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# **What is Intercultural Philosophy?**

Edited by  
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Committee for Intercultural Philosophy  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie  
The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE PROJECT OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

*WILLIAM SWEET*

## INTRODUCTION

Though there has been contact or, at least, a mutual awareness among cultures – particularly those of Europe, Asia, and Africa – for millennia, this contact has increased significantly since the early modern period. With this contact have come encounters with a wide range of practices, cultures, religions, and, particularly, of wisdom or philosophical traditions. The extent of the differences among them have often, but not always, been obvious, and there have been varying responses to these encounters: sometimes incomprehension, sometimes rejection and denigration, but sometimes active engagement.

One response to the contact of different cultures and traditions during the past century has been the proposal of a comparative or of an intercultural philosophy. Such a response is not without precedent; we see similar responses, for example, in literary, religious, and political studies. In intercultural philosophy, however, we find an attempt to have philosophers from different cultures or traditions actively engage one another – and to do so in a way that shows not only mutual respect, but also the recognition that one's own philosophical views are not complete, that there are other, legitimate philosophical views, and that one's own views may need a rearticulation or even revision.

This volume proposes to present and describe some models of intercultural philosophy – to discuss different ways in which intercultural philosophy can be understood, its presuppositions, and its rationale, but also some of the powerful challenges to such a project. Drawing on the work of scholars from South and East Asia, Western and Eastern Europe, Australasia, Africa, and North America, the present volume reviews the project of intercultural philosophy, and indicates what such a project presupposes or might involve.

Before turning to this discussion, it will be useful to examine what it means to raise the question of intercultural philosophy, to look at some models that have been proposed, and to see how it has been justified – but also to look at some of the challenges that such an enterprise needs to address.

## RAISING THE QUESTION OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

Some might say that the question ‘What is intercultural philosophy?’ begs a number of questions – that the very question presupposes the truth of a number of claims that we have little or no reason to suppose to be true. While this is, perhaps, a peculiarly philosophical worry – philosophers frequently raise the question of the very possibility of the activities and questions that they are engaged in – it is one that must be addressed.

To begin with, the question ‘What is intercultural philosophy?’ supposes that we have a clear idea of what the ‘intercultural’ is. Yet the term ‘intercultural’ admits of a range of meanings. For some, the term means simply “relating to, involving, or representing different cultures”<sup>1</sup> – which is rather vague in the present context. A slightly more robust sense is “taking place between cultures [as in, “intercultural communication”], or derived from different cultures.”<sup>2</sup> Some would argue that the preceding description still seems rather close to what is “multicultural” or “cross-cultural,” and prefer to go farther – to speak of that which “leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, some would insist that genuine interculturality go farther still, and designate contact among cultures which exemplifies, or leads to, “comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality.”<sup>4</sup> Arguably, it is this latter sense of interculturality that many of those who see themselves as engaged in intercultural philosophy aspire.

For some, intercultural philosophy is associated with ‘comparative philosophy’ – the bringing “together [of] philosophical traditions that have developed in relative isolation from one another and that are defined quite broadly along cultural and regional lines.”<sup>5</sup> Yet a number of authors would contest identifying the two, though they may allow that intercultural philosophy requires the kind of knowledge of different philosophical traditions often found in comparative philosophy.

Yet even if the notion of ‘intercultural’ is clarified, there remains the question of how intercultural philosophy is *philosophy*. Is it to be a field or subject area of philosophy, or is it more of an attitude, method, or approach – or plurality of approaches – to doing philosophy? Does it provide a positive direction or agenda, or does it focus more on avoiding certain problems in (traditional) philosophy? In other words, do we know what intercultural philosophy even looks like? For many, then, whatever intercultural philosophy is, they presuppose that it must be distinct from philosophy in general.

Some would suggest, however, that again the presupposition may be problematic: that all philosophy is, by definition, ‘intercultural’ (and so the question ‘What is intercultural philosophy?’ is misleading), or (if

one believes that philosophies can be differentiated by their culture of origin) that it ignores that cultures are not natural or ‘real,’ but themselves ‘constructed’ based on underlying philosophies, or that it assumes that ‘the cultural,’ ‘the intercultural,’ and ‘the real’ are things that can be known, and that communication about them is possible. ‘Culture’ is a vague, contested, and unstable concept, and we only introduce confusion into the discussion by talking about ‘intercultural’ philosophy.

These concerns are not easy to address. Yet, as the examples that follow and the discussion in this volume suggest, there is some reason to believe that intercultural philosophy is possible. Even though it may seem to be a somewhat vague notion, there have been many advocates of intercultural philosophy. Moreover, whatever else it does, intercultural philosophy insists that we take diversity of and in philosophical discourse seriously, and it recognizes that most cultures and traditions hold that they are home to ‘philosophy,’ even if it is understood in ways that are quite different from one another.

### **SOME MODELS OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY<sup>6</sup>**

One approach to the question of intercultural philosophy is rooted in the phenomenological tradition in Europe, in the writings of Paul Masson-Oursel (1882–1956), who taught at Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, and who was a long-time editor of the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*.<sup>7</sup> Influenced in part by the Indian polymath Brajendranath Seal (1864–1938), who was the author of a number of comparative studies,<sup>8</sup> Masson-Oursel proposed the development of a comparative philosophy – “the general examination of the ways in which human beings of all races and cultures reflect upon their actions and act upon their reflections.”<sup>9</sup> While Masson-Oursel argued that philosophers should look at a wide range of phenomena, he did not himself provide any specific set of answers to philosophical questions. His emphasis was on method: “Le véritable problème de la philosophie comparée consiste, non pas dans la détermination de son concept, mais dans la poursuite d’une méthode rigoureuse.”<sup>10</sup>

What is this rigorous method? Masson-Oursel saw his work as scientific, in the positivist tradition of Auguste Comte. He argued that one need take “the facts of philosophy from history,” and then seek an objectivity that nevertheless acknowledged context; “We are obliged to take Europe as our point of departure because we can only comprehend our neighbour relatively to ourselves, even though we learn not to judge him by ourselves.”<sup>11</sup> While Masson-Oursel states, perhaps paradoxically, that “there is no truth that is not relative,” he argued that it is by following a comparative approach – specifically, what he called an

analogical approach – that one can have a more “securely founded” scientific view.<sup>12</sup> Thus, comparative philosophy is said to offer a “pure and universal positive science of analogy.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet relatively few philosophers took up Masson-Oursel’s proposal. There was, and remains, an interest in comparative philosophy in Asia, but in ‘the West’ (i.e., in those countries to the ‘west’ of the Middle East) interest was quite limited. A few figures, such as Martin Heidegger, drew on the work of Asian thinkers in their writings, but even there the focus was not obviously comparative; generally, the project of comparative philosophy met with little support.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a renewed and stronger interest among Western thinkers, particularly in central Europe, in the matter. Increased consciousness of the cultural rootedness and biases of philosophical traditions led thinkers such as Ram Adhar Mall, a Professor at the University of Munich, to develop what he called ‘intercultural philosophy.’ Mall writes that “intercultural philosophy stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrisms, whether European or non-European,” and that it seeks to exhibit “a philosophical attitude, a philosophical conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of humankind.”<sup>14</sup> He continues: “It is the task of intercultural philosophy to mediate between...two ends, i.e., the specific philosophies as they are found in different cultures and the universal philosophy which is not culturally bound itself.”<sup>15</sup> This mention of there being even a possibility of a universal philosophy is an interesting one. It suggests that there are philosophical questions and methods of resolving those questions that are not restricted to specific cultures, and that may cross, or even transcend, cultures. Mall also insists that intercultural philosophy is not the same as comparative philosophy. Nevertheless, he allows that “Methodically intercultural philosophy...is based on comparative studies, and in particular on the comparison of cultures and their philosophical traditions.”<sup>16</sup>

A similar response has been that of Franz Martin Wimmer.<sup>17</sup> Here, intercultural philosophy is described as “the endeavour to give expression to the many and often marginalised voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and thereby to generate a shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all,” and its aim was “to facilitate and develop a new and timely culture of a plurality of philosophical dialogues between thinkers from around the world” – what Wimmer called a “polylog.”<sup>18</sup> Like the early comparativists and also like Mall, then, Wimmer wishes to open up traditional approaches to philosophy by insisting on an awareness of the philosophies and wisdom traditions of different cultures. Moreover, like Mall, Wimmer believes that such mutual awareness and exchange allows for making progress on philosophical issues. The ‘polylog’ approach



entails a new orientation because, in acknowledgment of the cultural situatedness of philosophy, claims must prove themselves interculturally, and culture and cultures must be consciously kept in view as the context of philosophising. It entails a new practice because this consciousness demands a departure from an individual, mono-cultural, frequently ethnocentric production of philosophy and seeks instead a dialogical, process-oriented, fundamentally open *polyphony* of cultures and disciplines.<sup>19</sup>

Wimmer, then, offers an elaborate description of how intercultural philosophy is to be done that is arguably clearer than that of many of his predecessors. He acknowledges that philosophy can be understood in two ways: first, as a thematic study, consisting of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, which can be identified in a range of different traditions and cultures, though the particular questions raised may have different origins. But philosophy may also be seen as exemplifying particular “forms of thinking and argumentation.” This may be a somewhat narrower, and more traditional understanding of philosophy than some proponents of intercultural philosophy might prefer.

A fourth, substantive approach to intercultural philosophy can be found in the writings of Indian philosophers Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and P.T. Raju – but also figures such as Alban Widgery – as a result of the contact between British and Indian philosophers in the early and mid- twentieth century. Radhakrishnan and Raju not only sought to engage philosophies outside of India and the Hindu traditions, but proposed the development of what they called a “comparative philosophy” – though it seems to be what we would now call an intercultural philosophy – that would involve philosophical traditions from the West, China, and India. Raju holds that, for example, in Chinese thought, we find an autonomous, social ethics based in human nature; in Indian thought, the reality and autonomy of the inner spiritual life; and in Western thought, a view of life as rooted in physical nature. These traditions, Raju writes, are distinctive, yet complementary. The complementarity of each tradition provides, according to Raju, a means by which each can “widen its scope” – but he also suggests that “they can be brought together”<sup>20</sup> through a kind of intercultural dialogue.

We have here, then, several different models of, or approaches to, intercultural philosophy – and there are others still. And some of their proponents would argue, moreover, that there is evidence for such a project of intercultural philosophy in various encounters of philosophical texts and traditions, across cultures, in the past.

## SUPPORT FOR INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

What nourishes the project of an intercultural philosophy is the fact of the existence (or – what I have called elsewhere – the “migration”<sup>21</sup>) of ideas, texts, and the like, that have moved *from* one culture *into* another. We can think of the presence of Buddhist philosophy in China, Korea, and Japan – and more recently in North America and Europe. Thus, from an ‘original’ Buddhism in India, there has been a ‘migration’ – the development of ‘schools’ of Buddhism in different cultures: Mahayana, predominantly in north and north east Asia; Theravada in south east Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma), and a number of further developments (within Mahayana) in Tibet, in Japan and China (including Pure Land and Chan/ Zen), and in Korea (Seon).

Many philosophies originating in the West seem similarly to have ‘migrated’ east and south; they have been introduced and, it would seem, have often been integrated and appropriated, into non-western cultures and traditions (e.g., in Africa, in the Indian sub-continent, and in China and Japan). As examples here we can think of the introduction of British philosophy (e.g., empiricism, utilitarianism, but also idealism) into India in the 19th and 20th centuries and the exchanges that resulted, and the introduction of hermeneutics and postmodern thought into Asia. Today, a number of Asian scholars adopt phenomenology and hermeneutics in their work on Asian thought, and there is a steady market for the translation of texts by H.-G. Gadamer and others – e.g., J. Derrida, G. Deleuze, and M. Foucault – into various Asian languages, particularly Chinese. One can readily think of other examples of the ‘migration’ and exchange of other philosophical ideas in cultures far from those of their origin.

This phenomenon of ‘migrating texts and traditions’ may seem not only straightforward, but rather prosaic. And it seems to reflect a point that many philosophers take for granted when they read and teach the classical or mediaeval – or even the modern – philosophers today: i.e., philosophical texts and traditions are not restricted to their cultures of origin and may be seen as ‘cross-’ or even intercultural. While such contact may not be sufficient for the kinds of intercultural philosophy described above, the preceding examples give some reason to think that the prospect of different philosophical traditions engaging one another, with some measure of mutuality and reciprocity, is not an altogether unreasonable one.

## CHALLENGES<sup>22</sup>

For some, however, the project of intercultural philosophy is far from unproblematic and uncontroversial. These scholars do not deny that

there has been some kind of encounter of the philosophical texts, ideas, and traditions of one culture with those of others, but they challenge how far or how deep this goes – and they suggest that the ‘migration’ and appropriation of these texts and traditions and, hence, the positive prospects for an intercultural philosophy, are more apparent than real.

One challenge to the project of intercultural philosophy derives its force from a claim about philosophy and its relation to culture. A number of philosophers today argue that philosophies and philosophical traditions are deeply marked by the cultures in which they arise, and that this precludes not only any direct engagement, but even attempts at mutual understanding. Philosophy is embedded in culture. It is not just that it has its source in its culture of origin, but it can never break free of that source.

