third question will be sought in the *Revival of the Sciences of Religion*, the major work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Like Augustine, Ghazālī combines philosophical, pastoral and polemical mindedness. His legacy, on the other hand, crosses the long-standing confessional boundaries of Islam.¹⁸

Ghazālī

Our first text is taken from the *Book of Love* of the *Revival*. We will read this text in Eric Ormsby's translation, to which I add some of the original phrasing in transliteration:

¹⁶ Latin text in *Bibliothèque Augustinienne 76. Texte critique de John William Mountain, introduction et notes de Daniel Dideberg* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2008), p. 420 (*In Iohannis epistolam ad Parthos*, x, 7).

¹⁷ This picture appears in most of his Epistles, but is particularly developed in *1 Corinthians*, 12: 12-30.

¹⁸ As masterfully documented by Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 450-459.

Know then that beauty exists in things other than objects of sense. You might, for example, say, “This is a beautiful character,” and “This is a beautiful science,” and “This is a beautiful life,” and “These are lovely moral traits.” By “lovely moral traits” are meant knowledge and intellect, chastity, bravery, piety, generosity and manliness, and all other fine qualities. And yet, not one of these traits is perceptible to the five senses. On the contrary, they are perceived by the light of inner sight. All of these traits prompt love; the man to whom they are attributed is naturally loved by anyone who becomes aware of his qualities [*wa l-mawṣūf bihā maḥbūb bi-ṭ-ṭab’ ‘inda man ‘arafa ṣifātihī*]. One sign that the matter is so, is that our natures are innately constituted to love the Prophets and the Companions, even though they cannot be seen directly with the eyes [*anna ṭ-ṭibā’ majbūla ‘alā ḥubbi l-anbiyā’ wa ‘alā ḥubbi ṣ-ṣaḥaba ma’a annahum lam yushāhadū*]. Furthermore, [human nature is so constituted] to love the masters of the schools of law, such as Shāfi’ī, Abū Ḥanifa, Mālik [ibn Anas], and others.¹⁹

The picture of love appearing in this passage is quite different from the one we encountered before. Love is not a desire of any kind but, as Ghazālī says elsewhere, an inclination (*mayl*).²⁰ This inclination is felt toward a beautiful person, beauty comprising sensible beauty as well as “lovely moral traits.” We love any person whom we know to have such traits, and regardless of his or her presence. This picture of love is close to the common picture, namely an emotion motivated by a favourable appreciation of the other person.

Ghazālī’s love looks somewhat familiar to us, but can it be a principle of tolerance? By no means, and for two reasons. First, if we love the person who has lovely moral traits, we will not love the person devoid of such traits. In case the person, moreover, has ugly moral traits, we will definitely hate him or her.²¹ Second, the examples given by Ghazālī show that he does not separate lovely moral traits from the person being a Muslim. After the Prophet, we love his companions, and the school founders Shāfi’ī, Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik. We love the Companions for their knowledge and piety, together with their bravery and generosity.²² We love the school founders, in addition to the two former traits, for their intellect.

¹⁹ *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment. Book xxxvi of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din). Translated by Eric Ormsby* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2011), pp. 18-19. Arabic text in *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*. Vol. xiv (Cairo: Dār al-sha’b, n. d.), p. 2579 (*Kitāb al-maḥabba*, 2).

²⁰ This word appears starting with the definition of love at the beginning of the *Book of Love (Ihyā’*, xiv, p. 2574 [*Kitāb al-maḥabba*, 2]).

²¹ As Ghazālī makes clear further in the section, with the examples of the hate of Abū Jahl (enemy and persecutor of the Prophet) and the hate of Iblīs (the devil).

²² The four traits are mentioned further as motives for the love of Abū Bakr (one of the first converts and first caliph after the death of the Prophet) and the love of ‘Alī (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and fourth caliph).

But these traits are not universal ones. We indeed love the Companions for their knowledge of the Muslim Tradition and law and for the particularly intense and extensive Muslim practice termed “piety,” for their bravery in the defence of the Muslim cause and their generosity to the Muslim community. We love the school founders, in addition to their Muslim knowledge and Muslim piety, for their use of the intellect in the interest of Muslim belief. Since all these traits belong only to Muslims, our love does not go much beyond our confession. We might love a non-Muslim for his or her chastity, or for his manliness. But there is no way we can love a non-Muslim political or military leader, or a non-Muslim scholar.

Love as an inclination prompted by lovely moral traits belongs to the “commendable” love Ghazālī wants to make available to his readers. A second picture of such love, named “love in God” (*ḥubb fi llah*), appears in the *Book of the Norms of Familiarity*. This picture is a version of love based on interest, mainly illustrated by the relationship between master and disciple. To see whether such love relationship can provide a principle of tolerance, let us read one passage in my translation:

A third type of love consists in loving someone, not for himself, but for other than himself, when this other thing does not relate to the satisfaction of man in the world, but to his satisfactions in the hereafter. This is also clear and devoid of obscurity. The one who, for instance, loves his professor or his master because he manages through him to acquire knowledge and to improve his practice, and for whom the end of knowledge and practice is success in the hereafter, that man counts among those who love in God. The same holds for the one who loves his disciple because the disciple collects from him knowledge, because he reaches by the means of his disciple the dignity of teaching and rises through him to the degree of greatness in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus, indeed, said: “The one who possesses knowledge, devotes himself to practice and teaches, that man is called ‘great’ in the kingdom of heaven.” Now teaching is only achieved through the one who learns. The disciple, then, is an instrument that enables to acquire this perfection. If the man loves his disciple because the disciple is an instrument for him [*fa-in aḥabbahu li-annahu āla lahu*] – in the sense that he has turned the heart of his disciple into a field he sows and that this labour enables him to rise to the dignity of greatness in the kingdom of heaven, he is someone who loves in God.²³

The love relationship described by this passage is based on a common search for “satisfaction,” but involves different satisfactions. The disciple derives from his master knowledge and a better practice. He loves him for this satisfaction which, though obtained in the world, is given the “end” of success in the hereafter. The master derives the dignity of teaching, and the degree of greatness in the kingdom of heaven, from his own activity,

²³ Arabic text in *Iḥyā’*, v, pp. 934-935 (*Kitāb ādāb al-ūlfa*, I, 2).

for which the disciple is a necessary means. "Teaching is only achieved through the one who learns," and not with his participation. A necessary means of teaching, the disciple is an "instrument" of the "perfection" that the master acquires first in the world, then in the hereafter. The master thus loves his disciple "because the disciple is an instrument for him." The relationship of disciple to master, neglected by Ghazālī, is clearly opposed to this instrumentalisation. The master is the source out of which the disciple derives, not a perfection, but a means of the mere success in the hereafter. Reduced to imperfection, the disciple must be content with exploiting the resources provided by the master, and with loving him for these resources. The master and the disciple, then, love one another for satisfactions conformable to their respective hierarchical positions. This love based on the reciprocal interest of unequal partners²⁴ goes against the mutual relationship required by tolerance, and the equal parties this relationship involves.

It now appears that love, as pictured by two central figures of the Christian and the Muslim Tradition, cannot be a principle of tolerance. But, one might object, "Tradition" is a big word. Does this word apply to contemporary Christians and Muslims, and should we regard them as traditional creatures? Have they not, on the contrary, adapted their picturing of things to the new contexts they live in? Can we not discover, in their oral and literary productions, a picture of love different from the one encountered in Augustine and Ghazālī? If such picture results from adaptation, will it not meet the contemporary requirement of tolerance? A conclusive answer to this question would demand a comprehensive survey of contemporary Christian and Muslim productions. Based on two instances, our answer will be a tentative one indeed. To compensate for this tentativeness, we will invert the previous combination of religion and language. Our Christian instance will be provided by an Arabic-speaking author, while we will take our Muslim instance from a work written in a European language. Thus, our two texts will be more likely to illustrate the fate of a religious Tradition distinct from a linguistic or cultural one.

²⁴ The relationship between master and disciple still involves a common basis for satisfaction (derived from the acquisition of knowledge in the case of the latter, from the providing of it in the case of the former) unlike that, described by Pausanias in the *Symposium*, between "lover" and "favourite." The lover's "service" to the favourite consists in "contributing to [his] intellectual and all other excellence," while the favourite's "attentions" to the lover consist in "indug[ing]" him (Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Gorgias. Translated by W. R. M. Lamb* (Loeb Classical Library 166) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 119 and 120 [184 D-E]). This disparity of satisfactions makes it difficult to see reciprocity in the relationship between lover and favourite, while the master and the disciple seem to be aptly termed "unequal partners."

Contemporary Instances

Mattā al-Miskīn (Matthew the Poor, 1919-2006) is a Coptic Orthodox monk, and leading figure of the “monastic revival” in mid-twentieth century Egypt. After various monastic and eremitic experiences, he settled in the monastery of Saint Macarius (at Wādī l-Naṭrūn in the Western desert, roughly equidistant from Cairo and Alexandria), of which he became abbot. There, Mattā’s community expanded, and his reputation grew. Mattā was also involved, occasionally and with little success, in ecclesiastical and political affairs. His massive literary production mainly aims at making the Orthodox Tradition available to a contemporary Arabic-speaking audience. Through translation into numerous European languages, Mattā’s picture of Christian life gained wider diffusion.²⁵

In his *Christian Virtues according to the Gospel*, Mattā has, of course, a section on love (*maḥabba*). At the end of this section, he treats the “moral element that is in love.” This treatment takes the form of a commentary on *1 Corinthians*, 13: 4-8. Mattā starts with the “negative aspect,” and then moves to the “positive aspect.” Let us read the latter passage in my translation:

Love has patience [v. 4]: No wonder Saint Paul the Apostle places this quality at the beginning of the list of the qualities of love, pointing to its divine component. For God is patient, and so should His children be. Patience is the quality specific to the attitude toward the weak and sinners [*al-du'afā' wa l-khuṭāt*], and when man acquires it, he has the strongest factor of success at his service. [...]

Love is gentle [v. 4]: This is also one of the qualities of God, and it means gentle behaviour and compassion toward sinners and the weak. The one who has patience of necessity behaves gently. From there we see a subtle progression in the qualities of love, each of them having a constructive direction toward the psychology of the weak or impotent [*'ājiz*] man.

Love rejoices at the truth [*ḥaqq*] [v. 6]: Here is uncovered the core of love, on which love is built and to which it is attracted. Love comes down at its root from God, and for this reason it gets happiness and joy only from what brings it back to its place of origin. When the loving man feels joy and gladness at the truth alone, this is the greatest evidence that he is proceeding toward his place of origin in heaven, the source of truth!

Love bears [*taḥtamil*] everything [v. 7]: This quality ensures that love will reach the end. It signifies the capacity for bearing harm to the utmost degree, going beyond annoyance, ignoring hostility and overlooking damage and aggressions. All this is done without response because the soul draws its strength and peace from the source of strength and peace that has no limit.

²⁵ This information is derived from the Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia (ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/cce), art. “Father Matta Al-Miskeen.”

Love believes everything [v. 7]: Because love is certain of its goal. For its part, every situation is welcome, and there is no doubt about the possibility that it will keep its ability to pass over the traps and obstacles scattered by the Enemy on the way. Even if it believes everything, love uncovers lie [*kadhīb*], exposes it and stops its action. Love does this, when it faces lie, with its optimistic positiveness. Love also believes everything because it can make crooked things straight, and steep ways even.

Love hopes everything [v. 7]: Because it is optimistic and does not lose at all faith in the burnt wick, nor in the broken stick, nor in the man who has been sick for thirty-eight years, nor in the woman whom Satan has tied up for eighteen years (*John*, 5: 1-10; *Luke*, 13: 10-13). Love is armed with a living hope which is not exhausted by the evil intent of the obstinate opponent [*mu'ānid*], nor by the mischievousness of Satan, nor by the stupidity [*ghabāwa*] of man, nor even by the weakness of the body. Love hopes as long as a door is opened to hope. Love and hope are eternally allied to one another.

Love endures [*taṣbir 'alā*] everything [v. 7]: The way of love in the middle of the world is rough and full of resistances, sneerings, betrayals, trickery, exploitation and traffickings. Love does not incline to this or that side but, on its ascending way, it comes to endure everything.²⁶

Mattā lives in an offensive world. There is only one enemy, Satan, but Mattā and his likes are surrounded by weak, impotent and stupid people. There are, moreover, sinners and obstinate opponents. The three former kinds seem to be those who are irreceptive to the truth, while the two latter are those who reject the truth. All kinds, however, partake in lie, and none is granted the excuse of error. From the followers of lie, Mattā and his likes experience various degrees of harm. Against this harm, they have the weapon of love at their disposal.

A more peaceful picture of love appears in the passage. Mattā and his likes indeed attempt to bring the followers of lie to the truth they possess and, under the impulse of love, do it patiently and gently. Other “qualities of love,” however, are not directly relevant to such an attempt. Through forbearance and endurance, the possessors of truth overcome the harm they experience from other people. Belief and hope enable them to regard this harm as a step on the way to their goal, itself devoid of harm. A further quality is utterly irrelevant to the bringing of people to the truth. Joy at the truth, inspired by a love of divine origin, gives the “loving man” evidence that he is “proceeding toward his place of origin in heaven.” This God-oriented picture of love extends to previous qualities. Having a “divine component,” patience is the “strongest factor of success at [man’s]

²⁶ *Al-Faḍā'il al-masīḥiyya bi-ḥasb al-Injīl*, Cairo, Maṭba'at Dayr al-Qiddis Anbā Maqār – Wādī l-Naṭrūn, 1992, pp. 53-54. My translation of the verses follows the Arabic version appearing in Mattā's text.

service.” Through enduring everything, love is “on its ascending way,” while the endured are presumably on a descending one.

Mattā’s love, then, could be described as a desire for one’s assimilation to God.²⁷ This picture of love may not be an adaptation of the one we have encountered in Augustine, but it seems suited to a specific context. A Christian minority living under a nominally Muslim dictatorship, the Copts of Mattā’s time have little opportunity to draw outsiders, nor to bring deviant insiders back to the fold.

The self-assimilatory picture of love involves the bearing of other people, and thus fits in with “tolerance” in the etymological sense. The people one bears, however, are guilty of following lie and of doing harm and, as such, are also endured. Belief and hope, moreover, turn the lying and harmful people into a means of one’s future benefit. For both reasons, the other people have no right to enjoy forbearance, nor does one have a duty to bear them. The self-assimilatory picture of love, then, is incompatible with the legal or moral content of tolerance. Since “tolerance,” as commonly used, has no meaning outside this content, Mattā’s love goes against any requirement of tolerance.

Mohamed Bajrafil (1978-) is imam in a Parisian suburb, and a major renewer of Islam in present-day France. The renewal he advocates aims at greater adaptation to the Western context, and simultaneously draws on the resources of the Tradition. Unlike many “Muslim leaders,” Bajrafil is conversant, through the training he received in his native Comoros, with the traditional sciences of Islam. The liberal and learned outlooks he combines has attracted the attention of French media, especially after the publication of his *Let’s wake up!*²⁸

This book is mainly an attack on the Muslim “bigots,” who offer a caricature of Islam to their coreligionists, and thus contribute to the anti-Muslim sentiment in Western societies. One of the faults of the bigots is

²⁷ Mattā is famous for having upheld the traditional Orthodox doctrine of “deification” of man (private communication with John Khalil, March 2016). For an account of this doctrine in its wider context, see Dumitru Staniloae, *Théologie ascétique et mystique de l’Eglise orthodoxe. Traduit du roumain par Jean Boboc et Romain Otal* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), pp. 379-471. Love, coming down from God at an advanced stage of man’s ascent, is central to Staniloae’s picture of deification. Love of the neighbour is occasionally associated with love of God, and shares its derivative character. Commenting on a saint’s statement that the one who loves God loves equally the just and the sinner, Staniloae says: “The strength of such a love for the neighbour is explained by the fact that it is none other than God’s love having come down into the soul, and being directed on the one hand toward God, on the other hand toward people” (p. 385).

²⁸ Mohamed Bajrafil, *Réveillons-nous! Lettre à un jeune Français musulman* (Paris: Plein Jour), 2018.

intolerance, directed both at non-Muslims and at Muslims who do not share their views. An argument against the former kind of intolerance appears in the chapter on the “goals of the creation of man.” Love (*amour/aimer*) occurs twice in this argument while hate (*haine*), or detestation (*détester/détestation*), occurs six times. Let us look at these occurrences in my English rendering of the argument, which includes numbering the two passages where love occurs.

Commenting on a traditional scholar’s statement that revelation and reason converge in promoting the interest of people, Bajrafil says: “If there is something reason condemns, it is indeed hate and strife among people.”²⁹ He then moves to the Koran which, in one of its verses (49: 13), teaches that “people were created different so that they become acquainted with each other.” Mutual knowledge “can hardly be taken as a synonym of ‘to detest one another’ or ‘to wage war on one another.’”³⁰ Bajrafil further notes that an exegetical story shows a supporter of the messengers calling his murderers “my community” and wishing them divine guidance,³¹ while a Koranic verse (60: 8) allows doing good to those of another religion who have not done you harm. The prescribed attitude toward those who have done you good, he concludes, is obvious. How, then, can one “detest one’s physician, one’s nurse in the name of religion?”³² (1) Bajrafil later notes that the word *silm* (peace) with its derivatives occurs in 133 Koranic verses, and *ḥarb* (war) only in six verses. As to *ilm* (knowledge), it occurs in 776 verses. The conclusion is that “love and knowledge are infinitely more important to the Muslim than war and hate.”³³ Bajrafil then considers the view that the “verse of the sword” (usually 9: 5) abrogates all peaceful verses, and gives the Muslim a “right of life and death over every non-Muslim human creature.” The message delivered by this view is “Exit Koranic beauty, make way for sourness and hate.”³⁴ Turning to the young Muslim, Bajrafil appeals to his or her sense of a duty to “inquire about what others need.” This duty obtains especially if the others are “your teachers, your neighbours, your physician.” It is, moreover, confirmed by the fact that “detestation and hate cannot be an act of worship.”³⁵ (2) Bajrafil eventually mentions a traditional invocation where the Prophet witnesses to God’s oneness, to his own mission and to the brotherhood of all humans. He exhorts the young Muslim to take up this invocation,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

³¹ Bajrafil does not mention specific exegetes, and mentions only the sura (36). The story, however, clearly interprets verses 20-25.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

and to put it into practice. Doing this “will have the twofold advantage of making people and God love you.”³⁶

Bajrafil wants to improve the world he lives in. In this world, Muslims offend followers of other religions through avoiding contact with them, and occasionally through harming them. Such offence is described, in accordance with a contemporary trend, as “hate.” Bajrafil’s task is to show the Muslim practitioners of hate that they also offend themselves because their sources prescribe the opposite and because reason, granted authority by their Tradition, makes the same prescription. The opposite of hate is not love, but concern for the common interest, desire for mutual knowledge, urge to return the good, sensitivity to the beauty of peace, care for the needs of others and awareness of a shared human brotherhood. Each of these qualities responds to a specific situation. Muslims will honour themselves if, in each of the situations they encounter, they exercise the proper quality.

For a Muslim figure acting in a country not wholly severed from its Christian past, it was indeed tempting to exhort his coreligionists to replace hate with love. Such exhortation would please especially those who still claim allegiance to Christianity as a religion, and those who regard themselves as cultural Christians. Bajrafil succumbed to the love temptation only once, and in an ambiguous manner. Since “war” or a related word regularly goes together with “hate” in the argument, and since the other Koranic words mentioned in 1 are “peace” and “knowledge,” the latter pair should have been opposed to the former. “Love” in “love and knowledge,” then, might well be a lapse.

The picture of love Bajrafil adheres to clearly appears in 2. The young Muslim who takes up the Prophet’s invocation and puts it into practice will observe shared human brotherhood. He or she will acquire, to use Ghazālī’s phrase, a lovely moral trait. This trait, as soon as it is known, will prompt people to love him or her. God does not need intermediate knowledge, but likewise loves the young Muslim for his or her observance.

Love motivated by the other person’s qualities does not apply to non-Muslims. The humanity of non-Muslims suffices for adopting a brotherly attitude toward them, while the good they occasionally do demands to be returned. Neither quality, however, suffices for loving them. A child of his Tradition, Bajrafil has difficulty in separating the moral motives of love from a person’s confession. Being a Muslim is still necessary, though by no means sufficient, for being loved.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

We may conclude, again tentatively, from the last three sections that love, whether of the Christian or Muslim sort, cannot be a principle of tolerance. But what can be such principle? I mean by that a principle distinct from the right to tolerance established by law or morality. I also mean a principle distinct from the argument in favour of tolerance developed, to take the instance of our first topic, in Locke's *Letter*. The principle I am looking for is, finally, one of tolerance, not in the etymological sense of bearing the other person, but in the more modern sense of recognizing him or her. I find such principle in an English work of Locke's, the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

Back To Locke

The part of the *Essay* devoted to knowledge contains an argument in favour of tolerance.³⁷ Let us read, out of this argument, the passage where a principle appears:

We should do well to commiserate our mutual Ignorance, and endeavour to remove it in all the gentle and fair ways of Information; and not instantly treat others ill, as obstinate and perverse, because they will not renounce their own, and receive our Opinions, or at least those we would force upon them, when 'tis more than probable, that we are no less obstinate in not embracing some of theirs. For where is the Man, that has uncontestable Evidence of the Truth of all that he holds, or of the Falshood of all he condemns ; or can say, that he has examined, to the bottom, all his own, or other Men's Opinions? The necessity of believing, without Knowledge, nay, often upon very slight grounds, in this fleeting state of Action and Blindness we are in, should make us more busy and careful to inform our selves, than constrain others.³⁸

This passage provides a principle of tolerance because it connects a common feature of people ("mutual" ignorance) with a mutual duty, itself opposed to persecution ("force," "constrain").³⁹ I call this principle, using Locke's phrase, "principle of mutual ignorance." The duty inferred by

³⁷ Book IV, Chapter XVI: "Of the Degrees of Assent," § 4 (John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 659-661). This section is referred to by the Index under the heading "TOLERATION necessary in our State of Knowledge."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

³⁹ Unlike a previous passage, where the unavoidable having of "several *Opinions*, without certain and indubitable Proofs of their Truths" requires people to "maintain *Peace*, and the common Offices of Humanity, and *Friendship*" (*Ibid.*, pp. 659-660). The present passage is adduced by N. Wolterstorff as evidence of Locke's "social utopia of peace, humanity, and friendship" (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 155).

Locke from ignorance is not a merely negative one. We should not “treat others ill” on account of their persisting belief, and should instead “inform our selves.” Such self-information seems to concern equally our belief and those of other people. If we replace the ill-treatment of others with self-information about beliefs, we will remove some of our ignorance. Such removal may involve the discovery of some evidence against our belief, or some evidence in favour of other people’s belief. This will not, however, affect our treatment of others. Since it is our ignorance that is removed, we will not treat others well, but at best indifferently. Though having a positive component, then, the mutual tolerance pictured in our passage is close to forbearance. I will now attempt to show that the principle of mutual ignorance can be extended to recognition, and thus has contemporary relevance.

Belief, though a general feature of religion, is not sufficient for tolerance. If we believe in something, that is, take it to be true,⁴⁰ there is no reason why we should recognize the person who believes in something else, and takes what we believe in to be false. To do that, we need to be aware of the fact that our belief might be wrong, that what we take to be true might actually be false. This possibility always exists because we cannot have thoroughly examined all the evidence in favour of our belief and against it, as well as all the evidence in favour of other people’s beliefs and against them.⁴¹ If the other person has the same awareness, we will recognize one another. This mutual tolerance will not consist in recogniz-

⁴⁰ This meaning seems to be still intended today by those who say “I believe,” for instance “in Jesus” (take him to be truly the son of God, or at least a divinely inspired teacher) or “in Muḥammad” (take him to be truly the last prophet, or at least a major one). P. Ricœur proposes to replace the traditional meaning of “conviction” with a morally fitter one, expressed by the statement “I only hope to be in truth” (Paul Ricœur, “The Erosion of Tolerance and the Resistance of the Intolerable,” *Diogenes* No. 176, Vol. 44/4 (winter 1996), p. 194. I thank Peter Jonkers for having drawn my attention to this article, and to the book mentioned in the next note). This alternative is a merely verbal one. “Hoping to be in truth” seems to imply “hoping not to be in falseness,” and “hoping that the holder of a conviction other than mine is so.”

⁴¹ Both the possibility of error and the desirability of comprehensive examination are ruled out by Ch. Taylor, who uses the insider’s “faith” instead of the more neutral “belief”: “Our attachment to our own faith cannot come from a universal survey of all others from which we conclude that this is the right one. It can only come from our sense of its inner spiritual power, chastened by the challenges which we will have had to meet from other faiths” (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 680). Since, as the phrase “attachment to faith” suggests, faith is a kind of identity, our faith cannot be challenged by the evidence in favour of other people’s faiths. It is our sense of our faith’s inner spiritual power that is “chastened” by “other faiths.” The chastening cannot come from the fact, unknowable to us, that other people have a similar sense. Our sense is chastened simply because other faiths are different from our faith. This integrated chastening amounts to a difference-based recognition, itself close to self-recognition.

ing the value of our respective beliefs. Such recognition, whether mutual or one-sided, is in fact impossible because, as I have already suggested, you cannot give value to a claim to truth that contradicts yours. We will rather recognize the common limits of our knowledge and, ultimately, our shared human frailty. The principle of mutual ignorance can be regarded as a negative one, but it has the advantage of involving an actual common feature. “We don’t know” better ensures tolerance than “I love you,” be it reciprocated.

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6.

The Ideal of Humanity: A Comparison of Confucius' *Jen* and Gandhi's *Ahiṃsā*

POCHI HUANG

*"Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual
shelter; my refuge is humanity."*¹

Rabindranath Tagore

Introduction

One of the distinguishing features of human history is the advent of towering personalities in some very decisive epochs. In the Axial Age, Confucius (551-479 BCE) emerged as the great teacher of socio-political ethics in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 or 403 BCE) of China. His words and thoughts, as recorded in the *Analects*, have profoundly influenced the Chinese mind for more than two thousand years. He is certainly one of the most extraordinary thinkers in world history. On the other hand, Gandhi (1869-1948), our contemporary, took new ways of defending Indian solidarity in face of British colonialism, and redefined the meaning of political struggle and political life in the modern age. Gandhi powerfully transformed religious ideals into political persuasion. He bestows a powerful intellectual legacy to all humankind.

Max Weber, in discussing "the general character of Asiatic religion" has the following remarks on China and India:

For Asia as a whole, China played somewhat the role of France in the modern Occident. All cosmopolitan "polish" [Schliff] from China, to Tibet to Japan and outlying Indian territories. Against this India in Asia has a significance comparable to that of antique Hellenism. There are few conceptions transcending practical interests in Asia whose source would not finally have to

¹ Amartya Sen, "Tagore and his India," *New York Review of Books*, June: 55, 1997, p. 60.

be sought there. Particularly, all orthodox and heterodox salvation religions that could claim a role in Asia similar to that of Christianity are Indian.²

Weber's observation is fascinating, as India was the birthplace of Buddhism and China was the center of East Asian Buddhism. Buddhism enriched Eastern Asian religious culture, and monks from Korea, Japan and Vietnam flocked to China during the Tang (618-907 AD) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties to learn more about this new religious tradition. However, as far as political and moral culture is concerned, Confucianism remained a lasting legacy in East Asia.³ By contrast, deriving from Indian religions, Gandhi created a new political and moral philosophy which had international repercussions. His influence is not confined to India. In fact, the entire world owed him a new concept of practicing politics.

In this essay, I will draw a brief comparison of Confucius and Gandhi. Using Confucius's *jen* and Gandhi's *ahimsā* as reference points, I endeavor to offer a careful appraisal of their contribution to humanity. To be sure, Confucius and Gandhi belong to two very different eras in human history and they are widely dissimilar in terms of their religious, political and moral ideals. One is an ancient Chinese sage who pursued a position in the government, but failed and devoted his life as private teacher to many enthusiastic students. The other one was the leader of the modern Indian Independence movement for the creation of new India as a modern state. Eventually India was founded, yet he died for the cause of social and religious harmony.

Confucius' *Jen*

The *Analects*, as the record of Confucius' collected sayings, is full of original ideas and provoking thoughts. One of these ideas is *jen*⁴ (ideographically: two persons, *humanity*⁵). In fact, Confucius often refers to this

² Max Weber, *The Religion of India. The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. and edited by By Gerth and Martindale (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), p. 329.

³ Cf. Benjamin Schwartz, "The Primacy of the Political Order in East Asian Societies," in *China and Other Matters*, edited by Benjamin Schwartz (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 114-124.

⁴ "Benevolence (*jen*) is the most important moral quality a man can possess. Although the use of the term was not an innovation on the part of Confucius, it is certain that the complexity of its content and the pre-eminence it attained amongst moral qualities were due to Confucius." D. C. Lau, *Confucius – The Analects*, translated with an introduction (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 14.

⁵ "It is commonly accepted that etymologically *jen* consists of two parts, one is a simple ideogram of a human figure, meaning the self, and the other with two horizontal strokes, suggesting human relations." Wei-Ming Tu, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 84.

idea as the all-inclusive virtue ⁶ but never gives a formal definition of it. Although it is the core value in Confucian thought, his remarks on *Jen* are always situational and never dealt with in abstraction. Arthur Waley called *jen* the “mystic entity” in the *Analects*.⁷ Indeed, *jen* has a wider meaning as in the examples given below.

The Master said: “Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with *true virtue (jen)*.”⁸ (1:3. Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the *friendship of the good (jen)*...”⁹ (1: 6, Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, “If a man be without the *virtues proper to humanity (jen)*, what has he to do with the rites of propriety (*li*)? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?”¹⁰ (3: 3, Trans. James Legge)

From what is quoted above, we notice that *jen* is a characteristic quality of humanity as a moral being. Endowed with this essential virtue, every person has to cultivate it within interpersonal relationships. Starting from familial relationship and mutual friendship, one can carry out *jen* step by step to include the entire humanity. It is only within meaningful interpersonal relationships that *jen* can be fruitfully implemented. The ideal of *jen* is to become a fully developed human being with spiritual betterment. Also, it is an inner quality of human existence, which is vital for the outer manifestation of religious or cultural life like social etiquette, cult or music.¹¹ Without this inherent quality, culture loses its genuine value and becomes a sheer decoration of humanity.

In Book Four of the *Analects*, *jen* is constantly referred to by Confucius to express a matter of paramount importance in our daily life. *Jen*

⁶ “Although Confucius ‘rarely spoke of profit, fate or *jen*,’ (9:1) his recorded remarks on *jen* by far surpass his comments on any other virtues in the *Analects*.” Tu, *Confucian Thought*, p. 85.

⁷ Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, transl. A. Waley (London: Allen & Unwin 1938), p. 28.

⁸ 子曰：「巧言令色鮮矣仁。」

⁹ 子曰：「弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾而親仁……。」

¹⁰ 子曰：「人而不仁，如禮何，人而不仁，如樂何。」

¹¹ *Li* (禮, rite or courtesy) is another key concept in the *Analects*. As an all-inclusive expression of social conventions or norms, *Li* is compliment to *jen* as inner humane quality. Fingarette argues that “Men become truly human as their raw impulse is shaped by *li*. And *li* is the fulfillment of human impulse, the civilized expression of it - not a formalistic dehumanization. *Li* is the specifically humanizing form of the dynamic relation of man-to-man.” Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius - The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), p. 7.

becomes the abiding virtue of each person learning to be human. Let us take a look at some examples:

The Master said, "Those who are without virtue (*jen*) cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment. The virtuous rest in virtue (*jen*); the wise desire virtue (*jen*)."¹² (4: 2, Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, "It is only the truly virtuous (*jen*) man, who can love, or who can hate, others."¹³ (4: 3, Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, "If the will be set on virtue (*jen*), there will be no practice of wickedness."¹⁴ (4: 4, Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, "I have not seen a person who loved virtue (*jen*), or one who hated what was not virtuous. He who loved virtue, would esteem nothing above it. He who hated what is not virtuous, would practice virtue in such a way that he would not allow anything that is not virtuous to approach his person. Is anyone able for one day to apply his strength to virtue (*jen*)? I have not seen the case in which his strength would be insufficient. Should there possibly be any such case, I have not seen it."¹⁵ (4: 6, Trans. James Legge)

Jen is a desirable virtue to be cherished and lived within a civilized community. Without this virtue, one cannot find rest in restraint or in happiness. It is also a moral judgment that one has to exercise in deciding goodness over wickedness. As the highest human virtue, it has to be practiced persistently and unyieldingly. It is within human capacity as a moral agent, yet most people could not realize it because of a lack of continued and persevering exertion. One has to make *jen* an abiding guideline in one's personal life: "The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue (*jen*). In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it."¹⁶ (4: 5.3, Trans. James Legge)

From what is depicted above, it is also clear that *jen* is all-important in terms of human relationship. It affords a sound basis for a harmonious and lasting relationship. This is why the import of *jen* would cease to exist if one were to lead a life of solitude. Without interacting dynamically with other people, a person cannot practice the virtue of *jen* in a significant manner. A human community is therefore the ideal place for the proper cultivation of *jen*. Confucius' ideal of spiritual development of humanity

¹² 子曰：「不仁者，不可以久處約，不可以長處樂。仁者安仁，知者利仁。」

¹³ 子曰：「唯仁者，能好人，能惡人。」

¹⁴ 子曰：「苟志於仁矣，無惡也。」

¹⁵ 子曰：「我未見好仁者，惡不仁者。好仁者，無以尚之；惡不仁者，其為仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身。有能一日用其力於仁矣乎？我未見力不足者。蓋有之矣，我未之見也。」

¹⁶ 「君子無終食之間違仁、造次必於是、顛沛必於是。」

would receive a serious setback if people were to live in seclusion.¹⁷ Consequently, the idea of world-renunciation is out of the question in early Confucianism.

It is important to keep moral standards of righteousness in a community where people inevitably interact with one another. For Confucius, the distinction between a person with *jen* and without *jen* is essential for the improvement of a community and so that the moral order of the society can be steadfastly maintained. It is ethics rather than punishment (*danḍa*) which lays the basis for the governing of a civilized community:

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame.

If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."¹⁸ (2: 3, Trans. James Legge)

Putting a higher priority on the cultivation of morality, Confucius also draws a distinction between superior man (君子) and small man (小人) according to ethical standards. A superior man or virtuous person (君子) is someone who abides faithfully by *jen*. We should aspire to such an elevated moral position. On the other hand, a small man or small-minded person (小人) is one who always thinks of one's own benefit first. To get rid of this selfishness, it is important for us to develop the altruistic spirit of *jen*.¹⁹ *Jen* is truly a valid criterion in judging the moral character of a person:

The Master said, "The faults of men are characteristic of the class to which they belong. By observing a man's faults, it may be known that he is virtuous (*jen*)."²⁰ (4: 7, Trans. James Legge)

The Master said, "The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort. The superior man thinks of the sanctions of law; the small man thinks of favors which he may receive."²¹ (4: 11, Trans. James Legge)

¹⁷ "Indeed, a sense of community, which is a manifestation of the organismic vision, is absolutely essential for moral and spiritual development [...]. Confucianism [...] unequivocally asserts that society is both necessary and intrinsically valuable for self-realization." Tu, *Confucian Thought*, p. 26.

¹⁸ 子曰：「道之以政，齊之以刑，民免而無恥；道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格。」

¹⁹ Tu, *Confucian Thought*, pp. 55-58.

²⁰ 子曰：「人之過也，各於其黨，觀過，斯知仁矣。」

²¹ 子曰：「君子懷德，小人懷土；君子懷刑，小人懷惠。」

Gandhi's *Ahiṃsā*

Gandhi's ideals and practices of *ahiṃsā* – the philosophy of non-violence – have had far-reaching global influence in modern world.²² People like Martin Luther King or the Dalai Lama acknowledged their deep debt to Gandhi. What was the starting point of Gandhi's meditation on *ahiṃsā*? For Gandhi, it actually started with food. We know that Gandhi was a very strict vegetarian during his entire life. He said:

I believe that there is no religion greater than *ahiṃsā*, and yet I cannot escape the *hiṃsā* which is inevitably involved in the process of eating and drinking. The ideal of *ahiṃsā* is, however, ever before me; even in these processes, I do endeavor to restrain myself. I am striving every moment to reduce even those functions to a minimum.²³

Gandhi's scrupulousness about food is assuredly religiously oriented. To be sure, if all living beings are united in non-violence, i.e. no one inflicts mischief on other beings, then they will stay together in complete harmony. Consequently, non-violence is not confined to human relationship only. It is a virtue by which all sentient lives of the entire universe are connected. Non-violence is arguably the all-important ideal for which Gandhi is remembered by the world. In fact, he transformed a religious ideal into political praxis with outstanding success. Non-violence is also the manifestation of Truth, which for Gandhi is also the manifestation of God. It is a universal truth.

Surprisingly, this is an ideal which is not considered to be the highest virtue in his favorite volume, the *Bhagavad Gītā* (see 13:7 and 16:3; Gandhi tries to argue for it).²⁴ In the *Gītā*, because of its concern for *kṣatriya dharma*-which inevitably involves killing or *hiṃsā* – *ahiṃsā* is only listed among several virtues like patience, self-control, absence of pride and deceit.

Consequently, *ahiṃsā* as an ethical virtue is certainly praised, but not unconditional in scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gītā* or the *Manusmṛiti*. Undeniably, *ahiṃsā* as the highest virtue is started with rama ic traditions. Both Jainism and Buddhism espouse *ahiṃsā*. The Buddha praises bloodless sacrifice and Gandhi also considers that *ahiṃsā* is an important message of the Buddha.²⁵ On the other hand, Jainism considers *ahiṃsā*

²² Cf. R. Iyer, *Gandhi and Global Nonviolent Transformation* (Delhi: Gandhi Smrti & Darshan, 1994).