The reasons for this claim are fairly easy to surmise.

Our language and values are rooted in our cultures, and it is within that context that we find the specific sorts of problems and questions that philosophers pursue. Indeed, it is from one’s culture that one learns what counts as philosophy (as distinct from literature, science, history, or religion), and how to distinguish philosophy from the religious, the scientific, and the literary. One’s culture influences in what ‘language’ philosophical questions are expressed and answered – and even what counts as a satisfactory answer. It is because of this that, for a long time in the West, the work of figures such as Laozi, Confucius, or Sankara, or the traditions of thought in Asia or Africa or of American aboriginal tribes, were regarded by many as not being philosophy, but at best religions or ‘worldviews.’

To reinforce this claim, some scholars point to cases where one tradition or culture lacks the terminology, or concepts, or even the syntax to permit problems or concepts of other traditions to be intelligible – or where a language can ‘tilt’ a discussion in a way that makes the expression of philosophical issues in one culture awkward or irrelevant – to another.<sup>23</sup> This has been a concern of some African philosophers, particularly on matters related to ontology. For, if there are, as some African philosophers report, three or four constituent principles of human being, rather than the traditional two of western thought (i.e., mind or soul and body), then such issues as mind/body dualism, or the nature of death as the radical separation of soul and body, are not only not readily translatable, but arguably irrelevant to African thought<sup>24</sup> – and vice versa.

A second challenge to the project of intercultural philosophy derives its force from a claim about the nature of philosophy itself. R.G. Collingwood writes of philosophy as involving a method of “question and answer” – of “asking questions and answering them.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, in order to understand what exactly a philosopher said or meant, we need to

know the question that she or he sought to answer.<sup>26</sup> If this is so, then how to engage philosophies and philosophers from different cultures – and how a claim or a text from another context can be understood in one’s own – are, at the very least, rather complicated matters. Prior to engaging a philosophy from another culture in the hope that it will provide some assistance with one’s own concerns, one must, presumably, engage in a ‘mini history of philosophy’ in order to discern the questions that gave rise to that philosophical view or system in the first place. If we do not or cannot know the questions that gave rise to the philosophical view concerned, then there can be no real engagement with it at all.

Third, the project of intercultural philosophy is challenged by the position that, in many cases in the past where concepts from one philosophical *tradition* were introduced into another, they failed to be genuinely understood or assimilated – how much less likely is there to be understanding and exchange of ideas when the philosophical concepts come from different *cultures*. This is suggested in the work of a number of recent authors, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, concerning the nature and meaning of concepts in relation to traditions.<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre notes, for example, that in our contemporary philosophical – and, particularly, ethical – vocabulary, we have terms and concepts coming from a range of texts and traditions, but that there is no particular coherence or consistency among them. Now, when people share a language, or live together, they may believe that they share a broader overall culture and tradition – and so they may think that they can understand one another quite well, and that there is no problem in communicating with each other and working together on philosophical problems. But, MacIntyre writes, this flies in the face of experience; for example, “...nothing is more striking in the contemporary university than the extent of the apparently ineliminable continuing divisions and conflicts within all humanistic enquiry.”<sup>28</sup> For MacIntyre, moral beliefs and practices are constituted or formed by the traditions in which they are found. Each tradition has “its own standards of rational justification...[and] its set of authoritative texts.”<sup>29</sup> With different traditions – and the corresponding beliefs and epistemic and moral practices – we will have different standards of reasonableness, justification, and proof. And so, when discussion “between fundamentally opposed standpoints does occur...it is inevitably inconclusive. Each warring position characteristically appears irrefutable to its own adherents; indeed in its own terms and by its own standards of argument it is in practice irrefutable.”<sup>30</sup> Efforts at dialogue, on this model, will not get us very far. This is not to say that there cannot be any communication across traditions – but MacIntyre would insist that it is much more challenging than many realise. Fruitful contact and exchange are far from automatic and, when they do occur,

this is likely the result of a good deal of discernment by a person of ‘practical wisdom.’ In many if not most cases, then, this MacIntyrean argument suggests that efforts at intercultural philosophy are problematic.

The preceding objections and concerns are clearly forceful. Nevertheless, it is also clear that something is taking place in the cases of putative ‘migration’ of ideas and of philosophical encounters and exchange, cited earlier. The authors of the essays in this volume, then, undertake to provide responses to these concerns. They offer comments on the state of the discussion of the project of intercultural philosophy, descriptions of what intercultural philosophy is, as well as assessments of whether and how such a project might be fruitfully pursued.

## **RESPONSES**

What, exactly, is meant by ‘intercultural philosophy’? Is the project of intercultural philosophy, as an encounter and mutual engagement of philosophies from different cultures, possible? Can one be entirely open to other philosophical traditions, without succumbing to a form of relativism? Is the project of intercultural philosophy undercut by semantic differences among languages and by cultural difference? Or is there a way to respond to, or overcome, these differences? The different perspectives taken by the essays in this volume provide a wide range of responses.

In “What in the World is Intercultural Philosophy? A Reflection,” John Ozolins investigates the conditions for intercultural philosophy, though without focussing on any particular model. He argues that, to begin with, if intercultural philosophy is to be possible, cultures cannot be entirely incommensurable<sup>31</sup> – that is, there must be some language in which cultures can come into contact and be understandable to one another – although they may not be fully commensurable either. Thus, intercultural philosophy must be “monocultural,” in the sense that it requires the establishment of a shared conceptual space in which to take place. Still, in order to enter such a conceptual space and common framework, one must, in some way, be able to leave one’s own culture. Moreover, for an intercultural philosophy to occur, there must be shared philosophical concerns and interests across cultures – whether these be because of globalization and the dynamics of intercultural contact, or simply because there are some philosophical questions that arise in virtually every culture. Admittedly, given the dominance of the culture of ‘the West,’ it is inevitable that identifying, framing, and discussing philosophical problems will be influenced by that culture. But Ozolins argues that, if intercultural philosophy can explicitly recognise this domination while remaining open to cultural difference, the project of

intercultural philosophy is possible. Ozolins adds that an intercultural philosophy – one that acknowledges a wide variety of philosophical methods and methodologies and the contributions of diverse cultures – will be “an important creative resource.” Indeed, a philosophy that is open to a range of cultures and traditions is necessary, for no natural language or philosophical system can fully express the breadth of human experience. Ozolins concludes that, even though there will inevitably be currents and themes from certain philosophical traditions that will dominate from time to time, there is also momentum for philosophical investigation to be drawn into a shared or common space. This calls for the articulation of an intercultural philosophy.

Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, in “Beyond the Cultural Turn: Intercultural Philosophy in its Historical Context,” seeks to describe what intercultural philosophy is and, in particular, its epistemological presuppositions. Sympathetic to the intercultural philosophy of Franz Martin Wimmer, Kaltenbacher argues that several different approaches to intercultural philosophy are consistent with Wimmer’s account. In general, intercultural philosophy involves methodically reflecting on culture and intercultural problems, with the aim of allowing that which has been overlooked or obscured to emerge. Thus, intercultural philosophy develops new instruments and methods to comprehend culturality and to be open to new experience and ideas. For one to engage in intercultural philosophy successfully, however, one must have made an intense study of a philosophy from at least one other culture than one’s own. Yet while intercultural philosophy draws on this knowledge of different cultures, it must avoid relativism. Indeed, intercultural philosophy seeks truth, even if truth is, in the end, only a regulative idea. As an illustration of this kind of openness and truth-seeking in philosophizing, Kaltenbacher refers to the work of H.G. Gadamer, who employs the metaphor of a ‘fusion of horizons’ – though Kaltenbacher is careful to add that this is not to say that there must be ultimately one, common, horizon, or that the horizon does not change. Indeed, the obligation to openness in intercultural philosophy requires that one be prepared to change even one’s horizons. This is, admittedly, not without its challenges; Kaltenbacher refers to the model of intercultural studies in other disciplines such German studies, noting that one must learn from, and avoid, the ‘inefficacies’ committed by these other disciplines. The key to intercultural philosophy, then, lies in epistemology: such a philosophy requires a genuine widening of horizons – here Kaltenbacher refers, as well, to the work of Claudia Bickmann – and a dialectical activity, that acknowledge different accesses to the universal without seeking some abstract universal or collapsing into ‘relativistic culturalism.’

In “Interculturality: Some Philosophical Musings,” Edwin George offers an analysis of the notion of intercultural philosophy, outlining how it might be engaged in, in an Indian context. George largely follows the model of intercultural philosophy sketched out by Wimmer and the Indo-German philosopher, Ram Adhar Mall. Like them, he emphasizes that intercultural philosophy is not a new discipline but, rather, a new orientation and attitude to doing philosophy. Indeed, George asserts that “the interculturality of philosophy resides in all cultures” for “all [genuine] philosophy is intercultural.” Admittedly, intercultural philosophy does emphasise certain activities – primarily, the effort to deconstruct universalisms and to emancipate philosophy from ‘centrisms,’ especially Eurocentrism and the long-claimed superiority of the Western philosophical traditions. George also cites Wimmer’s statement that intercultural philosophy needs to work out a new method and methodology. Nevertheless, intercultural philosophy is part of a long-standing philosophical project. One may still search for universally valid arguments and seek a unity and foundation in philosophy, so long as there is no one centre of philosophical activity, no one model of discourse, and no uniformity. Intercultural philosophy, then, pushes for the recognition of ‘intercultural overlappings’ and for the importance of analogy as a way of avoiding moves to identity and uniformity on the one hand, and to radical difference and incommensurability on the other. As an illustration of this, George points to the work of Raimon Panikkar, to show how to make intercultural philosophy interculturally effective in the Indian context. Such an intercultural philosophy, George argues, is a ‘humble’ and praxis-oriented, rather than a theoretical philosophy, that is not only open but is particularly attentive to marginalized (e.g., subaltern) perspectives. It is only through such a “self-decentering” that goes beyond a culture-decentering that one can not only *do* intercultural philosophy, but “achieve” interculturality in philosophizing.

In “What is Intercultural Philosophy?,” Hsueh-i Chen offers a model of intercultural philosophy that is, again, rooted in, though it also develops, that of Wimmer. Offering an alternative to what he sees as the biased and universalizing character of traditional philosophies, Chen argues that a genuine intercultural philosophy requires a new way of doing philosophy, not simply adding a new sub-specialty to the discipline. Moreover, Chen insists that, since cultural identity can be seen as a product of a process of hybridization and deterritorialization, and since philosophy must overcome context and cultural bias, there must be a de-territorialization and a re-territorialization of philosophy. The intercultural philosophy that results cannot, however, be systematic, for it would then be limited to a specific culture. Intercultural philosophy, therefore, is a different kind of philosophy – one that must

take place in a context of equality and alterity, and thus reflect a philosophy of “equalterity.”

Flavia Monceri (“Taking Diversity Seriously: On the Notion of Intercultural Philosophy”) offers an argument for the ongoing “construction” of intercultural philosophy, rather than a specific model or approach to it. Monceri begins by noting that, since human beings can never fully comprehend reality, they create stereotypes in order to deal with it. The result is “culture.” What follows from this, however, is not only that there is no reality directly accessible to us (other than what we ‘co-construct’), but there are not even any universal frameworks. Philosophy, then, which arises out of culture, is necessarily biased, and no systematic philosophy – because it is not flexible enough to adjust to the dynamism of the range of contexts – can ever succeed to describe that reality. Interculturality and, by extension, intercultural philosophy propose to serve as a response to this. This offers us the possibility of modifying our stereotypes, by entering into other cultures and to “widen our perspective through interaction” with them, in order to “re-construct a new...model of reality.” Admittedly, Monceri notes, we will never “be able to reproduce reality as it is” and, so, intercultural philosophy is not something that we can construct once and for all. Indeed, intercultural philosophy, as a discipline or body of knowledge, cannot exist. It is, nevertheless, something that can be “incessantly” re-constructed.

In “Intercultural Philosophy and the Question of African Identity: An ‘Afroconstructivist’ Perspective,” Joseph Agbakoba provides a model of intercultural philosophy rooted in an African perspective. Agbakoba agrees that intercultural philosophy involves factoring other cultures into one’s own philosophical thinking, and breaking free of any ‘centrism’ (be they Eurocentrism or Afrocentrism). He focuses, however, on the question of identity – in particular, African identity and how it has been affected by non-African philosophical cultures and traditions. There are, Agbakoba argues, two models of identity: that of the ‘immutabilists,’ who see identity as something identical transmitted over generations, and that of the ‘mutabilists,’ who allow for change in identity while retaining a certain core. Agbakoba then discusses Africa’s “encounter” with Europe, and how the issues of slavery, colonization, and technological dependency have affected cultural identity. In conclusion, Agbakoba argues for mutabilism and an “Afro-constructivism” that “constructs and reconstructs itself” in response to its engagement with other cultures.

In “Interculturality in the Context of Africa’s Colonial and Decolonization Experience,” Dorothy Nwanyinma Ucheaga Olu-Jacob also looks at contemporary challenges to African culture. She argues for promoting a plurality of cultures and intercultural dialogue which, she believes, can best be achieved by promoting interculturality as a whole.



After briefly reviewing some of the problems with ‘universalist’ approaches as well as the oppression of Africa by its colonizers, she points out to the reader that this led to the articulation of different models of interculturality in the post-colonial era: principally, by the Senegalese cultural theorist and politician, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001), by the leader of Ghana (and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast), Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), and by the Nigerian journalist and politician, Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904–1996). Jacob argues that these models of interculturality emphasize the importance of understanding others, show how interculturality can affirm and accommodate cultural diversity, but also bring both African and non-African ideas into contact and even synthesis. Such models of interculturality provide African philosophers with a way to assert African identity in a global community, and have the potential to address problems of violence and intolerance.

Helen Lauer (“Global Economic Justice Defined Inter-Culturally: Alternatives that Emerge from the Neo-Colonial Cusp”) provides an example of the practice of “intercultural philosophy” – i.e., the development of an intercultural conception of global justice – and argues for such a global justice as a feasible, cross-cultural enterprise. Lauer begins by uncovering some of the presuppositions of Thomas Nagel’s “Hobbesian” case against the possibility of global justice. She then offers an alternative definition of global justice, based on Kwasi Wiredu’s account of rule by deliberative council. This process of deliberation is one, she notes, that reflects each person’s views and yet also arrives at “a policy for implementation that takes into consideration everyone’s represented views.” Thus, this alternative model of global justice requires not only individual contributions as a catalyst for deliberation, but a cross-cultural commensurability of moral perspectives and the possibility of communities of intercultural discourse.

In “Towards a Conception of Philosophy as Expression: Approaching Intercultural Philosophy from a Zen Buddhist paradigm,” Gereon Kopf does not so much offer a model of intercultural philosophy as an argument that all philosophy must be intercultural. He defends this by considering an example that some claim illustrates that there is a real difference between ‘Western’ and Asian philosophy – the tradition of Zen Buddhism. While there is, in Western philosophy, an increased cultural sensitivity towards local cultures and philosophical traditions, Kopf notes that many still assume that Western philosophy is the paradigm of philosophy. Kopf thus undertakes to ask the question whether non-Western traditions, such as Zen, are ‘genuinely’ philosophical. After a brief review of philosophy as ‘self-reflection’ in Western philosophy, Kopf looks at Zen Buddhism. Following thinkers

such as Keiji Nishitani and Shizuteru Ueda, Kopf's response is that Zen Buddhism *is* philosophical: that there is a critical, conscious self-reflection in Zen, that Zen practice and Western philosophical practice are similar, and that, like Western philosophy, there are traditions in Zen that seek to explain all. Specifically, Kopf argues that, since philosophy is simply "the attempt to make sense of the human predicament and to take a self-reflective and critical attitude to our interactions with the world," this is fully consistent with Zen as presented by Nishitani and Ueda. Thus, since philosophy addresses common human problems in a global context, since philosophy is a form of discourse and attempts in dialogue to reach "that ever-elusive one truth that encompasses all perspectives and standpoints," and since philosophy – including Zen – is written with a universal appeal, we see that good philosophy must "include or allow for the inclusion of other standpoints" and cannot be limited to one tradition. Genuine philosophy, then, must be global and intercultural.

Yao Jiehou ("Four Dimensions of Intercultural Philosophy") argues that an intercultural philosophy is not only possible but necessary in order to promote intercultural communication and understanding. By looking at the experience of intercultural communication and cooperation as positive forces in history, and at the phenomenon of intercultural hermeneutics, he argues that it is plausible to maintain the existence of a genuine comparative philosophy that reflects a commensurability of cultures. Based on this evidence, and, given the ethical conditions of intercultural communication, we can, Yao believes, construct an intercultural philosophy that can contribute to the development of human peace and development. Key to this, Yao argues, is "strengthening philosophical studies on intercultural communication" and "promoting the rational communication [among] diverse philosophical traditions."<sup>32</sup>

In "Comparative Philosophy or Intercultural Philosophy? The Case of the Russian Buddhologist Theodor Stcherbatsky," Viktoria Lysenko asks what exactly the difference is between comparative philosophy and intercultural philosophy. Comparative philosophy itself is challenged by the (construction of) 'otherness' of other philosophical traditions and by the fact that the questions one brings to these texts and traditions are questions that arise from the context of one's own culture. Lysenko then asks what can we make of the intercultural philosophy of Wimmer and others given such challenges? She begins by looking at two of the founders of comparative philosophy in the West – Arthur Schopenhauer and Paul Deussen. Schopenhauer saw many affinities between his views and Buddhism, and rejected the notion that there was a fundamental otherness between them; he saw his views and those of Buddhist philosophy as exemplifying the same *philosophia perennis*.

Deussen similarly believed that there was only one philosophical tradition as well – one that stretched from the Upanisads to Schopenhauer. Lysenko then turns to the work of Th. Stcherbatsky [Fedor Ippolitovich Shcherbatskoï (1866-1942)], one of the leading ‘comparative philosophers’ of the twentieth century, who was one of the first to see Buddhism as a fully-fledged philosophical system and tradition, from its earliest texts to its later interpreters. Stcherbatsky not only sought to compare Buddhism and Western philosophy, but ‘recognised’ elements in Indian traditions that, he believed, pertained to those of the West. Lysenko argues that, by employing Kantian terminology in his translation of Buddhist epistemological texts, Stcherbatsky gives us an example of intercultural philosophy – of “thinking in terms of both traditions.” Stcherbatsky, then, goes beyond comparative philosophy to a genuinely intercultural philosophy in that, because “the human mind in different conditions and in different forms continually raises the same questions and reveals the same truths,” it was possible to bring different traditions together. Nevertheless, Lysenko argues that there is some question whether Stcherbatsky was able to address the hermeneutical pitfalls in his position and whether he succeeded in preserving the difference and otherness of Indian philosophical traditions in his efforts to construct bridges between Indian and contemporary Western thought. She concludes that, while Stcherbatsky does much to help bring Buddhist philosophy to the attention of the contemporary West, it is only through a recognition of, and the maintenance of, the ‘otherness’ of traditions – an ‘otherness’ better recognised by comparative philosophy – that true understanding of different philosophical traditions as equals may be possible.

The volume concludes with a brief Afterword on “The Prospect of Intercultural Philosophy,” that returns to the central questions of this Introduction, and offers some comments on the prospects for the project of intercultural philosophy.

## **TRANSITION**

This brief summary of the essays in this volume indicates something of the range of approaches to intercultural philosophy – of some conceptions and examples of intercultural philosophy – but also offers a more extensive statement of some of the challenges to it. This Introduction has also provided some context and background to these essays, reminded us of some of the presuppositions of intercultural philosophy, and identified a number of the issues that, arguably, need to be addressed.

The reader will immediately recognise that these essays in this volume do not exhaust the range of options and views on intercultural

philosophy. Nevertheless, they propose to help to advance our understanding, clarify key concepts, and mark out a number of the alternatives. In this regard, they provide a necessary propaedeutic for the *prospect* of intercultural philosophy.

At this point, then, it is time to turn to these essays themselves, and to see how far the question ‘What is intercultural philosophy?’ has been answered.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe, “Intercultural Dialogue” [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp)

<sup>4</sup> United Church of Canada, “Defining Multicultural, Cross-cultural, and Intercultural,” 2011. <http://www.united-church.ca/files/intercultural/multicultural-crosscultural-intercultural.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> David Wong, “Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/comparphil-chiwes/>>

<sup>6</sup> In this section I draw extensively on my “‘Faith and Reason’ and Intercultural Philosophy,” in *Thomism and Asian Cultures: Celebrating 400 Years of Dialogue across Civilizations*, ed. Alfredo P. Co and Paolo A. Bolaños (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012), pp. 43-54, pp. 47-48.

<sup>7</sup> In his 1911 essay “Objet et méthode de la philosophie comparée” (*Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 19<sup>e</sup> année, No. 4 (Juillet 1911), pp. 541-548) and in *La philosophie comparée* (Alcan, Paris 1923; translated as *Comparative Philosophy*, London, 1926), Masson-Oursel’s focus was on logic. His 1911 essay also appears in the *Proceedings of the 4th International Congress of Philosophy* (Bologna, 1911), Volume 2, pp. 167ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Brajendranath Seal, *The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* (London: Longmans, Green, 1915), p. iv. See also the discussion by W. Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 422. Seal’s long-promised volume, *Studies in Comparative Philosophy* was, however, never published.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Masson-Oursel, “True Philosophy is Comparative Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1951), pp. 6-9, at p 6.

<sup>10</sup> Masson-Oursel, “Objet et méthode de la philosophie comparée,” pp. 542-3.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Masson-Oursel, *Comparative Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> See Masson-Oursel, *Comparative Philosophy*, pp. 39, 33, 42.

<sup>13</sup> See Lenart Skof, "Pragmatism and Social Ethics: An Intercultural and Phenomenological Approach," *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 5 (2008): 121–146, at p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. xii.

<sup>15</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, "The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy," tr. Michael Kimmel, in *polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*, 1 (2000). Online: <http://them.polylog.org/1/fmr-en.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Mall, "The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy."

<sup>17</sup> F.M. Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Theorie und Geschichte* (Wien: Passagen, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Cited from the discussion of 'polylog' at: <http://ev.polylog.org/> See also, for example, Franz Martin Wimmer, *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy* [Satya Nilayam Endowment Lectures] (Chennai-Madras: Satya Nilayam, 2002). For a more extensive discussion of Wimmer's view, see: <http://www.inst.at/ausstellung/enzy/polylog/wimmer.htm>

<sup>19</sup> See the explanation of 'polylog' at: <http://ev.polylog.org/>

<sup>20</sup> P.T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 335.

<sup>21</sup> See my *Migrating Texts and Traditions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> In this section, I draw extensively on section 2 (pp. 45-48) of my "Intercultural Philosophy and the Phenomenon of Migrating Texts and Traditions," in *Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy*, ed. Hans Lenk (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), pp. 39-58. I wish to thank the editor for permission to use this material here.

<sup>23</sup> For more on this, see my "Culture and Pluralism in Philosophy," in *Philosophy, Culture, and Pluralism*, ed. William Sweet (Aylmer, QC: Editions du scribe, 2002), pp. v-xxi. It has been claimed that some philosophers may simply not understand the views of philosophers from other cultures because their own philosophical views are so culturally-laden that they cannot recognise the propositions and conceptual structures of other cultures; or because they are so immersed in their own approach that they cannot recognize how their own presuppositions exclude, a priori, other approaches.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Chibueze Udeani, "The Body-Mind-Spirit Relationship within the African World-View," in *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions*, 2 (2003): 57-62.

<sup>25</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan: Or, Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 74. (It is interesting that Hans-Georg Gadamer finds a link with Collingwood in Gadamer's own logic of question and answer, which he develops in *Wahrheit und Methode* [1960; See Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 333.)

<sup>26</sup> Collingwood writes that "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question" (Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940], p. 23), and that "In order to find out [a philosopher's] meaning you must also know what the question was...to which

the thing he [or she] has said or written was meant as an answer” (Collingwood, *Autobiography* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939], p. 31).

<sup>27</sup> Nothing in what follows hinges on whether MacIntyre himself would accept this reading, but a follower of MacIntyre may have to.

<sup>28</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 345.

<sup>30</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 7. MacIntyre provides a series of caveats, however, starting on p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> In his *The Road Since Structure: Philosophical Essays, 1970-1993* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Kuhn writes: “The claim that two theories are incommensurable is then the claim that there is no language, neutral or otherwise, into which both theories, conceived as sets of sentences, can be translated without residue or loss” (ibid., p. 36), and by “translation” he means, a “systematic substitution of words or strings of words from another, in such a way to produce an equivalent text in this second language” (ibid., p. 38).

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion of this, see *Philosophical Challenges and Opportunities of Globalization*, ed. Oliva Blanchette, Tomonobu Imamichi, George F. McLean, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001).

## CHAPTER I

# WHAT IN THE WORLD IS INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY? A REFLECTION

*JĀNIS (JOHN) OZOLINS*

### INTRODUCTION

It is sometimes said that there are as many philosophical opinions as there are philosophers and nearly as many disagreements. The same may be said for intercultural philosophy, which also takes many different guises and is conceptualised in a multitude of ways. I do not propose to discuss all of these variants, but simply to reflect on how culture, language and experience influence philosophical outlooks as well as philosophical methods.