²³ R. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. 2 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), vol. 1: pp. 322-323.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 507-509 and 511-512

the foremost moral precept. In an episode related to the birth of Mahāvīra, the Jain leader contemporary of the Buddha, the fetus Mahāvīra displayed a highly elaborate sense of *ahimsā*. He lay completely still, lest his kicks should cause his mother pain. Only presented with a supernatural knowledge that his mother feared him dead did he stir slightly to reassure her. It is said: Now, Śramaṇa Bhagavān Mahāvīra, out of compassion for his mother, did not move, nor stir, nor quiver, but remained contracted and motionless.²⁶

It is compassion (Prakrit *aṇukampana*, Sanskrit *anukampana*) which connects all sentient beings together. Unable to bear the sufferings of others, the fetus Mahāvīra practiced the virtue of *ahimsā* to get rid of the anxieties of her mother. Her mother then was in high spirits again: Feeling her child in the womb quivering, trembling, moving and stirring, *ḷṣatriyāṇī* Trisālā became happy, pleased, and joyful, highly delighted in her mind, her heart was throbbing with glee.²⁷

In one of the Jaina texts, we find the following words of Mahāvīra: No being in the world is to be harmed by a spiritually inclined person, whether knowing or unknowingly, for all beings desire to live and no being wishes to die. A true Jaina therefore, consciously refrains from harming any being, however small.²⁸

Refraining from harming any being (Prakrit. *prāṇāivāyāo veramaṇaṇ*, Sanskrit. *prāṇātipātādviramaṇaṇ*) is the ideal relationship among different modalities of sentient beings. The practice of non-harming is what we need in dealing with others. Mindful of the vital importance of *ahimsā* is a duty incumbent upon all of us in our daily life. Gandhi grew up in Gujarat, where Jainism had been a stronghold and he also acknowledged Jaina influence on his life. His meticulous attitude toward food also reminds us of Jain mendicants. To be sure, Gandhi had made himself a great fearless bodhisattva in his insistence on pursuing *ahimsā*. The power of *ahimsā* is truly immeasurable as Gandhi understands it:

In its positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *ahimsā*, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. The active *ahimsā* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. A man cannot deceive his loved ones; he does not fear or

²⁶ *tae ṇaṇ samane bhagavaṇ mahāvīre māu-aṇukaṇpaṇāṭṭhāe ṇiccale ṇipphaṇde ṇireyaṇe allṇa-plṇa-gutte yāvi hoithā/ (Kalpa Sūtra, 1:92. Trans. by Lalwani).*

²⁷ *tae ṇaṇ sā tīsalā khattiyāṇī taṇ gabbhaṇ eyamāṇaṇ vevamāṇaṇ calamāṇaṇ phaṇḍa-māṇaṇ jāṇittā haṭṭhu-haṭṭhu jāva hiyayā (Kalpa Sūtra, 1:93. Trans. by Lalwani).*

²⁸ *tasya bhaṇte paḍikkamāmi niṇḍāmi garihāmi appāṇaṇi vosirāmi/ paṭhame bhaṇte mahavvāe uvṭṭhiomi savvāo pāṇāivāyāo veramaṇaṇi (Da avaiḷālika-sūtra, iv # 11, trans. by Lalwani).*

frighten him or her. The gift of life is the greatest of all gifts. A man who gives it in reality disarms all hostility. He has paved the way for an honorable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift. He must therefore be himself fearless. A man cannot then practice *ahimsā* and be a coward at the same time. The practice of *ahimsā* calls forth the greatest courage.²⁹

For Gandhi, *ahimsā* means the highest human virtue and the practice of *ahimsā* is not confined to vegetarianism or meticulous religious observance. He has made *ahimsā* a positive ideal to embrace the whole living universe. He gave many talks on *ahimsā* and wrote numerous essays on *ahimsā* to explore his ideals of new *ahimsā*. As we have seen, Gandhi has made *ahimsā* a powerful political persuasion as *ahimsā* is most visible in the realm of political struggle. The Christian influence is detectable, but Gandhi himself remarkably imparted a new and important dimension on the meaning of *ahimsā*.

Ahimsā should also be a social creed for Gandhi in a society where the under-privileged are suppressed by the privileged, we need the spirit of *ahimsā* to salvage them. Thus in India, the welfare of all should include the removal of untouchability. Gandhi calls the untouchables *Harijans*, the “children of god.” Being relegated to the lowest position in a caste society, they had little political and social or economic power. The plight of the untouchables could, in Gandhi’s thought, only be alleviated by non-violence and by holding fast to truth. Gandhi said:

There is an inextinguishable blot that Hinduism today carries with [untouchables]. I have declined to believe that it has been handed to us from immemorial times. I think this miserable, wretched enslaving spirit of “untouchableness” must have come to us when we were in the cycle of our lives, at our lowest ebb, and that evil has still stuck to us and it still remains with us. It is, to my mind, a curse that has come to us, and as long that curse remains with us, so long I think we are bound to consider that every affliction that we labor under in this sacred land is a fit and proper punishment for this great and indelible crime that we are committing. That any person should be considered untouchable because of his calling passes one’s comprehension...³⁰

Moreover, Gandhi urged for the harmony of all Indians, not only among Hindus themselves, but also among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He is a sincere believer of “non-violence,” yet ironically, he also died for this cause. Violence is still rampant in our world at this moment. We definitely have to take Gandhi’s noble ideal of “non-violence” more seriously than ever.

²⁹ Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 2: pp. 212-213.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 529-530.

Comparative Considerations

From what was explained above, we find that Confucius' *jen* and Gandhi' *ahimsā* are two different ideals of humanity. *Jen* is basically what is needed when an interpersonal communication happens. It is also the regulatory principle for determining what is morally right or wrong. Learning to be human, one has to start from a self-cultivation for spiritual growth and perfect *jen* for self-realization. Exercise of moral judgments and self-reflective learning are crucial in this process of spiritual growth. For Confucius, human existence is essentially a matter of moral practice. Also, it is moral life which distinguishes a human being from animals.

On the other hand, *ahimsā* is more than a moral concern. It is the ruling principle of religious life. As a religious virtue, it transcends moral dichotomy and ethical dualistic opposition. It is also a religious practice not confined to human community. All sentient beings are unavoidably involved in the universe of *ahimsā*. One has to practice this virtue in an interconnected world to show its universality. Gandhi has transformed religious *ahimsā* into a cardinal virtue of human society to resolve great political issues heretofore the domain of resorting to violence. He remarkably reshaped *ahimsā* into a powerful political persuasion. For him, *ahimsā* is what should be implemented in a world where antagonistic conflicts prevail. Conflicts can be settled through non-violent means rather than violence. It is a religious ideal of universal compassion which is very different from *jen* and its moral judgments about virtuous life.

Morality and religion are two of the most important human spiritual quests for the perfection of humanity. While the former lays emphasis on the distinction between what is right and what is wrong morally, the latter attempts to exceed good and evil. Confucius, as a humanitarian thinker, endeavors to argue for a humane community based on *jen*. Gandhi, in contrast, seeks the universal truth of the religious life-*ahimsā*. It is interesting to note that Confucius never talked about "extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings."³¹ On the other hand, Gandhi often referred to God in his talks. This clearly shows a critical difference between these two great-minded personalities in respect of their intellectual orientations: humanism vs. theism.

Conclusion

It is well-known that Confucianism has held an undisputed sway in East Asian lands like Vietnam, Korea and Japan for more than a millen-

³¹ 「子不語怪、力、亂、神。」 (Analects 7:20; translated by James Legge) “神” here could also be translated as “divinity” (Lau translated as “gods”) which clearly indicates Confucius' humanitarian and agnostic attitude.

nium. Confucian “moral universal” meaningfully defines East Asian mode of thinking. ³²Learning to be human is a process of moral cultivation of *jen* in a trustful community. By comparison, Gandhi inherited a tradition marked with the unmistakable characteristic of the “religious universal.” *Ahiṃsā* has been the prime virtue to be practiced consistently by a Jaina toward the myriads beings. Gandhi mightily transformed this “religious universal” of *ahiṃsā* into the “political universal” of non-violence in the modern world. Gandhi’s “political universal” is as important as Jaina “religious universal” in regard to their immense contributions to humanity. Curiously enough, through the dissemination of Buddhism in China, the Confucian “moral universal” evolved into in a new epoch of Neo-Confucianism in which the influence of the “religious universal” is noticeable. Thus, for Neo-Confucianist philosophers, to attain sagehood (聖) rather than the status person of *jen* became a matter of ultimate importance, and they saw the sage as aspiring to unite “all modalities of being in a common bond.”³³

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³² Tu, *Confucian Thought*, pp. 19-33,

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

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From al-Andalus to the Italian Renaissance: The Role of Ibn-Gabriel and Moses Maimonides in the Configuration of Leone Ebreo's Philosophy of Love

JOÃO J. VILA-CHÃ

Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) is a crucial author to understand the development of the *Idea of Love* in the context of Western cultures and civilization. Apart from his poems, among which we must distinguish his *Elegy against the Destiny* for its particularly human touch and value, Judah Abravanel left us three *Dialoghi d'amore* (*Dialogues of Love*), which, we assume, he wrote in Italian and were published for the first time in 1535.¹ The work rapidly became famous and highly esteemed in certain sectors of the Italian Renaissance and by 1607 had achieved twenty-five editions. In about hundred years, the work had been translated into French, Latin, Spanish and Hebrew.²

In this paper, we shall consider the possibility of establishing a relationship between two major figures of Al-Andalus, namely Ibn Gabirol and Moses Maimonides, and the dialogical configuration of Leone Ebreo's thought. Our purpose is to exemplify the role and value of cross-cultural references in the development of complex thought processes. We start with Ibn Gabirol, to whom Judah Abravanel/Leone Ebreo referred by the name of Avincebron.

¹ Cf. Leon Hebreo, *Diálogos de Amor*. Tradução de Giacinto Manuppella; apresentação de João J. Vila-Chã (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2001). Regarding the *Elegy*, cf. Heinz Pflaum, "Die Elegie des Jehudah Abarbanel (Elegie über das Schicksal. Von dem weisen Don Jehudah Abarbanel)," *Soncino-Blätter: Beiträge zur Kunde des jüdischen Buches*. I (1925-1926), pp. 105-111.

² Cf. João J. Vila-Chã, *Amor Intellectualis? Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) and the Intelligibility of Love* (Braga: Publicações da Faculdade de Filosofia, 2006).

Ibn Gabirol and the Spiritualization of Matter

Most probably born in Malaga in 1021/2, Ibn Gabirol (*Yahya ibn Gebirol al Kortobi* in Arabic) was a well-educated young man. He seems to have suffered from melancholia and loneliness and, perhaps because of that, was destined to become a great poet. His poetry is one of the very few sources available to us about his achievements. He lived most of his life in Saragossa, but also in Granada; he died in Valencia at the age of about thirty-seven.³ Through his poems, both religious and profane, Ibn Gabirol ranks among the greatest poets of the Hebrew language; actually, he was famous already during his own time; some of his religious hymns on the Glory of God made their way, and there remain, into the liturgy of the Sephardic Jews.⁴ His most important poem, the *Keter Malkhut* is often recited after the evening service on Yom Kippur.⁵ His secular poetry, on the other hand, deals with such themes as wine, friendship, life and love, loneliness and deep sorrow, etc. Indeed, he was particularly good at expressing both *joie de vivre* and despair given by the futilities of a worldly life.⁶

Ibn Gabirol's philosophy was expounded in a work originally written in Arabic, but also known under the title of *Meqor Hayyim* and, most importantly, under the title it received in the Latin translation (*Fons vitae*) in the twelfth century by John of Spain (perhaps Abraham ibn Daud, ca. 1110-1180), an Aristotelian philosopher, and Dominicus Gundissalinus.⁷ Ibn Gabirol's original work has survived only in fragments as preserved by Moses ibn Ezra (ca. 1060-ca. 1139) as well as Shem Tov Falaquera (c. 1225-1295). Falaquera was particularly interested in the reconciliation

³ Cf. Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *El Alma lastimada: Ibn Gabirol* (Córdoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 1992).

⁴ Regarding this topic see, in particular Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*. From a critical text edited by Israel Davidson (New York: Arno Press, 1973); and Idem, *Poemas*. Estudio preliminar y compilación de María José Cano (Granada; Salamanca: Universidad de Granada; Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1987); María José Cano, *Ibn Gabirol: poesía religiosa* (Granada: Granada Univ, 1992); Abraham Geiger, *Salomo Gabirol und seine Dichtungen. Jewish philosophy, mysticism, and the history of ideas* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

⁵ Cf. Salomo Ibn Gabirol, Eveline Goodman-Thau, and Christoph Schulte, *Krone des Königtums / Keter Malkût* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

⁶ Cf. Rosa Castillo et al., *Poetas hispano-hebreos: Antología* (Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle-Inclán, 1996).

⁷ Cf. Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *Avencebrolis (Ibn Gebirol) Fons vitae ex arabico in latinum translatus ab Iohanne Hispano et Dominico Gundissalino*. Ex codicibus Parisinis, Amploniano, Columbino primum edidit Clemens Baeumker (Monasterii: Aschendorff, 1892-1895). Cf. Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge; New York; Paris: Cambridge University Press; Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985), p. 68.

of Judaism with philosophy and, among other things, commented extensively on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.⁸

The *Fons vitae* (*Fountain of Life*) was known to Christian Scholastics,⁹ who seemed having not suspected that it was the work of a Jewish author. This is understandable given the fact that the work does not have a specifically Jewish context and was rather neglected by the Jews themselves during the Middle Ages. In any case, there is no question that both Jews and Christians were acquainted with Ibn Gabirol's philosophy despite the fact that different names were given to the author of the *Fons vitae* including the following: Avicebron, Avencebrol, Avicembron, Avicebrol. It was only in 1845 that Salomon Munk discovered that Avicebron, the celebrated author of the *Fons vitae*, was none other than the famous Jewish poet of Spain known as Salomon Ibn Gabirol.¹⁰ In his *Historia de la Filosofía Española*, Bonilla y San Martín claims that neither Don Isaac Abravanel nor his son Judah Abravanel/Leone Ebreo had any direct knowledge of the *Fons vitae*; the two Abravanel's must have gathered their knowledge about the *Meqor Hayyim* through references provided by scholastic authors.¹¹

It is indisputable that in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* there are direct references to Ibn Gabirol, as when the Renaissance author speaks of *il nostro Albenzubron* and his book *De fonte vitae*.¹² According to Joaquim de Carvalho, it is remarkable that Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* do not provide any reference to Scholastics such as Wilhelm of Auvergne, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus, i.e., those who included in their works the most references to Ibn Gabirol. According to Carvalho, Leone Ebreo had a direct knowledge of the author to whom he refers as *il nostro Albenzubron* and to the work he calls *De fonte vitae*, a fact directly con-

⁸ Cf. Raphael Jospe, *Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1988).

⁹ See, for example, Fernand Brunner, *Platonisme et aristotélisme: La critique d'Ibn Gabirol par saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1965); Idem, *Métaphysique d'Ibn Gabirol et de la tradition platonicienne* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1997); Jacob Guttman, *Das Verhältniss des Thomas von Aquino zum Judentum und zur jüdischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1891).

¹⁰ Salomon Munk made his important discovery public first in an article published in the *Literaturblatt des Orients* (n. 46) in 1846. Cf. his *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*. Reprint of the 1927 ed. published by Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

¹¹ Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, *Historia de la filosofía española (siglos viii-xii: Judios)* (Madrid: V. Suarez, 1911), p. 201.

¹² Cf. *Diálogos de Amor*. Vol. I: *Texto Italiano, Notas e Documentos*; Vol. II: *Versão Portuguesa & Bibliografia*. Texto fixado, anotado e traduzido por Manuppella, Giacinto. Lisboa: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, 1983; vol. I, *Dialoghi*, p. 212. – Cf. Joaquim de Carvalho, *Leão Hebreu, filósofo (para a história de platonismo no renascimento)* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1918), p. 200.

nected with the intellectual inheritance of the Portuguese Talmudist Isaac Abravanel, Leone's own father.¹³

One of the important characteristics of the *Fons vitae*, a representative of the Neoplatonic tradition within the context of medieval Jewish philosophy, is that it does not contain biblical citations or allusions to revealed religion, except perhaps some references to the *Sefer Yezirah*, the *Book of Creation*.¹⁴ Rather, it constitutes a good illustration of the non-confessional character of philosophy when understood more as a science on its own right than as an application of that «science» to any revealed religion. In this sense, it is clear that the *science* with which the *Fons vitae* is primarily concerned is the science of matter and form. Ibn Gabirol was indeed concerned with the idea of spiritual matter, which goes back to Plotinus and Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, in order to assert that ontologically matter constitutes the basis of unity in both the spiritual and the material world.¹⁵

The *Fons vitae* was written in a dialogic form, one in which the author made a conscious effort to use a literary device that, in the footsteps of Plato, anticipated the Italian Renaissance in the context of the Islamic Middle Ages. In contrast to the Platonic dialogues, in the *Fons vitae* neither the master nor the disciple, possess a vivid and distinguished personality. The master expounds the doctrine, while the student has the task of asking questions in order to give the master the sustained opportunity to again and again elucidate points under contention for lack of clarity.¹⁶

The *Fons vitae*, its complete title in Latin *Liber fontis vitae, de prima parte sapientiae, id est scientia de materia et forma universali*, is composed of five books: the first is about what must be initially established in order to situate universal matter and form, and to situate matter and form in compound substances; the second describes the spiritual substance that sustains the form of corporeality; the third shows the existence of simple substances; the fourth deals with the knowledge of matter and form in simple substances; the fifth studies universal matter in itself and universal

¹³ Cf. Carvalho, *Leão Hebreu, filósofo*, p. 200. See also Saül Mézan, *De Gabirol a Abravanel: Juifs espagnols promoteurs de la Renaissance* (Paris: Ed. Lipschutz, 1936).

¹⁴ Cf. Colette Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge: Selon les textes manuscrits et imprimés* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1983), p. 69.

¹⁵ In this aspect, Shem Tov Falaquera also rightly mentions Empedocles (or, rather, the Pseudo-Empedocles and the *Book of the Five Substances*), precisely in the measure that he maintains that *matter* and *form* are the first beings created, and thus are anterior to the *Intellect*. Cf. Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, p. 69.

¹⁶ The *dialogic* dimension of the method or approach present in Ibn Gabirol's work was studied in particular by Jacques Schlanger, "Le Maître et le disciple du *Fons Vitae*," *Revue des études juives* (127, 1968), pp. 393-397.

form in itself.¹⁷ The starting point of the *Fons vitae* is the question of how to conceive the material world derived from an utterly spiritual Being. The answer is typically Neoplatonic as it is said that everything that is emanates from the Creator. The overall purpose of the *Fons vitae* is to analyze the movement which is specific to the metaphysical mechanism of Creation, which is particularly reflected in Gabirol's notion of *intelligible matter*. The author, taking heed of the old Platonic fashion, uses the idea in order to preserve divine transcendence, i.e., to attempt a serious mediation between God and the world but without compromising the absolute-ness of God's oneness and perfection.¹⁸ As Plotinus and Iamblichus had done before, Ibn Gabirol intended to solve the difficulty on the notion of intelligible matter by drawing upon the anatomy of human thought, which allows him to assign to intelligible matter the hybrid character it needs in order to function as instrument of both the mind's access to the divine and God's access to nature.¹⁹

The Neoplatonic flavor of the *Fons vitae* is also present in the development of such notions as 1) knowledge constitutes the supreme aim of human life and its reason for existing; 2) the science of the soul, i.e., the knowledge that man has of himself opens up the vast possibility of knowing about God and the world inasmuch as the human being is nothing else but a microcosm. In the first book of the *Fons vitae*, i.e., the *Meqor Hayyim*, we read that

The knowing part being the best of man, that which man must seek is knowledge. What he must especially seek to know is himself, in order to arrive at knowledge of the other things that are not himself; for his essence comprehends all the things and penetrates them, and all the things are subject to his power. As well as this, he must seek to know the final cause for which he was created, so that he may attain supreme felicity; for man's existence has

¹⁷ Regarding the structure of the *Fons vitae*, see Jacques Schlanger, *La philosophie de Salomon Ibn Gabirol: Étude d'un néoplatonisme (Thèse pour le doctorat ès lettres présentée à la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'Université de Paris)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 20f. For important and useful editions of the work, see in particular Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *Die Lebensquelle*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Sabine S. Gehlhaar; übersetzt aus dem Lateinischen von Orm Lahann (Cuxhaven: Junghans-Verlag, 1989); Idem, *La fuente de la vida*. Traducida del latín al castellano por Federico de Castro y Fernández, revisada y corregida por Carlos del Valle; introducción de Carlos del Valle (Barcelona: Riopiedras Ediciones, 1987); Idem, *Livre de la source de vie (Fons vitae)*. Trans., introd. et notes Jacques Schlanger (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970).

¹⁸ See John M. Dillon, "Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine of Intelligible Matter," *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, edited by Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 43-59.

¹⁹ See Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

a final cause for which he [was] created, for everything is subject to the will of the one God.²⁰

Furthermore,

When one knows the art of demonstration [logic], what one should study first of all, and what is the most useful study, is the essence of the soul, its faculties, its accidents and everything that inheres in it and adheres to it, for the soul is the substratum of the sciences and it perceives all things by its faculties, which penetrate everything. If you study the science of the soul, you will know its excellence, its permanence and its subtlety in seizing everything, to the point where you shall be astonished to see, at least in some way, its substance sustaining all things. You will then realize that you yourself encompass everything that you know of things that exist, and that the existing things that you know subsist in some way in yourself. In seeing yourself thus understanding (and penetrating) everything that you know, you will see yourself comprehending the whole universe and understanding it more quickly than the twinkling of an eye. But you could not do this if the soul were not substance [both] subtle and strong, penetrating all things and being the dwelling of all things.²¹

The first of these themes, i.e., the assertion that science constitutes the ultimate aim of human life, has profound philosophical implications and goes back to the very sources of Western philosophical thinking. The second theme complements the first as in it we find in embryo the knowledge of everything. Indeed, since man is a microcosm partaking of both the intelligible and the corporeal worlds, he is able to grasp by his own powers the immaterial and spiritual forms of (or in) things. This theme of man as microcosm returns at the beginning of another of Ibn Gabirol's texts, namely the one on the *Improvement of Moral Qualities*,²² which states "if man's body is the reflection of the universe, his soul is the reflection of the Will."²³

²⁰ *Mekor Hayyim*, I, I here quoted from Colette Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, p. 71.

²¹ *Mekor Hayyim*, I, 4, here quoted from Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, p. 71.

²² See Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *Improvement of the Moral Qualities*. An ethical treatise of the eleventh century by Solomon ibn Gabirol, printed from a unique Arabic manuscript, together with a translation, and an essay on the place of Gabirol in the history of the development of Jewish ethics, by Stephen S. Wise (New York: AMS Press, 1966); and Idem, *La corrección de los caracteres*. Introducción, traducción y notas de Joaquín Lomba Fuentes (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 1990). Regarding Gabirol's *psychology* and *anthropology*, see Saul Horovitz, *Die Psychologie bei den jüdischen Religions-Philosophen des Mittelalters von Saadia bis Maimuni* (Farnborough: Gregg, 1970).

²³ Cf. Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, pp. 71-72. Regarding the important notion of *Will* in the *Fons vitae*, see Majer Bieler, *Der göttliche Wille (Logosbegriff) bei Gabirol* (Breslau: D. Rotenberg, 1933).

Once he asks the question about the nature of human theoretical knowledge, which in itself constitutes the goal of human existence, Ibn Gabirol makes clear that what he means under that notion is nothing else but the *knowledge of being*:

There are only three things in being: matter and form, the first substance [God], and Will, which is the intermediary between the extremes. The reason that only these three things exist is that there cannot be an effect without a cause and there must be an intermediary between the two. The cause is the first substance; the effect is matter together with form; the intermediary between the two is the Will. Matter and form are like man's body and its shape, which is the composition of its members; Will is like the soul and the first substance is like the intellect.²⁴

The rest of the *Fons vitae* consists of an explanation of terms and of entities that form the philosophical universe of the work, namely, God, who is the first substance, His Will, Matter and Form. The idea that man is able to apprehend himself by his own powers, i.e., without some necessary illumination from an external intelligence as asserted by some Arab thinkers, means that the human being discovers that his intelligence corresponds to the first substance, his soul to the Will, his matter and his form to the *First Matter* and the *First Form*.²⁵

The fundamental notion of this philosophy is, therefore, that the entire universe, both spiritual and material, is composed of matter and form: "These different kinds of matters and of forms, whatever their diversity, all come together in the idea of matter and form. In the perceptible things of nature, universal as much as specific, there is no other thing than matter and form" (1, 10).²⁶ Matter and form are both one and multiple, similar and different. Since they are found at every degree of the hierarchy of beings, beings are first diversified by their forms, both material and spiritual, while matter is one and universal. In the end, however, the unity of matter corresponds to the unity of form. Gabirol makes clear that what causes the diversity of beings is not form, for form is one and purely spiritual, but matter, which in itself can range from perfect and delicate to rough and heavy. Matter cannot subsist without form and universal matter cannot subsist by itself except potentially. The "general matter" and the "general form," which immediately proceed from God, cannot subsist without each other, even for a single instant. In Book IV, 17, Ibn Gabirol writes:

²⁴ *Meqor Hayyim* I,3, here quoted from Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, p. 73.

²⁵ Cf. See Fernand Brunner, *Métaphysique d'Ibn Gabirol et de la tradition platonicienne* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1997); Jacob Guttman, *Die Philosophie des Salomon ibn Gabirol dargestellt und erläutert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1889).

²⁶ Cf. Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge*, p. 73.

The substance of matter, cannot be without form for a single instant, nor can the substance of form exist without matter. And in this there is a strong proof that the existence of each of them is of necessary existence only by the necessary existence of the other. Consider now the properties of unity, and you will find them attached to the form: it is unity that produces multiplicity and keeps it, it gives it its being, comprehends it and exists in all its parts, it is born by what is its substratum and it is more dignified than its substratum. In consequence, these properties are in form, because it is form which constitutes the essence of that within which it is, it gives it its being; comprehends it, retains it, is in all its parts, it is born in the matter which is its substratum, and it is superior to it, and matter is below it.²⁷

The notion of matter carries a plurality of meanings in the *Fons vitae*. According to Colette Sirat, Ibn Gabirol applies the notion to five different levels of reality: 1) First *universal matter*, which is entirely simple and absolutely without form, at least potentially, for, according to some passages, it cannot subsist without form: it is the substratum of both the intelligible world and the corporeal world, of everything that exists, except God; 2) *Universal corporeal matter*, which emanates from nature; it acts as a substratum to the forms of corporeality and quantity; the celestial spheres and the sublunary beings are made of it; 3) The *matter common to the celestial spheres*, which is eternal and not subject to generation and corruption; 4) The *matter of the lower world*, also called general natural matter, which with its elements (fire, air, water, earth) is subject to generation and corruption; 5) *Natural particular matter*, i.e., that of composite, material beings.²⁸

The *Fons vitae* seems interested in the demonstration of how we can perceive the order proper to the simple substances from the order of the substances that are composite, and in the same way our understanding of the microcosm can enable us to perceive the order of the macrocosm. In Book III, chapter 44, Ibn Gabirol writes:

If you will imagine the structure of the whole, that is, the universal body and the spiritual substances that contain it, consider the formation of man and take it as an image. For the body of man corresponds to the universal body and the spiritual substances that move it correspond to the universal substances that move the universal body, and among these spiritual substances the inferior substance obeys the superior substance and is submissive to it, until the motion reaches the substance of the intelligence. You will then find that the intelligence orders and dominates these substances and you will find that all the substances that move the body of man follow the intelligence and obey it while it perceives them and judges them.²⁹

²⁷ Quoted from *Ibid.* p. 73.

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁹ Quoted from *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

In other words, what enables us to describe the whole of creation and its organization is that the inferior, in this case man, is the image of the superior, because the superior directs the inferior and flows into it. In man, as in the universe, the surrounding substances are spiritual and more general, indeed they are the matter of the inferior substances, commanding them and giving them movement and light. And so it is that, moving from one level to the other, one is able, according to Gabirol, to reach absolute unity, i.e. the Intellect. Therefore, our knowledge of the world, i.e., of matter and form, is not veritable knowledge, but only the road that leads to true knowledge, that of God, or rather, that of the divine Will, because God Himself is unknowable. For Ibn Gabirol and the *Fons vitae*, thus, knowledge is nothing else but the way of ascent towards divinity. The only reason why this world and the world of the spheres, as the world of simple substances, is said to constitute the aim and object of science, is because in themselves they carry the very traces of the divine Will. While describing the metaphysical relations of matter and form, what *il nostro Albenzubron* truly intends to do is to seek and find the traces of the divine Will, which, being essentially identical to the Godhead is also, in its outward action, separate from it.

For Ibn Gabirol, thus, the world is like an open book where one may read the divine text not just when one wants to but when one effectively knows how to read it. In order to do so, the first thing one needs to do is to distance oneself from all sensible things, be concerned exclusively with intelligible things and turn entirely towards God. Then, God will come to one's rescue. According to Gabirol, the desire for good must come from man, for man is the one who must make the effort to detach himself from matter. Once the human being makes himself closer to God, God will help the person come to the end of the road and bring him close to Himself with the offer of eternal life: "He will favor you with His regard and He will be generous towards you, for He is the source of beneficence. May He be praised and exalted! Amen." (V, 74). No surprise, thus, that for Ibn Gabirol the true sense of the Scriptures coincides with the quest for the intelligible, that is, with the spiritual ascent of the human soul towards God.³⁰

Let's now consider why it is reasonable to think that Leone Ebreo, whose *Dialoghi d'amore* were to become one of the most widely read books of the European Renaissance, was a student of the teachings of *Albenzubron* and his *De fonte vitae* [sic]. For Leone Ebreo, everything that has been made is composed of the Matter of Chaos (*di materia del Chaos*) and

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79. See also Frederick P. Bargebühr, "Die Bedeutung des Weltalls für Gott nach Ibn Gabirols philosophischen Gedichte," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* (vi, 1954) pp. 18-36.

the Form of the Intellectual Idea (*di forma della Idea intellettuale*) and, therefore, must have a temporal beginning and an end, which is always followed by a new beginning. In other words, the nature of the process under metaphysical description is cyclical.³¹

In the third of his *Dialoghi d'amore*, Leone Ebreo takes for granted the existence of two kinds of cosmic cycles. One of them lasts seven thousand years and can be divided into two parts: (1) a six-thousand-year period during which the "Lower world," which is beneath the heavenly sphere, passes away because one of the elements (Fire or, less often, Water) becomes predominant; and (2) a one-thousand year period which may be designated by the Hebrew appellation *shemita* (*scemita*, *che vuol dire relaxazione*³²). During this latter period things in the "Lower world" return to the Primal Chaos (*nel chaos primo*), which last at rest one thousand years. In the course of this interval of Time, chaos is impregnated in order to generate a new world. There are also cycles that last fifty thousand years, which are divided into forty-nine thousand years comprising seven "short" cycles. The last thousand years are called *yovel/yobel* in Hebrew.³³ It is precisely during the last thousand years that the two worlds, the celestial and "the lower," are renewed.

Leone Ebreo explicitly defends the idea of a succession of worlds which pass away cyclically. Then, the question emerges: How do the intellectual souls, i.e., the angels and the pure intellects, fare at the time of universal dissolution? According to Judah Abravanel, only two answers are given. The first is based on the premise that the entities in question are not composed of matter and form and, therefore, do not have part in Chaos. The third of the *Dialogui* on Love explains that, given this premise,

³¹ Cf. Shlomo Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines," *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 370.

³² Cf. *Dialoghi*, p. 215.

³³ *Dialoghi*, p. 215: "questa *scemita* è come il sabbato ne' giorni de la settimana. Dice ancora Moises che quando saranno passate sette *scemita*, che sono quarantanove milia anni, si debba fare il quinquagesimo anno *iobel*, che in latino vuol dire iubileo, e redizione ancora." – On the topic of *cosmic cycles* in Judaism, see, in particular regarding the *shmitot*, Dovid Marchant, *Understanding Shmittot: The Sources and Background of the Halochos of Shmittot*; and, *Halochos of Shmittot: Based on Selections From [Shemita Ke-Hilkhatah] by Rabbi Moische Sternbuch [Shelita]* (Jerusalem; New York: Feldheim, 1986); Edgar Frank, *Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology: The Systems of Counting Years in Jewish Literature*. Foreword by Sidney B. Hoenig (New York: P. Feldheim, 1956). For an analysis of the question more in terms of the notion of *Yovel*, see Benedict Zuckermann, *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Chronology of the Time Anterior and Subsequent to the Captivity: Accompanied by a Table of Sabbatical Years*. Translated from the German of B. Zuckermann by A. Lowy (New York: Hermon Press, 1974).

all the intellectual entities will at the time of universal dissolution persist in their essences and contemplate the deity: *Se non sono composti di materia e forma, né hanno parte nel Caos, si truovano separati da' corpi ne le loro proprie essenzie, contemplando la Divinità.*³⁴

However, if we look at Abravanel's second answer we may find something related to the theory of *il nostro Albenzubron*, according to which intellectual entities are composed of matter and form; the incorporeal matter and substance of those entities participate in Chaos, in terms of a universal Mother, while by their form they participate in the supreme God, i.e., the universal Father of everything.³⁵

According to Shlomo Pines, there are some doubts as to the actual words pertaining to the quotation that Leone Ebreo takes from the *Fons Vitae* and integrates in the *Dialoghi d'amore*. The text that would be relevant here, says Pines, contains both a statement and what may be regarded as an interpretation thereof. In any case, the statement containing the affirmation that the incorporeal entities are composed of matter and form is undoubtedly in conformity with the doctrine of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*.

One aspect of Leone Ebreo's doctrine is the notion that the cosmos is periodically created by the "interfusion of Forms." These are directly related to the Divine Principle described in at least one passage as the Supreme Form, and with Matter, derived from or identical with the Chaos, an inferior Principle and yet coeval with the deity. Upon the dissolution of the cosmos in the concluding phase of a great cycle each of these two components returns to the Principle from which it had come forth. Leone Ebreo seemed certain that such view of the two Principles was held, among others, by Ibn Gabirol. Regardless of the problems in this particular assertion, Leone Ebreo was convinced of his proximity to Ibn Gabirol's teaching regarding the nature of the immaterial entities which, like all other existents (except God), are composed of Matter and Form. A particular sign of this closeness between the author of the *Dialoghi d'amore* and the Jewish philosopher of al-Andalus can be seen in the very fact that Ibn Gabirol is one of the very few medieval philosophers referred to by name in the work of the famous author of the Portuguese-Italian Renaissance.

The fact that Leone Ebreo referred to Ibn Gabirol as *il nostro Albenzubron* means that he is using an appellation to be expected only in relation to a much revered Jewish figure, as he does, for example, when he speaks of Moses Maimonides as *Il nostro rabi Moise* or when he refers to Moses and Aaron under the designation of *I nostri santi padri*. In other words, Leone Ebreo must have been aware that the author of the *Fons vitae* was

³⁴ *Dialoghi*, p. 212.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

not an Arab, but a Jew. It turns out that the passage from the *Dialoghi d'amore* just mentioned was perhaps the last written witness we can find about the Jewish identity of Ibn Gabirol up to the point when S. Munk discovered in Paris the Hebrew manuscript containing Schem Tov Ibn Falaquera's translation. Since Leone Ebreo quoted the title of Ibn Gabirol's work only in the Latin form (*il nostro Albenzubron nel suo libro de fonte vitae*) it was unlikely that Leone Ebreo could have had in his hands either the Arabic original (which is now considered lost) or the Hebrew translation of the same. It seems that the only direct contact that Leone Ebreo could have had with Gabirol's work must have happened through the Latin translation done in the XII century by Dominicus Gundissalinus.³⁶

According to Heinz Pflaum, Leone Ebreo must have known the *Fons vitae* not only, as Joaquim de Carvalho also assumes, through extracts collected by the medieval Scholastics, but most likely through the Latin translation mentioned above. In sum, Leone Ebreo was probably the last author before Munk to identify the Jewish poet from Spain Ibn Gabirol as the creator of the *Fons Vitae*. This to emphasize the historico-cultural relevance of Leone Ebreo's reference to Ibn Gabirol and the *Fons Vitae* in the *Dialoghi d'amore*.³⁷

The Transformation of Moses Maimonides

The significance of Ibn Gabirol as one of the sources of Leone Ebreo's Neoplatonism implies an innovative attitude on the part of the author of the *Dialoghi d'amore*. The same can be said of the contribution of Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides, a historical figure sometimes referred to by the acronym Rambam.³⁸ Born in Córdoba, an important center of the Almoravid Empire (now Spain), on Passover Eve of the

³⁶ A manuscript of Gundissalinus' Latin translation from the XIV century is still extant in Seville. This makes one wonder that Leone Ebreo came to have a direct contact with the *Fons Vitae* while still in Spain, i.e., just before 1492. Heinz Pflaum writes in this regard: "Hinzu kommt weiterhin, daß einerseits Leone auch die übrigen arabischen Philosophen in lateinischer Übersetzung benutzt haben dürfte, und dass andererseits gerade von denjenigen arabischen Philosophen, die Leone immer zusammen anführt, Avicenna, Alfarabi und Algazali, lateinische Übersetzungen eben des Dominikus Gundissalinus vorlagen. Endlich kann seine Kenntnis des Textes auf der hebräischen Übersetzung Falaqeras allein auch nicht beruhen. Denn z. B. gerade die entscheidenden Stellen von der "Unitas multiplicabilis," (...) fehlen in dieser Übersetzung, die ja nur einen wenn auch sehr ausführlichen Auszug darstellt. Leone muss also, wenn er schon Falaqeras Text gekannt hat, außerdem noch einen andern (also wohl eben des Gundisalvi) benutzt haben." Cf. Heinz Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe: Leone Ebreo: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie in der Renaissance* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1926) p. 126.