One of the criticisms that is levelled at philosophical analyses and philosophical theories is that they are culturally bound. This observation can often be used as a quick way of dismissing a theory that is found to be unacceptable and to avoid defending an opinion that has been expressed. Hence, the views of Richard Rorty are sometimes dismissed on the grounds that he is an American white male; those of Emmanuel Lévinas because he, too, is a white male (and ‘suspiciously’ French and Jewish); and, yet again, those of Martin Heidegger because he is another white male – though German – and a Nazi. Thus, the genesis of the ideas and conceptual frameworks of philosophers are ascribed to their nationality, gender, religion, and politics rather than to philosophical influences. Other examples abound: David Hume is described as a Scottish philosopher, Immanuel Kant as a German philosopher, John Dewey as an American philosopher, and Jean-Paul Sartre as a quintessentially French philosopher – as if nationality were sufficient to account for the origins of their philosophical ideas. Although philosophical antecedents are likely to have been more significant, there is no doubt that culture, values, language, and traditions influence the mature thought of philosophers.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then a more complete understanding of a particular philosopher demands immersion not only in his or her language, but also in his or her culture. Without this, it will not be possible to fully understand him or her. Pre-empting an account of intercultural philosophy, if it is to be possible at all, it has to be assumed that different cultures, languages, traditions, religions, values, and practices are not incommensurable. That is, unless

we can understand one another on some level, no communication is possible, let alone intercultural philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

This is perhaps the lesson that W.V.O. Quine was trying to teach, when he argued for the indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference. No matter how hard we try, we don't know for certain if members of a newly-discovered jungle tribe are talking about rabbits or undetached rabbit-parts when they use the term "gavagai", even though they are excitedly pointing to what the English speaker sees as a rabbit. Even if this seems far-fetched, the term "gavagai" could refer to a young rabbit, or as Quine puts it, a rabbit-stage.

Quine proposes that we consider if there is a class of stimulations which would prompt a speaker to utter "gavagai" and, in the presence of an isomorphic class of stimulations, another speaker would utter "rabbit." If there are two isomorphic sets of stimulations, then it is possible to conclude that the term "gavagai" and the term "rabbit" have the same stimulus meaning. The difficulty is that, for this to work, we need to have isomorphic sets of stimulations which elicit the response "gavagai" in one instance, and "rabbit" in the other, and that we know that these sets themselves are isomorphic. That is, it is possible that there is no difference between the class of stimulations which would elicit the term "rabbit stage" and that which elicits the term "rabbit." So one set of stimulations has more than one term to which it is correlated. This is, in fact, Quine's point. We cannot be sure that our translation of "gavagai" as "rabbit" is correct, for it remains possible that the correct translation is "rabbit-stage." From this, says Quine, it follows that if a sentence uses a term which has an indeterminate meaning, then what the sentence refers to is similarly indeterminate in its meaning. If this is the case, then what it might refer to is unable to be determined – hence, we have inscrutability of reference.<sup>3</sup>

Still, while proposing that we will never have exact translation between two different languages – and we might add cultures – Quine nevertheless accepts that at some level it will be possible to come to a working knowledge and even an excellent knowledge of another language because the stimulus meanings of words in different languages will correspond to a high degree. Thus, in most instances, the translator can confidently translate "gavagai" as "rabbit." None of this, however, will be possible unless both the newly-discovered jungle tribe and the English translator share the same physical attributes, so that the stimuli that they receive in similar circumstances are the same. The members of the tribe must see what the English translator sees and hear what he hears.

This needs to be nuanced, however, since at one level, our jungle tribe will be adapted to living in the jungle and so will likely be attuned to seeing the jungle with a degree of detail that will be invisible to the



English translator. Members of the tribe will be much better at seeing dangers and also possible food sources because of the necessity of being adapted to their jungle home. Hence, they may see “gavagai” in many more places than the English translator. Nevertheless, it remains the case that in principle we expect that the English translator will be able to learn to see the jungle in the same way as the jungle tribe.

Those who have engaged in translation from one language to another know how difficult this is because it is not easy to translate idioms, make transparent particular cultural usages, or even construct sentences that entirely capture the meaning of the author. An obvious example of this is the difficulty of translating poetry without doing violence to what is translated. Of course, with poetry, so much more is going on, with the employment of metaphor, simile, and other literary devices that play with meaning and that use words and sounds of words to elicit emotions and feelings. The meaning of a sentence is much more than the individual words of which it is composed; there are, in fact, layers of meaning.

That there are philosophical influences on philosophers’ outlooks is obvious enough and these will not necessarily be culturally or historically bound. It is possible, for example, for a philosopher to be influenced by Plato and Aristotle without having any idea of ancient Greek culture or the language in which they wrote. Here, philosophical ideas are analysed from different perspectives and new ideas synthesised, leading to new philosophical thought. Thomas Aquinas is one example of this. With the availability of Latin translations of Aristotle, coupled with his knowledge of Augustine (who wrote in Latin), he synthesised these to provide a philosophical foundation for the development of Christian theology. We can speculate about whether Aquinas had much knowledge about Greek culture, and it is not unreasonable to conclude that he did not, given that he did not speak Greek nor had the opportunity to study Greek culture. If this is so, then he would have been reading Aristotle without being able to place his thought within the context of his historical and cultural milieu. He read and interpreted Aristotle, therefore, from within his own mediaeval cultural and linguistic vantage point.

Philosophers are, of course, shameless in borrowing ideas from not just their own philosophical antecedents, but also from cultures and traditions not their own. There is, for example, evidence to support the contention that Schopenhauer was influenced by Buddhism<sup>4</sup> and that Wittgenstein, who was influenced by Schopenhauer, was also. That Buddhism is an Eastern religion not practised by very many Germans in the time of Schopenhauer or Wittgenstein indicates quite obviously that they borrowed ideas from a culture and a religion not their own. Human beings have been borrowing ideas, technology, values, and sometimes

entire systems of thought from each other since different cultures first came in contact with each other. The genealogy of such borrowings is sometimes relatively easy to trace, but it is not always so, as some ideas that are borrowed become drastically altered in the adoptive culture and, unless we are familiar with the original culture, the ideas are accepted as belonging to the culture adopting the ideas. Greek philosophy, for example, springs to mind as the example par excellence of ideas and values that are at the heart of Western culture, but many people would be unaware of this, since it is so deeply embedded in Western ways of thinking.

### **INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY OR *INTERRING* CULTURAL PHILOSOPHY**

Thus far, we have been discussing two ideas. The first, whether the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference, leads to the incommensurability of cultures and traditions and, hence, the impossibility of any meaningful interaction among different peoples. That this is obviously not the case opens the possibility of mutual enrichment through dialogue, though it is acknowledged that not everything in one particular culture will be intelligible to another. Some customs and practices will just seem quaint and incomprehensible, even when we share, say, a religion.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Quine's warning to us about the indeterminacy of translation reminds us that cultures and traditions are not transparent, and that we should be wary about thinking that a concept in one language is synonymous with a concept in another. The second idea concerns the extent to which philosophers – and others – have borrowed freely from cultures and traditions not their own. Intercultural philosophy in this sense can be understood as the intermingling of cultures, languages, and traditions. In support of this idea we have cited some examples of Western philosophers influenced by cultures not their own.

Not all intermingling of cultures, languages, and traditions is benign, however. It is possible that one culture will dominate another and that the latter will disappear under the onslaught of a form of cultural imperialism or colonisation. A small country surrounded by much larger neighbours and cultures will have considerable difficulty in maintaining its cultural identity, simply because it does not have the resources to be able to compete with its neighbour in the production of ideas or in their development. The larger culture simply overwhelms the smaller. We do not have intercultural philosophy, but rather, we find that we *inter* cultural philosophy, that is, we bury the culturally distinct philosophy of the smaller country. This will be so particularly where the smaller country has a different, unrelated language from its neighbours.

In addition, on a purely practical level, there will not be a sufficient number of philosophical works to produce discussion of the significant questions that human beings ask, nor enough of them to produce the concepts needed to frame the dialogue.

There are numerous examples that illustrate the difficulty of maintaining a distinctive philosophical perspective that owes its existence to the specific language and culture in which the philosophical thought occurs. Unless there is a sizeable population to sustain thinking in a particular language, the danger is that circumstances will force a numerically small culture and language to adopt the ways of thought of its neighbours. There are, for example, philosophers in Ireland, but the extent to which they are Irish philosophers, as distinct from philosophers in Ireland is not so easy to determine, especially if they do not publish in Gaelic. This does not mean that the Irish culture has no influence, but if the audience for the philosophical work that is produced is English-speaking, then, firstly, what is written will need to be intelligible to that group and, secondly, it will need to engage in the kinds of problems in which that audience is interested. The distinctive problems that will be germane to a Gaelic-speaking philosopher and writer will not necessarily be the same as those of an English-speaking philosopher, nor will they be considered from the same perspective. Moreover, the significantly larger number of books produced in English will swamp whatever the locals might produce in their own language. This will mean that any serious student of philosophy will have to have mastered at least English, if he or she is to be able to take part in broad ranging philosophical discussion.

This problem becomes particularly acute when we also consider the disparities of resources that are available to philosophers in different countries and cultures. A country, such as the United States, for example, is able to place significantly larger resources into humanities research than other countries, with the result that not only are there more philosophers working in the United States, but they are also able to spend more time thinking about philosophical problems and producing publications that disseminate their ideas throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> In a small country with limited resources, philosophers working there will not be able to disseminate a distinct perspective from their own culture and language for two reasons, firstly, because any research about a particular philosophical issue will have only been discussed to a limited extent in their own language and, secondly, because the issue will have been framed in terms of the philosophical discourse emanating from the larger country. Hence, when philosophical problems are considered, the number and type of these will have been already framed from another perspective, such as that of American or Anglo-American philosophers.<sup>7</sup> This means that the conversation about such problems takes place within

a particular framework, and if a philosopher from a minority culture wants to discuss a philosophical problem he or she will have to do so according to the dominant discourse and in the language of that discourse. Additionally, if a problem is to be discussed fully, the majority of the available published resources will be those, overwhelmingly, in the English language and, more often than not, in American journals.

Western philosophy, with perhaps some recognition of the contributions of continental philosophers, is dominated by Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which is ubiquitous in its reach because of the large number of journals and resources at its disposal. As a result, the conventions and rules of philosophical discourse are often determined by those who are trained in this tradition. Because there are more of these voices engaged in the philosophical conversation, it is not surprising that the idioms are those of English speakers, and so what counts as philosophy is largely philosophy practised in the Anglo-American analytic tradition. Continental philosophers, such as German and French philosophers, who constitute another species of Western philosophers, may protest all they like, but it is overridingly the Anglo-American analytic philosophical tradition which determines what counts as the key philosophical questions of the day.<sup>8</sup> The fact that a very large portion of philosophical papers are published in English shows how much one particular tradition dominates and so shapes philosophical discourse.<sup>9</sup>

The philosophical traditions of the major countries and cultures in effect colonise smaller countries, and so philosophical thought, as we have argued, follows the lines of thought, practices, and framework of the dominant culture. Anglo-American philosophy and its patterns of thought override other ways of thinking and, hence, the unique perspective of a smaller culture is interred. This argument is not restricted to the dominance of Anglo-American philosophy vis-à-vis other cultures and traditions; the same will apply in other cases. German and French philosophy, for example, also have the capacity to dominate the philosophical thought of other smaller European countries. The study of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Habermas, and Heidegger, amongst other important German philosophers, for example, is not restricted to Germany, nor the work of Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Maritain, Lévinas, and Ricoeur to France. These are all great philosophers and their thought has universal application, so it transcends the local cultural tradition from which it originates. Since every philosopher from whatever cultural tradition he or she comes is interested in universal philosophical questions, he or she will be interested in the way in which these are framed by other philosophers, especially those who are recognised as providing significant illumination of these questions.

Nevertheless, because there are so many great philosophers with much to say on significant philosophical issues, the philosophical conversation about these issues will be in terms of the frameworks that these other philosophers will have established. That is, these will be based in *their* own culture, language, and tradition. In order for someone from another culture, language, and tradition to take part in the philosophical conversation, he or she will need to do so from within the framework established by the dominant philosophers. Cultural philosophy, which is to say, philosophical thought framed from within a particular language and culture, is not possible, and the result is that critical thinking – and what counts as critical thinking – occurs within a foreign colonising cultural and linguistic framework.

If this line of reasoning is right, then intercultural philosophy is possible because it is monocultural. The cultural and linguistic frameworks of non-dominant, minority cultures are buried, and philosophical dialogue for the most part takes place within the Anglo-American or some other dominant philosophical tradition. The issue of whether different cultures, traditions, and languages are incommensurable does not arise, since the common framework that is adopted is that of the dominant tradition. If, for example, philosophers want to discuss the concept of truth, they will consult the literature available. If they wish to write in their own language and for an audience only in their own country, they may wish to restrict their discussions to what is being said in the narrow circle of their own country. On the other hand, if they wish to reach a wider audience, they will need to consider the wider conversation on the topic. This will, if they are proficient in English, bring them in contact with a much more extensive literature. Since the Anglo-American tradition is dominant, if those from of non-dominant, minority cultures wish to contribute to the debates, they will need to write their papers in English, especially if they wish to reach the widest philosophical audience. Translation from one language to another, as we already observed, is a tricky business, but if the discourse takes place within the Anglo-American philosophical tradition and the literature consulted is in English, then translation is not required. Philosophers who work in English where it is a second language, typically will not translate from English to their native language, but will try to work within the thought processes established by English; in that sense, they do not require translation. In translating from their own language into English, they will also face the prospect of having work within the constraints imposed by English grammar and modes of expression. In either case, the unique perspective of the particular cultural tradition is suppressed and intercultural dialogue proceeds through non-English speakers leaving their own cultures and entering a common framework which is determined by the English

language and the dominant Anglo-American tradition. The same point applies in any situation in which one tradition is dominant over others.

The inescapable conclusion from the foregoing is that intercultural philosophy, where this means philosophical discussion that does not suppress individual cultural perspectives, cannot occur because dialogue needs to take place in a common conceptual space. In addition, this will inevitably be in the language and tradition that is dominant, and this will be the one that most participants in the dialogue will have in common. Thus, intercultural philosophy comes to mean philosophical discussion taking place in one language, usually English, to which others from different cultures, languages, and traditions contribute. This does not mean that nothing of value is to be achieved in such dialogue – indeed, the very opposite is the case – but what is revealed by the argument are the limitations on intercultural dialogue and, so, on intercultural philosophy. The question that is raised, but is not answered, is whether it is possible to take more account of perspectives arising from different languages, and how these can be best expressed in another language framework, at the same time knowing, given the indeterminacy of translation, that this will never be complete.

### **GLOBALISATION, CONVERGENCE OF CULTURE, AND INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY**

Although we have established that intercultural philosophy, if it is to be practised in the wider arena, by and large will result in the suppression of individual cultural perspectives, this need not lead us to give up on being sensitive to cultural differences and on bringing these out as far as possible, even if the discussion is taking place within, say, a particular language such as English. We began our discussion by asserting that a condition for the possibility of intercultural philosophy was that cultures could not be incommensurable. Since we asserted that cultures were commensurable, at least to a degree, intercultural philosophy was possible, notwithstanding that it would take place within a leading paradigm. Globalisation and the varieties of mass communication brought about by the electronic age have brought cultures together in ways that was not possible previously. This suggests that differences between peoples and cultures are decreasing.

Culture is affected by the interaction of human beings. Where two cultures meet, they are both changed in some way, though the extent to which each will change will depend on their relative strengths. Two equal cultures living side by side have a good chance of preserving their separate cultures if they do not interact to any great extent. Where the two cultures do interact, through intermarriage, common religious practices, values, and the slow development of a common language, they

will begin to exhibit commonalities and slowly merge. Tribes merge into larger collectivities and these, in turn, into separate unique cultural regions and, finally, through the formation of alliances, sovereign states. Where there is considerable disparity in size between two cultures, it is difficult for a minority culture to maintain its separate culture. It takes conscious effort to maintain and preserve a minority culture. The ubiquitous reach of modern Western media and mass communication make this increasingly difficult, however, especially in a global market economy which relies on the spread of consumer goods wherever a market can be found.<sup>10</sup> The same mass-produced goods can be found in markets throughout the world. Shopping centres, whether they are in Beijing or in New York, will have shops with the same brands and the same consumer goods. If we apply this to philosophical ideas, these will also be found everywhere.

Globalisation, sometimes regarded with suspicion, is a major and continuing influence on not only the economic development of countries, but also their cultures and language. Economic imperialism, through the flooding of countries with consumer goods from European countries, the United States, and perhaps even further afield, such as China and India, has a very powerful influence on popular culture within a country and arguably will erode it. The market economy, though currently in some difficulty, has been embraced throughout the world and, as a result, local customs and traditions start to change in response to advertising which advocates a particular – typically identified as Western – way of seeing the world. It is not only popular culture that is affected, however, since economic rationalism, and its accompanying language and thought processes have infiltrated all aspects of intellectual life and, as a result, for good or ill, constitute an area of cultural convergence. This does not mean that philosophers, in whatever culture they happen to be, accept economic rationalism and its consequences, but it means that philosophers globally have a common experience and understanding of what economic rationalism represents and, so, there is the beginning of commonality. Thought processes begin to take on a degree of sameness.

Understood as the perceived interconnectedness between different peoples and the result of the internationalisation of business and trade – as well as of social, cultural, religious and political forces operating across regions and borders – globalisation exercises significant influence over our conceptions of ourselves as members of a particular cultural community. Intercultural philosophy takes on a global hue because each philosopher is confronted by a large number of global problems to which he or she is obliged to respond, not only as a philosopher, but as a human being. Unless we live in some remote corner of the world with little or no contact with other human beings, we are faced with the

results of the activities of other human beings, of problems not of our own making, and of a need to respond. Climate change and global warming, for example, whether we believe it is occurring or not, demands a response from us, for it raises questions about how we ought use resources and which resources these should be. Questions about the common good, of distributive justice, and of the fair distribution of resources demand a global response, especially in the face of current global crises. These are essentially philosophical questions and, since no individual culture can respond authoritatively on behalf of us all to these questions, they are questions addressed to everyone. That there are no simple answers to these questions makes it more urgent that intercultural dialogue about them takes place, and philosophers above all have an important role to play in the critical response to them. The pressure on individuals to respond to global questions and issues forces us to think about ourselves in a global context and outside our normal roles as citizens and members of a particular cultural community or nation.

### **CULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS TASKS**

Although we have enumerated a number of global questions to which we believe philosophers from a variety of cultures and backgrounds can contribute, it is a courageous philosopher or a foolish one who ventures to speak with any degree of authority about the tasks of philosophy, as if there were a certain number of these that have been pre-ordained for philosophers to pursue.<sup>11</sup> Intercultural philosophy will have a contribution to make to those problems which are universal in nature and, arguably, it is a feature of philosophy that it tackles universal questions, albeit with a local cultural flavour. Nevertheless, if we find the question of what is philosophy difficult to answer, the question of its general tasks will be no easier, and different cultures will emphasise different problems. For some, the question of distributive justice might loom large, for others, the end and purpose of life. Despite this, differences in emphasis do not affect the number of universal questions in which philosophers of all stripes will be interested. Some of the main concerns of philosophy to which all can contribute can be distilled into a few fundamental questions. MacIntyre<sup>12</sup>, for example, points out that one of the primary tasks of philosophy is to articulate and to pursue answers to questions that are asked by ordinary human beings and not just by professional philosophers. Ordinary human beings, he goes on to say, quoting from the papal encyclical, *Fides et ratio*, are universally concerned with the same kinds of things, namely what is the good for human beings, what is the meaning of our lives, and why do we suffer.<sup>13</sup> Ordinary human beings have their own answers to these questions, though not always satisfactory ones from their own point of view. It is,



after all, not uncommon for people to pursue particular goals in their lives and, having reached them, discover that their lives have become devoid of meaning. Questions about the nature of the good life are not just of interest to philosophers, but to everyone. As John Paul II points out in *Fides et ratio*, for each person, the question of the meaning of life and of death is inescapable because it is the condition of every human life.<sup>14</sup> It is, therefore, a question which is not just the province of philosophers, but of everyone.

John Paul II goes on to argue that in pursuing the question of the meaning of life, people everywhere are simply not satisfied with an answer which is not definitive: they want, not to put too fine a point on it, the truth. What this means, he says, is that they want something ultimate, something which is absolute. The meaning of personal existence has to be anchored, he claims, in certitude.<sup>15</sup> It is the quest for certitude, he goes on to say, which accounts for the different philosophical systems that have been devised and for the various schools of thought that have arisen over the course of centuries.<sup>16</sup> Although one might want to argue that John Paul II considers these questions from a Western philosophical perspective, one would be hard-pressed to find a people or a civilisation that was not interested in questions about the meaning of life and of death. Questions about the nature of the good, about human nature, about the destiny of human beings and about how life is to be lived are not Western questions, but are a part of the common heritage of human beings.

If John Paul II is right that the questions of philosophy have their origins in the ordinary reflections of ordinary people, and if these reflections are about the practicalities of life, including deep questions about its meaning and purpose, then it can be concluded that the questions of philosophy in whatever culture they are found will be the same. Because the questions are the same, however, does not mean that the approach to their resolution will be the same. Just as it is plainly evident in Western conceptions of the questions of philosophy that there are a variety of ways in which philosophers can tackle these, so too it is evident that in non-Western philosophy questions can be conceived in a variety of ways and tackled in different ways. The salient question is whether these different approaches are incommensurable with one another. This, however, takes us to the question of philosophical methods and these may not differ from each other along a cultural and linguistic divide. It is also evident that the incommensurability or otherwise of philosophical methods is not the same issue as the incommensurability of different cultures, languages, and traditions. It is possible for philosophical methods to be incommensurable with one another, despite the commensurability of the different cultures in which

they are employed. We do not intend to pursue this question further here, however.

We have already argued that there are dominant traditions, such as the Anglo-American conception of philosophical discourse, and though these act to suppress discourse in other cultures and languages, this does not mean different discourses are eliminated. The Anglo-American methods of philosophy, just as European as well as non-Western<sup>17</sup> styles, are not monolithic, and within each there is a variety of philosophical methods and approaches to universal questions. There is room therefore, for the acceptance of different philosophical methodologies. Given that cultures are not isolated from each other, a particular cultural understanding can be expressed through a variation of a philosophical method. That this will never capture completely a particular cultural and linguistic perspective has already been argued, but it provides a mechanism for capturing as much as possible of that view. If we want to understand a particular point of view as deeply as possible, there is no escaping the need to immerse ourselves completely in the specific culture, language, and tradition.

### **INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS**

It is clear that there is no particular method that is prescribed in philosophy. Just as it is virtually impossible to answer the question “What is philosophy?”, it is just as difficult to specify a single method of doing philosophy. Plato and Aristotle, two of the greatest philosophical figures in Western philosophy, diverge considerably in their approach to philosophy. Plato believes in the eternal realm of the forms and Aristotle by contrast has a far greater place for observation. That both of these great philosophers emerged from the same Greek culture provides evidence for the flexibility of philosophical method and shows that cultural traditions leave room for significant variations, and these can be of assistance in helping to capture a particular standpoint from a minority culture.

The mediaeval period, long dismissed as not particularly interesting philosophically, perhaps because it was dominated for so long by scholasticism, was characterised by the method of disputation, a method which Aquinas used to devastating effect. Much of the work of this period awaits reevaluation. Within the European context, the mediaeval period is also characterised by the influence of the works of Aristotle, which were transmitted by the Arab world and brought to Europe. Here we see the coming together of European civilisation and culture with those of the Middle East and of ancient Greece. That something new was able to be constructed is a testament to the power of

intercultural philosophy and the ability of different cultures to exploit a particular, Aristotelian philosophical method.

Following Plato and Aristotle, probably the best known proponent of a philosophical method was Descartes, who emphasises the ‘method of doubt.’<sup>18</sup> That Descartes was French does not seem to have troubled philosophers who made haste to use his method. If Descartes was the first modern philosopher to introduce a distinctive philosophical method, he was followed by a veritable deluge of ways in which different philosophers conceived of doing philosophy. In England, there are the British empiricists, Locke and Hume; in France, the Enlightenment heirs of Descartes, d’Alembert, Diderot, and Voltaire; and, in Prussia, Kant. In the nineteenth century, still other important currents of philosophical thought emerged with Hegel’s dialectical method, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Marx, as well as pragmatism in the United States with Peirce, Dewey, James, and Mead. The twentieth century saw the rise of analytic philosophy, beginning with Frege, Russell, and Moore, but also idealism, positivism, phenomenology, and existentialism. In reaction to modernity, postmodernity enters the stage, though its origins are not in philosophy, but elsewhere. Several of its relativist principles are taken up, some would argue, by the later Wittgenstein who, along with others, is held responsible for the linguistic turn of philosophy and conceptual analysis.

What the catalogue of philosophers from various European cultures and traditions briefly illustrates is the wide variety of philosophical method and methodology that has arisen, particularly in the modern era. It is by no means exhaustive, only gives consideration to mostly Western philosophy, and is a rather idiosyncratic list. If we were to add philosophers working in Chinese, Indian, Russian, African, Middle Eastern, and South American philosophy, the catalogue of approaches to philosophy would grow considerably. Though these philosophical methods have their roots in a specific cultural context, their use is not restricted to that culture and tradition. They are available to all those who take the time to immerse themselves in another tradition and to engage in an authentic way in intercultural philosophy. Nonetheless, philosophers cannot be cognisant of everything that is happening in different areas of the world in philosophy, and it takes a lifetime to be truly proficient in any philosophical method. Still, it is important to be aware of the vast array of philosophical riches that provide many different ways of approaching philosophical questions, especially that there are other cultures and other approaches to the tasks of philosophy which are not Western.

## INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND PERSPECTIVES

Every philosophical perspective brings out different ways in which philosophical questions – which have their origins in real problems, not just in idealised problems of interest only to philosophers – can be engaged. Different perspectives are an important creative resource because they provide us with different ways in which problems can not only be framed, but also tackled. It is therefore important that we ensure that these different perspectives are preserved. This is, of course, no easy task, given the tendency, since philosophy has gone global, for philosophical thinking to be largely done in one language – English. This has its merits, but it should not be forgotten that different languages provide different perspectives on the world because they arise in different cultures. This is, of course, the view that language provides a particular way of seeing the world, and so is an echo of Wittgenstein's often quoted dictum that the limits of language are the limits of the world.<sup>19</sup> What this suggests is that language plays a unique role in articulating how a group of human beings, living in a particular time and space, experiences the world. Since there are many common experiences, and, as we have already argued, because many of the concerns of human beings are the same, it is not surprising that different languages will have expressions for common questions and concerns. Wittgenstein is mistaken, however, in thinking that the limits of language are the limits of the world, since there are many human experiences which defy complete linguistic expression and yet can be universally understood in profound ways without having recourse to words. Sorrow, joy, love, empathy for another, being wronged, are all universal human realities and can be felt and understood without the need for language.<sup>20</sup> The world is much more than language and can be understood as such.