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁸ The meaning of Rambam is the following: *Rabbeinu M šeh bēn Maimon*, "Our Rabbi Moses son of Maimon."

year 1135 or 1138, he became a rabbi, a physician, and a philosopher of extraordinary importance, and was active not only in his native Cordoba, but also in Morocco and, most importantly, in Egypt, where he died on December 12, 1204.³⁹

In the *Guide of the Perplex* (II, 13), Maimonides wrote about the mysteries of Creation in the following terms:

There are three opinions of human beings, namely of all those who believe that there is an existent deity with regard to the eternity of the world or its production in time. The first opinion, which is the opinion of all who believe in the Law of Moses our Master ... is that the world as a whole ... was brought into existence by God after having been purely and absolutely non-existent, and that God ... had existed alone, and nothing else. ... Afterwards through His will and His volition, He brought into existence out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things... The second opinion is that of all the philosophers of whom we have heard reports and whose discourses we have seen... Hence they believe that there exists a certain matter that is eternal as the deity is eternal; and that He does not exist without it, nor does it exist without Him. They do not believe that it has the same rank in what exists as He... but that He is the cause of its existence ... This is also the belief of Plato... The third opinion is that of Aristotle, his followers and the commentators ... He thinks that this being as a whole, such as it is, has never ceased and will never do so; that the permanent thing not subject to generation and passing-away, namely the heaven, likewise does not cease to be; that time and motion are perpetual and everlasting and not subject to generation and passing-away; and also that the thing subject to generation and passing-away, namely that which is beneath the sphere of the moon, does not cease to be.⁴⁰

As a Renaissance author, Leone Ebreo intended to employ different “opinions” regarding issues of fundamental importance for his understanding of the world. He does so regardless of his manifest preference for the position of Plato over that of Aristotle. Hence the relevance to us of the position that Maimonides ascribes to Plato in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II, chapter 13, a position that for the author of the *Dialoghi d'Amore* appeared as if dressed in kabbalistic garb. According to Shlomo Pines, such doctrine implies that both “the Intellect (which contains the Ideas and is pure act and form) and Primal Matter or Chaos (which is pure potentiality) participate in God’s Eternity, the first being the Universal Father of all things and

³⁹ Cf. In particular Kenneth Hart Green, *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Translated with an introd. and notes by Shlomo Pines; with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 281-285; here quoted from Shlomo Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?,” pp. 367-368.

the second their Mother. Their Sons, however, made and formed – as is the whole and every part of it – by God through the intermediary of these two parents, have not the capacity for being eternal. For everything that has been made is composed of the Matter of Chaos (*di materia del Chaos*) and of the Form of the Intellectual Idea (*di forma della Idea intellettuale*) and must (therefore) have a temporal beginning and an end – followed by a new beginning. In other words, this process is cyclical.”⁴¹

Therefore, the “conversation” between Leone Ebreo and Maimonides appears to us as particularly important inasmuch as it confirms that the Renaissance author tried to overcome the metaphysical dualism of the tradition and, concomitantly, his personal search for a unifying principle of universal unity. Furthermore, it also proves the absence of any communality between Leone Ebreo and the Manichean belief in the existence of an irreducible Evil in the world. In the *Dialoghi d'amore*, rather, we see a strong insistence upon the idea that Creation is good, as seen in *Genesis* 1, as well as upon the consideration that Satan himself must be understood as servant of God Almighty, something clearly expressed in chapter 1 of the *Book of Job*. In other words, the metaphysical tension that remains in the *Dialoghi d'amore* seems to be mostly at work between what we might consider as two desirable goals. As shown by Shlomo Pines, Leone Ebreo is best understood in terms of a subtle dialectic of contemplation and action, something that puts him in a league with some major expressions of Renaissance spirituality.⁴²

The relevance of all this is related to the fact that it is as an heir to the intellectualism of Maimonides that Leone Ebreo first identifies intellectual contemplation as the highest goal of man, a goal that remains concomitant with a withdrawal from the world and an experience of authentic delight in God's eternal Ideas. Hence the association of Leone Ebreo's eroticism with the mystique of the *Song of Songs*. As Anthony Perry has shown, the Hebrew Bible is read in the *Dialoghi d'amore* in explicit allegorical terms, indeed in terms so allegorical that for Leone Ebreo the proper meaning of the biblical poem is inseparable from the idea that the goal of life is for the soul to achieve an ecstatic bliss in connection with the experience of being united with God. As in the Jewish tradition, the supreme instance of this union with the divine is to be found in the figure of Moses, the man of whom in the mystical tradition it is said that he died by the *kiss of God*.⁴³

Like Maimonides, Leone Ebreo believes that for the human being to reach that highest form of beatitude, a most rigorous and consistent intel-

⁴¹ Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?,” pp. 369-370.

⁴² Cf. Anthony T. Perry, *Erotic Spirituality: The Integrative Tradition From Leone Ebreo to John Donne* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980).

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

lectual preparation is needed. Before gaining entrance through the gates of theology, the true seeker of Wisdom must first study logic, natural philosophy and sciences. Being aware that it is impossible to have exhaustive and comprehensive empirical study of all things in the world and to know all things, Leone Ebreo makes an important assertion when he says that the adequately prepared intellect is the one that receives divine illumination and thereby will “see all things not in their particularity but as they exist essentially, in eternal unity in the mind of God.”⁴⁴ This moment of illumination, the result of the intervention of the agent intellect, corresponds to the one in which the human being can be said to enjoy the highest and most perfect felicity, which is the intellectual vision of God.

For Leone Ebreo, love constitutes the most important fruit of knowledge. But which one of these two, i.e., knowledge or love, constitutes the true essence of happiness? The position developed in the *Dialoghi d'amore* regarding the nature of the highest beatitude of man is that neither love nor knowledge as independent instances are capable of inducing happiness, but only the union of the two, precisely in that *copulazione* of human intellect and divine mind which appears as central in the thought of the son of the Don Isaac Abravanel.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in consonance with the intellectualistic tradition of Moses Maimonides, Leone Ebreo defends the idea that only the intellect is eternal and capable of approaching the divine in the human being. He elaborates this in the *Dialoghi d'amore* with a study of the five levels of intellect, each of which reflects the divine beauty in accordance to its own nature or capacity: human intellect in *potentia*, human intellect *in actu*, human intellect in “copulation” with pure or angelic intellect, angelic intellect, and divine intellect.⁴⁶

In line with Maimonides, Leone Ebreo particularizes the discussion on the problem of man's union with the agent intellect, which for the most part has been codified in accordance with one of two traditions: 1) the *philosophers*, who regard the agent intellect as the lowest of the angelic intellects; and 2) the *true believers*, who identify the agent intellect with God Himself.⁴⁷ In the *Dialoghi d'amore*, these two views appear as complementary, rather than contradictory. The first intends to describe the limits

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Cf. Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe*, pp. 90-94.

⁴⁶ *Dialoghi*, p. 236.

⁴⁷ The first doctrine, i.e., the view that the agent intellect is the lowest of the angels, was maintained by Jewish Neoplatonist philosophers in Italy such as Jehudah Romano (born in 1292), while the identification of the agent intellect with God, which Leone Ebreo seems to favor, was defended especially by Christian Philosophers like Saint Thomas Aquinas. On this complex question see Josef Baruch Sermoneta, *La dottrina dell'intelletto e la “fede filosofica” di Jehudah e Immanuel Romano* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1965). Cf. Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, p. 21.

of man's natural reason, while the second is an evocation of the glory conferred by divine grace, that is, the angelic vision of God. The logical question for Leone Ebreo is the link between the angelic world, in which it is born, and the created universe, to where it proceeds, and where angels all directly partake of the love of divine beauty, or through the medium of the angel next above it in excellence. In preparing the answer, Leone Ebreo establishes his conviction that angels all partake of the divine love in the same way or measure as they enjoy union with God. He says, "philosophers, theologians, and Arabic thought are at variance" on this issue. By following the schools of Avicenna and Al-Ghazali, rabbi Moses and others, on the ascending order of intellectual love, Leone argues that the birth of lower beings from higher ones is through the two kinds of contemplation and love which are proper to each. For instance, on the one hand the highest angel or first intelligence moves the first heaven and enjoys the vision of God without intermediary; it contemplates the beauty of its cause, God, produces the second intelligence out of love for Him. On the other hand, the highest angel contemplates its own beauty and for the love of which produces the first heaven, which is composed of an incorruptible and circular body and an intellectual soul. Similarly, the second intelligence produces both the third intelligence and the second heaven, and so on down to the lowest of the upper intelligences, such as in the sphere of the moon, which, through its own two contemplations, produces the lower agent intellect including all the forms of the sublunar world as well as the lowest or human intellect.⁴⁸

Shlomo Pines contends that Leone Ebreo's metaphysical system constitutes a theory about the production of the worlds and the cosmic dimension of love.⁴⁹ It is in the presentation of this theory that Leone Ebreo refers not only to the Arabic and Jewish philosophers, but also to the Greeks as well in his *Dialoghi d'amore*.

In order to evaluate the relevance of Moses Maimonides in the formation of Leone Ebreo's thought, we must take into consideration the fact that in the cultural formation of the Jews in the Middle Ages the *Moreh Nevukhim* (*The Guide of the Perplexed*) played a similar role to the one played by the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard among Christian theologians. In some Synagogues of the Iberian Peninsula, including the one in Lisbon, Maimonides' *Guide* constituted the pedagogical base for the course of rabbinical and philosophical formation of their members. During his exile in Italy Don Isaac Abravanel had the intention of composing a commentary on the *Moreh Nevukhim*, a fact that makes us easily assume that Judah Abravanel was helped by his own father in the process of becoming

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?"

acquainted with the work of the great rabbi and Jewish philosopher, something all the more understandable as Moses Maimonides came to play in the Jewish Middle Ages a role no less important than the one played by Thomas Aquinas in Christianity.

Conclusion: The Arabs and the Role of Dialogue

Besides Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides, Leone Ebreo also mentioned in his *Dialoghi d'amore* four other Islamic philosophers, Averroes, al-Farabi, Avicenna, and al-Ghazali, who belonged to different schools of thought. For Leone Ebreo, these thinkers were inscribed under the common designation of *la prima academia de gl'Arabi*,⁵⁰ a designation that calls to mind, not only the first Platonic Academy in Athens, but also the Academy founded by Marsilio Ficino in Florence.⁵¹ According to Shlomo Pines, it is plausible to think that by using such a label Leone Ebreo intended to suggest the Platonic nature of these important thinkers of the Middle Ages. The plausibility is corroborated by the fact that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola used the adjectives *divinum et Platonicum* in at least one of his references to Avicenna.⁵²

Leone Ebreo introduces his references to the Arabic philosophers in the context of the controversy being played in the second of the *Dialoghi* regarding the question whether the Supreme God may be identified with the Mover of the Universe, i.e. the First of the Separate Intellects, each of which has charge of a sphere, or whether He who is called the First or the First Cause is different from, and superior to, the Separate Intellects. He explained how the Arab philosophers were keen to insist that the First Mover does not apply to God Most High, since otherwise God would be like a soul assigned to a sphere, just as motor intelligences. Such an allocation would be inappropriate when referring to God Himself, for God must be said the "end, for whose sake the Prime Mover moves." Leone Ebreo argued that this opinion is not universally accepted as Averroes and other commentators of Aristotle defended the opinion that the Supreme God can be identified with the Mover of the Universe, i.e. the First of the Separate Intellects. Regarding the question whether God Most High (*il sommo Dio*) is the First Motor, Leone Ebreo remarked that it would be excessively bold on his part to attempt to settle such a profound philosophical dispute (*Sarebbe lungo dirti quello che in ciò si può dire, e forse sarebbe audacia affermare l'una opinione sopra l'altra*).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Dialoghi*, p. 136.

⁵¹ Cf. Nesca Adeline Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*. Reprint of the 1935 ed. (New York: Octagon Books, 1968).

⁵² Cf. Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?," p. 376.

Regarding the issue of using a dialogic form in philosophy we go back to Gabirol's *Fons vitae* as it plays a paradoxical role. On the one hand, his work disregards the importance of dialogue as a philosophical or literary device; on the other hand, it also can be described as a dialogue itself that nothing interrupts or diverts and so pursues its central subject unswervingly far from all human contingencies and so constitutes a more or less systematic development of philosophical ideas such as the existence of universal matter and universal form.⁵³

Occupying the dramatic scene of the *Fons vitae* is a teacher and a disciple, who are basically in accord with one another regarding both the end to be attained and the method to pursue it. Like the disciple in the *Fons Vitae*, the role of the woman (Sofia) in the *Dialoghi d'amore* appears limited to the task of summarizing the discourses of her "teacher" (Filone), something she always does leading the reader into Filone's declarations by asking certain, rather strategic questions; but like the teacher in the *Fons vitae*, it is always the learned Filone who does the bulk of the talking. Following the example of the Teacher in Ibn Gabirol's work, Filone is the figure endowed by Leone Ebreo with all the required authority to effectively answer the questions and interpellations. Sofia approaches Filone with the attitude of someone who knows well how her interlocutor can solve all her doubts; on the other hand, she herself is at times severely "reprimanded" by her instructor – at least twice just by means of a twist of her name – for her lack of wisdom. It would thus seem that "Filone" is indeed the author's mouthpiece and, consequently, that the dialogical form used by both Ibn Gabirol and Leone Ebreo constitutes nothing more than an artificial device at the service of the expository dynamic of the text.⁵⁴

The role and importance of the dialogue as literary and philosophical form remains a complex issue. We believe that behind all the investment in the dialogic form that we see both in the *Fons vitae* and in the *Dialoghi d'amore* there is a rationale at work, which explains why the use of dialogue can be most appropriate for a systematic exploration of certain philosophical questions. In fact, one wonders: if the main interest commanding the authors of these works is purely systematic, why then did they not simply develop the argument in the form of a treatise? In Ibn Gabirol's case, here is the explanation we can find in Jacques Schlanger:

Fictitious dialogue or real dialogue, the *Fons Vitae* develops and explains doctrinal elements of which Ibn Gabirol is the heir and not the author. Nevertheless, the fact remains that nowhere is the doctrine of universal matter and universal form extended until its final logical and ontological conse-

⁵³ Cf. Jacques Schlanger, "Le Maître et le disciple du *Fons Vitae*," *Revue des études juives* (127, 1968), pp. 393-397.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

quences, as in the *Fons Vitae*... Ibn Gabirol plays the game thoroughly: he takes seriously the philosophical data that transmitted to him. The result is that, on the one hand, he extracts the most radical conclusions, while trying not to hit the traditional framework of belief too brutally; and on the other hand, it puts doctrine to the test and raises fundamental objections. Why a dialogue and not a systematic exposition? Because only dialogue allows both the deepening of doctrine by the play of questions and answers, and its testing by real and founded objections.⁵⁵

Leone Ebreo's use of dialogue as philosophical and literary device is perhaps richer and more brilliant than that of Ibn Gabirol, for, should Filone be the only and true mouthpiece of the author, how, then, explain that his name is Filone (which derives from love) rather than Sofia or wisdom, particularly given the fact that within Leone Ebreo's intellectual universe wisdom represents the higher principle in man? Moreover, if Filone is able to say everything, how to explain the discrepancy between Filone's ideas on the intellectual love of God as the source of man's happiness and his confessed immediate desire, which undoubtedly pursues sensual delight? It is not uncommon throughout the *Dialoghi* that Filone reveals himself as a lethargic figure. This can be seen from both the beginning and the end of each section when Sofia asks for continuation of the proceedings and Filone seems always inclined to some other, more urgent, matter. For Leone Ebreo, the very first and initial impetus of the *Dialoghi d'amore* towards a philosophical dialogue is provided by Sofia, as she is the one who successfully turns her suitor's declaration of affection into a major philosophical problem. Whereas Filone often seems satisfied with the mere transmission of opinions learned from other thinkers, Sofia, by the power and energy of her criticism, always forces him to make needed distinctions and, above all, to give his own personal view or opinion about the ideas or issues under discussion. Indeed, there are no few instances in which Leone Ebreo reverses the roles within the dialectic of master and disciple, as to indicate that in question, ultimately, are the relations between man and woman, the dialectic of male and female as condition of possibility for the construction of a better world.

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⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

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Love Comes First

EDWARD MOAD

We philosophers have developed a reputation for ourselves as a bunch of arrogant “wise guys.” Yet philosophy, as we like to remind people, means “love of wisdom,” and as Socrates reminds us in the *Symposium*, this entails a lack of wisdom, rather than its possession. Recall his critique of Agathon’s speech on the nature of Love. One who loves something desires it, he argues; but one does not desire what one already possesses. Therefore, one only loves that which one lacks. When we express desire for what we already possess, he reasons, what we really mean is that we want to remain in possession of it. “But this is to be in love with a thing which is not yet in one’s power or possession,” he says, “namely the continuance and preservation of one’s present blessings in the future.”¹

Following this line of reasoning further, leads to the conclusion that true possession is not mere transitory possession. Thus, no true possession is possible for transitory beings like ourselves, for the future is not in our power. The lover, therefore, never truly possesses what he loves. In fact, love entails the awareness of this fact. For again, that which is truly (that is, eternally) possessed, is not desired, and that which is not desired, is not loved. Yet the objective fact that we transitory beings can never truly possess anything is not the end of the story here. For desire is a subjective state, and one may subjectively believe oneself to truly possess something, even though this is objectively impossible. It is therefore just as impossible to desire that which one merely (and falsely) *believes* he truly possesses.

That which one believes he truly possesses, he therefore does not love. To believe one truly possesses something is to take it for granted, and this indicates a lack of love. This is reflected in how we understand our personal relationships. For to take a parent, spouse, or friend for granted indicates a deficiency in love. We only truly love a person if we do not take

¹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin, 1951).

them for granted; that is, if we acknowledge that our future enjoyment of the relationship is not entirely within our power. That is, we only love that which we understand ourselves as not truly possessing.

Thus, one only truly loves wisdom – one is only truly a philosopher – when one understands oneself as not truly possessing wisdom. What does it mean to understand oneself as not truly possessing wisdom? It is to understand that the continued blessing of whatever wisdom one enjoys at any time is not entirely within one's power to secure. This, in turn, is to understand wisdom as a reality independent of any transitory enjoyment of it with which I, or any other temporal being, might happen to be blessed at any moment. That is, wisdom is not simply an attribute that human beings have when we are "wise."

The existence of an attribute is dependent on the thing that possesses it. Then if wisdom were just my attribute, it would cease to exist when I cease being wise. That would mean there is no wisdom that I do not possess. Yet the object of my love, as we saw, is necessarily something that I do not possess. So as a lover of wisdom I must necessarily understand wisdom as *something*; that is, a reality independent of my possession of it. My understanding that I do not truly possess wisdom follows from my temporality: the fact that since I do not have power over the future, I do not have power over my continued enjoyment of the blessing of wisdom. Therefore, wisdom is a reality independent of its possession by, and is thus not simply an attribute of, any temporal being.

That is, wisdom is not simply the attribute of wise people, inasmuch as they are wise. If all humanity were to descend into foolishness, wisdom would still be a reality, and a possible object of love for the true philosopher, who consequently understands wisdom as a transcendent reality, existing independently of any temporal being. To understand wisdom as a reality transcendent of any temporal being, is to understand it as eternal. It is the eternal principle of that wisdom enjoyed by, or exemplified in temporal things. The philosopher, therefore, loves wisdom as something discoverable in and through the nature of being, and not just in and through himself. His desire is to discover, enjoy, and conform to it eternally.

This leads me to pose the question, whether it is possible to desire that which one also believes to be impossible. More specifically, can one desire the perpetual enjoyment of the blessing of wisdom and believe it is impossible? Can one love wisdom, who has given up hope in it? If not, then to love wisdom is to believe in the possibility of its perpetual enjoyment. Since this is also to understand that it is not in my power to secure its perpetual enjoyment, then it means believing in another in whose power it is to secure it for me, with all that entails. That is, if I may use Aquinas' famous phrase, "what all men mean by God." In that case, true philosophy

entails hope and faith; and its pursuit always bears the essential feature of prayer.

This is, of course, the very opposite of how we have come to understand “philosophy” in modern parlance, where we have unfortunately become used to defining it in opposition to “religion.” However, as I do not have on hand any solid argument against the possibility of desiring what one believes to be impossible, this remains a purely hypothetical supposition. The best I could do in this regard, is to consider the desire for something that all would take to be absolutely impossible. Can one, for example, desire to be God? When we describe someone as wanting to be God, do we mean that he wants that which he knows is impossible, or can we only mean that he is under the illusion that it is possible? As I remain inconclusive on the question, I must leave open the case of the tragically pessimistic philosopher; that is, of the sincerity of one who claims to love wisdom having abandoned hope in it. I will turn, then, to the question why he would have abandoned hope; to which I think the role of method is relevant.

If one desires something, we may safely propose, one will desire the means to attain it. A philosophical method – that is, method in the broadest epistemological sense – is intended as a means of attaining wisdom. Philosophers, therefore, naturally desire method, and to pursue their object methodologically. We do not want any method, however, but sound method. Then what do we mean by a sound method? Is it a sufficient means of attaining wisdom, or a necessary means, or both? Consider, in the context of the classical Islamic tradition, the demonstrative method (or *Burhan*), which the *falasifa* developed from their Aristotelian inheritance.

Genuine knowledge, according to this view, is arrived at by deduction, from self-evident first principles through a series of middle terms, to apodictic conclusions. Syllogistic logic lays out the forms of valid, truth preserving relationships between terms, but how do these terms enter the mind in the first place? This question was related to that of how to interpret the fifth chapter of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. Thinking, like all change, is the activation of a potency in the human soul, and therefore requires an active agent. Is this agent intellect, then, part of the human soul, or something beyond it?

The consensus of the *falasifa* seems to have been that it is something beyond. Indeed, it seems it would have to be, if knowledge is to be about anything outside of one’s self. In this case, the demonstrative method is not a sufficient means of attaining wisdom. For without contact with the agent intellect, it would have no traction. The terms that we link together in a logical demonstration are drawn from the forms of things, and these forms are transmitted to both the matter of the cosmos and the human

soul from the agent intellect. That is, the pursuit of wisdom is only possible for the lover of wisdom, if he is connected to the wisdom in the nature of things by the principle of wisdom behind it.

Is the *burhani* method, then, a necessary condition of attaining wisdom? Al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy would seem to imply that it is not. For the prophet, according to this theory, has all the forms of the cosmos transmitted to his soul from the agent intellect at once, mitigating the need for a deduction from first principles.² Ibn Sīnā's theory of '*aql qudsi* even grants something of this ability to non-prophets.³ Here, an entire line of reasoning – all the terms that one would otherwise need to arrive at stepwise by deduction – is intuited together. What the *falasifa* took to be the soundest of methods was not, on final analysis, taken as either necessary or sufficient for the enjoyment of wisdom. Rather, it was a tool that the lover of wisdom could, and would, avail herself, in the pursuit of her beloved, but the consummation of that pursuit was ultimately a blessing and gift of the Wise Himself.

Nevertheless, the *falasifa* still tended to overstep in their claims of what that method availed them, at least according to a critic like Al-Ghazālī. While he was no enemy of demonstrative method, he explicitly testifies in his famous autobiographical account to his ultimate dependence on the divine light for his confidence in the validity of the first principles on which demonstration rests.⁴ A central theme of his critique of the *falasifa*, is that while demonstration can arrive at proof of the existence of divine power and wisdom on the basis of the existence and wisdom discoverable in the cosmos, it cannot explain the existence of the cosmos and the wisdom therein, as a kind of logical deduction from the existence of God.⁵ That is, the wisdom in the existence of creation lies outside the domain of what any rational method can grasp.

Thus, he argues, the world's order is both optimal and contingent. Reason can demonstrate, following on God's perfection, that this world is as good as any world could possibly be, but not that it is the only world that could be this good. There are features of the universe that could have been quite different, without compromising its degree of perfection. Thus, the world is as it is, not by necessity, but by divine creative will. It is therefore not subject to explanation by demonstrative method. Then to hold that wisdom is limited to that which is demonstrable through the *burhani* method, entails that everything in existence is ultimately absurd.

² Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

³ Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1980).

⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, translated by Michael Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1997).

For the *falasifa*, this would have counted as a *reductio* argument against defining wisdom as what is availed by that method. Hence, Ibn Rushd's response was to insist that all the details of the cosmos are demonstrably necessary, but in lieu of actually giving the demonstration, he tells us to look for it in the natural sciences.⁶ Since Nietzsche, an approach to philosophy has become commonplace, which would happily accept the implication that existence is absurd, and even take it as a point in favor. Nevertheless, we accept such "anti-philosophical" approaches to philosophy, as forms of "philosophy," and include them (as we should) on the menu of philosophical options in our liberal market of ideas. Yet when it comes to the Islamic tradition, our conception of what counts as "philosophical" narrows to include only those committed, not just to the hegemony of rational method, but of a specific model of rational method of ancient Greek origin long since abandoned by the modern West.

Thus, Islamic philosophy can only be *falsifa*. One might think this is a natural conclusion to draw, from the fact that *falsifa* is the Arabized form of *philosophy*. However, it is not an Arabic translation of the term's meaning. That would be *hubb al-hikma*, "love of wisdom." Orientalist scholars of Islamic thought were of course aware of this. Their narrow notion of what could count as Islamic philosophy was more often motivated more by their own self-conception in contradistinction to their conception of Islam. At any rate, the full scope and story of Islamic philosophy has only more recently begun to be discovered in western scholarship.⁷ I suggest that we might describe this story as one of resistance against the tyranny of method, in favor of a methodological pluralism and even productive ambiguity, effectively maintaining an attitude of epistemic humility and openness to the reception of wisdom by whichever means we might receive it.

We can find a paradigmatic example of the opposite trend, that of succumbing to or imposing methodological tyranny, in the work of David Hume.⁸ He is quite certain of what the source of any wisdom must be (if there is such a thing). Every idea, he says, is a copy of an impression (or empirical "sense data"). On this basis, he prescribes his method for determining the meaning (or meaninglessness) of whatever anyone might say: find the impression whence it comes. Then how do we know that every idea is a copy of an impression? To this question, Hume simply issues a challenge: find an idea that is not a copy of an impression, for he is sure we cannot. To take this seriously means that, if we do find such an

⁶ Ibn Rushd, *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954).

⁷ Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

idea, the copy theory stands refuted. Yet, when he famously “discovers” that we have no impression of causation, he does not conclude that not all ideas are after all copies of impressions. Instead, he concludes that we have no idea of causation after all. Thus, he chooses the hegemony of the empirical method over wisdom from whatever source it may come. The impact of this choice on the history of western thought needs no review and it would be difficult to overestimate.

For to create the appearance of avoiding the chasm of skepticism toward which Hume casually steers the ship of thought, Kant played his carefully crafted parlor trick.⁹ If acquiescence to the tyranny of method cuts us off from truth, then we may simply redefine “truth” as the product of such acquiescence. How do we know this product is the truth? Because it is the product of the method. How do we know the method is valid? Because it is the pre-condition of the product. Self-conscious epistemic ambiguity can be illuminating when it opens up spaces for illumination, as we find so often in the history of philosophy. The effect is the opposite, however, when such ambiguity appears in the guise of finality. Thus, after Kant, we find this ambiguity inevitably resolved in one way or another. With neo-Kantians and Hegel, wisdom has no external source, but is all “inside us.” It finally took the wisdom of Nietzsche to evaluate the resulting situation: there is wisdom neither inside nor out.

Thereafter “philosophy” and “philosophers” gave up on love and turned to prostitution. And as they did, so did the whole of knowledge, having lost its center and guiding hope, falling fully apart into its current state as a hyper-specialized, compartmentalized “marketplace of ideas.” This story is not new and has been retold many times, and in better, more complete versions than this. All I would add here, to the general lament, is to emphasize that love is the key element missing in the philosophical formula underlying the current human condition; and thus to warn against the mistake of seeing a solution in the replacement, of the tyranny of a current method (however conceived), by the tyranny of an alternative method. This would only place different (and equally arrogant) preconditions on the means by which wisdom shall accepted from this source beyond.

On the contrary, the lover of wisdom must defy any intellectual boundaries that stand in the way of her pursuit of the beloved. For when love dies, and the pretense of wisdom holds sway, self-defining intellectual fiefdoms close their borders and leave philosophy floating on a raft in the sea.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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Philosophy as Love of Being and Its Role in the Recovery of Meaning Today

JOSEPH I. FERNANDO

The Greek definition of philosophy as love of wisdom is traditionally attributed to Pythagoras (570-495 BC). The philosopher as lover of wisdom seems to have been contrasted with the sophist, the lover of knowledge. Philosophy as love of wisdom is ancient, time-honored, respectable and apt but inadequate today because people do not seem to relate to it in the context of the crisis of meaning prevalent in the technological, postmodern, cybernetic times of ours. Is it possible to love wisdom today? Would it be better to say that we desire wisdom rather than love it? If wisdom is desirable, philosophy is desire for wisdom rather than love of wisdom. *Philosophy is more than love of wisdom; it is love of being.* Why must philosophy be love of being rather than love of wisdom? Because the ultimate nature of being is love. Hence, love constitutes the ultimate concern of metaphysics. Philosophy as love of being defines humans' essential relationship with being which is something more than a subject-object relationship or of a conqueror and the conquered or of a consumer and the consumed or of anything imaginable. How is love of being possible? It is possible primarily because humans experience intrinsically an undeniably deep thirst and hunger to love and be loved. This existential reality is the basis of humans' projection into other beings as lovable. To be is to be lovable. Humans are surrounded by people who are lovable (though some are not so!) and by myriad other lovable beings as well and attracted profoundly by Divinity, the supremely lovable Being or Love Itself. Love is not only a choice but also a moral and a spiritual law of being. Love is built into being. Love is sacred. Every being in the universe and beyond is sacred. No being is profane.

Being is not only one, true, good and beautiful but also lovable. Being is one because it is a particular being and not some other being as well simultaneously. Being is true because it exists. Being is good not necessarily in the moral sense, but to be is better than not to be. In this sense,

being is good. Being is beautiful not necessarily in the aesthetic sense but in the sense of wholesomeness which is metaphysical beauty. Finally, being is lovable because of its cherished place in the scheme of things and their inter-relatedness. *I would like to propose ontophilia which is love of being as a new definition of philosophy.* *Ontophilia* includes *homophilia*, *cosmophilia* and *theophilia* which are love of humans, love of the world and love of God respectively. The understanding of philosophy as *ontophilia* or love of being invites us to fall in love with being. It is not enough to have knowledge of being but we ought to love it. Love of wisdom may sound abstract whereas love of being is concrete and at once a task, involvement and commitment. *Love of being is a moral imperative.* To put it theo-philosophically, we need to love not only the Creator but creation too. Philosophy as love of being would provide meaning to our existence because existence is unthinkable without entering into union with the other, which is sustained by communion. Our fulfillment is not found in ourselves but in the profound union with the other. Existence is essentially and inextricably oriented to the other. *Take away the other; I cease to be.* Philosophy construed as love of being rather than as love of wisdom impels us to have peak experience with the other, to celebrate the joy of union with the other and to exult in the eternal presence of the other.

Ontophilia as love of being defines our relationship with the world, humans and God. It provides a spiritual basis for our interaction with beings. Love of being renders conquest of being impossible. Philosophy as *cosmophilia* impels us to love the world – the earth and the air, water and fire, birds and animals, oceans and deserts, forests and mountains, the sun, the moon and the stars, and myriad other things. If what God created is good because He is supremely good, we ought to love creation. Beings in the world are not mere objects having use-value and cash-value. Our self-respect demands that we handle them with respect. Such an attitude will free us from domination to care of beings. Philosophy as *cosmophilia* will liberate us from domination of the world. “God took seeds from different worlds and sowed them on this earth, and His garden grew up and everything came up that could come up. But what grows lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. If that feeling grows weak or is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die away in you. Then you will be indifferent to life and even grow to hate it. That is what I think.”¹ Philosophy as *ontophilia* which includes *homophilia* will define inter-subjective relationships in terms of solidarity and fellowship rather than of animosity and confrontation. Philosophy as love of fellow humans provides the basis of love and becomes dynamic and obligatory. Finally, *ontophilia* as inclusive of *theophilia* will guide us to

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: American Library, 1980), p. 296.

enter into profound union with Divinity rather than endless speculation on it. Thus, *ontophilia* may contribute to a recovery of meaning in an age of crisis of meaning.

Philosophy as Homophilia, Love of Humans

The highest call humans can ever receive is the call to love. Love is more than an idea; it is an experience, a commitment. It is easy to love an idea and so hard to love beings. Loving humanity is not the same as loving human beings. "The more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity."² No human being can live without love. All of us desire to love and be loved. Some people are keener on being loved than loving. Some others complain nobody loves them. To be loved it is better to make myself lovable rather than complaining that nobody loves me. How to make myself lovable? If I am cantankerous, nasty, harm others, I cannot expect people to love me. Some saints may love me out of charity; but others may not because of what I am. If I am kind, generous, forgiving, pleasant and honest – in other words, virtuous – more people may love me. If I am interested in giving rather than receiving I will experience more of love and joy. Without love, we would be dead either physically or spiritually. Love is the most essential human need. *Homophilia*, as opposed to homophobia, originates in the family and reaches out to more and more people. The home and the hearth have to be protected and valued above all else. A nation that pays utmost attention to the welfare of the family is a blessed nation because the disintegration of marriage and the family would mean disintegration of society and the nation. *Just like life on earth is impossible without water (no philosophy and theology will be possible without water because we will be dead), homophilia, cosmophilia and theophilia will be impossible without the existence of the family without which there cannot be a community/nation/globe.*

My sense is that philosophy as love of being is more concrete than philosophy as love of wisdom. That does not mean wisdom is less important. Philosophy as love of being binds us to the other without whom meaning is blurry and ambiguous. Meaning is found in union which is the goal of life. In this sense, marriage is a commitment necessitated by the good of the family. Married couples with kids spend almost their entire lives in raising their offspring, educating them and finally getting them settled in life. Despite joys and sorrows, the family is expected to stick together, pray together, dine together and do many other things together. A broken marriage, a shattered home would be the ideal breeding ground for criminals and loveless persons. A marriage does not automatically become a success.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

The family has to work hard to succeed, which implies sacrifices and the spirit of forgiveness. Married love is the most fundamental and necessary love for the sustenance of humanity, without which the origin and development of human life would be impossible. Some people may run away from love because they may not be ready to accept the obligations of marriage. They may prefer to seek love outside marriage. If many people do that, what is social life going to be like? Marriage being a life-long commitment, one need to be very prudent in choosing one's partner and avoid rushing into marriage. Physical attraction plays a very important role in falling in love but that is not everything. *The human person is more than a body*. As Dostoevsky observes, some people fall in love not with the person but with some parts of the body of the person.³ Such a love may not last long because it is too physical. Suppose, later on, some parts of the body which are the object of love are removed or altered by surgery, will the love last after that? You fall in love with the total person, not some of their body parts!

Besides the love between the spouses which is most sacred and intimate, the love between parents and children is the next level of relationship in *homophilia*. Another level of loving experience is between siblings. In some places, the parents are not permitted to have more than one child. In such cases, words like brother, sister, uncle, aunt and the like exist in the dictionary but do not relate to real life. I do not know how happy the life of a single child would be. Would it know the joy of a shared life with siblings? In several cases, siblings experience deep and abiding love for each other. There are also cases of siblings who hate each other. A loving relationship depends on several factors which I am not going to examine right here. Yet another level of loving relationship takes place among relatives; this love spills out of the narrow circle of the family and reaches out to a larger one but still remains clannish. Clan has its own value but its members need to transcend tribal sentiments to enter larger circles of human relationship.⁴

The family is the nursery of love where humans learn the practice and value of love. Virtues like caring, sharing, forgiveness, joy, sacrifice, hard work, gratitude, generosity, unity are primarily learnt in the family and extended to the community, nation and globe. The family is the bedrock of *homophilia*. A disintegrated family will defeat *homophilia*. It is through redeeming the family that the world can be redeemed. Today, several attacks are mounted on the family and thousands of them collapse under the weight of these attacks. We need to work for the welfare of the family, the essential foundational institution of society. Schools, colleges, univer-

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Joseph F. Isidore, *Pathway to Peace: A Nonviolent Lifestyle* (Delhi: ISFCK, 2017), p. 223.

sities, governments, religious institutions and others are under obligation to safeguard the interests of the sacred institution of the family failing which will usher in the destruction of the globe. Love and care for the family or perish.

Homophilia is impossible without friendship which is a great gift indeed. I think friends are like-minded in several ways and have a lot in common to share with each other. Their mutual influence is great. Genuine friendship as a loving relationship is indispensable for people. Friends are those who weep for us. As Khalil Gibran says, we may forget those who laughed with us but not those who wept with us. The world would be poorer without friends. The circle of relationship gets larger when it includes the neighbourhood, acquaintances, teachers, classmates, school-mates, colleagues, clubs, fraternal associations, places of worship and the like. Lastly, there is the everyday contact with so many people mostly anonymous. We think love means only loving people who are close to us. In fact, it means goodwill towards all including our enemies. Obviously, we like those who are nice to us and dislike those who harm us. But love in a sublime sense means doing good things to those who are not good to us. Some people talk about “forgive and forget” in the context of forgiving those who harmed us and forgetting the harm. Forgiving may be possible but not forgetting. Just as we are somehow in touch with the future through hope and anticipation, we are connected to the past through our memory. So we remember the harm done to us. It is hard to forget it and in some severe cases impossible unless some healing of memory takes place. Even though the memory may be healed, it is not obliterated. “Forgive and forget” means “I have forgiven you. The harm you did to me is no longer an impediment to my doing good things to you.” Being good towards those who treated us nastily is very difficult ethics; but by practicing it we become divine. By regular practice of being nice to those who are not nice to us, we change the world for the better. This is easier said than done.⁵ To create a less violent and more humane atmosphere, we need to do this which is demanded by *homophilia*.

Union as the purpose of life is attainable with the right kind of being. Some people seek union with the wrong beings ending up in misery and tragedy. Excessive indulgence in alcohol, sex, and food is the wrong kind of union with things. Some others seek union with drugs which wreck them. These are substitutes to genuine union with persons without whom we cannot be. *Homophilia* is the right kind of union with humans. Humans are capable of achieving peak experience in loving each other. We live in a world where success is considered by many a supreme value. Some people are ready to do anything to be successful. Scores of youngsters

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

are inspired by the CEOs of multinational corporations, whose role model they imitate. Imagine the state of society in which the majority is after amassing fabulous wealth. Some others are keen on achieving fame, on exercising enormous power over others and the like. Wealth in itself is not evil; but opting for accumulation of wealth as one's greatest goal in life is not right. Why not? The simple answer is one cannot achieve union with wealth since union alone brings lasting bliss. Wealth can fly away any time! Wealth is no match to one's soul which finds bliss in things of a spiritual nature.