Since the world is much more than language, the ways in which we can articulate our experiences of that world will be underdetermined by language. That is, our experiences outrun our linguistic resources and so will never be able to be fully captured in language. If this is so, no natural language (or formal language) will fully express human experience of the world. Each natural language partially captures human experience and so provides a unique perspective on the world. This is why it is important to conserve different languages and cultures and why intercultural philosophy is important.

Human experience is also articulated through culture, through the particular values, beliefs, and practices that are shared by a specific group of people, generally identified through being members of an ethnic group.<sup>21</sup> It is through cultural practices that we can come to understand something of the values and beliefs of a particular people

speaking a particular language. A language cannot be fully understood unless its cultural context is understood. Given a common human nature<sup>22</sup>, it is possible to come to understand another culture and another language, but this does not mean that everything expressible in one language is expressible in another; neither does it mean that the cultural experiences or lived life of one culture can be understood from a standpoint within another culture. This was the point that Quine, discussed earlier, has helped us to see. Understanding Chinese culture, say, from an Australian cultural standpoint is limited. That is, though there are common concerns which can be appreciated from within one's own culture, the unique way in which they are understood from the point of view of the other culture can be done only from within that culture. It is from within the particular culture that it is possible to see how previously opaque values and beliefs form part of the outlook on the world that is the lived experience of that culture. This was approach taken in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century by the great Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, who immersed himself in Chinese culture in order to be able to facilitate the encounter between Christianity and Confucianism.

Different philosophical perspectives enable us to illuminate different philosophical questions from different angles or provide different approaches to a consideration of the human condition. This is not to suggest that all approaches will be illuminating; some may prove to be disappointing and lead to blind alleys. Nonetheless, even these can be instructive. We have already mentioned the very large number of different philosophical approaches that philosophy, East and West, has spawned. If, as argued, different cultures provide different perspectives on human life and its trials and tribulations, so too will each culture have philosophical perspectives that will be unique to that culture. Though an English-speaking Kantian will have much in common with a German-speaking Kantian, there will be differences in how each will understand Kant. It is often remarked that it is better to study a philosopher in his or her particular language, if one wants to have a clear insight into what he or she was trying to express.<sup>23</sup> This is because certain concepts in one language will only be partly translatable into another.<sup>24</sup> Of course, where cultures are similar and there are similar background experiences, these differences may not be very large. Nevertheless, they remain.

## **CONCLUSION**

We began our discussion of intercultural philosophy by reflecting on the impact of culture, tradition, and language on philosophical thought, and concluded that intercultural philosophy would not be possible if different cultures, languages, and traditions were incommensurable. There had to

be some level of commensurability, but the extent of this was not straightforwardly determined. Quine showed quite clearly that different languages were not isomorphic, and so translation of one to another always remained indeterminate. Bearing this in mind, it was noted that, through encounter with each other, traditions and cultures intermingle, adopt, and borrow from one another, but this is not always on an equal basis. It is possible that one culture, language, and tradition will dominate others. In such a case, intercultural philosophy could reduce to a dialogue which takes place from within only one conceptual space, that of the dominant culture.

Intercultural philosophy, it was argued, should not simply be the domination of one culture over a number of other cultures. That is, intercultural philosophy is not represented by one culture or philosophical tradition, such as the Anglo-American culture, determining the nature of philosophical interaction with other less dominant philosophical traditions arising in other cultures, traditions, and languages. The conceptual space should make room for more than one culture, language, and tradition. Globalisation presents an opportunity for creating such a common conceptual space. Globalisation is a two-edged sword, however. On the one hand, it can be a medium for the transmission of a dominant mono-culture which colonises the ways of thought in many different parts of the world. On the other, it can be a way of drawing cultures and traditions together into a common space to show that there are common problems that all human beings need to face, and about which philosophers everywhere can provide illumination. That there are many problems to be addressed is obvious.

Philosophical methods, it was observed, though self-evidently arising out of particular cultures, are not restricted to those cultures and can be adopted by philosophers from different traditions. The virtue of increased global communication is that the different ways in which philosophical problems can be addressed are made accessible to a wide variety of audiences. This is, of course, not enough, since to have a clear idea of the unique contribution that a particular pattern of thought makes requires immersion in the culture, language, and tradition from which it originates. This cannot be done superficially. Intercultural dialogue in general, and philosophical work in particular, demand that close attention be paid to the cultural background and language of the partners in the dialogue. As Quine says, we will not know what the jungle tribesman means by “gavagai” unless we are prepared to spend considerable time in getting to know the tribe, their language, and their culture. Similarly, we will not be able to engage in intercultural philosophy unless we are prepared to listen carefully, try to understand the other culture, and if possible, learn the language of our interlocutors.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I do not propose to argue for this here. It would seem to be self evident that a particular way in which the world is described and understood will be in part determined by the language in which it is expressed. Wittgenstein asserted that language expresses a ‘form of life’, that is, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), para. 19. Gadamer says that the achievement of thought takes place within something which is firm – that is, morals, law, and religion, which is to say within a cultural tradition which acts as the bedrock for thought. See H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, tr. rev. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), pp. 235-236.

<sup>2</sup> Note that we cannot argue that, since intercultural philosophy exists, this means that different cultures, traditions, values, languages are commensurable. This would be fallacious reasoning (affirming the consequent).

<sup>3</sup> Quine has a great deal to say about the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference, but a further discussion of this would take us far from the present topic. See W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1960), pp. 26-79.

<sup>4</sup> C. Janaway, “Introduction” in C. Janaway (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> I have in mind, for example, the celebration of Hallowe’en in the United States of America, which is a quaint custom that has been exported to other countries such as Australia, where it has little or no meaning, but is nonetheless imitated.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the number of open access journals published in the United States in 2011 was 1345. This is double the number of the second-place country, Brazil, at 652. The United Kingdom, in third place, has 528. These are not all philosophy journals, but it is illustrative of the point that the number of English language journals is much larger than the number of journals in other languages and that a very large proportion of these journals are published in the United States. By way of contrast, Ireland has only 9. See the Directory of Open Access Journals at URL: <http://www.doaj.org/oaaj?func=byCountry&uiLanguage=en> Accessed: 6/11/2011

<sup>7</sup> For convenience, I will take American philosophy to be broadly the same as Anglo-American philosophy, which can be understood to encompass the kind of philosophical tradition that exists in English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that American philosophers do not engage with what is broadly described as European or Continental philosophy. The point is rather that American philosophers will invariably set the agenda because they have resources as their disposal that many philosophers elsewhere simply do not have.

<sup>9</sup> See B. Sandelin and N. Sarafoglu, “Language and Scientific Language Statistics,” *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 28 (2004): 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> This is what Adorno warns about in his critique of what he calls the “culture industry,” though he does not refer to the effect of a dominant culture on a minority culture in the way that we have here. What we have been talking about here is the way in which a dominant culture’s way of doing philosophy will suppress a minority culture’s way of doing philosophy. Nevertheless, the idea is similar; the dominant culture – not so much through a kind of “top down” reduction of culture to the lowest common denominator, but simply because there are more philosophers working within it – swamps the minority culture, whose perspective disappears because it is replaced by what appeals to the largest number of philosophers. This will result in a philosophical culture that has few distinguishing features and, so, little to differentiate one group of philosophers from another. See T. Adorno, “Cultural Industry Reconsidered”, tr. A.G. Rabinbach, *New German Critique*, 6 (1975): 12-19.

<sup>11</sup> Although we have pointed out some general global issues to which philosophy and different cultural approaches can make a contribution, we do not claim that these are the definitive tasks of philosophy. They are, however, general global concerns that are of universal interest, that are philosophical, and that philosophers – and ordinary human beings – grapple with.

<sup>12</sup> A. MacIntyre, “Philosophy Recalled to Its Tasks: a Thomistic Reading of *Fides et Ratio*” in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Paul’s Publications, 1998), paras. 26 and 27.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, para. 27.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, para. 28.

<sup>17</sup> It is recognised that lumping all non-Western approaches together is quite crude, since they differ considerably amongst themselves. Indian philosophy is very different from Chinese philosophy, as is African philosophy from both of these. Moreover, all of these will have significant variations amongst them also.

<sup>18</sup> R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, tr. and intro., F.E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> This remark occurs at 5.62 of the *Tractatus*. (L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C.K. Ogden [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922].) Wittgenstein says at 4.001 “The totality of propositions is language” and, at 4.01, “A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it”. He repeats this at 4.021. He argues that propositions, if true, depict reality. In translating one language into another, it is not the proposition which is translated, but its constituents (para. 4.025). Wittgenstein allows that the meaning of a word (which is a constituent of a proposition) can be translated from one language to another (4.243) Thus, in the *Tractatus*, he holds that languages are intertranslatable. This was also the view of Carnap, who attempted to construct a formal language that could be understood as constituting the structure of natural language. See, for example, Carnap’s *Logische Aufbau der Welt* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1928), published in English in 1967 as *The Logical Structure of the World: Pseudoproblems in*



*Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press), and his later *The Logical Syntax of Language*, first published in 1934, translated by Amethe Smeaton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937), where Carnap develops a purely logical theory of the structure of linguistic expressions. Both Wittgenstein and Carnap subsequently moved away from thinking that the underlying structure of natural languages was the same.

<sup>20</sup> A simple and prosaic example is provided by foreign language television. It is possible to follow a story about love and tragedy unfolding on the screen without understanding the language. Shakespeare is translatable, not because there is an isomorphic relationship between words in one language and those in another, but because the major themes of his plays are universal ones.

<sup>21</sup> Some cultures are, of course, multicultural, because they consist of a number of different ethnic groups. Our comments will apply equally well to such situations.

<sup>22</sup> This is a controversial assertion, Rorty, for example, denies that there is any such thing as a common human nature. We shall not argue against Rorty's position here, save to note that this is not the Christian view. See R. Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> This is why different translations of the same works are made. The difficulties of translation should not be underestimated. But it is clear that this means that there are different perspectives which sometimes cannot be captured in translation.

<sup>24</sup> Quine, as we have already stated, argues for the untranslatability of different conceptual schemes. See W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 1-19.



## CHAPTER II

# BEYOND THE CULTURAL TURN: INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

WOLFGANG KALTENBACHER

Manfred Mayrhofer, professor emeritus at the University of Vienna and an Indo-Europeanist noted for his etymological dictionary of Sanskrit, used to call the attention of his students to the fact that his name has the same initials as Max Müller, which would even permit him – as he underlined self-ironically – to adopt the Sanskrit name Moksha Mula, or ‘the root of Release.’ Austria and Germany have had great scholars in Indian studies, but not all of them had Mayrhofer’s sense of humor, and great philological competency has not always been combined with political sensibility. Indology has begun only lately to review critically its own history. Criticism, however, should be more severe with authors of the twentieth century than with the founders of the discipline. Ram Adhar Mall has criticised Müller’s Eurocentrism, though acknowledging his merits for Indian culture. It is the discrepancy between the high level of philological work and philosophical reflection on the one hand, and the lack of sensibility for intercultural dynamics on the other hand, that intercultural philosophy holds against authors like Müller and Hegel.

Intercultural philosophy, which claims to take into account the cultural context of philosophising, has itself a historical context that does not diminish its value but which can help us to understand its concept and its actual position. Intercultural issues were studied and discussed in several disciplines long before philosophers felt the necessity to reflect systematically on the problems of interculturality. Even if philosophy has always dealt with questions concerning intercultural topics, intercultural philosophy, as the explicit attempt to face the problems of interculturality, is not older than three decades. One of the most visible contributions to intercultural philosophy has been given by the group of scholars and institutions around *polylog*, the *Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*. Even if individual authors have given quite different definitions of ‘intercultural philosophy,’<sup>1</sup> there is obviously a general consensus of what intercultural philosophy should be.

We understand intercultural philosophy as the endeavor to give expression to the many voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and, thereby, to generate a

shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all. In intercultural philosophy we see above all a new *orientation* and a new *practice* of philosophy – of a philosophy that entails an attitude of mutual respect, listening, and learning.

It entails a new orientation because, in acknowledgment of the cultural situatedness of philosophy, claims must prove themselves interculturally, and culture and cultures must be consciously kept in view as the context of philosophising. It requires a new practice because this consciousness demands a departure from an individual, mono-cultural production of philosophy, and seeks instead a dialogical, process-oriented, fundamentally open *polyphony* of cultures and disciplines.<sup>2</sup>

Within this general frame we find several different approaches to intercultural philosophy which can also be conceived as different steps within the same project. Intercultural philosophy starts from the awareness of the cultural context of philosophy and of the relevance of this context for the development of philosophical theories and practices. Herein originates the task to reflect systematically the relationship between philosophy and its cultural context and to develop new instruments and methods in order to be able to comprehend culturality and interculturality in philosophy. The consciousness of the role of the cultural context changes our sensibility and our attitude towards other cultural contexts, and invites us to reflect methodically on cultural and intercultural problems. Philosophy widens its competence to become philosophy of interculturality.<sup>3</sup> The fact that every philosophical tradition has its own cultural background must not lead necessarily to a determinism and cultural relativism. It is still possible to hold up the conviction of a universal ‘truth,’ even if we cannot any longer pretend to have a privileged or exclusive access to this ‘truth.’ It remains a regulative idea.

Intercultural philosophy could change the way we see our own philosophical tradition. Western philosophy in particular has been criticised for its self perception, and it has been invited to open itself to other philosophical traditions. Indeed, many Western authors have considered philosophy as an exclusive European achievement, but such an attitude cannot be defended. Besides, we should not forget that Europeans have always been eager to know other cultures and that this interest for other cultures has not always been based on imperialistic desires. The critique of Eurocentrism occupied much space in the first publications on intercultural philosophy. Indeed, all other forms of centrism, such as Sinocentrism and Afrocentrism, were challenged at the same time.<sup>4</sup> One needs to find a way beyond one’s own tradition, and

intercultural philosophy proposes to contribute to reach this goal, ascertaining the cultural differences and the transcultural similarities.<sup>5</sup> But without an intense study of at least one other culture, such an attempt will surely come to nothing.

Intercultural philosophy should not be confused with comparative philosophy; the starting points are different. Comparative philosophy does not have, as its main object, the cultural context of philosophising. Still, intercultural philosophy depends on the comparison of different philosophical traditions. For this reason, intercultural philosophy has to face many of the same problems as comparative philosophy. Any comparison presupposes a deep knowledge of the traditions to be compared. This requires years of intensive study. Moreover, scholars must realise that their knowledge of the culture that they have studied lifelong likely remains fragmentary. By these comments, we do not mean to assert the inaccessibility of other cultures or the impossibility of transcultural philosophy. We just wish to underline the real difficulties connected with intercultural philosophy. A prominent example is the study of the philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. With good reason Indologists have been sceptical of hasty comparisons in comparative philosophy and intercultural philosophy.

Even with an incomplete or uncertain knowledge of other traditions, a person engaged in intercultural philosophy can nevertheless start with the reflection on the cultural context of his or her own tradition. In this case, impulses from outside that tradition will be vital. Such external impulses could have the form of questions which do not require a perfect understanding of other traditions.

At this point it becomes unavoidable to recall the discussion of the concept of 'culture' of the last decades. What do we mean by 'culture'? In all sciences engaged with cultural phenomena, the static concept of culture has been replaced by a dynamic concept. Cultures are not immutable, and are not fixed entities. Every culture is the result of a complex historical process with countless contacts and exchanges among cultures. No culture exists in isolation from others, and borders between cultures cannot be determined exactly. What can be regarded as 'culture' depends on the criteria that we apply to define 'culture,' from the cultural nation to local cultures, to even smaller units.

However we define culture, we can never leave the cultural circle that we belong to. We cannot leave our own culture, but the circle that we do belong to can change. We can widen our horizon, we can adopt elements from other cultures, we can 'appropriate' them. Through the process of appropriation they become part of our own culture. Admittedly, this process of 'appropriation' has been object of severe criticism. Appropriation could be mere incorporation and assimilation. In this case, the foreign cultural elements would be simply included and

classified according to one's own categories. On the other hand, in the best case, the widening of the horizon will bring to bear all cultural traditions involved in the process. In reality, however, we do not find either of these ideal-typical forms of intercultural interaction.

Various metaphors have been used to characterise the encounter of cultures. One of the best known is that of the 'fusion of horizons' – a metaphor usually rejected by those doing intercultural philosophy. Gadamer has become a favourite target of all defenders of 'difference' who interpret the 'fusion of horizons' as a form of usurpation. There is always the danger that, with the widening of the horizon, the categories of one's own culture transform the reality of other cultures. The history of the humanities illustrates this well. Gadamer, however, had repeatedly underlined the necessity of learning from other cultures. In a conversation with Gerardo Marotta, he expressed his hope that, from a real encounter of cultures, something new could emerge.<sup>6</sup>

The fusion of horizons is a metaphor that, like every metaphor, has its limits. It needs to be interpreted. Authors like Mall have seen its limitations. On his view

The science of hermeneutics as an art of understanding and interpretation is undergoing a fundamental change in the global context of interculturality today and experiencing an unprecedented widening of horizons that does not necessarily go hand in hand with a real fusion of horizons (Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung*). This means that every hermeneutics has its own culturally sedimented roots and cannot unconditionally claim universal acceptance. Any dialogue – most importantly, of course, any intercultural one – has to begin from this insight.<sup>7</sup>

Mall himself mentions that Gadamer was interested in intercultural dialog, but he complains that Gadamer did not really practice this dialog and that he remained fixed, fundamentally, to a Eurocentric concept of philosophy. There is no doubt that Gadamer's philosophy was very intimately related with Greek thought from the very beginning. On the other hand, we should not undervalue Gadamer's attempts to open his own thinking to other traditions.<sup>8</sup> At any rate, what has been presented until now as 'analogical' or 'intercultural hermeneutics' does not represent a revolutionary progress in comparison to classical hermeneutics, at least as regards its epistemological aspect.

The historical consciousness knows that it is historically determined. Being historically affected, this consciousness is unable to reach complete historical knowledge. Its horizon is the circle that

encompasses everything that can be perceived from a certain point of view. But its horizon is changing and, with it, consciousness. As Philippe Eberhard (2004) has demonstrated, the German expression *Horizontverschmelzung* is ambiguous. It contains contemporaneously one horizon and many horizons. “The ambiguity of Gadamer’s account is not a weakness but a way of saying that there is one and many horizon(s) at the same time.”<sup>9</sup> In the process of understanding, we come to a common context of understanding, to a partly shared horizon. We start from many horizons and, in this sense, it is justified to speak of a (partial) fusion of horizons. Intercultural philosophy uses the image of ‘overlappings.’ The common context is not a unique horizon, for the understanding subjects continue to change their own horizons. “Horizons are many, and they interact with each other. This interaction implies motion and change. Horizons are historical and evolve: all of them, including the horizons of the past move with us as we move into and within them.”<sup>10</sup>

We do not wish to defend the metaphor of the fusion of horizons at all costs; there are many unresolved problems in Gadamer’s philosophy. But it cannot be denied that his theory contains various elements that are fundamental for intercultural philosophy. Even other philosophers with apparent Eurocentric attitudes have developed categories that are essential for the analysis of intercultural processes. Hegel, for example, has been criticised vehemently by many authors, but this criticism often remains superficial. It is clear that some aspects of Hegel’s philosophy are indefensible. Certainly we cannot follow Hegel in his metaphysics of the history of religion, to mention just one issue, but his conceptual framework is very useful for the development of a pluralistic philosophy.<sup>11</sup> In the encounter with other traditions, we can either highlight the common context of thinking or we can exalt the differences. In any case, Hegel’s *Logic* offers us a sophisticated set of conceptual tools to analyse the process of understanding/misunderstanding. Hegel is just the summit of a tradition of dialectical thinking that points out the fact that all concepts reveal their dialectical nature. What is dividing us from other traditions is connecting us to them. To know the border, we must be already beyond the border. The process of mutual understanding is gradual; there is no absolute misunderstanding but, on the other hand, there will always remain cultural differences. That means that the need for cultural translation will never disappear.

An epistemology of intercultural philosophy starts from the complex process of a real widening of the horizon, in which new categories are adopted and one’s own position changes continuously. I have described this epistemological model elsewhere as dialectical

universalism, in which the cultural relativism and the abstract universalism are overcome as mistaken alternatives.<sup>12</sup>

Similar concepts have been developed by some of the leading figures in intercultural philosophy. Claudia Bickmann starts from the idea of a *philosophia perennis* that, however, is not possessed by any one school or tradition alone. There are different accesses to the universal, and different cultures have different approaches to it. We must recognise these differences. On the other hand, we cannot suspend the universal. The desire to create a counterbalance to unilateral universalist philosophies has led to the creation of another way of unilateral philosophical thinking, the philosophy of difference. Intercultural philosophy has arisen in the general stream of the philosophy of difference. The particularities of the different philosophical traditions have to be defended. But now the moment has come, Bickmann contends, to correct the excesses of the philosophy of difference. We should retain the common elements within the various particular cultural manifestations. Overlappings among cultures permit communication without cancelling the differences. The fiction of a complete commensurability of cultures as well as the opposite thesis of the complete incommensurability must be rejected. Bickmann has formulated new standards for intercultural philosophy, adopted by the Society of Intercultural Philosophy, that document the distance from early writings on intercultural philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

It is no accident that intercultural philosophy developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. It is part of the great shift from 'politics and economy' towards 'culture' characterised as cultural turn(s): from the British Cultural Studies to postmodern and post-structural criticism, from the *Kulturwissenschaft* in Germany to Postcolonial Studies and other 'cultural turns' in the American humanities.<sup>14</sup>

An interesting analogy to this development in philosophy can be found in German Studies that, since the 1970s, has generated a new branch dedicated to intercultural studies.<sup>15</sup> This new sector of German Studies has as its central topic the perspectives from which other cultures perceive German-speaking countries. The leading review, the *Jahrbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, founded in 1975, has since 1995 the English subtitle *Intercultural German Studies*. Several authors of intercultural philosophy have repeatedly underlined that intercultural philosophy does not form a new discipline but rather a new orientation. This is different in German Studies, but nonetheless many of the motives to go in new ways are quite similar in both fields of research. Intercultural German Studies intends to take seriously the hermeneutic plurality of the interests in the cultures of German-speaking countries, considering the multiplicity of perspectives as a source for a better



understanding<sup>16</sup>; intercultural philosophy does so in its field as well. Intercultural German Studies starts with the view that the work of scholars all over the world is influenced by their own cultural ‘identity.’ Two positions should be rejected in this context: on the one hand, an ingenuous universalism which fails to recognise its own “cultural egocentrism,”<sup>17</sup> and, on the other hand, a culturalism that absolutises the importance of the cultural influence. Recognising the pluralism of cultural approaches, interests, and methods, intercultural German Studies insists on certain scientific principles and wants to distinguish itself from postmodern pluralism with its “cult of ethnicity.”<sup>18</sup>

Intercultural German Studies is an example of the various attempts to cross over the boundaries of the traditional branches of learning and to create or uncover spaces of new interdisciplinary perspectives: Cultural Sociology, Cultural Geography, *Historische Soziologie*, literary criticism revised with the categories of cultural anthropology, and so forth. This dissolution of boundaries can be fruitful and lead to new approaches of research, but it involves also the risk of dilettantism. New interdisciplinary perspectives experiment with an almost unlimited variety of new combinations of disciplines, creating a situation in which it becomes increasingly more difficult to keep an overview. The desire to establish some orientation in this confusion explains, in part, the vice to highlight certain trends in the scientific and cultural production as ‘turns.’

In Germany, the turn towards ‘culture’ and interdisciplinary research has brought about a shift from the traditional *Geisteswissenschaften* to the *Kulturwissenschaften*, and the formation of a new discipline called *Kulturwissenschaft* which is based in part on German traditions and in part on developments internationally: Cultural Studies, New Historicism, Cultural Poetics, Visual Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Cultural Analysis, and so on.<sup>19</sup> It is evident that even philosophy cannot escape this trend.

Intercultural German Studies defines itself as *Kulturwissenschaft*, and more precisely as *Fremdkulturwissenschaft*, as intercultural studies with the “characteristics of a comparative cultural anthropology.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it has continuous recourse to the main categories and discourses of cultural anthropology, discussing basic concepts like ‘interculturality’, ‘hybridity’, and ‘ethnicity.’ The designated target of intercultural German Studies is to overcome national boundaries. Literary texts are located between cultures as objects of intercultural communication research. The ‘anthropological turn’ in literary studies coincides with the ‘literary turn’ in anthropology and the literary critiques of ethnography, known as the ‘Writing Culture’ debate. Doris Bachmann-Medick has argued for a complete revision of literary and cultural studies within the horizon of the recent developments in cultural

anthropology.<sup>21</sup> The anthropological reorientation of literary studies should stimulate, above all, theoretical and methodological reflection on the encounters of cultures and literatures. Points of reference should be: the concept of culture as ‘text’ and as ‘performance’ (cultural anthropology), literature as cultural text that is connected with other kinds of texts and with other discourses (New Historicism), the new sensibility for the epistemological and political dimension of cultural representation (Writing Culture), the dynamic concept of culture, the inequalities in intercultural dialogue (Postcolonial Studies), the reflection on literary texts in the context of global migrations, and the critical review and extension of the literary canon in light of the challenges of non-Western literature. The self-interpretation of cultures is possible by means of ‘texts’ which can be literature, film, theatre, rituals, or a social action like the Balinese cockfight (which has come to be known from its description in the work of Clifford Geertz, the major representative of symbolic and interpretive anthropology). These ‘texts’ are forms of cultural representation. Analogously, literary studies have discovered the possibility to find in literary texts ‘thick descriptions’ that reveal social and cultural realities. Seen from this perspective, there is no universal truth to discover in literature, just local knowledge. The New Historicism has attempted to demonstrate how to analyse literary texts as cultural texts that are connected with other forms of representation.