The entire material universe which is perishable is not equal to a single human soul which is spiritual and immortal. Fame may flatter one's ego but does not fill one's soul with bliss. It is ephemeral and not spiritual. Neither wealth nor fame nor any other worldly thing can be the cause of the peak experience of love in humans. Why love alone can cause beatitude? In the entire universe humans alone are capable of beatitude because of their nature. Humans are persons who are a unique combination of body and soul. They are capable of experiencing immeasurable beatitude on earth as well as in heaven to the fullest extent. Beatitude is found in union with each other and ultimately with Divinity. It is found in union only with persons and not with non-persons.

How to seek beatitude in *homophilia*? Beatitude is unattainable without an understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to be divine. What is to be human? It means many things. First of all, to be human is to have intrinsic worth, value and dignity. These things mean that human beings are not things but persons who are not for use. Things have a cash-value and use-value but persons are priceless; they are not for sale. They are not means but ends in themselves. They are ends in themselves because of their soul which is not only rational but also immortal. It survives the death of the body. "If you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up. Moreover, nothing then would be immoral; everything would be lawful, even cannibalism."⁶ For lack of space, I am not going to demonstrate the immortality of the soul here. The two greatest human characteristics are knowledge and love which make humans unique in the entire universe. Knowledge is something humans are endowed with. They have a natural inclination to know as expressed in Aristotle's dictum: "By nature, all men long to know."⁷ But at the same time, humans are selective about what they like to know because of interest, value, and attitude. They see things in their own perspective. There is

⁶ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 72.

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 4.

greater choice with regard to loving. One may decide to reach out to others in love or not to love them at all.

How is reaching out to others in love possible? Humans have squandered a colossal amount of time, energy and other resources hating each other, harming and killing each other. They have not exhibited much love of wisdom. If they did, there would not have been thousands of killing fields and rivers of blood. *Homophilia* calls for concrete expressions of love of fellow humans. Since we get only one chance to live, why not spend it on love? Why not transcend the barriers of race, caste, status, ethnicity, religion, language, gender and the like to reach out to the people of the earth? Why not experience the bliss of love in openness and service to others, especially the needy, the marginalized, and enemies if there are any? "There are souls that in their narrowness blame the whole world. But overwhelm such a soul with mercy, give it love, and it will curse what it has done, for there are so many germs of good in it. The soul will expand and behold how merciful God is, and how beautiful and just people are. He will be horrified; he will be overwhelmed with repentance and the countless debt he must henceforth repay."⁸

It is through loving we are born again to a new life.

It is through loving we redeem the world.

It is through loving we become divine.

It is through loving we defeat the forces of darkness.

It is through loving we become children of God.

It is through loving the kingdom of God descends on the earth.

Brothers, love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labor. For we must love not only occasionally, for a moment but forever. Everyone can love occasionally, even the wicked can.⁹

Philosophy as Cosmophilia, Love of the Universe

The planet earth is the only home we have. But we are very violent towards it. We are cutting the ground under our feet. The life-sustaining eco-system is threatened. Air, water, food and land are massively being polluted and poisoned. Several species of flora and fauna are rapidly disappearing forever. Their disappearance may signal that of the humans. But capitalist greed is indifferent to the welfare of the world. "An attitude to life which seeks fulfillment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth – in short, materialism – does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is

⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 295.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

strictly limited. Already, the environment is trying to tell us that certain stresses are becoming excessive.”¹⁰ What is the origin of environmental decay?

In my opinion, the philosophy of the 17th century French philosopher Descartes had a negative impact on the environment. He said, “I think; therefore, I am,” creating a dichotomy between the thinking thing or the knowing subject and the extended thing or the known object. This has had far-reaching consequences down through the centuries. The world was divided into two kinds of beings: beings with mind and beings without mind. The beings with mind are endowed with knowledge and can make sense of the world. The beings without mind are simply there without knowing why they are there. The beings without mind are there for the sake of beings with mind. The beings without mind comprise all beings in the world except humans. The difference between the human and the non-human is that of the lord of beings and all non-human beings under human lordship. Descartes did not probably foresee the practical consequences of his dualism of mind and matter or dichotomy of subject and object. But what has happened is the emergence of the belief that the world exists to be dominated by the rational beings that can almost do whatever they want to do with the world. The world is there to be rearranged, redesigned and reordered to suit human purposes. The belief in the primacy/supremacy of the mind could be a cause of human domination over nature. Is human the lord of the earth because of his rationality? Since the object cannot think, is the subject free to deal with it as he likes?

“Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side. Until quite recently, the battle seemed to go well enough to give him the illusion of unlimited powers, but so well as to bring the possibility of total victory into view. This has now come into view, and many people, albeit only a minority, are beginning to realize what this means for the continued existence of humanity.”¹¹ Although Francis Bacon’s inductive method contributed to the advancement of science, it has had a degrading impact on humans and the environment over the centuries. His method was a major leap towards exploitation of nature. To control and use nature for the benefits of humans seems an affirmation of Descartes’ project. The experimental method of science must be used for the study of nature to unlock its secrets, to control and use it for human comfort, pleasure and profit. Nature is seen as fit for exploitation, for human consumption. The world is seen as a totality of commodities.

¹⁰ E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (Delhi: Rupa and Co., 1993), p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

The world is for sale. Capitalist profit becomes a supreme value. Is there such a thing as pure science? Has science always been applied to concrete use through technology? The technological world we have today is largely a legacy of Francis Bacon. But in fact, nature cannot be conceived as opposed to humans who ought to love it and live in harmony with it. Such an attitude will not encourage ruthless exploitation of nature.

Polluting the atmosphere began with the Industrial Revolution as factories were set up for large scale production. The Industrial Revolution and colonialism fortified capitalism. Raw materials were shipped from the colonies to European factories and the colonies were gradually devastated by both material and human exploitation. Capitalist profit paved the way for greed as well. Humans have imposed their brokenness on the world. The world is groaning and longing for redemption. We need to redeem the world from decay and destruction to redeem ourselves too. The world is not exclusively for the present generation to live in but also for those in the future.¹²

This philosophy which upholds pleasure as the goal of life has further strengthened the legacy of exploitation. Aristotle considers happiness as the goal of life. But the utilitarians depart from this position to uphold the pleasure principle. Perhaps for them happiness is equated with pleasure. How should humans go about seeking pleasure? What would be the behavior of humans in a society which seeks pleasure? How would social life be possible? Is human only a pleasure-seeking animal? If everyone in a society is a pleasure-seeker, what would be the nature of such a society? What comes first, pleasure or goodness? Is it more important to be a good person than being a pleasure-seeker? In order to be good, do we not renounce some pleasures? Although some pleasures are legitimate and necessary for humans, does that mean we live only for the sake of pleasures or do we have certain higher goals and purposes in life? Is the meaning of life found only in pleasures? It seems that the philosophy of utilitarianism would justify exploiting the world for the sake of experiencing pleasures. E. F. Schumacher might distance himself from Mill because this world is finite and not sufficient for everyone's indulgence in maximum pleasures. Although humans are in need of material things for living, they are distinctly beings of moral concerns. We need to create a world where all would have the opportunity to live a truly human life free from dehumanizing conditions.¹³

The anthropocentric approach to the environment is a failure because it has glorified human and brought disaster to nature. Science is expected to be at the service humans so that i) they could control nature and ii) make

¹² Isidore, *Pathway to Peace*, p. 74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

human life increasingly comfortable. But the question is: are humans only to control nature or to live harmoniously with it, and how comfortable must be human life? Historically, the activity of controlling nature and adding limitless comforts to human life has been carried out to a ruthless extreme. There is a fundamental flaw in anthropocentrism which holds that humans are inherently superior to everything else in the world. Since humans alone are capable of understanding the world, they are superior to the plants and animals. Being rationally endowed does not mean being endowed with a license to treat nature whimsically. Perception of human superiority has resulted in non-perception of the – basic inter-relatedness of all things in the world.¹⁴

To rectify these erroneous perceptions and treatment of the world, our love has to transcend human beings and reach out to the world, the environmental world. We ought to love the world for to be human is not only to love humans but also the world. *The world does not belong to us; we belong to it.* We are part of the world although we think of it as a world of objects; we as subjects make sense out of the world. We think the world is for our use. In a sense it is true; but the world does not exist solely for our use. The world is to be there. The trees, forests, birds, animals, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains and oceans have a right to be. We have to let them be and depend on them prudently for our survival. Our lives would be poorer without watching the sunrise and the sunset. The humanity in us would be incomplete without looking at the drifting clouds above and the blue sea below them. Love every blade of grass, every flower that blooms for you, every butterfly that displays its magical charm, every flamingo that exhibits its flying skills, every bird that carols for you, every drop of water and every food grain that sustain you. Fall in love with the world and all that the world holds for you. It is by falling in love with the world that you begin to experience how wonderful the world is and how fortunate you are to behold it and how you begin to grow as a beautiful person in unison with the world that reveals a lot about the meaning of life. “Love all God’s creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If thou love each thing thou wilt perceive the mystery of God in all; and when once thou perceive this, thou wilt thenceforward grow every day to a fuller understanding of it: until thou come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal.”¹⁵ The world was created out of love, is sustained by love, and its teleology is love.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁵ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 216.

The more you love the world, the less violent you will be towards it.
The more you love the world, the more you will redeem it.
The more you love the world, the more divine you become.
The more divine you become, the more the world will be divinized.
This is *cosmophilia*, the love of the cosmos.
What more do you want than this?
Find it below.

Philosophy as Theophilia, Love of Divinity

Besides our love of humans and the world, we have other kinds of love too. We love certain causes and ideals. Down through the ages, great personalities have inspired us through their commitment to noble causes such as freedom, peace, reconciliation, loving service, heroism, human development and welfare, scientific and other discoveries even to the point of laying down their lives. We enjoy several benefits because of what they have bequeathed to us. It is in pursuit of excellence, in our search for truth, goodness and beauty that we espouse great causes and ideals which keep beckoning us. To be human is to fall in love with noble ideals which reflect *ontophilia*, the love of being. Finally, to be human is to transcend people, the world and ideals and to fall in love with Divinity. This may sound strange in a world where more and more people turn towards atheism and agnosticism. "There was an old sinner in the eighteenth century who declared that, if there was no God, he would have to be invented. And man has actually invented God. And what's strange, what would be marvelous, is not that God should really exist; the marvel is that such an idea, the idea of the necessity of God, could enter the head of such a savage, vicious beast as man. So holy it is, so touching, so wise and so great a credit it does to man."¹⁶

The call to holiness and to love Divinity is the ultimate call humans can ever receive. This is something to be experienced. The moment you experience it, you will be transported to another level of existence. I cannot say much about it. Just try it and you will know what I say is true. Yes, to be human is to love Divinity. "Faith means believing in things that are not seen." "Seek and you shall find." Seek Divinity and you shall find it. Pray like the Frenchman Jacques Maritain, an agnostic University student: "Oh, God, if you exist, let me know you." His prayer was answered and he became a believer and a great philosopher. Step out of atheism/agnosticism and dare to believe; Heaven will open up and grace and glory will descend on you. Already here and now, you will have a taste of *Satyam*,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Shivam, Sundaram (Truth, Love, Beauty), The Way, The Truth and The Life. You will experience in some measure the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the glory all the saints in heaven by putting on the new man. If only you believe, you will see things never seen before. To those souls who love profoundly, to those souls who pray constantly are revealed the secrets of existence, the mystery of Divinity. To those who are always bound to matter, these things do not matter because they do not transcend matter. Spiritual things are not revealed to them because they do not believe in them. *In my opinion, the best, the greatest and the noblest thing a human being can ever do is to love God.*

In this context, it is pointless to talk about a post-Christian Western civilization because a civilization cannot survive without a quest for Divinity. "For even those who have renounced Christianity and attack it, in their inmost being still follow the Christian ideal, for hitherto neither their subtlety nor the ardor of their hearts has been able to create a higher ideal of man and of virtue than the ideal given by Christ."¹⁷ In its desperate attempt to save itself from total collapse and extinction, the West will rediscover its Christian patrimony. The Western technological civilization will not last devoid of its Christian roots. The Western experiments with atheism and agnosticism will be exercises in futility and the West will regain its sanity someday. It will learn from Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist and other traditions what it means to be profoundly religious. The religions of the world cannot exist in isolation from each other. They shall be inefficacious without crisscrossing encounters. Their vitality and richness will fade into insignificance without their commitment to dialogue and fellowship with the peoples of the earth.

What splendid beings humans are because of their capacity to love and to have fellowship! This capacity to love reveals the inherent dignity, worth and value of human persons. Some may say that even the birds and animals are capable of love. So what is so special about human love? Yes, the birds and animals exhibit signs of love. They care for their young ones and for each other; but human love is much deeper arising out of an immortal soul with its commitment to a covenantal love, reaching out to noble causes, ideals and Divinity which the birds and animals are incapable of. *To be in love is to be in heaven. To be with the beloved is to be in heaven. Inability to love is to be in hell. To be estranged from the beloved is to be in hell. Locked up in the cocoon of selfishness is to be in hell.* Heaven and hell can be experienced in some measure already on earth. I tend to think what happens after death may be the continuation of what happens on earth. Is it God who either rewards or punishes us or are we going to either reward or punish ourselves based on the principle: reap what you

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

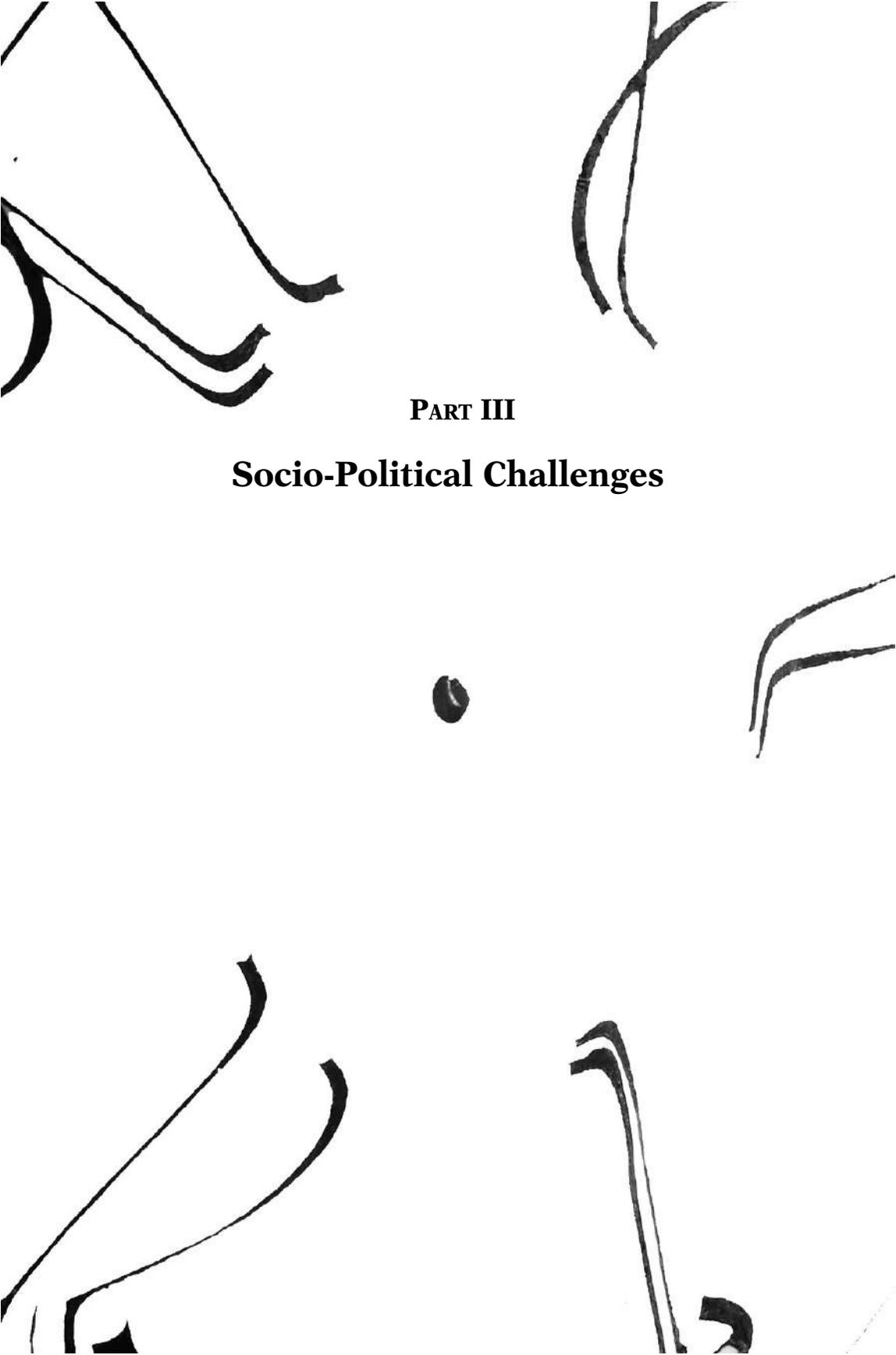
sow; love or perish? *Theophilia*, the love of Divinity is the pinnacle of *ontophilia*, the love of being.

Gabriel Marcel aptly remarks that life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived. I would like to add that it is love that enables us to live the mystery of life. In today's world where so many are interested in success, wealth, pampering of the senses and the like *ontophilia*, the love of being may not have an appeal. But philosophy as love of being can undoubtedly redeem and transform us and the world. That is why I am attracted by this definition of philosophy as love of being. I do not deny the value of the traditional definition of philosophy as love of wisdom. *But today, as we are engulfed in deadly violence the world over and perhaps on the brink of a nuclear holocaust, the recovery of sense and meaning of life may be found in our understanding of philosophy as ontophilia, love of being expressed through the triad of homophilia, love of humans, cosmophilia, love of the universe and theophilia, love of Divinity. Love alone leads to beatitude. "Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love. Love all men, love everything. Seek joy and love those tears. Don't be ashamed of that ecstasy, prize it, for it is a gift of God and a great one; it is not given to many but only to the elect."*¹⁸

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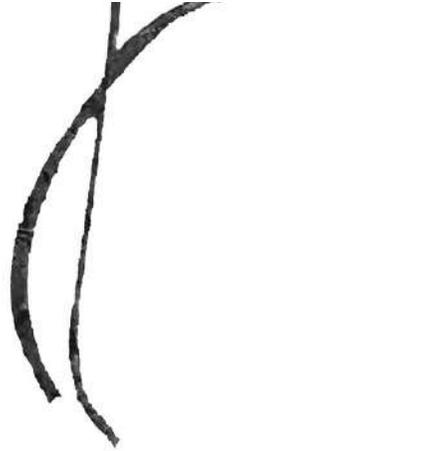
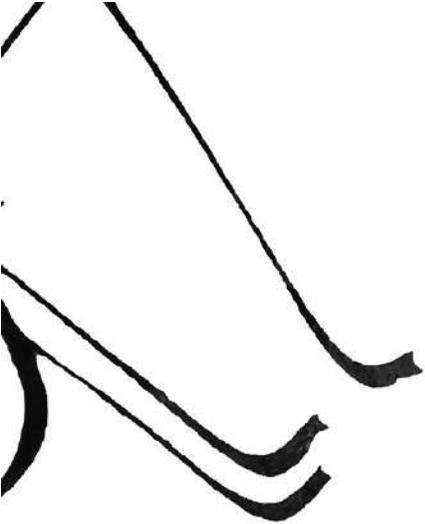
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¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.



PART III

Socio-Political Challenges



Morality, Moral Values in Traditional Yoruba Culture and Their Imperative for the Global Quest for Meaning

OLATUNJI A. OYESHILE

Introduction

The trajectory of human development predated or preceded the development of systematic philosophy. However philosophy, which is largely concerned with the “love of wisdom” about how man can organize his flux of experience, thereby providing answers to fundamental questions of life and existence, has over its history acquired various definitions in many academic circles. Howbeit, the definitions of philosophy itself are a philosophical problem. Granted this problem, it is still the case that philosophy is concerned with the human quest, which by extension, at the transcendental plane, leads to the question of God and, at the corporeal realm, leads to a concern with social and environmental events. All the same, humans continue to philosophize, not only to exercise their capacity to know and grapple with ultimate realities, but also to bring order, in the normative sense, to social organization.

In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the role of philosophy in bringing social order to human existence as a basis for addressing the global crisis of meaning that seems to hunt humans in contemporary life. In doing this, I appropriate the relevant philosophical tools from traditional Yoruba belief system, especially its moral philosophy which has its foundation in *Iwa* (character) and *Omoluabi* (A good person/a truly human person/one who behaves as a well-born/a morally upright person). My argument is precisely that Yoruba philosophy of existence, largely built on *Iwa* (character), is a major tool for answering the complex quest for existence. By extension, the philosophical constituents of *Iwa* constitute an important basis for resolving the global crisis of meaning which becomes manifest in the increasing capacity of humans to harm themselves at the interpersonal, group, ethnic, national and global levels. It is

also the case that the various global crises have led to an elusiveness of meaning in human endeavours, thereby precipitating global disorder. Meaning is employed in a normative philosophical sense to designate a harmonious and desirable condition that is conducive for human flourishing. This sense of meaning was the major preoccupation of ancient philosophers of all cultures, including the ancient Greek philosophers that were searching for unity in the face of diversity and the past masters of philosophy – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Our submission is that the moral foundation of Yoruba philosophy of existence is a veritable basis for addressing the contemporary crisis of meaning.

In realizing our goal, this paper is divided into the following sections: In the first and the second section, I elaborate on Yoruba worldview (*Weltanschauung*), philosophy of existence and morality. In this section, the Yoruba worldview, especially with regard to man and other forces in nature, is pointed out as the basis of their philosophy of existence, which itself is based mainly on morality. We look at the defining elements of morality, especially in the Yoruba world, starting from the etymology and centrality of *Iwa* (character) and other related concepts. We also allude to the interface between the secular and religious origins of morality in Yoruba culture to underscore the fact that whatever its origin, harmonious living is an imperative pursued in Yoruba morality.

The third section is devoted to the contemporary global quest for meaning. This section examines the nature and complexity of various kinds of conflicts at various levels of social existence that have led to dearth of meaning, that is, meaningful meaning within the purview of existence. These conflicts are as complex as the human actors within the interpersonal, state and global levels. Although conflict is inevitable for human progress, the destructive conflicts that have resulted in social disharmony or social disorder are given a cursory or panoramic view.

In the fourth section, we apply the key concepts of *Iwa* (morality) in Yoruba culture to addressing the contemporary global crisis of meaning. Such defining elements of morality in Yoruba culture such as *omoluabi* (a person of character), pursuit of virtue (not necessarily the Aristotelian virtue ethics), *Ajogbe* (consanguinity) and *Ajobi* (co-residentship), dialogue, persons as dignified agents and so forth are presented as a veritable basis for resolving the global crisis of meaning.

The methodology of our paper is analytic in the sense of a sustained analysis of major philosophical concepts employed in the work. This methodology is also critical in the sense of giving a rigorous appraisal to issues discussed, especially concerning our approaches to the causes of the crisis of meaning in contemporary global space. We also employ the hermeneutic method to give a detailed interpretation to the concept of

Iwa (character) and its cognate terms in the Yoruba belief system. The paper concludes with a constructive analysis of relevant principles that will engender global meaningful relations.

Yoruba Worldview: Philosophy of Existence and Morality

The belief that every culture makes a contribution to the global order supplies the motive for applying Yoruba philosophy of existence, anchored mainly on morality and founded on *Iwa* (character), to the global crisis of meaning. The Yoruba people are found mainly in the south-western part of Nigeria. However, there are also some scanty Yoruba settlements in Brazil and other parts of the world. The people speak Yoruba as their major language but have other dialects depending on the sub-tribes of the Yoruba, such as Ijesha, Oyo, Ibadan, Ijebu, Ekiti, Egba and Yewa. Though the old Oyo are always referred to as the proper Yoruba, nowadays people no longer make the distinction between the proper Yoruba and other Yoruba. In Nigeria, the Yoruba people occupy Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, Lagos, and some parts of Kwara and Kogi states. Some Yoruba people are also found in the Republic of Bessling.

The Yoruba people have been influenced tremendously by contact with other peoples of the world. This has had corresponding effect on their religious, political, cultural and economic activities. For instance, Christianity and Islam have been embraced by many of the people. Notwithstanding, they still practice their pristine religious beliefs simultaneously with these foreign religions. Now, the worldview of these people is made up of *Olodumare* (God), the divinities, lesser spirits, man, and the physical environment consisting of lower animals, plants, oceans, forests and so forth. Morality and moral values constitute a remarkable framework through which the people navigate the complex terrain of existence.

In Yoruba traditional philosophy, the human person comprises of three basic elements: *ara* (body), *emi* (vital principle) and *ori* (a person's destiny or the spiritual component of human personality). The Yoruba believe that it is *ori* that rules, controls and guides the life and activities of the person. The *ori* as the essence of a person derives its being from *Olodumare* and therefore, without the latter, man cannot have his being.¹ It should be

¹ For further details on this, see the following works: Olatunji A. Oyeshile, "Towards an African Concept of a Person: Person in Yoruba, Akan and Igbo Thoughts," *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 34, 1/2 (2002), pp. 104-114; Olatunji A. Oyeshile, "Predestination and Freewill in the Yoruba Concept of a Person: Contradictions and Paradoxes," *Philosophy, Culture and Traditions: A Journal of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies* 2 (2003), pp. 99-107; Olatunji A. Oyeshile, "The Physical and Non-Physical in the Yoruba's Concept of the Person," *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 35, 2 (2006), pp. 153-165.

noted that the insight in Yoruba thought just espoused attributes a vital importance to a proper understanding of the people's moral universe, and the ideas that can be derived from this have a fundamental meaning for a global audience. While I shall discuss this in another section of this paper, it now suffices to draw an outline of the most fundamental moral values in Yoruba traditional philosophy.

Moral values constitute a very important aspect of every society. More pertinently, they are those forms or patterns of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and thus cherished by society. They constitute not only principles of behaviour, but also goals for social and individual action.² The moral values in traditional Yoruba belief system revolve around the concept of *Iwa* (character). In fact, there is a general consensus among the Yoruba that morality is summarized in the word *Iwa*, which in ordinary English translation means character.³

Iwa (character) has many derivatives and means often "that good character must be the dominant feature of a person's life."⁴ From this conception of *Iwa*, it is common to hear an aphorism such as: *Iwa* or good character is a person's guard. The term *Iwa* sometimes has an ambivalent meaning because it is used in different senses to portray a person's character, whether good or bad. Wande Abimbola has shed light on different senses of the term.⁵ We can at least distinguish four or five senses in which the term is used, all of which are related. Etymologically, the word *Iwa* is formed from the root *wa* (to be, to exist) by addition of the prefix *I*. therefore, the original meaning of *Iwa* can simply be interpreted as "the fact of being, living or existing."⁶

The second meaning of *Iwa* is character or moral behaviour. This originates from the idiomatic usage of the original lexical meaning of *Iwa*. Taking this to be the case, *Iwa* construed as character is the essence of being.⁷ Simply put, *Iwa* in this sense concerns the ethical aspects of man's life as distinguished from other areas of human endeavour such as economy and science.

In the third sense, the word *Iwa* is used to refer to either good or bad character.⁸ This aspect can be demonstrated in statements as: *Iwa okunrin*

² Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), p. 54.

³ Wande Abimbola, "Iwapele: The Concept of Good Character in *Ifa* Literary Corpus," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition*, edited by W. Abimbola (Ibadan: University Press, 1975), p. 154.

⁴ Emmanuel Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962), p. 154.

⁵ Abimbola, "Iwapele," p. 154.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

naa ko dara (The man's character is not good); *Iwa omo naa ko dara* (The child's character is not good).

The fourth sense of the term, *Iwa*, occurs when it is used to refer to good character alone as in: *Obinrin naa ni iwa* (the woman has good character).

The fifth sense, which is derivative of the earlier senses of *Iwa* is when one talks about *iwapele* (gentle or good character) and *iwabuburu* (bad character).

The Yoruba have high regard of *Iwa* and they see it as one of the aims of human existence. In order to achieve one's aim in life, which is the good life, one must embrace *iwapele*.⁹ A person who refuses to exhibit good or gentle character is seen as a brute. The Yoruba say of such a person: *Ki seniyan, nse lo fawo eniyan bora* (He is not a human being, he merely assumes the skin of a human being). A well-behaved person is described as *O seniyan* (he acts the person). He can also be referred to as *Omoluabi* (one who behaves as well-born or a morally upright person or a virtuous person). The foregoing has nothing to do with the denial or affirmation of the biological nature of a person. Rather the term *eniyan* (person) is used metaphorically to describe the moral nature of a person.

The importance of *Iwa* (character) is amply demonstrated in the *odu* corpus according to *Ogbe Egunda*.¹⁰ According to the story of *Orunmila*, he was seeking success, but was told this could only be possible if he married *Iwa*. He did so and became very successful. The example of *Orunmila* made other people seek for *Iwa*, and she became the mother of many children, as this *Odu-Ifa* shows:

E wa w'omo iwa beere o'
E wa w'omo iwa beere o'
 Iwa gbe dani
 Iwapon seyin
 E wa w'omo iwa berere.
 Come and behold the countless the children of *iwa*,
 Come and behold the countless the children of *iwa*,
Iwa carries (children) in her arms'
Iwa carries (children) on her back,
 Come and behold the countless the children of *iwa*.¹¹

Let us, however, take a critical look at the foregoing general postulations. In this connection, let us ask: why must a person have *iwa* (good character)? Going by the Yoruba religious argument, one is moral because

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 394-395.

¹⁰ Idowu, *Olodumare*, p. 155.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Olodumare (the Supreme Being) has commanded it. Furthermore, it is by having *iwa* that man can be free from the authoritarian and hierarchical structure of the universe. *Iwa* also ensures that a man's life is guided by some principles which enable him to avoid collision with supernatural forces and his fellow men.

We shall see that the moral person in the Yoruba universe embraces *iwa* primarily to have a good existence such as is rational to conceive, thereby following the intention of nature. He therefore enjoys reflective freedom from the oppression of nature and the tyranny of the flesh.¹² The constant reference a Yoruba individual makes to God in moral matters becomes necessary when empirical solutions to his problems fail. For instance, in the case of theft that cannot be unravelled through empirical method, *Olodumare* is called to intervene. And the fact that Yoruba moral reasoning involves the supernatural does not mean that it leads to a transcendent morality. On the contrary, the concern for the natural existence of each person occupies a central place in their moral universe.¹³ For example, any person who goes against the moral rules is made to face appropriate moral sanctions.

We can say that people obey moral laws to enjoy the benefits of morality on the one hand and to avoid sanctions that accompany the violation of such moral rules, on the other hand. By talking about benefits, the individual tries to be prudent in his actions. He also takes actions on an expeditious basis depending on the situation he finds himself in. What all these elements point to is that human well-being, in the form of individual's interest and societal interest, constitutes the main rationale for being moral.

A look at the various interpretations and applications of morality in the traditional Yoruba belief system will buttress our analysis. The first interpretation is that morality is not just a means for harmony with the universe, but also an end in itself. This means that it is a good worth pursuing for itself. Secondly, it is believed that without morality or at least a morally good person, the world would be a difficult place to live in. The third is that being moral has its own burden, but the burden should not discourage a person from leading a moral life since morality is the very essence and value of life. Fourthly, the Yoruba are persuaded to be moral because of posterity, as it is believed that neither good nor bad conduct shall perish or be forgotten.¹⁴

¹² Moses Oke, "Self-Interest as the Ground of Moral Obligation," *Second Order: New Series* 1.2 (1988), p. 95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

A close scrutiny of all these interpretations of morality in traditional Yoruba universe only points to one factor: human-wellbeing. The claim that morality is a good worth pursuing on its own would on closer analysis be seen to yield certain benefits. The benefit will accrue to one who is moral. Furthermore, the claim that morality is necessary because of posterity can also be seen as a claim that has human well-being as a focus. For example, a person who died leaving behind good deeds had already established a good environment for his offspring. On the contrary, if no one stands to gain from the good deeds of a deceased person, many people while alive would restrict their actions to what is of immediate benefit to their present state. Therefore, whether one is guided by considerations of what one gains in physical or non-physical existence, the utmost factor is well-being of the agent in particular and the society in general.

Another close look at the way we speak about morality in traditional societies would reveal a pre-occupation with human welfare.¹⁵ For instance, what is morally good should be what befits a human being, what promotes human dignity and what brings joy to man and his community. On the contrary, what brings misery, disgrace and misfortune is morally bad. While no one can contest the claim that the Supreme Being hates immoral conducts, it is the case that God approves something (conduct or action) if such a thing is good in the first place.¹⁶

Even though we cannot downplay the role of the supernatural being when considering the rationale for being moral in traditional Yoruba universe, the individual's moral observance is dictated by prudence and expediency because his main goal is human well-being. Even when we consider the moral injunctions from the Supreme Being, we see that these are directed towards human well-being. Man as a rational being always has in focus what he stands to gain by embarking on any course of action, be it moral or otherwise.

How does our understanding of the rationale for being moral help to address the sense of insecurity in the contemporary world? If the primary rationale for being moral is human well-being, as the Yoruba example has shown, then the well-being of the world community is ensured based on the well-being of every member of the human or world community. And because the individual is a social being, any decision by him, which is immoral, would affect the well-being of other members of the society and subsequently retard human development, peace and security. It is the duty of every community, therefore, to ensure that individuals imbibe moral virtues through education, communal living, reward and sanctions.

¹⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 6.

¹⁶ Oke, "Self-Interest as the Ground of Moral Obligation," p. 96.

Though it is in the individual's self-interest to be moral, this self-interest can only be guaranteed from the perspective of the well-being of all.

Let us note that irrespective of our approach to moral issues, human well-being should be our focus. A safe world will be one that is preoccupied with ensuring the well-being of individuals, groups, institutions, communities, nations, and races. We cannot bargain less than human well-being, irrespective of our differences, if life is to continue and be meaningful on our planet.

In the Yoruba belief system, moral values are the basic elements that make up the moral framework. They can be referred to as moral norms, defining elements of morality, moral components, moral constituents and moral practices. The moral values are intertwined with the mores of the people in many traditional African cultures. Some of the moral values in Yoruba traditional society include hospitality (*isalejo*), opposition to selfishness (*imotaraeninikan*), avoidance of wickedness (*iwabuburu*), truth and rectitude (*ododo* or *otito* and *otito inu*), condemnation of stealing (*ole*), keeping covenant (*imule*), opposition to hypocrisy (*agabagebe*), cooperation (*ifowosowopo*) and tolerance (*amumora*).

The Contemporary Global Quest for Meaning

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human existence. Heraclitus, Marx, Hegel and even various traditional accounts of man in the world have shown that we cannot avoid conflicts in any form of human social relations. Conflicts could be positive or negative depending on the circumstances. But for growth to occur, there must be what I regard as "conflict of opposites." By conflict of opposites, as in Hegel's philosophy, a dialectical improvement in social conditions through the synthesis of hitherto forms of social order and those (some, in most cases) that seek to overthrow them. The basis of this reality lies in the fact that the theories that these praxis are founded on are themselves not flawless *ab initio*.

The foregoing, notwithstanding, the focus of this paper shall be restricted to the kind of conflict that retards development and undermines all that supports the being-in-the-world of man. Appropriating the Sartrean affirmation of the primacy of "existence" or living to "essence" or what becomes of a person's quest for living, I speculate on the possible adversities that are liable to follow from (these "inevitable") conflicts. While I am not speaking of conflict or crisis merely in abstract terms, it is obvious that conflicts, crises and turbulence are products of concrete human situations. To further clarify the above position, let us note the following words of Unah:

Generally, conflicts do not occur in a Robison Crusoe situation. They occur fundamentally from social relatedness. Consequently, insofar as we are human beings living in a human society, conflicts cannot but occur.¹⁷

The statements above reveal a fundamental axiom about human existence – the inevitability of conflicts especially at the interpersonal level, as earlier noted. Consequently, where diverse groups of people live, conflict is bound to be present. The fundamental issue then is how to manage such crises in such a way that they do not degenerate, thereby leading men back to the hypothetical Hobbesian state of nature in which life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

Man is a social being; he lives in a society. He possesses an array of values by which he orders his life. These values are seen in different perspectives by people he lives with, who have their own values and desires. Man’s attitudinal and behavioural rationality notwithstanding, his values at times obtrude with and obstruct the values of others, thereby leading to conflicts of various kinds. Some of the causes of these conflicts are greed, injustice, inordinate ambition, lack of consideration for others and selfishness.

As I noted earlier, although conflict is inevitable in human organization, due to differences in values and attitudes towards life, that, however, does not mean that we should fold our arms and just watch. In fact, this is not even possible because such an attitude can, and does lead to destruction and a state of underdevelopment of man and society. Paradoxically however, some philosophers such Heraclitus and Marx believe that conflict is necessary for the continued growth and flourishing of society. The kind of conflict we tackle in this paper is described by *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary* thus: “Violent collision; a struggle on contest; a battle; a mental struggle; to be in opposition; to clash; incompatible; or irreconcilable.”¹⁸

Given our description above, conflict can occur at various levels such as (1) conflict between one individual and the other, known as interpersonal conflict. (2) Conflict between the community and the individual, occurring in a situation where individual’s desires and goals are at variance with those of the society in which the individual finds himself. Sometimes, too, the society’s stance may not promote the goods of the citizens, for example, when there is a bad government. (3) Conflict can occur among groups in a country. For instance, in a nation where there are incompatible ethnic nationalities as we have in Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan (Sudan and South

¹⁷ Jim I. Unah, “Difficult Decision Situations: A Phenomenological Ontology of Crisis Management,” *Analecta Husserliana*, 77 (2000), p. 237.

¹⁸ *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, edited by Kirkpatrick (Edinburgh: W&R Chambers Ltd., 1983), p. 264.

Sudan) and many other African countries. (4) Conflict can occur between one country and another as can be gleaned in international conflicts. The conflict between Iraq and Iran; between United States of America and Iraq; between Cameroun and Nigeria some decades ago are instances of conflict situation among nations. (5) The last level of conflict is intra-personal conflict. Sometimes, we may say that a man is at conflict with himself. This could be due to psychological trauma regarding decisions taken or unfulfilled ambition. In Yoruba culture, such a person is said to be in conflict with his *Ori* (The Personality god).¹⁹

In his seminal Inaugural Lecture (2011), Innocent Asouzu calls for the abandonment of a philosophy of essence that construes the other as inferior and where contenders to issues, whether they are philosophical, religious, political, economic or even historical, approach reality with a mind-set that is polarized and bifurcated. According to him, “consistent commitment to a philosophy of essence as promoted by Aristotle enhances what I call ‘unintended ethnocentric commitment’ both in inquiry and human interpersonal relationship.”²⁰ The net result of this unintended ethnocentric commitment has the capacity to complicate (or engender conflictual) coexistence of peoples in the world.

Asouzu further relates this tendency to world-politics, taking inspiration from Fred Dallmayr who is of the opinion that:

Aristotelian mentality being fostered by most Western powers as they seek to be in control of most things strategic, and most especially nuclear weapons, under the supposition that they alone have the higher rationality and needed self-control to use them properly.²¹

The above tendency by European powers to view other nations as “the other” is a recipe for global and ethnic conflict. The phenomenon of the “other” has its ancestry in “Greeks” (supposedly) greater rationality and self-control as compared with the barbarians.²² Asouzu therefore recommends that we should drop this tendency of essentialism in human relations as well as the phenomenon of concealment (that which covers the eye or impairs vision) because they promote the tendency to construe human existence as a ceaseless struggle between irreconcilable opposites. According to Asouzu:

¹⁹ Olatunji A. Oyeshile, “Mythology and Conflict Resolution in Africa: The Political and Legal Imperatives,” *The Social Science Review* 1, 12 (2007), pp. 110-111.

²⁰ Innocent I. Asouzu, *Ibuanyindanda’ and the Philosophy of Essence*. Inaugural Lecture (Calabar, Nigeria: University of Calabar Press, 2011), p. 24.

²¹ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 27.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Since the ego believes that it can achieve everything alone, it also seeks absolute privileges over other stakeholders whom it perceives as inessential, inconsequential and dispensable. Because the phenomenon of concealment makes us believe that we are completely different from other stakeholders, we equally believe that we can act quite unrestrainedly. This is equivalent to the ego elevating itself to an absolute exclusivist subsisting essence capable of existing without other stakeholders; quite reminiscent of Aristotle's essence or substance that does not need the accidentals to subsist.²³

The above boils down in some sense to a politics of identity in and among multi-ethnic states. Politics of identity leads to dysfunctional politics that encourages lopsidedness in the allocation of resources among ethnic groups by domineering and dominant political leadership especially in Africa. Hence the fierce competition to control political power leads to what I term "poverty of power" – a situation in which power is not devolved to serve the interest of all stakeholders. All these lead to dearth of meaning and diminishes our humanity in contemporary world.

The likelihood of conflicts in a multi-ethnic society where there is injustice in the allocation of resources and the sharing of political power is on the high side and this often leads to ethnocentrism, which is a tendency to project one's own group as the centre of everything desirable while neglecting other groups. Such ethnocentrism often leads to deep-rooted prejudice on the part of the domineering and dominated groups. G. W. Allport in his book *The Nature of Prejudice* has outlined five types of features that are likely to be displayed by a prejudiced person towards another. These are:

- Negative remarks. This means that a person speaks disparagingly about the group that he dislikes.
- Avoidance. This means that a prejudiced person tries to shun anyone who does not belong to his group.
- Discrimination. This means that a prejudiced person often excludes members of the maligned group from certain types of employment, places of residence, or social privileges.
- Physical attack. The prejudiced person often becomes a party to violence, which is designed to intimidate the people he has come to hate.
- Extermination. The prejudiced person often participates in lynching, massacres, or extermination programmes.²⁴

These characteristics can be said to have featured in the Nazi's attack on the Jews in Germany in the mid-20th century, the conflict in Yugoslavia and the crises in Burundi, Cote D'Ivoire and the Sudanese Darfur region

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

²⁴ *Awake!*, Sept. 8, 2004: p. 5.

where as at March 2005, 70,000 people have been killed and 2 million people displaced.

From the foregoing analysis, it becomes obvious that there is a high level of dysfunctionality in global relations at all levels. Our so-called advancement has resulted in confusion such that meaning has become essentially contested, since we cannot agree on how to live together and achieve human solidarity. The question then looms: Has man not remained a problem to himself perpetually?

Extrapolating from the foregoing considerations, it bears being pointed out that a growing critical literature is now amassing with regard to the social realities of globalization, westernization and modernization. These critical commentaries, mostly emanating from the *Global South*, consider modernity as non-inclusive and an engenderer of a variegated range of conflicts in African societies. According to Ademola Dasyuva, for instance:

The challenge of modernity is characterized by wars, diseases, and poverty, as well as poor governance, especially in developing nations. Other problems include man's inhumanity to man, greed, corruption, political intrigues, and in Nigeria and perhaps some other African countries, ritual murder, arson, kidnapping, climatic changes as result if environmental degradation and general pollution, etc. this scenario summarizes the reality of the so-called modern world.²⁵

One cannot but agree with Dasyuva's description of the predicaments of humans (most especially, Africans) in the modern world. In fact, no part of Africa is exonerated from or immune to these challenges. There is hardly any day that news of violence, killing, arson, suicide, robbery, fraud and other dehumanizing incidents is not heard from various part of the world. This tendency calls into question the meaning of man, existence, happiness, social harmony and sustainable development. The philosopher, according to Plato, is saddled with the task of bringing men to reality, to truth, to justice and to the good life. As philosophers, we may ask: is it the case that all forms of conflict are inimical to human happiness? Are these conflicts even surmountable at all? To answer these questions, let us return to our analysis of the Yoruba account of morality and distil its possible implications for global order – and Africa, extensively.

Applying Key Concepts of Yoruba Morality at the Global Level

In this section, we posit that the key elements of morality in Yoruba culture, encapsulated in *Iwa* (character) and *Omoluabi* (a virtuous person)

²⁵ Ademola Omobewaji Dasyuva, "Globalization of Yoruba *Omoluwabi* Ideology," *Yoruba Studies Review* 1, 1 (2016), p. 67.

can serve as veritable basis for addressing the global crisis of meaning. Let us note that these elements of morality in Yoruba culture may not serve as the grand solution to all human problems, yet in their modest form, they can provide some ways out of the present global chaos and help us to avoid the necessary consequence of the Hobbesian state of nature in which life is solitary, brutish, nasty and short.²⁶

In the Yoruba moral universe, communal well-being constitutes the main focus of individual action. This buttresses Mbiti's assertion that "I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am."²⁷ This underscores a deep link between individual and general welfare that we lack in contemporary global relations. In the Yoruba moral universe the individual acts with the unconscious notion of communal interest. Of course, this does not imply that there are no tensions between individual and collective interests. But because of the emphasis on general welfare, this tension is often easily resolved.

A look at some of the defining elements of Yoruba morality shows that it moves from the standpoint of the community to the individual. An individual is regarded as a person of good character (*iwa rere*) if his or her actions are primarily beneficial to the community. Perhaps, this is why it has been argued that there are elements of the golden rule – "Do unto others as you would like that they should do unto you" – in the Yoruba moral system. This belief is supported by the common phrase: *Bi a ba se igi ni'gbo K'a faran ro ara eni wo* [whenever we fell a tree in the forest, let us put ourselves in the position of the tree being felled].

What is morally good should be what promotes human dignity and what brings joy to man and his community.²⁸ What brings misery, disgrace and misfortune is morally bad. While no one contests the claim that the Supreme Being hates immoral conduct, it is the case that God approves an action if such an action is good in the first instance. In Yoruba moral universe, the individual is forced to act in positive ways towards his community. This is predicated on the realization by the Yoruba that the individual must be prepared to sacrifice or suppress personal interests for the general good. This practice can constitute a good basis for positive global relations.

The Yoruba moral values of solidarity, co-operation, being one's brother's keeper, mutual aid, and interdependence show the need for human beings to live together in society, not as atomic entities or isolated

²⁶ Olatunji A. Oyeshile, "Traditional Social-Ethical Values and Governance in Modern Africa," *Philosophia Africana: Analysis of Philosophy and Issues in Africa and the Black Diaspora* 6, 2 (2003), pp. 81-82

²⁷ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 109.

²⁸ Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, p. 6.

monads of Leibniz, but as social beings who are brothers, sisters, uncles, cousins, fathers, mothers, nieces and nephews to one another. In this regard, the answer to the question “who am I?” is answered according to Okot p’Bitek thus: “I is not only one relationship, but numerous relationships: I has a clan, and shrine, a country, a job. I may or may not have children. Is ‘I’ a chief? Then he has subjects or followers.”²⁹

In the Yoruba moral universe, aphorisms such as *Ajoje lo dun* (there is joy in eating together) emphasise that people can only derive joy or happiness when they share things together. A selfish person is an unhappy person in traditional Yoruba society because he or she is virtually isolated from his or her kinsmen. Moral or communal values encourage individuals to be at their best, since it is only in this way that communal resources can be replenished regularly. The system does not support laziness and parasitism. Such Yoruba proverbs as *igi kan ki da igbo se* (a tree does not make a forest), *Agbajo owo la fi nsoya* (we can only beat the chest with all the fingers put together) and *ka fi owo otun we osi, ka fi owo osi we otun ni owo fi nmo* (the hands are only clean when the right hand is used to wash the left and vice versa) stress the need for sharing, mutual aid, hospitality, tolerance, altruism, interdependence, group solidarity, selflessness, social harmony and respect for another. All these values are exhibited or believed to be exhibited by an *Omoluabi* (a person of character or a virtuous person).

Perhaps, it is for the reasons above that Dasylyva opines that the attributes of *Omoluabi* can be a veritable basis for addressing the problem of global crisis. According to him:

Omoluwabi... fosters a dynamic, positive, pleasant and rewarding human relations. It is both a people-centred and a personality-propelled philosophy that helps to advance the collective vision of a people.³⁰

The logical inference from the foregoing is that contemporary global relations need *Omoluwabi* and *iwa* to address the crises at the political, social and economic levels.³¹

The fact cannot be denied that morality is intricately linked with social order. Therefore, to have a stable social order, morality must be implicated. According to Bewaji:

It is the social milieu in which competition for the scarce resources of the environment takes place. But it is not only the resources of the environment that are scarce. The human resources of love, patronage, recognition, compassion, companionship, etc., are also scarce and require deliberate efforts

²⁹ Okot p’Bitek, “The Sociality of Self,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel C. Eze (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), p. 74.

³⁰ Dasylyva, “Globalization of Yoruba *Omoluwabi* Ideology,” p. 75.

³¹ Oyesihle, “Traditional Social-Ethical Values,” p. 88.

in both their generation and equitable distribution. Here lies the crux of the moral responsibility of society to its members and to itself. And this fact is represented in numerous ideas in African thought.³²

The extensive passage from Bewaji has a lot of implications for contemporary global relations. In the contemporary world, we are not only experiencing a dearth of material resources needed for development and therefore human happiness, we also lack the moral resources to manage the little resources we have due to moral dislocation.³³

It is true that social order exists to provide the multifarious needs of man that are necessary for a fulfilled happy life conducive to development. It is also true that social order is a condition in which society is organized to effectively provide the needs of man. How then do we ensure the desired social order in global relations? This is where morality comes in. Interestingly, morality leads to the sustenance of social order and social order can enhance not only the internalization of morality, it can also enhance its application. Again, moral order is predicated on certain values variously described as communal, social and human values. According to Sogolo, human values can be taken to be essentially natural and universal simply because human nature itself is universal. He describes human values thus:

Human values are intrinsically designed to fulfil man's goal of individual and collective survival. Therefore, the human tendencies to pursue virtues such as peace, care, justice, truthfulness, etc., are naturally embraced to ensure the well-being and survival of human kind.³⁴

The point that bears pointing out is that the ethical imperative provides the basis for meaningful interrelationship at all levels of human existence. We should be moral in dealing with others. Other people, ethnic groups, and nationalities should not be treated as just means to the satisfaction of our own ends but as kingdom of ends in themselves. Kant, for instance, advances the thesis of Categorical Imperative, with the injunction that we should act on the maxim through which we can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. It is on this basis that Kant urges us to treat others as ends and never as means to further our own interests.³⁵

³² John Ayotunde I. Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), p. 397.

³³ Olusegun Oladipo, "Introduction," in *Remaking Africa: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Olusegun Oladipo (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1998), pp. 8-12.

³⁴ Godwin S. Sogolo, "Philosophy, Human Values and Social Order," An Unpublished Keynote Address Presented at the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 16th September, 2004, p. 3.

³⁵ Godwin Azenabor, "The Golden Rule Principle in an African Ethics and Kant's Categorical Imperative: A Comparative on the Foundation of Morality," *Hekmat va Falsafeh (Wisdom and Philosophy)* 4, 2 (2008), p. 58.

Buber's *I and Thou* (1937), which is the most popular of his works, provides a veritable basis for addressing conflicts that emanate from interpersonal and inter-ethnic relations. Living from 1878 until 1965, he applied his philosophical disquisition to bringing about understanding between Jews and Arabs and subsequently advocated a bi-national state.³⁶ As far as he was concerned there could be an alternative position to individualism and collectivism, and this he attempts to establish in the *I and Thou* through the elements of the inter-human.

The underlying assumption of Buber's *I and Thou* is that one is a proper human being as one sees himself in relation with other human beings. Although most existentialist theories will aver that one's consciousness tries to capture the consciousness of the other and make him an object, this approach cannot rule out the reality of the inter-human.³⁷ The reason for this can be put thus: "The essential thing is not that one makes the other his object, but the fact that he is not fully able to do so."³⁸ It is therefore only in partnership that my being can be perceived as an existing whole field.

In order to establish his thesis of the inter-human, Buber recognizes two major forms of relationship in society. These are the "*I-Thou*" relation and the "*I-it*" relation. The latter relation is unholy and depersonalizing as it treats other individuals apart from the I, as mere objects or means to be used in achieving one's life goal. It is an instrumentalist relationship. The *I-Thou* relationship, on the other hand, is a relationship that is mutually affirming. It upholds reciprocity and respect for the others as against the *I-it* relationship, which aims at degradation, manipulation and exploitation.³⁹ The *I-Thou* relationship upholds the belief that a person is fully a person in relation to other persons. In this light you are not a real person as long as you regard others as mere objects or instruments. Buber notes that the real meeting between person and person comes about only when each regards the other as an end.

There is thus a connection between Buber and Kant on interpersonal relationship. For Kant had expressed one of the essential principles in relationship that one's fellow must never at any time be thought of and treated merely as a means but rather as an independent end. According to Buber, the Kantian view is expressed as an "ought" which is sustained by idea of human dignity.

³⁶ M. Rader, *The Enduring Questions: Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 348.

³⁷ Martin Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," in *The Enduring Questions: Main Problems of Philosophy*, edited by M. Rader (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 351.

³⁸ Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," p. 351.

³⁹ Rader (ed.), *The Enduring Questions*, p. 365.

We can thus see in Buber the need for us, irrespective of our ethnic affiliation, to break away from our narrow individualism to interpersonal fellowship. The elements of the inter-human spell out a fundamental basis of the *I and Thou* relationship. It stresses that the completeness or wholeness of man is not only in virtue of his relation to himself, but embodies the virtue of his relation to others. We see then such elements as mutuality, everyone as an end, interpersonal fellowship and dialogue – genuine dialogue – as elements that are lacking or in short supply in global relations.

The Yoruba worldview, just like many other worldviews, is replete with injunctions that stress the need for ethical considerations of others. For instance the concepts of *ajobi* (consanguinity) and *ajogbe* (co-residentship) emphasize what we share together both as blood relations and non-blood relations. The bottom line is that in Yoruba communal universe, the need for interdependence and co-existence guide social and political behaviour.

Conclusion

Our preoccupation in this paper has been the need to resolve the global crisis of meaning in human relations. We have shown that Yoruba philosophy of existence, predicated largely on morality and spelled out in the concepts of *iwa* (character) and *Omoluwabi* (a virtuous person), constitutes a veritable basis for a meaningful global relationship. Our arguments are anchored in the fact that moral values in Yoruba traditional society assists in reconciling individuals, groups, societies and nations and thus promote harmony, development, social order and human happiness.

In achieving sustainable meaningful global relations, we should embrace the philosophical attitude of being critical, considerate and ethical. We should also avoid untenable presuppositions, just like Edmund Husserl advised that we should embrace the phenomenological attitude that will constantly put our natural attitude in check to allow for objectivity, harmony and happiness.

It must be stressed that a philosophical attitude is *a conditio sine qua non* to the survival of human societies and should be promoted through the teaching of philosophy to children right from elementary schools in all societies. The philosophical attitude enables one to be critical in assessing issues and arriving at rational judgments that will promote the being-in-the-world attitude of global citizens, since it will help to reduce the level of prejudice and predilection in daily life. Many unnecessary and avoidable conflicts have resulted as a consequence of our uncritical stance on issues. The philosophical attitude will also promote an ethical orientation that

will make it possible to internalize and apply such moral concepts as justice fairness, equity and other moral notions that are essential for human survival.⁴⁰ Humanity deserves nothing less.

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⁴⁰ Olatunji A. Oyeshile, "Beyond Religious and Ethnic Identities: The Imperative of Sense of Community in Citizenship," in *Religion, Ethnicity and Citizenship*, edited by Festus Adesanoye. An Occassional Publication of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (Ibadan: NAL, 2017), p. 79.

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Cultivating New Movements and Circles of Meaning Generation: Upholding Our World, Regeneratiing Our Earth and the Calling of a Planetary *Lokasangraha*¹

ANANTA KUMAR GIRI

As an antidote to the spread of “worldlessness” in our time, Hannah Arendt recommended the restoration of a “public realm” in which people would actively participate and be mutually connected. Digging beneath this public forum, Heidegger unearthed the deeper source of connectedness in the experience of “care” (*Sorge, cura*) in its different dimensions. From the angle of human “being-in-the-world,” care penetrates into all dimensions of this correlation – in the sense that existence is called upon to care about “world” and its constituent features (fellow-beings, nature, cosmos). Differently put: There cannot be, for Heidegger, an isolated “self-care” (*cura sui*) without care for the world – that includes care for world maintenance (without which *Dasein* cannot exist). In this latter concern, his work does not stand alone. In the Indian tradition, especially the *Bhagavad Gītā*, we find an emphasis on a basic ethical and ontological obligation: the caring attention to “world maintenance” or *loka-samgraha*. According to the *Gītā*, such attention needs to be cultivated, nurtured and practiced in order for human life to be sustainable and meaningful.² “Politics assume[s] a dimension that it cannot integrate for all that, a dimension that overflows it, one concerning an *ontology or an ethology of “being*

¹ This builds upon my presentation at the rvp seminar on “Re-Learning to Be Human and the Contemporary Global Crises of Meaning” at Georgetown University Doha in Jan 9-10, 2018. I am grateful to Professor Patrick Laude for his kind invitation and to Dr. Hu Yeping and Prof. João Pina-Cabral and their friends for their kind interest and encouragement. This text builds on two of earlier related essays in this field.

² Fred Dallmayr, *Against the Apocalypse: Recovering Humanity’s Wholeness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2015), pp. 51-52.

with," attached to that absolute experience of sense and passion for sense for which the word *sacred* was but the designation."³

Benedict Spinoza has spoken about *potestas* and *potential* – words that in Latin mean power. They are different in their import because they point to different connotations. The former is functionally the urge to possess by bossing it over others, and the latter reminds us about the potentials inherent in every human being, the many possibilities of flowering up and upholding, if freedom is the climate in which it develops. According to Spinoza, love is the mediating link between knowledge and power. Love of humanity, love of the world, a deep faith in the unending possibilities of individuals as well as the collectives. This calls for a higher consciousness that all knowledge should congenially aim at. To Sri Aurobindo, a higher consciousness, as a rule, has to prove itself in the world. It never runs away and can afford to prove itself to be an asset of the world.

But the change over is not that easy as the wonderful words and references may suggest. There will be many-a-restraint, obstacles and oppositions, both from without and within. Hence, those who have chosen love have been men of protest.⁴

The problem of finite transcendence is essentially the problem of the possibility of communication, i.e. communication of dialogue between subjects and a communication or dialogue of human subjects with the world. It is essentially to note that these two are aspects of a single dialogue, which we may call the dialogue of transcendence.⁵

Thoreau's copy of Homer is open on his table at Walden. So far as philosophy is a matter of caring about texts, meditation is its mark before argumentation.⁶

Introduction and Invitation

Meaning is a key foundation of human life. We yearn to make our life meaningful and have a proper understanding of the meaning of words and worlds which help us in blossoming of life rather than being trapped in labyrinths of confusion and annihilated in varieties of killing and destruction. But this fundamental yearning for meaning has always been under stress in different periods and epochs of human history. In our contem-

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Destruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 5 (emphasis added).

⁴ Chitta Ranjan Das, "Afterword," *The Modern Prince and the Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom* (London: Sage Publications, 2009), pp. 580-581.

⁵ R. Sunder Rajan, *Towards a Critique of Cultural Reason* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 83.

⁶ Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). p. 13.

porary world, we are also going through stress vis-à-vis the work of meanings in our lives which is part of a global crises of meaning. Our global crises of meaning with which our dialogue and our book is concerned with has multiple genealogies. Our contemporary crisis of meaning has its root in both the way we relate to language and our worlds. At present we go through devaluation of meaning of language as language is being made and produced as quite superficial.⁷ Another source of crisis of meaning is the continued dominance of positivism in our approaches to language and the world. In terms of our approaches to meaning of language, we are trapped within limits of cognitive and non-cognitive approaches to language, which are still predominantly positivist. As Fred Dallmayr, a deep thinker and spiritual seeker of the meaning of life in our world, tells us: “Within the exception of intuitivists, advocates of both cognitivism and noncognitivism can readily agree on the same positivist paradigm: while to the former normative statements are factual and hence demonstrable, the latter view the statements as nondemonstrable precisely because they are not factual.” But Dallmayr himself points to a gradual “reapproachment” of Anglo-American and Continental thought as both point towards a revival of the classical domain of “practical thought” in contradistinction to theoretical analyses and technical implementation in our comprehension of meaning of language and the world. But recovery of practical reasoning calls for “strengthening of intersubjective dialogue in lieu of cognitivist and non-cognitivist soliloquies.”⁸

⁷ This is explored in the following poem of Ananta Kumar Giri, “Deformation of Language,” in Idem, *Weaving New Hats: Our Half Birthdays* (Delhi: Studera Press, 2018).

1
 Deformation of Language
 Devaluation of Life
 Words turned into its opposite
 Democracy becomes tyranny
 Love Hatred
 How do we recover
 Retrieve its semantic potential?
 When language has lost its metaphor
 What to speak of it as a *Mantra*?

2
 Recovery of language
 Is it only a semantic act?
 Or also a work of creativity?
 Walking and meditating together
 Memory work and womb work
 Nurturing our pregnant future
 In our palms
 Stars of Infinity
 Dancing with Our Bare Feet

⁸ Fred Dallmayr (ed.), *Border-Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), pp. 930-931.

Dallmayr's pointer to limits of positivism and the need to overcome it with practice of creative intersubjective dialogues resonates with similar perspectives of R. Sunder Rajan, a deep philosopher from India. For Sunder Rajan, our contemporary human condition is shaped by movements in the last half century which challenge positivism and embody a variety of post-positivist moves and turns such as a linguistic turn, an ecological turn and feminist turns.⁹ All these movements have challenged the existing construction and production of meaning, for example feminism challenging not only the patriarchal nature of production and perception of meaning and social reality but also patriarchal constructions and methods of studying it. But all these post-positivist moves are still primarily epistemological, which adds to the contemporary crises of meaning, and for recovery of the holistic meaning of life, language and the world, we need to overcome the primacy of the epistemic in our relationship with language and the world. This calls for understanding the limits of the epistemic itself and for embracing the related post-epistemological transformations as the epistemic itself can be linked to varieties of structures of violence and violation of meaning.¹⁰ For example, the linguistic turn, as Hans-Herbert Kogler helps us understand which resonates with the spirit of Dallmayr, continued the project of a "fully externalist account of meaning in which the intentional or subjective understanding of speakers plays no systematic role."¹¹ In a related vein, the feminist critique of reality and quest for meaning does talk about standpoint – "feminist standpoint

⁹ R. Sunder Rajan, *Towards a Critique of Cultural Reason* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Heikki Patomaki and Colin Wright, "After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism," *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2), 2000: pp. 213-37. Patomaki & Wright (2000) also argue that post-positivist moves as primarily epistemological do not sufficiently understand the link between epistemology and violence in modernity and need to overcome this. In a different context, in her work on Wittgenstein, feminism and epistemology Alessandra Tanesini shows us how the feminist turn is still very much bound within the epistemic frame: "In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not characterize the notion of the subject in epistemic terms. The subject is not born out of the Cartesian search for certainty. Rather, it is the result of the need to transcend the contingent empirical world in order to create a place for meaning in one's lives. Recent feminist theorists, instead have often described the subject in epistemic terms." Alessandra Tanesini, *Wittgenstein: A Feminist Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004). One unfortunate implication of this epistemic binding and lack of accompanying ontological cultivation is that feminism is not able to embody a self-critique as part of a process of transformation.

¹¹ Hans-Herbert Kogler, "Consciousness as Symbolic Construction: A Semiotics of Thought after Cassirer," *Constructivist Foundation* 4 (3), 2009. It is in this context, Stephen D. Long argues that linguistic turn is based upon a "methodological nominalism" which "must be exceeded" Stephen D. Long, "Can (Analytic) Philosophers Tell Theologians the Truth? Richard Rorty and Methodological Nominalism," in *Rorty and the Religious: Christian Engagement with a Secular Philosopher*, edited by Jacob L. Goodin and Brend E. Stone (Eugene, OR: Wits & Stock Publishers, 2012), p. 34.

theory” – but this standpoint itself is mainly one of fixed positionality and epistemology¹² and does not embody an epistemology of transpositionality as well as a transformational ontology which would help it look at reality not only as divided but also as relational in a complex, problematic and emergent way.¹³ Post-positivist approaches to meaning now need to embody both post-epistemological moves where epistemology is not just tied to conventional scientific epistemology of proceduralism and post-ontological transformations where ontology again is not tied to fixed or essentialist ontology. It needs to embody what we have cultivated as ontological epistemology of participation in related strivings.¹⁴ Ontological epistemology of participation involves both epistemological and ontological engagement in a mutually implicated and transformative way where epistemic engagement is nurtured by appropriate ontological cultivation such as ontological commitment to understanding reality and not be deluded by illusions and delusions and where ontology itself emerges out of complex and creative epistemic practices of learning. Epistemology here becomes practical which resonates with practical turn in ontology.¹⁵ Practical epistemology¹⁶ and practical ontology dance together in ontological epistemology of practication. This, in turn, does draw inspiration from some fundamental transformations in science, for example, science now realizing that its primary concern is not with dead matter but with living Life. Matter itself is now perceived as having life. This transformation of science itself makes it close to spiritual approaches to reality. All these related transformations are crucial to overcoming the contemporary crises of meaning.

¹² Ananta Kumar Giri, *Sociology and Beyond: Windows and Horizons* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2012). Also Ananta Kuamr Giri (ed.), *Pathways of Creative Research: Towards a Festival of Dialogues* (Delhi: Primus, 2017).

¹³ Bell Hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (New York: Atria Books, 2004).

¹⁴ Giri (ed.), *Pathways of Creative Research*.

¹⁵ Fred Dallmayr cultivates a mode of looking at ontology as practical ontology where ontology is not foundational and essential and does not suffer from “ontic objectivism.” It is engaged with practical activities such as love, labor and learning.

¹⁶ In his book, *Aesthetic Experience in Science Education*, Wickman tells us about practical epistemology in the following way: “[...] Practical epistemology is not a description of how people should go about to find the right answers in life. Rather, it should be understood in a situated sense as a *description* of the actions usually used by people to deal with the events of life and to pursue their goals. [...] by calling it a *practical* epistemology, the intention is to stress that there are no cognitivist or deterministic assumptions made, and that the unit of analysis is not the individual mental capacities but the activities of individuals as participants in social practice.” Per-Olof Wickman, *Aesthetic Experience in Science Education: Learning and Meaning-Making as Situated Talk and Action* (Mahwah, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), p. 52. Wickman also argues how practical epistemology has an aesthetic dimension as in the works of John Dewey and Leo Vygotsky.

Thus recovery of meaning is linked to these related wider issues of the limits of positivism and cultivation of new movements such as an ontological epistemology of participation. We can deepen and widen this to the need for creating circles and movements of meaning generation. Our crises of meaning including global crises of meaning calls for creating movements and circles of meaning generation as meaning is not confined only to the comprehension of language or understanding the meaning of meaning within the fixed parameters of our life worlds. In this essay I link this project of creation of movement and circles of meaning to the vision and practice of upholding our world and regenerating our Earth and the calling of cultivating *lokasamagraha* – gathering of soul and people – at the levels of self, society and the world.

Cultivating New Movements and Circles of Meaning Generation: With and beyond Wounds of Words and Worlds

The meaning of our life is related to the nature, functioning and dynamics of words and worlds, language and society. But an existing organization of words and worlds can be entrapped in logics of domination and may not provide adequate space for self-realization and co-realization of self, language, culture and society. Existing organization of words and worlds may create wounds in our body, language, culture, self and society. They may be entrapped in varieties of structures of annihilating disrespect.¹⁷ It is one of the sources of the crises of meaning in our lives in general and the contemporary global crises of meaning in particular. A disrespectful organization and use of words and worlds creates wounds in our lives and wounds in our perception and organization of meaning. This is evident in the way we use language in social media and other spheres of media and society to humiliate and abuse the other. This is related to the technologization of words and worlds without the accompanying critique and transformation of the technological and humanization and divinization of words, self and the world. For the realization of meaning and its creation, generation, regeneration flourishing, we need to heal the wounds of words and the worlds.

But the wounds of words also can have a deeper dimension in the way Kabir, the great 15th century spiritual seeker and poet from India challenges us with his vision and practice of *Sabdaka Chot*, Wounds of the word.¹⁸ As Jyoti Sahi, a spiritual seeker, thinker and artist helps us under-

¹⁷ Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007).

¹⁸ Jyoti Sahi, "Art and Ecological Sustainability: Sustaining the Imagination," in *Cultural Spaces for Sustainable Futures*, edited by Siddhartha (Bangalore: Pippal Tree, 2017).

stand, “[t]he Wound of the word here refers to the way the Word or Logos is a fundamental challenge to human comprehension beyond our ability to totally comprehend and control the meaning of the Word.” According to Sahi,

the wound which this Word inflicts, is a realization that we can not comprehend the unknowable, that the Reality which we try to understand has a depth and meaning that is beyond our rational power to analyze, or dissect. By a strange paradox, this wound is itself a form of wholeness, a space that penetrates the way in which we see the world around us, in a light which mystically a kind of darkness. The term ‘*shabd ki chot*’ can also be translated as being ‘struck by the Word’ or ‘injured by the Word’. In the Prophetic tradition the Word that was from the Beginning, is sometimes described as a two edged sword, that cuts through the appearance of things, like a blade that tears aside the veil of our illusions. The body that we take as impenetrable, is torn apart by the Word that sees beyond the mere surface of things, to the essence.¹⁹

In this context, understanding the meaning of the Word with such a primordial Wound of the Word calls for an approach of vulnerability, weakness, and emptiness as an integral part of journey of meaning with words and worlds. It calls for an apophatic approach to words and worlds – an apophatic way of living as relationship with language and world.²⁰ Our contemporary crises of meaning emerge from lack of such an approach and a way of living. *Sabdaka Chot* (Wounds of the world) also challenges us to realize that “vulnerability is the condition of life, and to sustain what is vulnerable requires careful and thoughtful human care.”²¹ Thus recovery of meaning and healing wounds of words and worlds call for mutual care and co-responsibility and this is also the spirit of *Loka-*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ We can relate to this Gadamer’s way of thinking about language and poetry. Building upon Gadamer’s ways of thinking Bruns tells us: “Poetry is, again, the unforgetting of language, first of all, that language is not a formal system.” See Gerald L. Bruns, “The Remembrance of Language: An Introduction to Gadamer’s Poetics,” in Hans-George Gadamer, *Gadamer on Celan: “Who am I and Who Are You” and Other Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 16.

²¹ Sahi, “Art and Ecological Sustainability,” p. 162. In his essay from which I draw upon this theme of wound of words and worlds, Jyoti Sahi refers to the work of German artist Joseph Beuys to explain this calling of being open to wounds and vulnerability for realizing meaning of life: “But when the artist Joseph Beuys asked his student to “show the wound” he was suggesting a very different approach to the process that we call art. He believed that art was a form of shamanistic healing. And it is essential that the “shaman” should be a “wounded healer.” To be “wounded” or vulnerable, is an essential aspect of being able to heal. The shaman does not heal from a position of power, or strength, but from an ability to accept that we are vulnerable. What Beuys was trying to make his students understand, was that to be creative is to be vulnerable, and not “in control” and successful in the way that we normally think that a skillful person needs to be.”

samgraha – the processes of gathering of meaning, souls and people.²² It also challenges us to go beyond a lateral, literal and linear construction of meaning and realize circles²³ at work in our journey with meaning of words and worlds. It also points to the need for cultivating silence in our engagement with meaning of words and worlds. It also challenges us to understand the meaning of words and worlds as simultaneously hiding and revealing. As Patrick Laude invites us to travel with our journey of quest and realization of meaning of words and worlds: “Contemplating the word as both a revealing and a hiding veil.”²⁴

Finding meaning with the wounds of words and worlds calls for weaving meaning across multiples fragments and sometimes broken webs of life. It calls for creative thread works and thread meditations with and beyond the threats of life. Our contemporary global crisis of meaning emerges from varieties of threats in our lives – threats to meaning of language and threats to our relationships. Thus, creation of meaning is dependent upon our capacity and creativity to weave meaning across fragments and different grammars and cultures of the self, language and the world.

Movements and Circles of Meaning Generation

The crisis of the meaning of life also emerges from our production and construction of meaning from our locations, fixations and determinations in fixed positions. But once we move from position to position it creates condition for imagining and creating meaning differently with a vision and practice of “as if.”²⁵ For recovery, regeneration and realization of meaning,

²² Again as Jyoti Sahi helps us to understand: “To recognize one’s wound is to be aware of the fact that we existentially need the “other.” The “other” is not just an adversary that we have to struggle against, in order to survive. Rather the interconnectedness of all living things, is a necessary aspect for an empathy that creates an imaginative bond of trust and friendship between living beings.” *Ibid.*

²³ Jyoti Sahi here tells us that “The term “Mandala” simply means “circle.” The circle is enclosed, being the outer boundary that encompasses a central point. But this boundary, or circumference, is itself composed of many points from which other circles can be drawn, thus giving rise to a whole pattern of inter-connected spheres.” And Sahi continues by telling us that “Dante, in his *Divine Comedy* concludes his final book in which he describes a vision of Paradise with the famous passage: “like a wheel revolving uniformly – by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.” Here the *Mandala*, or circle of Creation symbolized by the wheel, is moved by love, which was the liberating theme of the songs that Troubadours composed, and which Francis of Assisi reinterpreted as the basis for a mystical understanding of Creation.” *Ibid.*

²⁴ Patrick Laude, *Singing the Way: Insights into Poetry and Spiritual Transformation* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2005).

²⁵ See Hans Vaihinger, *Philosophy of As If* (London: Routledge, 1968), and K. Anthony Appiah, *As If: Idealization and Ideas* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

we need to cultivate movement with our engagement of meaning. We need to move from positions to positions across positions and cultivate varieties of critical and creative transpositional movements which involve compassion and confrontation. We move transpositionally with compassion but this is not bereft of the reality and challenge of confrontation and here a challenge is to cultivate varieties of creative and critical movements of compassionate confrontation or confrontational compassion. Transpositional movements as part of our quest for meaning helps us to move from a fixed positional notion of subjectivity and objectivity. It also helps in the creation of a transpositional subjectivity and a transpositional objectivity. It also helps us to go beyond the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity and cultivate transpositional subjectobjectivity.²⁶ This helps us realize the meaning of life from the perspective of an emerging and emergent transpositional subjectobjectivity.

The meaning of life is rarely linear or literal and it is characterized by a rich symbolism of life. Understanding meaning thus requires a deep symbolic approach where we need to dance with the meaning of meaning rather than fix it while standing still in a manner of arrogance and certitude.²⁷

Cultivating Movements and Circles of Meaning and the Calling of Dharma and Upholding Our World

Recovery and regeneration of meaning through varieties of movements and circles are related to our visions and acts of upholding our world. Upholding the world calls for a life of *Dharma* – right conduct and right living on the part of individuals as well as society – challenging us to realize that our contemporary crisis of meaning is not just linguistic and functional, but moral and spiritual. *Dharma* in Indic thought has a cosmic dimension and is part of *Purusartha* – four fold end or goal of life characterized by *Dharma* (right conduct and right living), *Artha* (which means wealth as well as meaning giving rise to the challenge of meaningful wealth), *Kama* (desire) and *Moksha* (salvation). *Dharma* refers to modes

²⁶ Ananta Kumar Giri, “Transforming the Subjective and the Objective: The Calling of Transpositional Subjectobjectivity,” Madras Institute of Development Studies: Paper, 2016.

²⁷ Elizabeth S. Fiorenza helps us to understand this in her alternative feminist reading of the Bible: “However, the metaphor of dance seems best to express the method of feminist biblical interpretation. Dancing involves body and spirit, it involves feeling and emotions, and it takes us beyond our limits and creates community [...]. Moving in spirals and circles, critical feminist biblical interpretation is ongoing; it cannot be done once and for all but must be repeated differently in different situations and different perspectives.” Elisabeth Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001).

of right conduct and thinking which is different from righteousness as a fixed system of classification between right and wrong especially imprisoned within a political and religious system of classification between righteous self and the unrighteous other. Upholding our world depends upon our living a life of *Dharma* and cultivating it in the lives of self and society. It challenges us to understand the relationship between *Dharma* and law as well as justice and *Dharma*²⁸ as *Dharma* challenges us to go beyond an anthropocentric *reduction* of justice and dignity and realize our responsibility not only to human beings but also to the non-humans.²⁹ Here we also need to explore the link between *Kama* and *Dharma*, desire and *Dharma*. We can critically rethink our epics such as Mahabharata and Gilgamesh to understand the violence of *Kama* (desire) when it is not guided by *Dharma*. The burning of Khandava forest in Mahabharata is a manifestation of the destructive desire of Agni, the god of fire. In the epic, Krishna and Arjuna instead of interrogating the desire of Agni to consume the forest of Khandava became an accomplice to this which constitutes the ordinary violence in Mahabharata.³⁰ Similar is the killing of Humamba, the guardian god of forest in the epic Gilgamesh from Sumerian civilization, the earliest epic of humanity.³¹ Our dominant models and practice of development are being accompanied by destruction of forests and Nature which today has brought us to the tipping point of climate change. It is a product of work of our *Karma* (action) and *Kama* (desire) not restrained and uplifted by the spirit of *Dharma*. Today the survival of humanity itself is in question which urgently calls for transformation of such a destructive

²⁸ Ananta Kumar Giri, *Knowledge and Human Liberation: Towards Planetary Realizations* (London: Anthem Press, 2013).

²⁹ Gurucharan Das describes this need to cultivate Dharma vis-a-vis in our relationship to non-humans in his interpretation of Mahabharata. See Gurucharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009).

³⁰ As the story goes, Agni wanted to consume the forest of Khandava and every time He would try to do, Indra would send rain and the nefarious desire of Agni could not be realized. Once Krishna, Arjuna and their friends were having a feast and Agni came in the disguise of a Brahmin and asked for food. Krishna and Arjuna agreed to this but then Agni showed his true self and asked for Khandava forest as his food. Krishna and Arjuna did not interrogate this desire of Agni rather became accomplices in the fulfillment of his desire. As a result, the whole of Khandava forest was burnt and all the plants and animals were brutally killed. Only one snake Takshaka escaped. Takshaka wanted to take revenge and he helped to build the beautiful palace of the Pandavas in Hastinapuri seeing which Duryodhana became so envious that he wanted to overtake them by hook or by the crook. He invited Yudhishtira for the play of dice which as is well-known led not only to the loss of kingdom of the Pandavas but also to the attempt to disrobe Draupadi. Without the ordinary violence of the burning of Khandava the war of Mahabharata which led to the destruction and violence from both sides would not have happened. See Irawati Karve, *Yuganta: The End of An Epoch* (Pune: 1968).

³¹ Jeremy Rifkin, *Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcherer, 2009).

and violent model of development. In this context, we need to preserve both Nature and Humanity, biodiversity and cultural diversity in creative ways which can only secure true happiness for us what spiritually attuned scientist M. S. Swaminathan calls biohappiness.³² Biohappiness can make a creative link between *Anna* (food) and *Ananda* (bliss) which help us to nurture and uphold our body, soul, self, other and the world. Recovery and generation of meaning is linked to these processes of creation of happiness, biohappiness and *Ananda*.

Generation of Meaning: *Dharma*, *Sahadharma* and the Calling of an Integral *Purusartha*

Finding meaning in life is facilitated by a life of *Dharma* but *Dharma* is part of *Purusartha* of life and upholding our world also calls for proper relationship with other elements of *Purusartha*. *Purusartha* was an important vision and pathway of life in classical India which talked about realization of meaning and excellence in terms of four cardinal values and goals of life – *Dharma* (right conduct), *Artha* (wealth and meaning), *Kama* (desire) and *Moksha* (salvation). It provided paths of human excellence and social frame in classical India. But its implication for human development, social transformations, and upholding our world in the present day world has rarely been explored. This is not surprising as much of the vision and practice of development and search for meaning of life is Euro-American and suffers from an uncritical one-sided philosophical and civilizational binding of what Fred Dallmayr³³ calls “Enlightenment Blackbox” which cuts off our engagement with human development from our roots and especially our integral links with Nature and the Divine. For recovery and regeneration of and upholding our world, we need to rethink and transform both *Purusartha* and human and social development. In traditional schemes, *Purusartha* is confined to the individual level and rarely explores the challenge of *Purusartha* at the level of society. In our conventional understanding elements of *Purusartha* such as *Dharma* and *Artha* are looked at in isolation. But we need to overcome an isolated constitution of elements of *Purusartha* and look at them instead in a creative spirit of autonomy and interpenetration. Much of the illness and ill-being both in traditional societies as well as in our contemporary ones emerges from isolation of these elements for example, *Artha* (wealth) not being linked

³² M. S. Swaminathan, *In Search of Biohappiness: Biodiversity and Food, Health and Livelihood Security* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2011).

³³ Fred Dallmayr, *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

simultaneously to *Dharma* (right conduct) and *Mokhsa* (salvation).³⁴ Integral *Purusartha* goes beyond an isolated construction of elements of *Purusartha* and challenges us to realize and create transformational relationships among them. To face the challenges of crises of meaning in our contemporary world especially destruction of meaning through one sided valorization of *artha* and *kama*, we need a vision and practices of integral *Purusartha* in our individual and collective lives.

As part of integral *Purusartha*, we need to cultivate not only *Dharma* but also *Sahadharma* – *Dharma* of togetherness. *Dharma* as part of an integral *Purusartha* challenges us to rethink and realize *Dharma* in an open way rather than part of a logic of self-justificatory closure between self and other which closes and binds our quest for and realization of meaning of life. Here we can engage ourselves with the discourse of *Swadhharma* and *Paradharma* – *Dharma* of self and the other. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita talks about *Swadhharma* (*Dharma* of the self) and the need to protect one's *Swadhharma* from *Paradharma* (*Dharma* of others). But what is *Swadhharma*, what is *Paradharma*? So far in conventional structures of production of meaning in religion, politics and interpretative exercises these have been given a literal and group-linked categorical meaning. *Swadhharma* is not only one's socially given religious identity, it is the *Dharma* of one's being, the path of unfoldment, and the duty that one seeks and needs to follow. One needs to nurture and protect one's unique *Dharma* and mode of self-realization from those forces which are not intrinsically significant for one's self-realization. For a Hindu, *Swadhama* is not only Hinduism and Islam is *Paradharma*. This is a very superficial rendering of *Swadhharma* and *Paradharma* at the level of caste, religion and gender. Such a superficial rendering leads to superficiality and devaluation of meaning which we need to overcome.

³⁴ For Daya Krishna, "The oft-repeated traditional theory of the *Purusarthas* [...] is of little help in understanding the diversity and complexity of human seeking which makes human life so meaningful and worthwhile in diverse ways. The *kama*-centric and *artha*-centric theories of Freud and Marx are as mistaken as the *Dharma*-centric thought of sociologists and anthropologists who try to understand man in terms of the roles that he plays, and society in terms of the norms of those roles and their interactive relationships. For all these theories, the independent seeking of any value which is different from these is an illusion, except in an instrumental sense. [...] Fortunately for the Indian theory of *Purusarthas*, it has postulated the ideal of *moksa* which is tangential to all the other *Purusarthas*. But it too has no place for the independent life of reason as a separate value, or for that matter for any other life which is not concerned primarily with *artha*, *Dharma*, *kama* and *moksa*." See Daya Krishna, "Time, Truth and Transcendence," in *History, Culture and Truth: Essays Presented to DP Chattopadhyaya*, edited by Daya Krishna & K. Satchidananda Murty (Delhi: Kalki Prakashan, 1991), pp. 204-5. Also see Daya Krishna, *Prolegomena to Any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations* (New Delhi: Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture & Munshiram Manoharlal. 1997).

As we realize the deeper spiritual meaning and challenge of existing categories coming from our culture and religions, we also need to create new categories of reality, living and realization. In the case of the existing discourse of self and other, *Swadharma* and *Paradharma*, which has been used as units and instruments in antagonistic battles, we need to create a new category of *Saha* (together) and *Sahadharma* (*Dharma* of togetherness). *Sahadharma* emerges from our walking and meditating with the joy and pathos of manifold webs of relations what Martin Heidegger calls “midpoint of relationships.”³⁵ This is suggested in the concluding lines of *Rigveda* where there is a call for *Samagachadhwam*, *Sambadadhwam* – let us walk together, speak together. For Daya Krishna, this path of togetherness is the call of the future and the God to come is a God of togetherness. In his words:

Rta and *Satya* provide the cosmic foundation of the universe and may be apprehended by *Tapasa* or disciplined ‘seeking’ or *Sadhana* and realized through them. The Sukta 10.191, the last *Sukta* of the *Rgveda*, suggests that this is not, and cannot be, something on the part of an individual alone, but is rather the ‘collective’ enterprise of all ‘humankind’ and names the ‘god’ of this *Sukta* ‘Somjnanam’ emphasizing the ‘Togetherness’ of all ‘Being’ and spelling it out as *Sam Gachhadhwam*, *Sam Vadadyam*, *Sambho Manasi Jayatam*, *Deva Bhagam Jathapurve Sanjanatam Upasate*.³⁶

To confront the contemporary crises of meaning and for upholding our world, we need a new culture, political theology and spiritual ecology of *Sahadharma* which nurtures spaces and times of togetherness. Language and common natural resources constitute our arenas of *Sahadharma*, which includes both conflict and cooperation, and it calls for a new politics and spirituality of *Sadhana* and struggle, compassion and confrontation. In the field of languages, today there is a deathlike move towards monolingualism. But our mother languages, be it Tamil, Odia, Urdu, English or Chinese nurture the soul, imagination and dignity and of all those who speak this language coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and not only one dominant ethnic or religious group, such as Tamil Hindus or Odia Hindus, though they may be numerically dominant in these respective mother language spaces. Today as our mother languages are being marginalized all of us have a duty, a *Dharma* to nurture and protect this space of *Sahadharma*. Here Hindus, Muslims and Christians and fellow speakers from all religious and non-religious backgrounds can all strive together. Similarly, as our living environment is being destroyed and our natural resources are getting depleted, protecting

³⁵ Dallmayr, *Border-Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*.

³⁶ Krishna, *Prolegomena to Any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations*, p. 8.

and cultivating this environment is a matter of a new *Sahadharma*. This act of protection, conservation and renewal of our living environment is related to protecting and recovering our commons which also calls for a new mode of being with self, other and the world. Recovering our commons in turn calls for a new politics, ethics and epistemology of conviviality and cross-fertilization where we take pleasure in each other's presence rather than withdrawing ourselves, feeling threatened and threatening others.³⁷

Practice of and meditation with *Sahadharma* and recovery of commons is linked to processes of regeneration of self, culture and society and it creates movements for bottom-up processes of self and cultural awakening and challenges top-down processes of one-sided modernization and now globalization. This is crucial to overcoming our contemporary global crises of meaning.

Recovery of Meaning and Regeneration of Our Earth

Finding meaning in life also challenges us to relate to our Earth in creative ways. Meaning is not closed within language and world but also flows with the soil and soul of our Earth. Recovery of meaning today is linked to the challenges of regenerating our Earth. Our Earth today has been under stress and with climate change it is now bereft of green cover in many parts of our world which threaten human life on Earth. Our Earth is our Mother but sometimes we look at Earth as only a dead Matter and with inspiration and for recovery of meaning we need to transform such a cosmology, ideology and organization of meaning. This fore example is the spirit of Gaia cosmology which also touches science and religious and spiritual traditions of the world which can relate to Earth with sacredness. This is the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and Fred Dallmayr's meditation in his *Return to Nature?* It also calls us to plant seeds of trees and life on and with Earth. Regenerating our earth is connected to climate care movement in which we all can take part.³⁸ It calls for creative discovery of our roots and also a cross-fertilization between roots and routes.³⁹ Regenerating our Earth calls for regenerating both our roots and routes in creative and transformative ways. It calls for new ways of Earth work which also consists of new ways of memory works and memory meditations in which we can hear the groaning of our Mother

³⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Swaminathan, *In Search of Biohappiness: Biodiversity and Food, Health and Livelihood Security*.

³⁹ Giri, *Pathways of Creative Research*.

Earth and contribute to Her healings especially as ravaged by war and climate change. Such earth work, earth meditation and earth healing is critical to confront our contemporary global crises of meaning.⁴⁰

Upholding our world and regenerating our earth calls for seed works, seed meditations and a *Sadhana* of gardening. It also calls for creative and critical works such as walking and meditating with the vision and discourse and realization of Kingdom of God. The first challenge here is to realize that the visions like the “kingdom of God is within you” needs further deeper quest and realization. As Harvey Cox tells us, the real impulse of the vision “kingdom of God is within you” in Aramaic is to realize that kingdom of God is across you.⁴¹ This brings the *Sadhana* of realization of kingdom of God relational resonating with the spirit of *Sahadharma* and God of togetherness mentioned above.

Along with this, we are also invited to transform the language and discourse of Kingdom of God into a Garden of God. The vision and discourse of Kingdom of God has many a time been imprisoned within a logic of power where we are prone to valorize God’s power in order to valorize our own power on Earth, especially the logic of sovereignty at the level of self and society, rather than realize God’s mercy. We are also entrapped in a literal understanding of the Garden of Eden and fall from it by the devia-

⁴⁰ I had nurtured a symposium on this issue of regenerating earth with the title “Cross-Fertilizing Roots and Routes,” in which Dallmayr had taken part (Giri, *Pathways of Creative Research*). In his contribution to this symposium Dallmayr brings the discussion of Earth and World from Martin Heidegger which also helps us to understand the relationship between upholding our world and regenerating our earth and its manifold implication of recovery and regeneration of meaning. Here what he writes deserves our careful consideration: In Heidegger’s preservation, the terms “world” and “earth” refer basically to the difference between openness and sheltering, between revelation and concealment, between the disclosure of future possibilities of life and the reticence of finite origins. As in Giri’s case, what is important to note, however, is that difference is not equivalent to dualism or antithesis, but rather serves as a synonym for counterpoint or differential entwinement. In Heidegger’s words, difference here establishes a counterpoint which is a kind of “midpoint” between world and earth, but not in the sense of a stark antagonism. Hence, world is not simply openness and earth not simply closure; rather, there is mutual conditioning and interpenetration: “World provides the clearing for the paths of the guiding directions of life;” but these directions rely on “something not mastered, concealed and sheltered.” Similarly, earth is not simply closed but “opens itself up in and through self-sheltering.” [...] It is in the interplay of earth and world that, for Heidegger, the pathways of human life – Giri’s “itineraries” – are to be found. A similar thought is also at work in his discussion of temporality and history – where past and future are not split asunder into the “dead hand” of a mummified tradition, on the one hand, and radical futuristic “projects,” on the other, but remain linked in a differential entwinement (*Herkunft/Zukunft*). See Dallmayr “Earth and World: Roots and Routes,” *Social Alternatives* 36 (1), 2017: p. 12. Dallmayr’s call for understanding the entwinement between Earth and World urges us to realize Earth as an open journey of evolution and realization.

⁴¹ Harvey Cox, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016).

tion of the snake, Adam and Eve. But we can now transform the vision and discourse of kingdom of God to Garden of God and realize snake, Adam and Eve as children of both God and Mother Earth. This is an aspect of *Kundalini sadhana* which is crucial for recovery and regeneration of meaning. We can realize God as a Gardener,⁴² a creative Gardener, rather than a power hungry Sovereign dancing with the cosmic dance of what Dallmayr calls “sacred non-sovereignty and shared sovereignty.”⁴³ With a cross-cultural realization, we can realize that it is possibly the Divine in Snake which might have inspired Eve to whisper to Adam to eat the forbidden Apple so that the dance of creation and the Divine play on earth can unfold. We can here draw upon traditions such as *Kundalini* and Tantra from the Indic traditions which challenges us to realize the significance of serpentine energy or *Kundalini* in life.⁴⁴ It suggests new ways of

⁴² As theologian Brigitte Kahl writes: “We might expect God to lean back and watch the creature taking up the spade to start digging and planting [...] But instead we see God taking up spade and planting the trees in the garden, definitely hard and dirty manual work” (quoted in Shore-Goss 2016: 48). But when God is taking up spade by taking spade ourselves we collaborate with God in the continued process of gardening in the process also blessing Him and Her as we also become blessed. In Christian traditions, we can also realize Lord Jesus Christ as a gardener. As Julian of Norwich writes in his *Sowings* (1978):

For I saw the Lord sitting like a man. I watched, wondering what kind of labor it could be that the servant was to do. And then I understood that he was to do the greatest labor and the hardest work there is. He was to be a gardener, digging and ditching and sweating and turning the soil over and over, and to dig deep down, and to water the plants at the proper time (quoted in Shore-Goss 2016: 93).

By co-labouring with the Divine we bless him or her. It builds upon the deep realization in the Deuteronomy where it is said: “You shall bless the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 8: 10). In an insightful essay on this David Curwin (2018) tells us about one thinker Rashba and his student Asher who help us to understand the deeper significance of Humans blessing God:

Reshba only hints at the ‘secret’ that man can assist and contribute to his God, but his student Rabeenu Bahyaben Asher, says so explicitly in a number of places. In the introduction to his commentary on [...] (Deuteronomy 33), he writes: God deserves the *berakhyt* of man, and He has commanded us in this, as it says, ‘You shall bless the Lord your God’ (Deuteronomy 8: 10).

⁴³ Fred Dallmayr, *Small Wonder: Global Power and Its Discontents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

⁴⁴ This is suggested in the following poem by the author:

Cross and *Kundalini*
 Being with Cross
 Walking and Meditating
 Upward Flow of Energy
 Love, Concentration and Co-Evolution
 From the Bottom to the Top
 From the Underworld to Light Supreme
 Awakening and Generation of *Kundalini*
 Not only vertical
 But also horizontal

looking at the traditions of political theology and link it to the vision and practice of deeper cross-cultural spiritual realizations. For overcoming the contemporary crises of meaning especially emerging from structures of political theology which valorize violence, we need a *Kundalini Sadhana* of meaning in self, culture, language and the world.

Realization, Recovery and Regeneration of Meaning and the Calling of *Lokasangraha*

Realization, recovery and regeneration of meaning is linked to vision, practices and movements of *Lokasangraha*. *Lokasangraha* is an important invitation for self, social and cosmic transformation from the Indic tradition and it appears briefly in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* twice. It is usually translated as well-being of all but it also refers to the process of gathering – gathering or collecting of *loka* – people.⁴⁵ It is creative and critical gathering of people and the accompanying process of mutual care that leads to well-being of people. As a process of gathering it is not just confined to the public, the public sphere – or public political processes. It also involves an integrally inter-linked manner gathering of soul – *Atmasangraha*. *Lokasangraha* and *Atmasangraha* – gathering of soul and people – lead to a creative gathering of society not just as a mechanical entity but as a living process of critique, creativity and transformation. It also leads to creative regeneration of commons and a cosmic mobilization of energy. As K. B. Rao writes: “If the term *Samgraha* is taken as a verb, it stands for the act or process. But taken as a noun it stands for Reality in its dynamic Being.”⁴⁶ *Lokasangraha* challenges us to realize that our life, self, society and the world have a cosmic dimension and our cosmos is not just a dead entity but a living evolving process. *Lokasangraha* challenges us for a transformation of our cosmology from a mechanical one to a living and a spiritual one.⁴⁷ *Loka-sangraha* is not confined among human beings, it

Self, Other and the world
Becomes a *Sadhana* and *Tapasya* of Cross
Kundalini flowing across
As a Grace of Mutualization
With and Beyond the Terror and Tyranny of Annihilation

⁴⁵ As K. B. Rao writes: “The term occurs twice in the third chapter of the Gita, the Karma Yoga (3.20, 25). Here are some of the most prominent readings: Holding people together (Sri Aurobindo); World Maintenance, i.e. the world order (Radhakrishnan); Integration of the World (Natarajaguru); Performing Action with an Eye to Universal Action (B. G. Tilak); Extending loka-sangraha to include salvation for all; Establishing *ahimsa* as essential to Loka-sangraha (Gandhi).”

⁴⁶ K. B. Rao, *The Bhagavad Gita As The Philosophy of Loka-Sangraha or Cosmic Consolidation* (Bengaluru: Darpan Books, 2016).

⁴⁷ *Lokasangraha* appears in Bhagavad Gita and here what K. B. Rao writes deserves our careful consideration: “The cue for the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita is concealed

includes all beings and therefore challenges us to go beyond an anthropocentric concept of welfare and to “widen the implications of *Loka-samgraha* to cover the universal order of Being.”⁴⁸

In our earlier discussion we saw the significance of *Dharma* as *Sahadharma* and integral *Purusartha* for upholding our world and regeneration our Earth. But there is a link between *Purusartha* and *Lokasamgraha*. As Rao, a deep seeker in this field, tells us: “[...] the completeness of the *Purusarthas* is possible only when they include *Lokartha*, that is *Lokasamgraha*, as an integral part thereof.”⁴⁹

Lokasamgraha challenges us to realize well-being and happiness for all but for this we are all invited to be creative in our strivings and strug-

behind a most significant expression which is used only twice in the text, but which sums up the whole perspective not only of the philosophy of the Gita but Reality as such, namely *Loka-samgraha*. This is yet another significant term, which stands for the same, if divested of the narrow colorings put upon it, and that is *Dharma-sangraha* which the Lord [Lord Sri Krishna] terms *Dharma-samsthapana* (4.8). If taken in its widest sense against the background of the philosophy of the text itself and of the personality who says he has incarnated to achieve it, it is not simply overcoming the dissipating forces of irreligion and immortality and stabilizing righteousness of a certain kingdom at a given time, but has behind it the very basic truth of consolidating the more fundamental truth, viz., universal order, harmony and growth, transcending the limits of relative grievances and feelings, misunderstanding as well as understandings, customs, practices and even their laxities, linking all these with the larger sinews of Reality operating outside and around human living and extending it into the possibilities of all existence. *Dharma* is not only *Rta*, but also *Satya*. It is order and Reality. And how are we to understand the dynamics of it in its being and continuance of being, i.e. in its eternity, other than by the most apt expression *loka-samgraha*?” See *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ Here what Rao writes deserves our careful consideration: “*Dharma* should be viewed as inclusive of *Loka-samgraha*. With this wider interpretation, *Dharma* helps harmonize the individual and social goals of life. The complete harmonization can be expressed in three stages. At first stage, the individual goal – *Preyas* – is harmonized with *Dharma*, because both *Artha* and *Kama* become sanctified through *Dharma* and they are allotted their rightful place in the philosophy of life. At the second stage, *Loka-samgraha* is harmonized with the *Dharma* in the sense that as Iyer summarized Gandhi’s thoughts: “*Dharma* in his view, has no meaning apart from *Loka-samgraha*, the welfare of the whole world.” At the third stage, the individual goal – *sreyas* and the social goal – *Lokasamgraha* – are harmonized, because, as Vinoba says, both the goals can be achieved simultaneously from the same act of social service if performed in accordance with the teaching of the *Gita*: The service that is being rendered to the world through my external actions can itself, viewed from within, be described as spiritual exercise. The service of Creation and the development of the Spirit do not demand two different courses of action: service and spiritual growth are not different things. For both, the effort made, and the action performed is the same.” Rao 2016: pp. 167-8. Rao also tells us: “Since *Sreyas* and *Loka-samgraha* can be identified as the two most important goals of life according to the Gita, a close look into two respective enemies – attachment and egotism I obviously necessary. Attachment to the fruits of one’s action has received particular attention in the Gita, and the remedy suggested is *Samata*, or even mindedness in success or failure after having put in one’s best efforts.” See *Ibid*., p. 179.

gles and it cannot be left to the others, society and state. At the heart of *Lokasamgraha* is care and responsibility which connects the vision and practice of *Lokasamgraha* in the Western political traditions such as in the works of Hannah Arendt and in the Chinese philosophy of *Tian-Xia* – All Under Heaven.⁵⁰

Loka means both space and time and *Lokasamgraha* calls a creative gathering of space and time with and beyond their contemporary capitalist production as commodities and alienating entities. *Lokasamgraha* challenges us for creative rethinking and reconstitution of space and time where we can gather together without anxiety and help each other realize our potential – our evolutionary potential. Our space and time in modernity as well as in contemporary late modern times are determined by logics of capital but *Lokasamgraha* challenges us to nurture our space and time as pregnant capable of generating new lives and relationships and not just reproduce the capitalist relations of power and profit. *Lokasamgraha* is also a process of knowing about each other and knowing oneself. It involves creative epistemic practices of mutual knowing and knowing self, other and the world. It also involves ontological processes of self-realization, co-realizations, self-development as well as co-development. Processes of being together in *Lokasamgraha* involves manifold creative movements of ontological epistemology of participation going beyond the dualism of epistemology and ontology which bedevils modernist science, subjectivity and politics.

Lokasamgraha also involves movements across our initial positions and locations so that we do not become fixed and imprisoned within our positions and we can stand, seat and meditate in other positions and others' positions. Such transpositional movements create possibility of a new subject formation what be called a transpositional subjectivation rather than only a positioned subjectivity. Similarly objectivity in *Lokasamgraha* is also not fixed; it emerges out of transpositional movements across positions. *Lokasamgraha* calls for cultivation of a new subjectivity and objectivity – as discussed above, which can be called transpositional subjectobjectivity.⁵¹ It challenges us to go beyond the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity, ontology and epistemology. Going beyond the dualistic logic of modernity, *Lokasamgraha* calls for a cultivation of a non-dual logic and path of living, a multi-valued logic and path of living of autonomy and interpenetrations.⁵²

⁵⁰ Fred Dallmayr, *Against Apocalypse: Recovering Humanity's Wholeness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

⁵¹ Giri, "Transforming the Subjective and the Objective."

⁵² J. N. Mohanty, *Self and Other: Philosophical Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Lokasamgraha of Meaning and the Calling of a Multi-Topical Hermeneutics

Lokasamgraha involves creative reconstruction of hermeneutics. It challenges us to cultivate pathways of critical and reconstructive hermeneutics which does not justify or valorize initial prejudices rather than transform these into creative movements of mutual learning, collective learning and planetary learning.⁵³ This also involves moving across multiple *topoi* and terrains of our humanity and hermeneutics that emerges here is not only the positional hermeneutics of a single cultural tradition or that of diatopical hermeneutics of putting one's feet across two cultures as suggested by philosopher and theologian Raimundo Panikkar and sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos,⁵⁴ but multi-*topial* where we walk and meditate with multiple *topoi* of hermeneutics. But this movement is not just lateral but also vertical touching the depth dimensions of self, culture, other and the world. Here bringing a *Kundalini* approach to multi-*topial* hermeneutics we can realize that we also move from our lower planes or *chakras* of existence to higher planes. While understanding each other we understand self and other mainly from our positions in lower *chakras* such as sex, desire and accumulation of profit or preoccupation with worldly power and interpretative victory then our understanding is bound to be inadequate. But if we base our hermeneutics on higher planes of our own and mutual Truth realization (animated by a co-operative and collaborative search for Truth) which is not dismissive of the lower but is part of an integral hermeneutics then it helps us to gain deeper understanding of self, other and the world. Multi-*topial* hermeneutics and an integral *chakra* hermeneutics help us understand each other deeply which

⁵³ Here what Dallmayr writes deserves our careful consideration: "[...] my siding in favor of difference and hermeneutics never amounted to a slide into a shallow pragmatism or relativism (which separated me from some of the more exuberant forms of post-modernism). In the case of Gadamer, this slide is prevented by his moorings in Aristotle as well as in Herder/Hegel and in Heidegger. There is another point worth mentioning: my intellectual encounters up to this point were confined to European or Western philosophy. Despite my fondness for difference, my outlook was still basically Eurocentric or Western-centric. Although having been prepared by various episodes, the crucial step had not yet been made. The step happened in 1984 with my first visit to India. The occasion was a conference on political theory / philosophy at the University of Baroda in Gujarat. The convener, Bhikhu Parekh (himself an eminent political thinker), had invited a number of colleagues from Europe and America and also a large contingent of Indian scholars. Although in travelling to India I had expected a routine event, nothing routine-like occurred. I finally broke through my Western shell and, then and there, vowed to myself to become a serious intercultural scholar."

⁵⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

is crucial for a cross-cultural dialogue, planetary conversations and planetary realizations where we realize each other as fellow and interested children of Mother Earth and our each other's knowledge and gifts to the world.

Multi-*topial* hermeneutics involves movements across multiple terrains, topoi and traditions and it is animated by a spirit of weaving meanings, connections, communications and relationships. It involves thread works and thread meditations as part of weaving meaning and communication across borders and boundaries in the midst of threats and threat works of many kinds. It is this act of weaving which keeps the spirit and process of *Lokasangraha* of meaning alive in the midst of varieties of threats and destruction which leads to *Lokavinahsa* or destruction of people. For realizing the link between weaving and *Lokasangraha*, we can build upon multiple traditions of creative thinking and practice in humanity and on such weavers of meaning and life such as Kabir, St. Francis of Assisi, Hans Christian Andersen and Gandhi.⁵⁵

Lokasangraha* of Meaning and the Calling of *Satyagraha

Kabir, St. Francis of Assisi, Hans Christian Andersen, Gandhi and many kindred souls and movements in societies and histories devoted themselves to quest for Truth and sought to transform self and society. This is the spirit of *Satyagraha*. Gandhi's most profound contribution to humanity is a spirit of integral *Purusartha* (as discussed above) in finding a proper relationship between *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* where *Moksha* is transformed from its other worldly preoccupation to worldly transformative movements and realizations and *Satyagraha*.⁵⁶ For the realization of *Lokasangraha* and a regeneration of meaning, we need

⁵⁵ Here again Jyoti Sahi ("Art and Ecological Sustainability") helps us understand the spirit of weaving in Kabir, Gandhi and St. Francis of Assisi. For Sahi, all these pioneers gave themselves to the *sadhana* of weaving. In case of St. Francis of Assisi, he drew inspiration from the La Troubadour who sang across borders and wove new meanings and relationships. Both Gandhi and St. Francis of Assisi wove their own humble clothes. For understanding the significance of thread works and thread meditations in philosophy, theology and literature we can here reflect upon the creative works of Hans Christian Andersen, the great poet, story writer and novelist from Denmark. Here what Kaj Mogensen, a critic, writes deserves our careful consideration: "There is as well as thoroughgoing poetics displayed in the novel [of Hans Christian Anderson]. The invisible thread in the lives of the characters in the novel will show that there is also an invisible in the lives of the readers. In this way it is clear that the novel has the intention of making a proclamation. Indeed, it reveals what the task of poetry is all about: by poetic means to present the invisible threads so that it is understood to be the real thread in human life."

⁵⁶ According to Anthony J. Parel, realizing integral *Purusartha* and bringing *Moksha* closer to *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* in religion and politics is the most important contribution

multi-dimensional movements of integral *Purusartha* and *Satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* is struggle for Truth which is also a *Sadhana* and struggle for realization of beauty, dignity and dialogues in the midst of indignity, ugliness and monological assertions and violence of many kinds. *Satyagraha* is simultaneously political and spiritual and it embodies resistance – soulful resistance – as well as movements of reconstitution and transformation. *Satyagraha* is one of the most important contributions of Gandhi to our world of thought and practice but we find this in many seekers and transformers in the world. *Satyagraha* is not only a political action but also an epistemic action as any epistemic engagement can benefit by embodying a *Satyagrahic* mode of knowing and being. *Satyagraha* is a quest for Truth but Truth here is neither merely epistemological nor ontological. It exceeds both epistemology and ontology and, as Dallmayr has helped us understand in case of Gandhi's Truth, has a demand quality to it.⁵⁷ Truth is not only a product of the existing discourse and constellation of knowledge and power. Truth is not only a point but part of a landscape of reality and realization with multiple circles and spirals. We can here cultivate an ecological view of Truth which is different from Truth as egological and one-dimensional where it is a landscape of reality and realizations and multiple locations of viewing and engagement and multiple perspectives on Truth which reflect different dimensions of it rather than necessarily contradicting each other. An ecological perspective and realization of Truth is related to a multi-valued logic of Truth and life as different from the dualistic logic of an either or approach.

Satyagraha as quest for Truth faces challenges internal as well as external. Both self and society as fields where *Satyagraha* works is constituted by *Trigunas* – three qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. In Indic traditions, there is a complex understanding of Truth existing in dynamic relation with what are called *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness). *Satyagraha* as quest for Truth needs to work and mediate with both *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness) and in the way transform these. *Satyagraha* involves

of Gandhi. See Anthony J. Parel, *Pax Gandhiana: The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ As Dallmayr tells us about Gandhi's Truth: "Where psychologism tends to reduce truth to internal intuition (or a psychic state of mind), discursive epistemology – insisting on initial ignorance or fallibility – perceives truth as emerging through a process of interacting or communicative constitution or construction. What is missed in both accounts is the "otherwise" or demand-quality of truth – the aspect that search for truth while proceeding in ignorance is yet compelled by something which exceeds the range of human management or construction." See Fred Dallmayr, "Gandhi's Truth." Paper presented at the International Vedanta Congress. University of Madras, 1996, p. 12.

movements and travel across these domains and beyond and also translation. So we need to link *Satyagraha* to travel, truth and translation.⁵⁸

Translation is facilitated by travel, especially modality of being such as walking where one travels and translates lightly. Inter-cultural translation as well as cross-cultural dialogues and multi-topical hermeneutics thus can be linked to creative footwork as part of a cross-cultural memory work. This is also a truth work and meditation where one walks and meditates with Truth. This truth work is an aspect of *Satyagraha* and it has epistemic and ontological dimension as well as political and spiritual dimensions. For realization of *Lokasangraha* of meaning, we need to bring creative movements of Truth, Travel and Translations as part of *Satyagraha* in self, culture, other, society and the world.

The Calling of a Planetary Lokasangraha: With and beyond Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has been a discourse which seems to help us understand our belonging to our world. It helps us to realize that we are all citizens of the world. But this itself suffers from Eurocentric and ethnocentric limitations and now we need to go beyond cosmopolitanism as citizens of the world and realize that we are simultaneously citizens of the world and children of our Mother Earth. To overcome contemporary global crises of meaning, we need to go beyond Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism and contemporary dominant discourses of cosmopolitanism which is still primarily Eurocentric.⁵⁹

Cultivating Movements and Circles of Meaning Generation: Planetary Lokasangraha and New Politics and Spirituality of Co-Creativity and Co-Creation

Lokasangraha is related to generation of well-being and thus is at the root of this heart-touching aspiration and prayer: *Lokah Samastah Sukhino*

⁵⁸ This is suggested in the following poem of the author:

Three T and More
 Travel, Truth and Translation
 Travelling with Truth
 Translating Truth in Travel
 In Between the Relative and the Relational
 Absolute and Approximate
 Translating While Travelling
 Self, Culture and Divine
 Beyond the Annihilating Tyranny of the Singular
 A New Trinity of Prayer
 A New Multiple of *Sadhana* and Surrender

⁵⁹ Ananta Kumar Giri, *Weaving New Hats: Our Half Birthdays* (Delhi: Studera Press, 2018).

Bhavantu which means let all people and all beings be happy. But how can we be happy? What is the meaning of happiness when it becomes a slave of quick satisfaction and consumption? Can we be happy without being creative? Creativity may be the foundation of well-being, creative self and creative society. Thus along with the familiar prayer *Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu* we can strive and pray new prayers: *Lokah Samastah Srujana Bhavantu* – let all people be creativity, *Lokah Samastah Srata Bhavantu* – let all people be creators, *Lokah Samastah Saha Srasta Bhavantu* – let all people be co-creators. *Lokasamgraha* calls for multi-dimensional co-creative movements in self, society and cosmos to be creative in self and society, religion, politics, spirituality and every day lives. Co-creation of many kinds is crucial to our contemporary efforts to overcome global crises of meaning and realize and regenerate it in new ways.

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Al-Farabi in the Nigerian Polity: Propositions for Virtue Politics and the Moderation of Identity Politics

BENJAMIN TIMI OLUJOHUNGBE

Introduction

The proliferation of violent identity politics in the north of Nigeria, especially since the nation's return to democratic practice in 1999, has been responsible for the volatility of that specific region. Thus, the advancement of human and social development in that part of Nigeria is often jeopardized by the lack of peace and stability. Furthermore, metamorphosing violent identity politics constitute a real quest for existential meaning in that part of the globe. This paper, focusing on the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria, aims at the mitigation of violent identity politics in northern Nigeria.

Drawing upon philosophy, characterized by the love and pursuit of wisdom, this paper retrieves the thoughts of medieval Islamic philosopher, Al-Farabi in order to make sense of the attainment of a polity characterized by virtue, in view of mitigating the ongoing insurgency in northern Nigeria. This paper also intends to emphasize that Al-Farabi's thoughts contribute to resolving the global crisis of meaning with specific reference to northern Nigeria. It will be argued in this connection that the propositions of Al-Farabi for "the virtuous city," which includes elements such as virtue, knowledge, and happiness, are crucial in the task of promoting peace, stability and development in northern Nigeria.

This paper begins with an exposition of the scope, nature, and factors that underlie the ongoing violence in northern Nigeria. It will be argued in the first part that negative identity politics in northern Nigeria is often centered on issues related to ethnicity, distribution of social goods, and the quest for political and religious hegemony. The idea of virtue politics and the imperative to embrace it in view of promoting peace and development shall be discussed in the section thereafter. The third section shall be a

retrieval of Al-Farabi's propositions for the promotion of a "virtuous city," which is by nature a functional welfare state, wherein elements such as justice and knowledge advance the wellbeing of individuals and society at large. These propositions for a welfare state are related in the final section to the polity of northern Nigeria.

Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Violence

Northern Nigeria, prior to and since the attainment of independence from colonial authorities, has featured series of violence occasioned by ethnic, political, economic, and religious interests. In fact, the interplay of politics and faith in Nigeria presents a template for violence, whereby even when it seems that the cause of a particular public dissent borders essentially on politics or economy, religion gets implicated easily and warring factions conveniently introduce the "Muslim vs. Christian" rhetoric into the various forms of propaganda that ensue. The phenomenon of so-called religion-implicated violence, which can be found in post-independent violence in northern Nigeria, such as the 1966 massacre of the Igbo, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the *Maitatsine* violence of the 1980s, the Kano riot of 1982, the Kaduna crises occurring in Kafanchan and Zangon-Kataf in 1987 and 1992 respectively, the violent attacks and counter-attacks occasioned by the publication of the Danish cartoon parodying religious figures and several other skirmishes¹ could only flourish because of the deep-seated religious orientation of most Nigerians.

Although the causes for which violent identity groups seek recognition vary, there are common denominators in the states of affairs occasioning these violent conflicts. Earl Conteh-Morgan has defined the following denominators of violent conflicts:

Class cleavages or problems of inequality continue to polarize segments of populations, and the negative effects of abject poverty, economic deprivation, unemployment, or ethnic discrimination continue to widen in scope and deepen in intensity. This results in violent eruptions either between incumbent regimes and specific groups, or between ethno-communal groups.²

¹ The following texts provide detailed narratives on violent identity politics in the polity of northern Nigeria: Matthew H. Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An Insider Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011); Abimbola O. Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State," *Africa Today* 57, 4 (2011), pp. 98-119; Rotimi T. Suberu, *Ethnic Minority Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003), pp. 48-56; J. Ibrahim, "The Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State," *Review of African Political Economy* 45/46 (1989), pp. 65-82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4006011>.

² Earl Conteh-Morgan, *Collective Political Violence: An Introduction to the Theories and Cases of Violent Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

To be sure, social inequality, lack of resource control, and alienation from the distribution/redistribution of resources are denominators of dysfunctional social arrangements and thus has the capacity to cause varying reactions from social actors. These reactions and counter-reactions include individual agitations, specific group uprisings organized and proliferated by racial, gender, class and religious identities and the use of state coercive powers in the attempt to respond to the agonies of agitating individuals or peoples.³

For the most part, violent conflicts in Nigeria and more specifically in northern Nigeria fit into the pattern described above. As Osaghae and Suberu have noted:

Nigeria presents a complex of individual as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which the ethnic, religious, regional and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts in the country. This is both from the point of view of the identities most commonly assumed by citizens especially for political purposes and the identities often implicated in day-to-day contestations over citizenship as well as competitions and conflicts over resources and privileges.⁴

The frequent occasion of violent conflicts in northern Nigeria has often shown a pattern of identity politics in which violence is arranged along the lines of social, political, religious and economic interests. Indeed, for the most part, the common denominators of violent struggles in northern Nigeria are the quest for resource (re)distribution and religious/political hegemony.

The Boko Haram⁵ movement is prominent in the current state of affairs regarding violence in northern Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgency which has as its goal the eradication of Western education and all its appurtenances from the public space employs the religious toga in the quest for recognition. Boko Haram – an extremist Islamic group with supposed affiliation to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) has the mission of instituting a theocracy; and thus condemns the influence of the Western world not only in northern Nigeria but in the entirety of the country.

It is important to state here that in the spirit of the freedom which a liberal democracy grants every citizen, arguments could be given for the actualization of what Will Kymlicka refers to as “group-differentiated

³ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴ Eghosa E. Osaghae and Rotimi T. Suberu, “A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria,” *CRISE Working Papers*, 6 (2005), p. 7.

⁵ *Boko Haram* means “western education is forbidden.” The name combines elements of the Hausa language (*Boko*) referring to western education and the Arabic “*haram*”; where the latter word means “forbidden.”

rights,”⁶ which in the context of a group aversion against western modes of living would require that socio-religious groups or cultural bases with reservations concerning Western education and/or civilization should rather struggle for state recognition of the values they hold sacred and seek to live by without jeopardizing the freedom of other citizens in a pluralistic democratic polity as Nigeria’s.⁷ The point made here is that the preference for a theocratic way of ordering a particularly delineated geopolitical space is not in itself a negative idea. It is the means of seeking to impose a theocracy, which includes the use of raw violence and the imposition of a single religious and political orientation on a heterogeneous state like Nigeria that is called into question.

In the course of prosecuting its war against western education, the Boko Haram sect has also generated schismatic identities. For instance, the Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands (*Ansaru*) broke out of Boko Haram in 2012, accusing its estranged parent group of being “inhuman to the Muslim *Ummah*” (community). This schism was necessitated by what the spokesperson of *Ansaru* refers to as the difference between Boko Haram, which launches attacks even at mosques, and the breakaway *Ansaru*, which unlike its estranged parent group has the mission to “protect Muslim lives and properties.”⁸

In forcefully insisting on a theocracy for heterogeneous Nigeria, Boko Haram seeks recognition in view of attaining both political and religious hegemony over the public space. The struggle for recognition by Boko Haram has led to several military attempts at quelling the terror imposed on the nation by this group, resulting among others in high mortality, the kidnapping of school children, and an increase in the number of internally displaced persons. The overall effect of the violent propaganda of this group has brought sorrow in many families, social instability, and the dissolution of the proper atmosphere for sustainable development.

Conscriptions in Northern Identity Politics

For the most part, the identity politics celebrated in northern Nigeria raises “the question of nationhood and power sharing in a hopelessly

⁶ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 109.

⁷ Examples abound in this connection: The Amish who maintain social, political and religious life distinct from mainstream American society, the Catalonians of northeastern Spain who enjoy some political autonomy from the Spanish government, French-speaking Canadian regions enjoying various state-conferred rights to freely pursue life and meaning through specific cultural, religious and political choices.

⁸ T. Joscelyn, “Jihadist Divisions Grown in Nigeria,” (2015): <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/02/jihadist-divisions-grow-in-nigeria.php>.

skewed federalism,”⁹ where the façade of ethnic, religious, political and other affiliations is employed by devious politicians to procure the attention and participation of the citizens in wild and violent reactions. In such arrangements, integrative politics is replaced by a negative celebration of identities which sees to it that the *polis* loses the focus on ideologies for social cohesion while ensuring the establishment of parallel and dividing provincial ethoi. The diversity that should be enriching to the *polis* thus becomes the very bane of recurrent conflicts centered on the dynamics of sharing power and resources at the expense of other constructive values.¹⁰

Through rhetoric which deploys ethnicity, religious and political persuasions to sway the “unknowing,” the foot soldiers who participate in violent activities are conscripted from citizens who live on the margins of society and are therefore deprived of their primary needs as human persons, like food, shelter, wholesome health care system, education (Western or Arabic), equal opportunity and those other essential things that make for commodious living. To be certain, young people, male and female in their teenage years are conscripted to function in collaboration with other persons as suicide bombers, saboteurs and peddlers of violence, wielding sophisticated weapons across North-eastern Nigeria.¹¹ These actors in the prosecution of negative identity politics discountenance their own being, and also proceed to jeopardize the life of other individuals by causing wanton destruction of lives, the economy and the polity.

Such conscriptions into the violent quest for recognition are only possible in a geo-political space where there is a privation of social cohesion. It is to such privation that the idea of virtue politics speaks.

The Idea of Virtue Politics

The focus of virtue politics according to Stephen Holland is on actions and/or policies aimed at the approximation of functional societies.¹² Much as it is an emerging approach in social and political philosophical discourses when compared with virtue ethics with which it is related, virtue politics directly applies elements of virtue theory to issues related to values

⁹ Taoheed Ajao, “Challenges of Identity Politics in Africa: The Nigerian Example,” *The Hope* (November 17, 2017): <http://thehopenewspaper.com/2016/04/challenges-identity-politics-africa-nigerian-example/>.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* Also see Matthias Kamp, “The Governability of the Multinational State of Nigeria,” *KAS International Reports* (2014), p. 7, <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.38098/>.

¹¹ U. Abbo, A. A. Bello, and Z. B. Zain, “Examining Youth’s Propensity to Political Violence in Northern Nigeria: A Pilot Study Report,” *International journal of African and Asian studies* 16 (2015), pp. 58-66.

¹² Stephen Holland, “The Virtue Ethics Approach to Bioethics,” *Bioethics* 25, no. 4 (2011), p. 199.

in the discourse of political philosophy. Virtue politics as an approach which relates virtue theory more directly to the functioning of society is relevant on account of its being more adapted to prescribing ready actions useful for consolidating the orientation of citizens for inter-subjective life in the public space and the promulgation of appropriate policies for the flourishing of people in society.¹³ The nexus existing between virtue and the *polis* is drawn by Alasdair MacIntyre:

Morality and social structure are in fact one and the same in heroic society. There is only one set of social bonds. Morality as something distinct does not yet exist. Evaluative questions are questions of social fact...For the given rules which assign men their place in the social order and with it their identity also prescribe what they owe and what is owed them and how they are to be treated and regarded if they fail and how they are to treat and regard others if those others fail.¹⁴

The virtues thus constitute a *sine qua non*, without which an individual and indeed society as a whole cannot attain *eudaimonia*. A privation of such virtues frustrates the individual or societal efforts at appropriating towards their *telos* or purpose.¹⁵ The idea of virtue invokes a sense of character disposition, and according to Richard Dagger, in the context of the organization of the *polis*, it is “a role-related concept,” where civic virtues refer to the roles of the citizen in enhancing the stability of the society.¹⁶ Such civic virtues also demand a particular character disposition from state actors who only got into public offices on account of their original statuses as bona fide citizens prior to becoming state actors. This point is important because only individuals acting on behalf of the state can be held responsible for the outcome of promulgations and policies aimed at societal welfare.

Virtue politics is appropriate for the moderation of life in the *polis* on account of its being more “fitting for the task of guiding law and policy making processes in contradistinction to virtue ethics which is agent-oriented toward the individual and evaluates personal judgments and decisions.”¹⁷ Virtue politics transcends the moral choices of the individual qua individual and rather locates the individual as a citizen in the hetero-

¹³ Cf. Ben Eastaugh and Chris Sternal-Johnson, “Virtue Theory: Ethics and Politics,” *Moral Musings* (2011): <https://moralmusings21.wordpress.com/2010/01/24/virtue-theory-ethics-and-politics/>.

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 123.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁶ Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship and Republican Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 196.

¹⁷ Holland, “The Virtue Ethics Approach to Bioethics,” p. 199.

geneous public space interacting with other human subjects. Most importantly, it also includes the state functioning through its agents working for the flourishing or well-being of the society (*eudaimonia*). In this connection, Rosalind Hursthouse notes that the idea of virtue politics recalls the link that Plato in his *Republic* and Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* maintain between ethics and political life. On that ground, Hursthouse expresses the view that virtue politics is the future of virtue ethics.¹⁸

In a more direct way and in the context of a discourse on the mitigation of identity politics in northern Nigeria we inquire: What does virtue politics speak to? This question can be reworded in the fashion of Alasdair MacIntyre commenting on the virtues in the ancient Greek city states:

What were the political problems whose solution required the practice of virtues? They are the problems of a society in which the central and equitable administration of justice, universities and other means of sustaining learning and culture and the kind of civility which particularly belongs to urban life and are all still in the process of being created.¹⁹

The polity in northern Nigeria as presently construed is congruent with the political life of societies wherein equitable administration of justice and the kind of civility, underscored by the indices of urbanity, are yet to be established. Such privation of equitable administration of justice, education and all the other means of cultivating and sustaining civility is the bane of the violence proliferated in northern Nigeria.

The Structure of a Virtuous Polis

In this section, the ideas proposed by the medieval Islamic philosopher, Abu Nasr al-Farabi (for brevity hereafter referred to as Al-Farabi) for “the virtuous city” – the *khalifat* are retrieved and introduced into the contemporary socio-political space of northern Nigeria in view of mitigating the recurrent negative identity politics, in which the proliferation of violence establishes social instability and inhibits the chances of attaining holistic societal development. Al-Farabi’s analysis of a variety of city polities and his propositions for a welfare state which includes elements such as virtue, knowledge and happiness are relevant even for twenty-first century interpretation of global politics, even though these ideas were generated in the Middle Ages. The harmony, which the medieval scholar shows to exist in virtue, knowledge and happiness as the *telos* of the human community, is even more crucial in the advancement of peace, stability and development in northern Nigeria.

¹⁸ Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 6-9.

¹⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 171.

It is important to recall here the appellation “the second teacher,” by which Al-Farabi was called. The appellation derived from the fact that Al-Farabi himself retrieved, translated and incorporated the works of Aristotle in order to consolidate an Islamic political philosophy which served to promote social order during the era in which he lived. The context and legacy of Al-Farabi’s contributions to political discourse is explained in the following:

The era of Al-Farabi’s life coincided with the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate. Initially, the Abbasids ruled as the leaders of the Islamic world and strengthened the unity of the Muslims, but at the beginning of the 10th century caliphate, it enters a period of crisis and the result was that the state disintegrated. The Philosopher, watching those events, developed the political constructs that would help create consistency and order in the state. Ideas, proposed by Al-Farabi, were intended to transform society, to instill the principles, norms and rules, and compliance which would stabilize the political situation, and would subsequently bring about the centralization of the state power and wellbeing of the population. Al-Farabi’s legacy is the spiritual and historical bridge between the East and the West, study and research, which are particularly fundamental in present day processes of globalization.²⁰

Al-Farabi begins in the fashion of Aristotle by grounding the virtuous city on the nature of the human person as a political being whose ultimate purpose to attain *sa’adah* (happiness) cannot be achieved unless there is an inter-subjective relationship with others in a pluralistic society.²¹ The inter-subjectivity of human persons required for the attainment of happiness rests on the fact that human agents “are constantly in need of the assistance of their fellows in the provision of their basic needs and their very survival.”²² This inter-subjectivity accounts for the organization of the ideal human community into three varied forms according to demography namely: the *ma’murah*, which refers to humanity throughout the globe, the *ummah*, which refers to the nation and the *Madinah*, which refers to the city-state or *polis*. Whether the political association existing in the various human communities enhances the attainment of *sa’adah* for the individual and by extension, for the community, or rather gravitates towards its undesirable opposite which is rife with mystery, ignorance and depravity depends on the quality of human conduct in the polity.²³

²⁰ G. Kurmangaliyeva and A. Azerbayev, “Al-Farabi’s Virtuous City and Its Contemporary Significance,” *Anthropologist* 26, Nos 1&2 (2016), p. 88.

²¹ Cf. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *Ara’Ahl Al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, edited by A. Nader (Beirut, 1959), p. 96.

²² Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence* (England: Oneworld Publications, 2002), p. 101.

²³ Cf. Al-Farabi, *Ara’Ahl Al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, p. 109. See also, Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, p. 107.

The structure of the virtuous *khalifat* in Al-Farabi prescribes the role of its citizens as building and sustaining a welfare state. In the words of Majid Fakhry, it is “compared [by Al-Farabi] to a sound body, whose organs cooperate in ensuring the health of the animal, as well as its survival. Like the body, whose organs differ in rank or function, the parts of the city differ in rank and function, too.”²⁴ The welfare state, in which there is a provision for equal rights for citizens and the development of a system that ensures the maintenance of harmony between individual well-being and the common good of the society,²⁵ must therefore be led by a ruler who functions as the very heart of the body polity. This ruler must possess attributes that show him as a person oriented towards the pursuit of excellence – the essence of virtue. Among the attributes desired of a successful ruler of the *khalifat* are the possession of sound health, intellectual perfection, eloquence in communication, temperance in matters relating to the natural appetites (food, drink and sex), interest in truth and justice for all, disinterest in the acquisition of inordinate wealth and other material goods, easy disposition to the virtue of integrity by which his words or policies align with his actions and bravery.²⁶

The enumeration of the virtues makes flexible allowance for the possibility of committing the governance of the *polis* to more than one person on the ground that since the various virtuous attributes expected of a ruler may not inhere in a single individual at once, they may be complemented by other wise persons; so that a plurality of persons with compatible characters may steer the ship of state to its *telos*. However, as noted by Fakhry, in the event of the privation of wisdom in those other persons who are supposed to complement each other in the direction of the affairs of state, the state becomes acephalous and is thus destined to perish.²⁷ The point about a plurality of virtuous persons sharing in the task of advancing common good as rulers in the polis is most relevant in the context of contemporary arrangement of the modern democratic state where instead of the “rule of one,” there is a preponderance of the separation of powers which is ordinarily aimed at preventing a situation whereby absolute power corrupts an individual statesman absolutely.

Having proposed the structure of the *khalifat* as a polity in which both the ruling class and the citizens are expected to live a life of virtue, the

²⁴ Al-Farabi, *Ara’Ahl Al-Madīnah al-Fadīlah*, p. 96. See also Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, pp. 101-102.

²⁵ Cf. Kurmangaliyeva, and Azerbayev, “Al-Farabi’s Virtuous City,” p. 90.

²⁶ Al-Farabi, *Ara’Ahl Al-Madīnah al-Fadīlah*, p. 704. See also Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, pp. 103-104. It is instructive to note, as Fakhry (p. 104) makes clear, that the enumeration of the qualifying attributes of the ruler of the *khalifat* is modeled along the lines of what is prescribed in Plato’s *Republic* VI, 484, b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

particular virtue of justice is highlighted as an important element for the organization of a virtuous society. The significance of this for global politics cannot be overemphasized, especially as issues regarding political instability are often reducible to questions regarding the various theories, practices and orientations towards the cause of justice in different political settings.

Al-Farabi's vision of justice (*"adl"*) for the *khalifat* is one in which there is "equitable distribution of common goods, consisting of security, property and social standing."²⁸ Here, an equitable distribution also involves virtue in so far as the sharing of these goods must be guided by the golden mean, which ensures that beneficiaries receive what is proportionate to their merit. A merit-based, equitable distribution of social goods would mean, in the first place, a distribution that recognizes the humanity of all citizens. Distribution of social goods should also be arranged along the lines of the various roles or statuses of citizens; such that, each person – either a member of the ruling class or an individual from the rank of the masses receives social goods based on needs justly prescribed by social status. Hence, a disproportionate conferment of benefits thus amounts to distributive injustice.²⁹ Distributive justice is central to the attainment and sustenance of human flourishing in every society and its importance is illustrated in contemporary politics by the point earlier cited from Conteh-Morgan, namely that class cleavages or problems of inequality continue to polarize segments of populations, and the negative effects of abject poverty, economic deprivation, unemployment constitute the bane of "violent eruptions either between incumbent regimes and specific groups, or between ethno-communal groups."³⁰

Given the importance of establishing a functional distributive justice system for a society that must flourish, Fakhry details how Al-Farabi decries devious characters in the *khalifat* who use religion in a clever way to "distract" the masses from benefitting from the distributive scheme of justice:

Some people, he goes on to say, resort to religious devices to achieve the goals of conquest or ascendancy. They appeal to piety (*khushu*) in seeking these aims, by professing belief in a Deity who manages the affairs of the world providentially (*yudabbir*), assisted by spiritual entities (i.e. angels), who superintend all human actions... It is then held that whoever practices such rituals and renounces the coveted goods of this world will be rewarded by much greater good in the after-life. If, however, one does not, but continues to cling to worldly goods, one will be punished severely in the hereafter.

²⁸ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, p. 100.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁰ Conteh-Morgan, *Collective Political Violence*, p. 1.

For, as he comments, those practices are mere tricks or devices intended to achieve victory over the opponent. They are resorted to when other means have failed, and are practiced by those who are no longer able to achieve their goals by recourse to open warfare. In calling for the renunciation of worldly goods, they wish to give the impression that they are not really interested in them. Thus, they are trusted by others and their conduct is described as divine. Even “their attire and looks,” Al-Farabi adds, “appear to be those of people who are not interested in these [worldly] goods on their own account.”...For by pretending to renounce worldly goods out of a sense of piety, they end up beating everybody in the acquisition of honors, social station, wealth and pleasure. They will, in addition, earn the esteem of their fellows and continue to grow in (fake) wisdom and certainty.³¹

The point made here shows how Al-Farabi criticizes the deployment of religion as *instrumentum regni*; that is, as a tool employed in the context of public governance for the manipulation of the people.³² Such a manipulation sees to it that while a mass of people are mischievously led like a herd by the hand of a perverted use of religion to commit all of their being and existence to the extra-terrestrial, the devious ruler focuses on looting the economy, appropriating state resources in the service of his or her untamed appetites. This phenomenon which yields popular misery is the bane of non-virtuous societies as noted by Al-Farabi.³³ It is often found in the Nigerian polity; and more specifically, in northern Nigeria where people who live on the margins of the society are deprived of primary needs and thus vulnerable to be used as foot soldiers in the prosecution of violence.

Justice in Al-Farabi’s virtuous city is also construed as “man’s use of his virtuous actions in relation to others, no matter what virtues are involved.”³⁴ This is an inter-subjective appreciation of the virtue of justice and such a vision binds well with the virtue of integrity or consistency in policy or action, whereby the acting agent seeks to advance the course of humanity not only in him- or herself but also in the person of other human agents with whom the public space is shared.³⁵

Al-Farabi’s vision of the virtuous city incorporates the possession of knowledge by the citizens to complement the virtue of justice in the pursuit of the purpose of the society, namely happiness. The place of knowl-

³¹ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, pp. 115-116.

³² Al-Farabi functioned as a social critic; engaging the polity intellectually, betraying no sentiments or personal attachments to the practices of particular religious figures in his epoch.

³³ Al-Farabi, *Ara’Ahl Al-Madīnah al-Fadīlah*, p. 109.

³⁴ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, p. 100.

³⁵ This vision of justice aligns well with Aristotle’s idea of justice as harmony. This is the sense to which Aristotle refers in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as complete justice or the fact that “he who possesses it can exercise his virtue, not only in himself, but toward his neighbors also.” See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, v, 1128 b 30.

edge in the virtuous polis is underscored by the fact that citizens are supposed to be bound by a common *raison d'être*. As such, all citizens must seek to advance the reason for their being together in a geo-political space by seeking to consciously procure knowledge of a variety of things, ranging from the abstract and the immaterial entities that can be properly said to exist, to the empirical entities, their properties, generation and corruption. Also included in the curriculum are the nature and scope of human knowledge which today goes under the appellation "epistemology," the nature of will and choice (agency), the attributes of political rulers and their subjects, the nature of happiness and issues relating to societies that neglect the importance of virtues. All of these are to be studied in view of procuring knowledge as far as the human capacity can afford; so that the human person can relate in harmony with nature and whatever can be said to be.³⁶ What may be tagged Al-Farabi's philosophy of education for the virtuous city is summarized here:

Indeed, the whole activity of education, in Al-Farabi's view, can be summed up as the acquisition of values, knowledge and practical skills by the individual, within a particular period and a particular culture. The goal of education is to lead the individual to perfection since the human being was created for this purpose. The perfect human being (*al-insan al-kamil*), thought Al-Farabi, is the one who has obtained theoretical virtue – thus completing his intellectual knowledge – and has acquired practical moral virtues – thus becoming perfect in his moral behavior. Then, crowning these theoretical and moral virtues with effective power, they are anchored in the souls of individual members of the community when they assume the responsibility of political leadership, thus becoming role models for other people.³⁷

The pursuit of knowledge in the virtuous society is not an end in itself; it is rather a means to the greater end of developing the human person in all aspects. Such intellectual formation, an education in the humanities in the proper sense should be a continuous activity in a virtue-oriented society whose purpose is the advancement of *mens sana in corpore sano* – healthy mind in a healthy body; so that society itself achieves harmony despite the plurality which characterizes it. Societal harmony itself culminates in the attainment of *sa'addat* (happiness) – the ultimate *telos* of the human community.

³⁶ Cf. Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*, pp. 105-106.

³⁷ A. Tanabayeva a.o., "Al-Farabi's Humanistic Principles and "Virtuous City,"" *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences* (2015), p. 126, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2015.01.14>.

Situating Virtue Politics in Northern Nigeria

The propositions of Al-Farabi for a virtuous politics speak to issues of social order and stability in the Nigerian polity. They specifically address the reality of being and existence in northern Nigeria, where a recurring quest for recognition is promoted by using violent conflicts arranged along the lines of social, political, religious and economic interests. Justice and knowledge proposed as virtues for life in the public space are therefore useful in the task of promoting peace, stability and development in northern Nigeria, where the attainment of these three salutary values means an approximation to the purpose of society.

The importance of resource (re)distribution in the context of promoting social stability is intricately tied to inequality – the key driver of conflict in northern Nigeria. In this connection, efforts at regaining social stability in northern Nigeria must focus among other measures on re-negotiating the terms of distributive justice so as to ensure an all-inclusive virtuous city where the dignity of each human person is hallowed. Distributive justice in the polis, which according to Al-Farabi must be based on merit, is moderated by the non-material vision of justice by which the human person commits his faculties and excellence to the wellbeing of others in society. Here, political justice as “the basic structure of the society, [...] the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation,”³⁸ intersects with the idea of justice which ensures that life of the citizens is always an expression of inter-subjective reliance.

The idea that justice is the basic structure of society implies the incorporation of a subsidiarity approach, prescribing that each citizen exercises agency in the scheme of affairs in a plural society. The exercise of agency by the citizen is also founded on the individual being able to access the social goods, which are also distributed on the terms of justice. The virtue of justice therefore requires that “citizens of a religiously pluralistic society understand themselves as moral, rather than purely cultural persons,”³⁹ so that the wellbeing and advantage of all is preserved at all times. On account of the nexus existing between the conception of the virtue of justice both as distribution and social integration and the overall attainment of happiness in the society, it becomes imperative to recover and sustain the precincts of the virtue of justice in view of appropriating social stability for human flourishing in northern Nigeria.

³⁸ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 11-12.

³⁹ Simeon O. Ilesanmi, “Appraising the National Covenant: Faith, Public Reason, and the Search for Ethical Integrity in Nigeria’s Democracy,” in *2017 Convocation Lecture University of Ibadan* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2017), p. 7.

Al-Farabi's enumeration of knowledge as a value that the rulers of the *khalifat* and their subjects (citizens) must be immersed in bears the status of a virtue properly speaking; especially as the acquisition of such knowledge moderates the existential choices made either by the ruler, which comes in the form of legislations, policies and acts, or by the actions of the individual citizen acting within the confines of a heterogeneous public space. The propagation and accumulation of an all-inclusive yet dynamic corpus of knowledge is crucial in the effort to stem the tide of violence caused by extremists in northern Nigeria. The inclusivity that must be characteristic of a functional knowledge system must seek to reform the corrupted version of *Almajiri* knowledge system that is proliferated in northern Nigeria. In this system, instead of being groomed in the way of civility and the peace which the Islamic faith is supposed to promote, young people enrolled in the *Almajiri* system of education rather become street children, begging in the heart of cities and suburbs from where they are easily recruited into the rank of suicide bombers.⁴⁰

Education, the means of distilling and dispersing knowledge is at the heart of building a virtuous *polis*. Simeon Ilesanmi underscores this point when he notes that:

To educate is to nurture an individual into a particular community. We must recognize plainly that all education is education for citizenship. What we teach, how we teach it and whom we teach it to necessarily describe a vision of society and of the types of individuals we want to prepare for that society. Values do not merely infiltrate education from the outside as ideological add-ons, but are constitutive of the very practice of teaching.⁴¹

If, according to the philosophy of education that Aristotle espouses, the goal of education is to replicate in future generations the "type of character" that will sustain our polities,⁴² then only an inclusive education which neither makes a distinction between elites and the *hoi polloi* nor bifurcates the curriculum in praise of a privileged learning for a few can suffice in further advancing equity and by extension, stability in northern Nigeria.

Having delineated the virtues of justice and knowledge acquisition as crucial values for the mitigation of identity politics in northern Nigeria, it is important to state that cultivating virtues often benefits extensively from a discursive process, in which "the right kinds of tension or even conflict, creative rather than destructive are generated between the secular

⁴⁰ It is important to note that the corruption of the ideal *Almajiri* system of education was openly decried by the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III. See "Almajiri practice not representing Islam – Sultan of Sokoto," *Vanguard*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/05/almajiri-practice-not-representing-islam-sultan-sokoto/amp/>.

⁴¹ Ilesanmi, "Appraising the National Covenant," p. 21.

⁴² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337a.

and the sacred, local and national, rural and urban. It is in the context of such conflicts that moral education goes on and that the virtues come to be valued and redefined.⁴³ The goal of such discursive conflict is to seek an exchange of perspectives in view of achieving harmony. It is right in this connection to argue that instilling the virtues into the polity through a discursive, dialectical process also demands a certain possession of the virtue of courage, which Hannah Arendt identifies as crucial for the proper alignment of social and political order.⁴⁴ Without this virtue, neither rulers nor their subjects can meaningfully confront issues thought to be critical but volatile in a plural socio-political space. This is more so in the particular Nigerian context of violent identity politics and the proliferation of claims for public recognition at the expense of societal salutary interests.

Conclusion

This paper opened with an exposition of the scope and nature of violent conflict in northern Nigeria. At the inception, it was stated that recurrent violent conflicts in northern Nigeria have shown for the most part a pattern of negative identity politics wherein claims of social, political, religious and economic interests constitute the issues around which violence is structured. The challenge posed to society by a lop-sided distribution of social goods and the quest for political hegemony are also established as serious factors in the proliferation of violent conflicts in northern Nigeria. While the second section of this paper focused on the very idea of virtue politics as a burgeoning approach in political philosophy which relates virtue theory more directly to the organization of plural societies, the third section was a retrieval and exposition of “virtue politics” as developed by Al-Farabi who wrote in his time about the importance of the virtue of justice and knowledge, which a society must imbibe in order to achieve its goal of happiness. In the last section, the propositions of Al-Farabi are domesticated within the context of politics in northern Nigeria.

Al-Farabi’s propositions for a virtuous city in 10th century Abbasid caliphate, which was a union of both state and religion, are instructive in the context of northern Nigeria where, although the constitutional status of Nigeria as a nation is without a state religion, political life is overtly affected by the religious beliefs and practices of many. The critique of the adverse use of religion and the introduction of morality into the political landscape with existential categories such as justice and knowledge functioning as means of cultivating human happiness are even more relevant in the context of mitigating violent identity politics.

⁴³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 171.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Great Britain: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 156.

By way of conclusion, the imperative to build what Al-Farabi calls “virtuous cities” in northern Nigeria is a task seeking to connect the wisdom subsisting in philosophy with the perennial global quest for meaning. The responsibilities that this task imposes rest for the most part on the ruling class who possess the requisite practical wisdom for the execution of state duties. This task is also extended to the citizenry which must exercise their agency in the advancement of a virtuous polity.

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Do Humans Need to Make Clear and Proclaim What They Believe?

MARTIN LU

Preface: Learning and Relearning to Be Human

Recently I spent two weeks on a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam, seeing many castles, fortresses and churches/cathedrals along the Rhine river in Germany. They serve as timeless witnesses of both religious faith and conflicts. Afterwards I was resting in a small rural hot-springs resort town in South Eastern Taiwan. Opposite my hotel along the river, there is a tiny temple worshipping some unknown idols (as is common in Taiwan), which reminds me of St. Paul's experience in Athens:

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.¹

So I would like to bring to this volume the following question for discussion: Do humans need to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve? The question may appear to be religious, but the concern is shared by adherents of all traditions regardless of what God or gods they believe or even whether they believe or not. The main theme of our volume is “Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times.” “Learning to be human” has been the peculiar catchphrase of Confucianism in recent interreligious dialogues. It is Confucius' (551-479 BCE) idea that we should live in one world at a time, he says: “if you do not know how to live, how do you know how to die?”²

“Learning to be human” should be taken in this sense: “knowing how to live” paves the way for “knowing how to die.” It does not stop at “learning

¹ *Acts* 17:23.

² *Analects*, 11:12.

how to be human” in the secular sense or even in the sense of “secular as sacred.” Being towards death is an important theme in Heidegger’s masterpiece *Being and Time*. This is an echo of Christian soteriology. And the life and death issue is thematic in all schools of Buddhism. So this is the unquestionable common ground of major traditions and religions of the world. But could we make clear what we believe or disbelieve? After two thousand years, the unknown God Apostle Paul encounters in Athens is still very much with us today. Christian history could be considered as persistent attempts, direct or otherwise, to make clear what God is and the result is often the opposite of what they expect. John Cobb, Jr., a 20th century Christian process theologian, reflects on his dialogue with Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist dedicating his life to interfaith dialogues in the West:

I argued that the Buddhist polemic against God was usually against a substantial God and against divine power acting on events from without. Process thought also opposed those notions and appreciated the Buddhist polemic.³ So it is rather unique during our modern time that a Christian theologian and a Buddhist, a religious atheist, would both oppose the notions of God as a substance and God acting from without. John Cobb thought he had accommodated enough to Buddhism, but Masao Abe still considered the process theology not “empty” and “emptying” enough. Abe eventually found the common ground of Buddhist / Christian dialogues in *ūnyata* (emptiness) and *Kénōsis* (surrender of divinity).

The above dialogue illustrates the depth of “learning to be human” where the primordial experience of ultimate reality could serve as the common ground for various faiths or non-faith.

Justification of Beliefs – “The Dark Cloud Where God Dwells”

Much of what humans believe or disbelieve has to do with God, which is especially true in the Abrahamic traditions. Moses saw darkness where God was (Exodus 20:21). The Christian Apostle Paul might mean well: He wanted to make clear and proclaim to the Athenians their “unknown God.” But at what price, which we may even appreciate more today? To be “ignorant” and “in the dark” may be something negative and empty from the modern Western perspective, but it is not necessary so in the view of Eastern wisdom. Socrates was considered wise by the Delphic oracle because he was ignorant and in the dark over certain heavenly matters. But his legacy to the West is still: Virtue is Knowledge. Confucius says: “If you know, you say you know; if you do not know, you say you do not

³ *Masao Abe a Zen Life of Dialogue*, edited by Donald W. Mitchell, Kindle Version, Loc 1521 of 8494.

know. This is knowledge.”⁴ (My own literal rendering of 「知之為知之，不知為不知，是知也！」)

Ever since Moses, there has been a tendency in Western philosophical and theological traditions to dispel this dark cloud by justifying their beliefs one way or the other. The climax is the epistemological crisis of the Enlightenment period when all objective standards to evaluate beliefs and knowledge are abandoned. In turn, the epistemological crisis leads to crisis of belief. Humans cannot live without moral, political or religious commitments and beliefs, which unfortunately often lead to conflicts within an individual and a group, and between groups.

I shall discuss below the Christian ecumenism of the postliberal theology of George Lindbeck (*The Nature of Doctrine*), the metaphysical justification of Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*) over his own attempt to reconcile his Christian and Marxist commitments and subsequent conflicts, and finally Herbert Fingarette’s behaviorist interpretation of Confucius in the *Analects* (*Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*) as an alternative paradigm to Abrahamic traditions of “making clear and proclaiming what they believe,” which date back to Moses and Paul.

From the almost autobiographical accounts of MacIntyre and Lindbeck as exemplified in the former’s Prologue and the latter’s Afterword in the 25th Anniversary Editions of their respective books mentioned above, we see their lifelong quest for certainty and justifications. On the one hand, they need a clear identification of belief and sense of superiority in order to have commitment, but the epistemological crisis has rendered the attempt difficult if not impossible. On the other hand, the multi-religious/multi-cultural climate of their age opens them to a diversity of traditions whose resources they could all learn, but to do it may risk losing their identity, belief and the sense of community within their cherished tradition. So, either one-sided particularism or one-sided universalism is not the option for them. As a result, both of them seek for justifications in the tradition.

Perhaps the tension between the secular and the sacred leads to these dilemmas of belief and justification for both Lindbeck and MacIntyre, and the harmony between the two realms for Fingarette’s Confucius makes the appearance of the same dilemmas not even a rejected possibility. In the case of Singapore, many Chinese have the dual status of being both Confucians and Buddhists, or being both Confucians and Christians, but not being both Buddhists and Christians. Although historically there had been philosophical attempts in China to make clear the Confucian identity by philosophical justifications, but this is not the case in popular Confucianism as lived by ordinary people.

⁴ *Analects*, 2:17.

To address these issues, I will begin with the short-lived social engineering experiment in Singapore of “religious knowledge” as moral education during the period of 1984-1989.

“Religious Knowledge” as Moral Education in Singapore

When I participated in the promotion of Confucian ethics in Singapore during the 1980s in my capacity as local adviser of the Ministry of Education and researcher at the National University of Singapore, the relevance of Confucianism to Global Times was then persuasive but not entirely convincing. But after a span of 30 years, the rise of China (economical and political) and the ever heightening of global crisis in terms of terrorism, regional and sectarian conflicts, and even unthinkable nuclear catastrophe, have now made it more imperative for me to revisit the significance of Confucianism in dealing with our current global crisis. If Confucianism could be expediently classified into Popular Confucianism, Political Confucianism, and Spiritual (Philosophical) Confucianism, the economic success and political stability of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China could be attributed to Popular and Political Confucianism of culturally hard-working Chinese and their inborn amenability even to “soft authoritarianism” under reasonable circumstances. But the ideal of Chinese rounded teaching (圓教), shared by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, is now even more pertinent to the shifting world of meaning and its associated crisis and apocalyptic catastrophe as we now experience on a daily basis.

Unlike the Socratic/Platonic view of philosophy as preparation for death (*Phaedo*), the Confucian view is a “cultivation of humanistic learning in this life” (修道之謂教) as prescribed in the Confucian “Doctrine of the Mean” (中庸). An object (物) is not just an isolated thing in the external world to be investigated by an epistemological subject, but something a human being could feel and give meaning to such as “family, state, and the world” (家、國、天下) as taught in the Confucian “Great Learning” (大學).

In the early 1980s, the Singapore Government was concerned about the encroachment of undesirable Western values and decline of Asian values. Dr. Goh Keng Swee (1918-2010), a Malacca Peranakan/Straits-born Chinese, was Singapore’s Minister of Education. He publicly admitted that he was a nominal Christian but believed that moral education without religious basis will not take root. So he introduced Religious Knowledge as a compulsory subject for upper secondary school students. In 1984, six options were made available – Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies and Sikh Studies. However, the project as social engineering lasted for only five years till 1989 when religious knowledge was no longer a compulsory subject, but optional outside curriculum hours.

According to Singapore's 2000 population census, about 42 % is Buddhist, just under 15% Muslim, 14% Christian, 14% professing no religion, 8% Taoist, and 4% Hindu. The census shows "a strong correlation among ethnicity, home language and ... religion among the Malays and Indians," where "almost all Malay-speaking residents were Muslims while most Tamil-speaking residents were Hindus."⁵ Confucianism is not regarded as a religion in the official classification of religions but most Chinese Singaporeans have the dual status of being a Confucian and belonging to another institutional religion such as Buddhism, Taoism or Christianity.

The strong correlation between race, language and religion is significant not only sociologically, but also philosophically in terms of "What do we believe?" and "Why should we believe?" In Singapore, the practice of religion is closely related to ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. In some cultural or ethnic groups, people just accept the religion passed on to them, and they never doubt that this is also part of their "free choice." Furthermore, not only one's race or language plays a role in one's faith, the government also makes sure that religious harmony is maintained. It is an offence to "cause ill-feelings between different religious groups."⁶ Around the same time, when Singapore was promoting Confucian ethics, the debates over Asian values also emerged. The principal proponent of Asian values was Singapore's founding father and the longest serving Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015), who also made it possible for Confucian ethics to be included as one of the subjects of religious knowledge in upper middle schools. In no time, both Confucian ethics and Asian values were perceived by Western media as an attempt to perpetuate authoritarianism.

Today the global crisis culminated by racial, religious and ideological conflicts may have provided us with more hindsight and wisdom to rethink the Singapore experience. Western democracy may have minimized much evil and contributed to human goodness, but clearly does not promise Paradise as foreseen by Plato and witnessed by recent developments. No one should take religious harmony for granted especially in a multicultural society such as Singapore without wise and foresighted leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee.

If we look around the world today, it is a utopian fantasy to expect the emergence of a philosopher king. Even Chinese philosopher Mencius said that in Chinese history a sage king appeared only once in 500 years. So we could fairly argue that, without the intervention of wise rulers and philosophers, religious harmony could only be postponed to the eschatological future.

⁵ Department of Statistics, Singapore Census of Population 2000.

⁶ Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, passed in November, 1990; also Ministry of Information and the Arts, "The Need for the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act," 1992.

George Lindbeck: Social-Linguistic Model of Religion

I have been conducting dialogues with Chinese Christians and Buddhists informally for decades. It has been difficult if not impossible to carry on philosophically meaningful and constructive dialogues especially with ordinary Christians if you do not accept and learn their cultural-linguistic terminology. (I understand the situation better now with the insights from *The Nature of Doctrine* by George Lindbeck.) The usual pattern of a dialogue is to start discussing the existence of God initiated by the Christian and often based on the “argument from design.” And it is meant to be cognitive and referential without even defining what God means. But at least some sort of universal and objective standards, even including science, could be appealed to. If both parties are harmonious and patient enough, we would move on to doctrines such as Christology, Trinity, salvation and *eschaton* etc. without realizing that here no objective criteria are possible.

George Lindbeck’s small and yet monumental volume *The Nature of Doctrine* (ND) makes clear the road map of such discussions. Are religious statements / doctrines cognitive and propositional, pointing to reality? Are they expressions of inner feelings and experience? Or are they just cultural-linguistic scheme of interpretation as Lindbeck puts forward? In ND, Lindbeck speaks of “truth” in three different ways: (1) categorical, (2) intrasystematic, and (3) ontological, which mean (1) meaning and reference, (2) warrant or justification, and (3) traditional notion of truth as corresponding to reality.⁷ Basically he is interpreting Christian and religious doctrines in an ecumenical and neutral manner without committing himself regarding which Christian denomination or religion is closer to ontological truth. He defends his interpretative theory of doctrines as neither a relativism nor an isolationism, but a “particularistic universalism.” With his cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine, the adherent can open up without being enclosed in a “religious ghetto,” or she could reconcile without capitulation with her fundamental birth-right beliefs.

I would consider this original and creative approach of an ecumenical attempt as the starting point for interreligious dialogues. When we engage in such dialogues, at least we understand whether we are referring to the internal rules of language and the kind of truth we have in mind. As to our question of “making clear what we believe or disbelieve” in terms of doctrinal clarity, there is less of such needs in Eastern traditions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

⁷ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary Edition, 2009. First published in 1984 by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, with a new introduction by Bruce D. Marshall and a new afterword by the author, Kindle Version, Loc. 332-339.

As an example, the late Jan Van Bragt (1928-2007), a Catholic scholar of Japanese religion and philosophy, has this Buddhist interpretation of the Christian Trinity, which in his view could be justified by Scripture:

As is well known, the notion of *persona* entered Christian speculation from the discussion about the Holy Trinity, where one needed to think of a plurality of realities that would not destroy the unity of the one and only God. The notion of *person* was then coined to denote *entities* that have nothing in and by themselves, but have everything by their reciprocal relationship or total mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*); not entities that first exist and then get into relationships, but entities that are nothing but their relationships – *relationes subsistentes*.⁸

The Trinity has been a controversial issue in Christian history. But if we internet the three “persons,” (God the Father, God the Son, and Holy Spirit), not so much as independent entities but as “nothing but their relationships,” then the issue is more readily resolved. So it takes more than an academic scholar to think through the issue, but someone, either a Buddhist Catholic or a Catholic Buddhist, who is able to speak the cultural-linguistic languages of both traditions.

Jan Van Bragt has also awakened me from the dogmatic slumber of following Greek Philosophy for years in my personal approach to Christian theology and religion. He writes:

Greek philosophy, however, did not try to explain religious reality as such; it was geared at explaining and *grounding* the things of this world and basically took as its prototype of *being* the (immovable forms of the) material *things* around us. Let us have a quick look at the kind of problems this creates for a religious, specifically Christian, way of thinking. For example, if you take the being of a material thing, such as this desk here, as your model, you cannot really say that God *is*; and if you do so anyway, you posit God as a substance over and against us and the worlds – something that has created a whole tangle of difficulties when it comes to speaking of the *existence of God* in the West, and may indeed be mainly responsible for the birth of atheism.⁹

Bruce Marshall in his new Introduction to *The Nature of Doctrine* refers to the divine mysteries of faith and also the source of religious doctrines:

The business of theology is not to penetrate divine mysteries inaccessible to ordinary mortals, so to instruct the Christian assembly about what to say and do, but to make explicit, in a rigorous if fragmentary way, the grasp of those mysteries that any faithful worshiper has already been given.¹⁰

⁸ Jan Van Bragt, *Interreligious Affinities: Encounters with the Kyoto School and the Religions of Japan*, edited by James W. Heisig & Seung Chul Kim (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2004), Kindle Version, Loc. 694-699.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Loc. 733-742.

¹⁰ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, Loc. 519-523.

The theologians in the West consider it their duty to make clear what the ordinary believers adhere to. And intellectuals prefer to contemplate in an isolated way without getting into what Lindbeck would call “traditional community life.” Most ordinary adherents of main religions tend to actually follow their “cultural-linguistic” schemes of interpretation in practice without knowing how to express them. If we engage them in dialogues, they tend to explain their beliefs cognitively, interpreting doctrines as referring to ontological reality as the corresponding meaning (even though they may not express it clearly).

Among academics, as Lindbeck is well aware of, the experiential-expressive approach as exemplified by Paul Tillich has been most popular because it satisfies the modern needs of pluralism, equality, and universality. It refers to the universal core experience which people of different cultures and traditions could express in their own ways. This core experience is famously expressed by Tillich’s “ultimate concern.”

In Japan, the cross-fertilization between Buddhism and Christianity had been deep, genuine, and fruitful so much so that Jan Van Bragt could write and lecture on “Contributions of Buddhism to Christianity” even before the Vatican II Council in these words: “It is only in the perspective of a Christianity not yet in possession of the full truth, and God (Christ) graciously at work also in other religions, that we can speak of possible contributions of Buddhism to Christianity.”¹¹

Christianity’s above-mentioned encounter with Buddhism in Japan has shown that, despite its belief in supposedly perennial doctrines, the actual practice and doctrinal interpretation could still adapt to local cultural and traditional environments because “historical Christianity is still not yet in possession of the full truth.” When I visited the Institute for Religion and Culture at (Catholic) Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan, (where Jan Van Bragt served as its acting director in 1976), as researcher in 2007, there was even a meditation room in the Visiting Scholars’ Lodge where I stayed. Meditation is a serious practice for genuine Buddhists in Japan. The medieval Christian monasteries also emphasized it. Even Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) in his exhortation to priests also advised daily meditation for priestly perfection.

Lindbeck may have stressed the significance of Christian doctrine in the traditionally embedded church, but Christian churches nowadays may not be so doctrine-oriented. For instance, Chinese churches nowadays are a haven for those “who are weary and burdened.”¹² They are more concerned with human relationship and personal experience in the church

¹¹ Van Bragt, *Interreligious Affinities*, Loc. 488.

¹² Matthew 11:28

community than with doctrinal issues such as the Trinity. The cultural-linguistic interpretative scheme is only applicable to a certain extent. For many Chinese Christians, the church is only part of the secular world in which they live.

Alasdair MacIntyre: How Do We Justify What We Believe?

Alasdair MacIntyre may be right: In order to judge and assess one tradition we need to do it from the perspective of another tradition. Life is too short to immerse in another tradition, learning its culture and language in order to assess and justify our own tradition. Some people of dual traditional status such as Jan Van Bragt may be in a unique position to do it. Otherwise, we could only do it by imagining and projecting our situation onto another tradition.

If George Lindbeck's focus is ecumenical and inter-religious, Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophical orientation tends to be more inter-traditional, as in his existential and religious conciliation between Christianity and Marxism, and between modernity and Aristotelianism. But the cultural-linguistic approach was what MacIntyre was following as he described in his autobiographical journey of a truth seeker and utopian dreamer, from a committed Marxist back to a Christian.

He was then looking forward to a revival of tradition such as a monastery of prayer, learning, and labor, which would not only survive but flourish in the new age of darkness. He had been waiting for this 25 years ago as he was then. Yet most people do not have this luxury of waiting for so long as they need to deal with everyday life here and now. Let us read MacIntyre's following comment on *After Virtue* after 25 years:

I should also make it clear that, although *After Virtue* was written in part out of a recognition of those moral inadequacies of Marxism which its twentieth-century history had disclosed, I was and remain deeply indebted to Marx's critique of the economic, social, and cultural order of capitalism and to the development of that critique by later Marxists.

...

And it was my intention to suggest, when I wrote that last sentence in 1980, that ours too is a time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal. It is also a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity. So it was twenty-six years ago, so it is still.¹³

¹³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Third Edition (Notre Dame, Indiana: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), Kindle Version, Loc. 189-194.

For MacIntyre, the loss of traditional context and justification (due to the epistemological crisis) leads to social and moral changes, which in turn result in new authority and justification. And often we need to see things from the vantage point of a different tradition such as Aristotelian ethics to review our own tradition: "It is only from the standpoint of a very different tradition, one whose beliefs and presuppositions were articulated in their classical form by Aristotle, that we can understand both the genesis and the predicament of moral modernity."¹⁴

He also learned from Aquinas that an account of the human good is inadequate unless there is a metaphysical grounding with a purpose. In other words, justification of human actions and beliefs could only be teleological:

...I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.¹⁵

He had been a Christian and a Marxist follower, trying to reconcile the two, and then abandoned his Communist membership, but retained the Marxist ideal of social justice. After the enlightenment epistemological crisis, his philosophical dilemma is whether to maintain the rational ideal of metaphysical justification, or to lapse into postmodern relativism. But he is determined to reject relativism as a genuine follower of Aristotelian or Abrahamic tradition in assessing the merits of one tradition against another:

Yet, just because there are no such neutral standards, the protagonists of a defeated tradition may not recognize, and may not be able to recognize, that such a defeat has occurred. They may well recognize that they confront problems of their own to which no fully satisfactory solution has as yet been advanced, but it may be that nothing compels them to go any further than this. They will still take themselves to have excellent reasons for rejecting any invitation to adopt the standpoint of any other rival and incompatible tradition, even in imagination, for if the basic principles that they now assert are true and rationally justified, as they take them to be, then those assertions advanced by adherents of rival traditions that are incompatible with their own must be false and must lack rational justification. So they will continue – perhaps indefinitely – to defend their own positions and to proceed

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Loc. 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Loc. 83.

with their own enquiries, unable to recognize that those enquiries are in fact condemned to sterility and frustration.¹⁶

Is MacIntyre still optimistic with regard to what he attempts to achieve: evaluating one's own tradition from the vantage point of another? Yet the above passage seems to echo Lindbeck's distinction between justified and true belief. In inter-religious dialogues, we need to assume that the rival traditions may be justified but not necessarily true. Nevertheless, if we are self-reflective enough, we may be able to critically examine our own tradition, which does not occur very often. Here we could apply the cultural-linguistic approach to such self-examination, and accept that all our religious doctrines are just second-order statements and subject to change. But what is this unknown goal we are striving for and aiming at?

Twenty-five after the first publication of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre wrote in his new Prologue: "Central to these (the theses and arguments in the book) was and is the claim that it is only possible to understand the dominant moral culture of advanced modernity adequately from a standpoint external to that culture."¹⁷ This is a never-ceasing spirit of inquiry. It is also a religious and metaphysical mystery as to where we could find the neutral standards to compare diverse traditions and decide which tradition is not only more justifiable but also ultimately true.

Confucius: The Secular as Sacred (Herbert Fingarette)

Finally let us move on to a non-Abrahamic tradition as exemplified by Fingarette's book, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, to see a different view of human life in this multicultural world. The *Analects of Confucius* has been the valuable cultural heritage of ordinary Chinese and East Asian people in their daily life since the time of Socrates and the Buddha. Its spirit as revived by Herbert Fingarette's insightful work mentioned above has injected a fresh reading into the *Analects*. To a certain extent, his interpretation is true to the spirit of Confucius and also in harmony with what we have discussed above about the cultural-linguistic interpretative framework.

What is Confucius' humanness, which blends so well the secular and sacred to the extent of historically harmonizing and assimilating different cultures and people in East Asia? We tend to ask this question whenever we revisit the *Analects*. Traditionally scholars would consider *jen* (仁 benevolence, love or human-heartedness) as the Confucian core virtue and other virtues such as *li* (禮 rites or rules of social propriety) as expressions or

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Loc. 148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Loc. 54.

manifestations of the core virtue. According to Fingarette, the translations and interpretations before him have read Christian, Buddhist or Taoist connotations into the *Analects*. His proposed “pure” rendition of the *Analects* is that Confucius’ world is a “Human Community as Holy Rite,” not relying on any superstitious acts, but on the power of ritual performance:

The remarks which follow are aimed at revealing the magic power which Confucius saw, quite correctly, as the very essence of human virtue. It is finally by way of the magical that we can also arrive at the best vantage point for seeing the holiness in human existence which Confucius saw as central. In the twentieth century this central role of the holy in Confucius’ teaching has been largely ignored because we have failed to grasp the existential point of that teaching.¹⁸

The *Analects* is so close to everyday life on the one hand and also so traditional on the other that we could read it either as secular or as sacred. Confucius could be construed as a believer in *Heaven* (天 God) or a pragmatic agnostic. Fingarette helps us see the holiness in human existence in Confucius’ world (despite the latter’s maintaining a respectful distance from the traditional spirits):

“Devote yourself to man’s duties,” says the Master, “respect spiritual beings but keep (them at a) distance” (*Analects*, 6:20) He suited the deed to the precept and himself “never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders, or spirits.” (*Analects*, 7:20) In response to direct questions about the transcendent and supernatural he said: “Until you are able to serve men, how can you serve spiritual being? Until you know about life, how can you know about death?” (*Analects*, 11:11).¹⁹

But the Master’s main focus is to mold the raw impulse and potential of man with the social forms of *li* (禮) into true humanity:

The (spiritually) noble man is one who has labored at the alchemy of fusing social forms (*li* 禮) and raw personal existence in such a way that they transmuted into a way of being which realizes *te* (德), the distinctively human virtue or power.

...

Men become truly human as their raw impulse is shaped by *li*. And *li* is the fulfillment of human impulse, the civilized expression of it – not a formalistic dehumanization. *Li* is the specifically humanizing form of the dynamic relation of man-to-man.²⁰

¹⁸ Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1972), Kindle Version, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

For our purpose here of stressing the cultural-linguistic approach, Fingarette's interpretation is more compatible with this approach than the experiential-expressive one of treating the inner life as something prior, spiritual, and transcendent. In some way, the fresh reading reflects more truly Chinese and East Asian people's understanding of Confucius in their daily practice. Their belief does not lie in ontological existence, power or otherworldly salvation.

The ontologically Heaven-endowed human nature in the *Doctrine of the Mean* much elaborated upon by later Confucianists during the Song (970-1279 CE) and Ming (1368-1644 CE) Dynasty, and Contemporary New Confucianists such as Mou Zongsan (牟宗三) is apparently a later development and interpolation of Confucius' original teaching in the *Analects*. Significantly, Contemporary Chinese Christian scholars have taken exception to this treatment of Confucian God (Heaven), almost equating human moral subjectivity with God, but would not object to Fingarette's interpretation.

Epilogue: Contemplating the Silent Mysteries behind Various Traditions

The question (posed at the beginning of this essay, "Do humans need to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve?") actually occurred to me when I witnessed an unknown god worshipped in a small temple in remote Taiwan. Many people there have never asked questions as to which gods to believe and why?

In the West, philosophers since Immanuel Kant have argued well that we cannot directly know what we believe by pure reason. Lindbeck's post-liberal cultural-linguistic argument is an attempt to justify what we believe without neutral and objective standards. And his argument relying on tradition is in harmony with MacIntyre's metaphysical justification of belief and Fingarette's interpretation of Confucius' *Analects*.

Perhaps Lindbeck is right that man is primarily a cultural-linguistic animal before he is a thinking animal. Even thinking is not necessary something initiated from human experience: it could well be a gift of nature which just comes to us mysteriously from another world. To make clear what we humans believe may be the cultural habit of certain traditions rather than that of others. In the case of Confucius, historically whenever his followers turn to metaphysical justifications they tend to deviate from his original teaching. It is inter-religiously inspiring that we had to wait till 20th century for an American philosopher Fingarette to bring us back to a more original Confucius.

If we stay closely to the text of the *Analects*, the performance of rites in human community is related to music, of which Confucius was a devotee (as Fingarette reminds us). So Confucius' world is more cultural, linguistic and even artistic than metaphysically argumentative. He once states: "Do not look, do not listen, do not speak, and do not act, if not in accordance with the holy rites of conduct (*li* 禮)"²¹ And the *li* is traditionally – embedded, but subject to change, being contingent upon circumstances (almost similar to the cultural-linguistic interpretative scheme).

Confucius had the foresight to know what we find out only after more than 2000 years as a result of epistemological crisis: "To be human is creatively and mysteriously traditional; there is no need and it is impossible to metaphysically make clear what it means." He said: "I am a transmitter, and not a creator."²² (述而不作)

Furthermore, social performance of rites is like music performance. We could easily detect what is genuine and what is fake: there is no need to go into the performer's inner state of mind. As Fingarette interprets well: "We detect all this in the performance; we do not have to look into the psyche or personality of the performer. It is all 'there', public."²³

Nevertheless, Zen Buddhist D. T. Suzuki describes the same performance in a different way because his tradition is more inwardly oriented; instead, he refers to the spirit and God's inspiration:

Take the case of painting. I often hear Chinese or Japanese art critics declare that Oriental art consists in depicting spirit and not form.

...

A real artist is a creator and not a copyist. He has visited God's workshop and has learned the secrets of creation-creating something out of nothing. With such a painter every stroke of his brush is the work of creation, and it cannot be retraced because it never permits a repetition. God cannot cancel his fiat; it is final, irrevocable, it is an ultimatum.²⁴

But Suzuki is more of an experiential-expressionist than a cultural-linguist according to Lindbeck's theological taxonomy:

In the same way every minute of human life as long as it is an expression of its inner self is original, divine, creative, and cannot be retrieved. Each individual life thus is a great work of art. Whether or not one makes it a fine inimitable masterpiece depends upon one's consciousness of the working of *śūnyatā* within oneself.²⁵

²¹ *Analects*, 12:1.

²² *Analects*, 7:1.

²³ Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, p. 53.

²⁴ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (Kindle Version: 2017), Loc. 450.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Loc. 458.

The Buddhist has more to say about the secret of creativity than Confucius' adumbration and embodiment of the prosaic, secular and yet sacred truth of how to be human. If I may borrow Patrick Laude's book title, *Shimmering Mirrors: Reality and Appearance In Contemplative Metaphysics East and West*, somewhere behind the "shimmering mirrors" of various traditions there are mysteries of creativity no one can penetrate. Confucius says, "Does Heaven say anything? The four seasons run their course, and the myriad things in the universe are naturally reproduced."²⁶ Confucius' God is a silent One. For him, it is not necessary for humans to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve. Unknowingly, many ordinary people in Athens and East Asia share with Confucius' belief in their worship of the unknown God.

Last but not least, George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach and Paul Tillich's experiential-expressionist could after all be unified and identical if we go to the depth of "learning to be human" as examined at the beginning of this essay where Masao Abe and John Cobb agree in their opposing God as substance or as a divine power acting on events from outside. Human spirituality could only come from the same source, that is what we learn ultimately as humans about how to be human.

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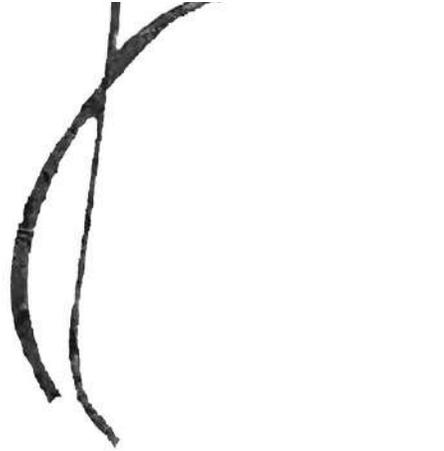
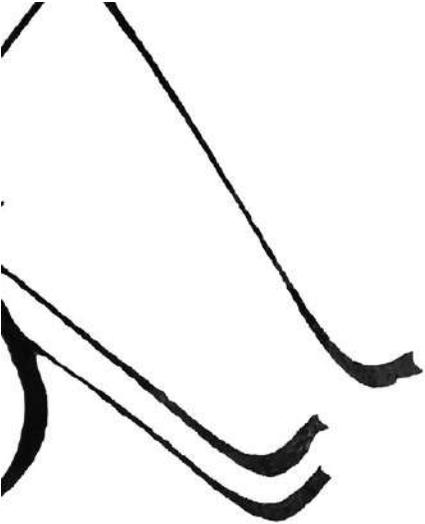
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²⁶ *Analects*, 17:17k.



List of Contributors





JOSEPH I. FERNANDO received a Baccalaureate in Philosophy from the Pontifical Athenaeum, Pune, India, and MA in Ancient Indian Culture, M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Philosophy (dissertation titled *Critique of Technology: Marx and Heidegger*) from the University of Pune, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Gandhian Studies from the University of Madurai. In 2000, he participated in a Postdoctoral Research Program conducted by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC which sharpened his focus on further research. He has spent several years teaching Philosophy in India and as a Visiting Professor abroad, and trying to understand Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Dostoevsky, Marx, Gandhi, Heidegger and Martin Luther King, Jr. His research interests are: What is to be? What is to be Human? What is to be Nonviolent? What is to be Technological? What is to be Holy? His recent publication is: *Pathway to Peace: A Nonviolent Lifestyle*. ISPC, Delhi, 2017, Pages 241.

ANANTA KUMAR GIRI is a Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India. He has taught and done research in many universities in India and abroad, including Aalborg University (Denmark), *Maison des sciences de l'homme*, Paris (France), the University of Kentucky (USA), University of Freiburg & Humboldt University (Germany), Jagiellonian University (Poland) and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has an abiding interest in social movements and cultural change, criticism, creativity and contemporary dialectics of transformation, theories of self, culture and society, and creative streams in education, philosophy and literature. Dr. Giri has written and edited around two dozen books in Odia and English, including *Conversations and Transformations: Toward a New Ethics of Self and Society* (2002); *Self-Development and Social Transformations? The Vision and Practice of Self-Study Mobilization of Swadhyaya* (2008); *Mochi o Darshanika* (The Cobbler and the Philosopher, 2009); *Sociology and Beyond: Windows and Horizons* (2012), *Knowledge and Human Liberation: Towards Planetary Realizations* (2013); *Philosophy and Anthropology: Border-Crossing and Transformations* (co-edited with John Clammer, 2013); *New Horizons of Human Development* (editor, 2015); *Pathways of Creative Research: Towards a Festival of Dialogues* (editor, 2017); *Cultivating Pathways of Creative Research: New Horizons of Transformative Practice and Collaborative Imagination* (editor, 2017); *Research as Realization: Science, Spirituality and Harmony* (editor, 2017); *Beyond Sociology* (editor, 2018); *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary*

Conversations (editor, 2018); *Practical Spirituality and Human Development* 2 Volumes (editor, 2018); *Weaving New Hats: Our Half Birthdays* (2018); and *Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Towards Planetary Transformations* (editor, 2018).

POCHI HUANG got a MTS degree from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. degree from Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University. He has been teaching at Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University, Taiwan since 2001 and currently is professor of Sanskrit, Pali and Indian Religions. He is also the president of Taiwan Indological Association, research fellow at Center for the Study of Chinese Religions and Research Center for Chinese Cultural Subjectivity National Chengchi University. He is vitally interested in intellectual interaction between Brahmanical orthodoxy and Śramanical unorthodoxy in early and medieval India as well as cultural history of Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia. In relation to above topic, he researches the problem of Indianization in Southeast Asia. He also takes abiding interest in ancient India, China and Israel. His present research project “From the *Bhagavad Gītā* to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: Religious Landscape of Vaiṣṇava” is sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Technology of Taiwan. In 2017, he published a book on pre-modern Indian intellectual history entitled *The Cosmos, The Body and Īśvara – Ideals of the Body in Indian Socio-Religious History* (Citē Publishing Company, Taipei).

HU YEPING is executive director of the McLean Center for the Study of Culture and Values (Catholic University of Washington, USA) and The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), and is responsible for the organization of annual seminars and the coordination of international conferences around the globe. She is the managing editor of the RVP publication series “Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change” (more than 300 volumes; for an overview see www.crvp.org). She has published widely in journals and volumes all over the world (China, Germany, India, Italy, Philippines, Romania, Thailand, USA, Vietnam etc.)

GYU-EON JANG is a researcher of the Mind-Only Buddhist Thought in East Asian tradition. He received his Ph.D. from the Academy of Korean Studies in 2012. He also had audited literary Tibetan classes and intensive seminar at Peking University as a foreign student during his 2006-2007 and 2011 stay in Beijing. After graduation, he worked in both Geumgang University and Dongguk University, Korea as a researcher. He is a Research Professor at Department of Buddhist Studies, Seoul University of Buddhism, Korea. His main work is *Woncheuk Haesimmilgyeong-so Musaseongsang-pum jongseongnon bubun yeokju* (Korean Translation and Annotations of the

Section on *Gotra-Theory* in “Musaseongsang-pum” (Chapter on character of Non-Substance) of *Haesimmilgyeong-so* (Commentary of *Samdhinirmocana-sutra*) by Woncheuk (613~696) – With a Critical Revision Based on Its Tibetan Translation, Seoul: CIR, 2013). It also includes the English version of this Critical Revision. For last a few years, he has been focusing on the exposition of Woncheuk’s Buddhist thought based in Seoul.

PETER JONKERS is professor of philosophy at Tilburg University (School of Catholic Theology). His teaching and research expertise includes philosophy of religion, metaphysics, history of modern philosophy (especially Hegel and his contemporaries), and contemporary continental philosophy. Currently, his research is focused on (religious) truth, tolerance, religious diversity, wisdom, and the future of the Catholic Church. He is member of the Board of the ESPR, coordinator for Western Europe of RVP, and member of the steering committee of FISP. Some of his recent publications: “A Revaluation of Wisdom as a Way to Reconnect Philosophy with the Life-World,” in: *Philosophy and the Life World*. Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2017; “Religion as a Source of Evil,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, 4-5, 2017; “Serving the World Through Wisdom,” in: *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018; “The Boundaries of Intercultural Dialogue in a World ‘After Babel,’” *Universitas. Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 10, 2018.

PATRICK LAUDE joined the faculty of Georgetown University in Washington, DC in 1991. He has been teaching courses in religious studies at the School of Foreign Service in Qatar since 2006. A former fellow of the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris, he earned a Master’s degree in philosophy from the University of Paris IV Sorbonne, and a doctorate in French literature from Indiana University. His scholarly interests include comparative mysticism and metaphysics, poetry and mysticism, and Western representations of Asian spiritual traditions. He has authored a dozen books including: *Shimmering Mirrors: Reality and Appearance in Contemplative Metaphysics East and West*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2017, *Pathways to an Inner Islam*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2010, *Louis Massignon: The Vow and the Oath*, London: Matheson Trust, 2011, *Pray Without Ceasing: The Way of the Invocation in World Religion*, Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006, *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter and Spiritual Understanding*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

ADRIEN LEITES owns a Ph.D. from Princeton University in Islamic Studies, and teaches Muslim thinking at Sorbonne Université in Paris. His recent work focuses on connecting the Muslim Tradition with the Christian Tradition

and with parts of the Western philosophical Tradition, as well as on contemporary issues. Leites' *Amour chrétien, amour musulman* (Fayard, 2015), a confrontation of Augustine and Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī on the topic of love, is expanded in this volume's article. It will be followed by several articles centring on Ghazālī, and dealing with questions related to faith.

MARTIN LU (Taiwan, 1942) graduated from National Taiwan University in 1967 with a BA in English Language and Literature, and obtained a M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy from Southern Illinois University (USA) in 1972. From 1972 to 1989 he taught at the Department of Philosophy, National University of Singapore as Senior Lecturer, and then moved to Bond University (Australia), as Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of East-West Cultural and Economic Studies. He has served as Board Member of the International Confucian Association, Beijing; Visiting Professor, Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing; Visiting Professor, Shanghai East China Normal University; Academic Adviser of the Cultural Regeneration & Research Society, Vancouver, Canada; Visiting Fellow, Institute of Culture and Religion, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan; Visiting Professor (Foreign Expert), Suzhou University, Suzhou, China; and Visiting Senior Lecturer, Division of Humanities, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong. From 1983 to 1988, he was Local Adviser of the Confucian Ethics Project Team, Ministry of Education, Singapore. This is one of his academic highlights, assisting in the promotion of Confucian ethics in Singapore. He is currently working on a manuscript: "A Personal Journey into Truth: Dialogues with Chinese Christians."

EDWARD MOAD (Ph.D. 2004 University of Missouri-Columbia) is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at Qatar University, where he founded the university's first Philosophy program in 2014. He specializes in Metaphysics, Islamic Philosophy, and Comparative Moral Epistemology.

BENJAMIN TIMI OLUJOHUNGBE is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. His doctoral dissertation proposes to deploy the idea of virtue politics in mitigating the challenges of multiculturalism. He has worked as a Teaching Assistant with the University of Ibadan, Centre for General Studies, where he taught Philosophy and Logic to undergraduate students. At present, he is an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Augustine University Ilara-Epe (The Catholic University of the Archdiocese of Lagos), Lagos State, Nigeria. His research interests include identity politics and politics of recognition, gender studies in Africa and the intersections between faith and philosophy. Olujohunbe is the author of "Women's Agency and the

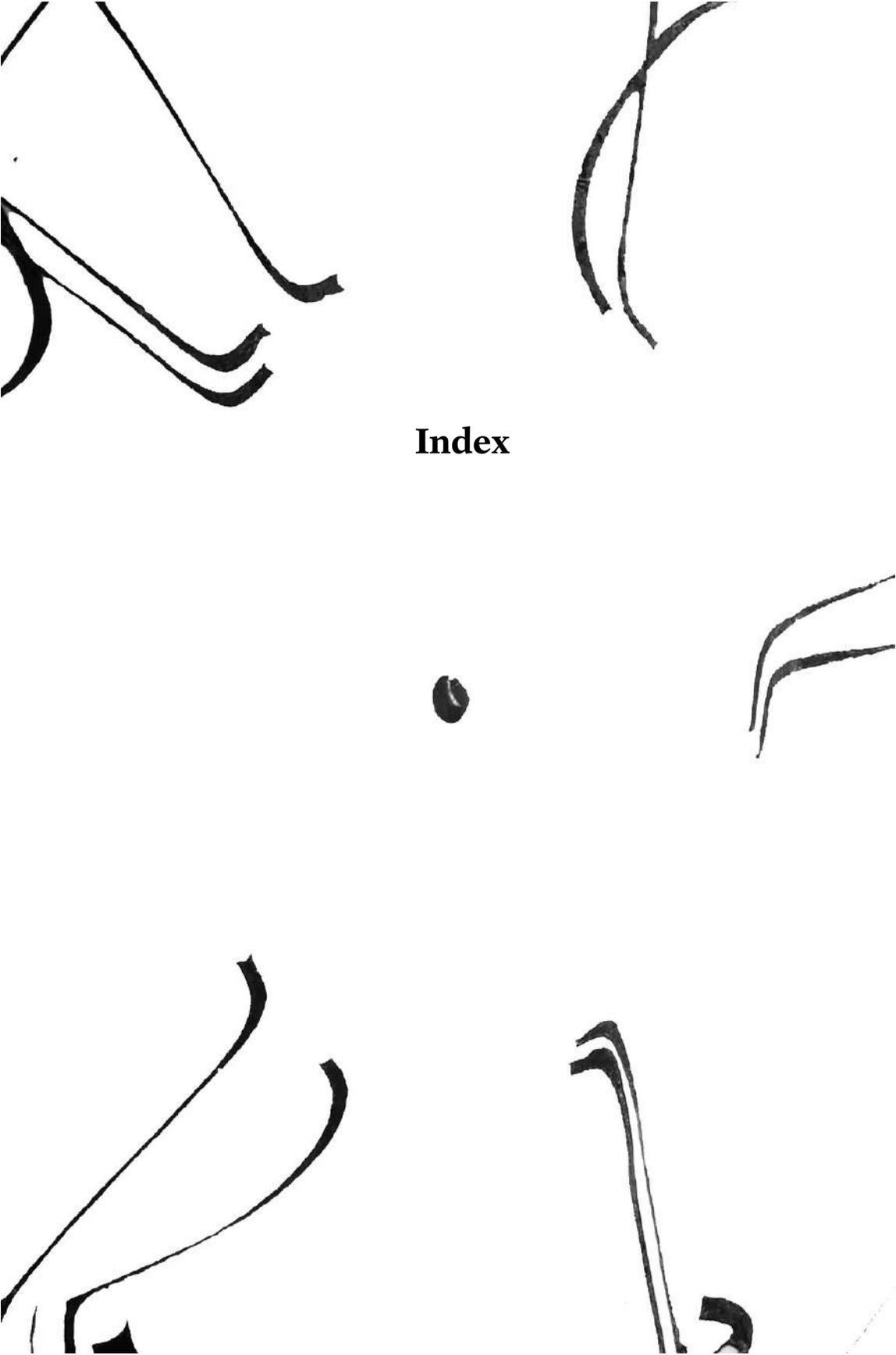
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OLATUNJI A. OYESHILE (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He specializes in African Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy, Metaphysics and Existentialism. He has published nationally and internationally in these areas and has attended conferences across the globe. His present research emphasis is on “Community and Individual in Africa.” He is an editorial consultant to *Philosophia*, The Philippines. He is a member of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL), the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD) and the Philosophers Association of Nigeria (PAN). He has participated in the activities of the Centre for Research in Values and Philosophy and co-edited with J. Kenny *The Idea of a Nigerian University: A Revisit*. Nigerian Philosophical Studies, III. (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2013). His work, *Reconciling the Self with the Other: An Existentialist Perspective on the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2005) has become a major reference point in Applied Existentialism. His paper, “Corporate Existence and Individual’s Freedom in African Communal Society: The Yoruba Example,” appeared in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning Journal* (URAM) Canada, 30, 4, 2007.

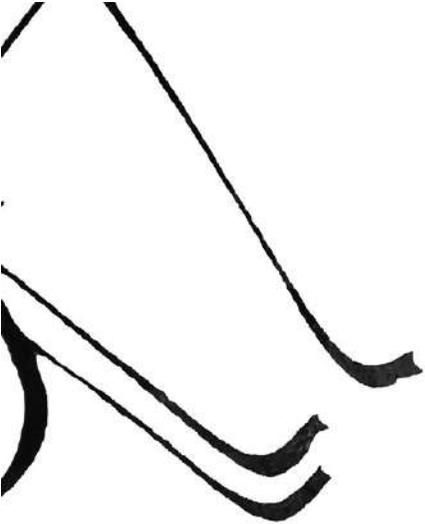
JOHN PARASKEVOPOULOS is a Shin Buddhist priest from Australia. He attended the University of Melbourne where he was awarded first-class honours in Philosophy. He received ordination in 1994 at the Temple of the Primal Vow (Hongan-ji) in Kyoto and has written a number of works including *Call of the Infinite* (also published in French, Italian and Greek editions), *The Fragrance of Light* and *The Unhindered Path*. During his 25 years of ministry work, Reverend Paraskevopoulos has actively sought to spread the teachings of Shin Buddhism to Western audiences around the world through his books, articles and lectures. In addition to his academic pursuits, he edits an online journal of Shin Buddhism (*Muryōko*) and is particularly committed to providing pastoral support to his dharma community.

JOÃO J. VILA-CHÃ, SJ was born (1960) in Portugal and studied in Braga, Frankfurt and Boston, where he obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston College. At Boston College he taught from 1992-1996 “Philosophy of the Person” and “Perspectives on Western Culture and Civilization.” From

1998-2008 he taught History of Contemporary Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology at the Portuguese Catholic University in Braga. He is now Professor of Social and Political Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Among his special interests is the study of the relationship between politics and religion, the phenomenological quest, and the many issues associated with interculturality and pluralism in our societies. He is also particularly interested in issues of social communication, in the role of Institutions for the configuration of the Good Society, in the onto-social implications of technologies and the Rule of Law. Of special importance, however, is now the transformation of humanistic models of understanding the world as derived from positions associated with both anti-humanistic and meta-humanistic approaches in the different realms of Philosophy, Science, and Technology. He was Director of the *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* and is now serving as member of the Editorial Board of *Concilium*, *Síntese*, and *Pensamiento*. He was President of the European Association of Jesuit Professors of Philosophy from 2002 to 2008 and is since 2013 President of the *Conférence Mondiale des Institutions Catholiques Universitaires de Philosophie* (COMIUCAP). He is also Vice-President of the *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* (RVP) and in the last seven years has been directing the Post-Graduate International Seminar of RVP.

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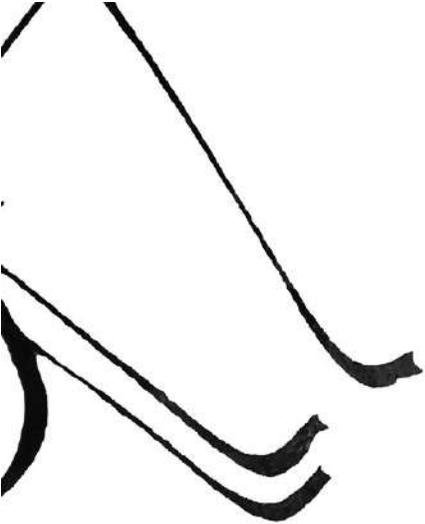
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