Philosophy has been as fundamental as anthropology in the cultural turn. Anthropology and philosophy, for their part staying in complex relations with other disciplines, have dragged one another into the vortex of postmodernism. The influence was mutual, but with changing dominance. One line leads from hermeneutics to interpretive anthropology and, from there, to intercultural philosophy.

Clifford Geertz has commented on the recent developments in anthropology by taking a strong potshot at ‘cultural studies.’ Anthropology “now finds various cooked-up and johnny-come-lately disciplines, semidisciplines, and marching societies (gender studies, science studies, queer studies, media studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, loosely grouped, the final insult, as ‘cultural studies’), crowding into the space it has so painstakingly, and so bravely, cleared and weeded and begun to work.”<sup>22</sup> Interdisciplinary research is important, but interdisciplinarity presupposes disciplinarity.

Like literary studies, intercultural philosophy has overcome the culturalist excesses. The postmodern critique of Western ‘narratives’ continue to be important in de-constructing the great hegemonic discourses, but the insufficiency of a mere de-construction has become obvious and a new trend can be observed towards a more equilibrated position. To be conscious of the culturality of philosophy without abandoning the claim to universality has often been mentioned by

Wimmer as a general objective. Intercultural philosophy has to develop procedures that permit one to avoid abstract universalism as well as relativistic particularism.<sup>23</sup> Oliver Kozlarek<sup>24</sup> formulates the narrative appropriation of universal values and/or norms as the task of global modernity, with reference to the reconceptualisation of modernity as global modernity by Arif Dirlik.<sup>25</sup> In advancing from the concepts of postmodern realities to the concept of global modernity, we could regain knowledge about the dialectical nature of modernity that should never have been undervalued. Modernity is capable to think itself and its contrary, and it already has the categories to comprehend the contradictions of our contemporary world. On the other hand, we cannot deny that modernity needed the postmodern therapy. It had to be deconstructed in order to be able to reconstruct itself, and new contradictions will lead to new de-constructions and reconstructions. This is the sense of its dialectical structure.

Like anthropology, intercultural philosophy must be aware of the danger of falling victim to its own ideas. Today's world has forced cultural anthropology to rethink its fundamental categories. Concepts like 'culture,' 'tribe,' or 'ethnic group,' that have determined the discourse in anthropology for some time, cannot be used any longer to describe the structure of the globalised world. The image of the world as subdivided into 'cultures' has been replaced by other representations like that of a 'global ecumene'<sup>26</sup> with complex interactions and cultural exchanges.<sup>27</sup> This new conceptualisation might be regarded as yet another excess, set in motion by the necessity of dissolving constructions of cultural entities that do not exist in reality. Intercultural philosophy, however, should not be based on concepts that already have proved their inefficacy in other disciplines.

The danger of new hypostatisations is evident in the case of the confrontation of Western authors with the various philosophical and religious traditions of India. Comparative philosophy and intercultural philosophy here have to face enormous difficulties. The philosophical and religious panorama of India, that has been a jungle of traditions with multiple mutual influences and interdependences from ancient times, experienced fundamental transformations through the encounter with Western traditions during the colonial period, a fact which makes it extremely difficult to distinguish 'genuine' Indian traditions from hybrid developments. Just for this reason, serious work cannot be done in this field without experts of Indian studies. Indologists all over the world have become conscious of the errors made by their discipline in the past and of the necessity to make continuous efforts to keep in mind the relevance of the cultural context of their own scientific work.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Franz Martin Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie: eine Einführung* (Wien: WUV, 2004), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> <http://prof.polylog.org/obj-en.htm> [Accessed 11 November 2012]

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Cesana, "Kulturalität und interkulturelle Philosophie," in *Orthafte Ortlosigkeit: eine interkulturelle Orientierung; Festschrift für Ram Adhar Mall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hamid Reza Yousefi, Ina Braun, and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2007), pp. 51-64, at p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie*, pp. 53-62; Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture: global mélange*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Cesana, "Kulturalität und interkulturelle Philosophie," p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, "Il 'luogo' scientifico della germanistica interculturale," in *Annali-Sez. Germanica* (Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"), N.S. XIV (2004): 1-2, 249-270, at p. 265.

<sup>7</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, "India and Intercultural Aesthetics," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ed. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (Dordrecht-London: Springer, 2010), pp. 161-166, at p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Grondin, "Zu welcher Kultur gehört man eigentlich? Bemerkungen zur Kultur der Interkulturalität," in *Orthafte Ortlosigkeit: eine interkulturelle Orientierung; Festschrift für Ram Adhar Mall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hamid Reza Yousefi, Ina Braun, and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2007), pp. 139-148.

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics: a basic interpretation with some theological implications* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Herta Nagl-Docekal, Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, Ludwig Nagl, *Einleitung: Viele Religionen, eine Vernunft*, in *Viele Religionen – eine Vernunft? Ein Disput zu Hegel*, ed. Herta Nagl-Docekal, Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, and Ludwig Nagl (Wien/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 9-32, at p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, "Universalität der Vernunft, Pluralität der Religionen: Indien und Europa," in *Viele Religionen – eine Vernunft? Ein Disput zu Hegel*, ed. Herta Nagl-Docekal, Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, and Ludwig Nagl (Wien/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 265-280, at p. 280.

<sup>13</sup> Claudia Bickmann, "Philosophieren zwischen der Universalität des begrifflich Allgemeinen und der unverrechenbaren Besonderheit des Individuellen," in *Orthafte Ortlosigkeit: eine interkulturelle Orientierung; Festschrift für Ram Adhar Mall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hamid Reza Yousefi, Ina Braun, and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2007), pp. 103-119; See Bickmann at [http://www.int-gip.de/englisch/informationen\\_englisch.html](http://www.int-gip.de/englisch/informationen_englisch.html) [Accessed 11 November 2012]

<sup>14</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern. 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998); Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006); Hartmut Böhme, "Vom 'turn' zum 'vertigo'. Wohin drehen

sich die Kulturwissenschaften?“ (Review of: Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, in *JLTONline* (19.05.2008), <http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/reviews/article/view/26/177> [Accessed 11 November 2012].

<sup>15</sup> Alois Wierlacher, *Architektur interkultureller Germanistik* (München: Iudicium, 2001); Alois Wierlacher and Andrea Bogner (eds), *Handbuch interkulturelle Germanistik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003); Kaltenbacher, *Il 'luogo' scientifico della germanistica intercultural*.

<sup>16</sup> Alois Wierlacher, *Das Fremde und das Eigene: Prolegomena zu einer interkulturellen Germanistik* (München: Iudicium, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Wierlacher, *Architektur interkultureller Germanistik*, p. 262.

<sup>18</sup> Wierlacher, *Architektur interkultureller Germanistik*, p. 266.

<sup>19</sup> Hartmut Böhme, “Zur Gegenstandsfrage der Germanistik und Kulturwissenschaft,” in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, XLII (1998): 476-485, and Hartmut Böhme, “Kulturwissenschaft,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. II, (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 356-359; and Böhme, “Vom ‘turn’ zum ‘vertigo’.”

<sup>20</sup> Wierlacher, *Architektur interkultureller Germanistik*, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Kulturanthropologische Horizonte interkultureller Literaturwissenschaft,” in *Handbuch interkulturelle Germanistik*, ed. Alois Wierlacher and Andrea Bogner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 439-448.

<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. x.

<sup>23</sup> Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie*, pp. 63, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Oliver Kozlarek, “Narrative Aneignung des Universalen als Aufgabe der globalen Moderne,” in *polylog. Forum für interkulturelle Philosophie*, 6 (2005), <http://them.polylog.org/6/ako-de.htm> [Accessed 11 November 2012].

<sup>25</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism*, in *European Journal of Social Theory*, 6 (2003), pp. 275-292.

<sup>26</sup> See U. Hannerz, “Cultural Diversity in the Global Ecumene,” in P. Dasgupta, K.-G. Maler and A. Vercelli (eds), *The Economics of Transnational Commons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Ugo Fabietti, *Antropologia culturale: l'esperienza e l'interpretazione* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 261-268.



## CHAPTER III

# INTERCULTURALITY: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS

*EDWIN GEORGE*

The world is changing. It has always. The beginning of civilization was marked by human beings making stone and wooden tools. To shift from hunting, to an agrarian way of life, and then to mechanization, took more than fifteen centuries. But in the twenty-first century, change means rapid transformation. It is so rapid that, by the time the phenomenon of change is clarified, it has become outdated. The shift from mechanization to digitalization, to virtualization and to the automation of all our activities has taken just a few decades. Thomas Friedman, three times winner of the Pulitzer Prize, calls this new phase of rapid transformation “Globalisation 3.0.”<sup>1</sup> This has set in motion transformations in hierarchies, challenging them to move “from top-down structures into more horizontal and collaborative ones.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, he introduced the fascinating notion that ‘the world has gone from round to flat.’ In other words, there is no one point of reference anymore. There is no one super power. Every one and each country takes centre stage in this flat world. There are many centres. Universalism gives way to transversalism. One can learn much from each other, across boundaries. This is a case in point for the category of Interculturality. From this standpoint, deliberations on Interculturality are enhanced and made interesting.

The terms ‘Interculturality’ and ‘intercultural philosophy’ are familiar. These terms have already been in use for the past three decades or so. It may be that when they are taken for analysis and clarification, one notices an air of unfamiliarity trudging along. These terms first appeared in German publications in early 1990s. ‘Interculturality’ as a term or subject was not created first in philosophy but in disciplines such as education, geography, and communications theory.<sup>3</sup> Although intercultural philosophy as a “movement”<sup>4</sup> has gained momentum in the West, in India apart from a few initiatives, the responses remain very scattered and thin.<sup>5</sup> It may be worthwhile to find out the causes for the lack of dynamic response in this land of multi-cultures, but this paper does not have that as its aim. Instead, in this paper, we shall present a few clarifications with regard to the terms of our discussion in comparison with similar or parallel terms that prevail. Then, we shall analyze the perspectives, methodology, and foundations of intercultural

philosophy. Before concluding, we shall briefly consider some possible projects that might be carried out by an intercultural mode of philosophizing.

### WHAT IS INTERCULTURALITY?

Interculturality denotes a pluralistic mind-set. It is a kind of norm such as 'believe and let believe', 'live and let live', 'read and let read,' and so on. It is an attitude or conviction that no one culture can claim an absolute priority or a status as *the* culture of the whole of humanity. Here, we take for granted the term "culture" itself, which takes on quite varied meanings based on different contexts.<sup>6</sup> The prefix 'inter' may be used as an equivalent (but quite inadequately so) of other prefixes such as 'intra' and 'cross,' and may mean 'trans' as well. But, for the sake of clarity of usage here, the prefix 'inter' is not used in the sense of comparison, or in the sense of the prefix 'trans.' 'Inter' points to the space or 'holy void' which can be experienced in the intersection of cultures. This space is needed. This void is meaningful in the interplay. The term 'intercultural' itself is ably substituted by terms such as 'cross-cultural,' 'intracultural,' 'multicultural,' and the post-colonial term 'hybridity.' But, we prefer and opt for 'interculturality.'

For Ram Adhar Mall, interculturality is a "mental and moral category"; it is not just an abstraction or theorization or intellectual and aesthetic category.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to explain by stating that it cannot be considered as a trendy expression but is a "sensitive multi-faceted phenomenon."<sup>8</sup> In this sense, we can speak meaningfully of interculturality only in the context of pluralism.<sup>9</sup> It would be more rewarding to see intercultural as "existential and experiential one."<sup>10</sup> Interculturality belies the aspect of belongingness as its base. This belongingness leads people to relate and interact. This paves the way for interrelatedness as its characteristic mark.<sup>11</sup> Interculturality is a growing phenomenon that is open, tolerant, inclusive, "pluripolar"<sup>12</sup> or multi-centered, and advocates heterogeneity and polylog.<sup>13</sup>

### INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

#### *Philosophically...*

For Raimon Panikkar, philosophy is "that human activity which asks questions about the very foundations of human life under the heavens and on earth."<sup>14</sup> Reflecting on intercultural philosophy, he points out that "Philosophy is but the conscious and critical accompaniment of Man's journeying towards his destiny."<sup>15</sup> But, in this life's journey, it cannot be reduced to a merely religious connotation. It is more than that. In an



intercultural phenomenon, no one language, culture, or thought-process is sufficient enough for philosophizing. Philosophy was once considered as “Queen of all Sciences,” a phrase from days of yore that indicates a universal and hegemonic attitude. Philosophy has lost its aura of invincibility now, but it is still loud enough to speak of its refined nature regarding all that is human, especially concerning the human mind and culture.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, intercultural philosophy can be discussed as part of all philosophical deliberations.

By nature, philosophy is considered to deal with abstract elements or ideas. It has no place for practical devices in this virtual postmodern world. But philosophy is practical in its own way, affecting human ways of thinking, understanding the “other” and the external world and, thus, bringing about transformation in human actions and interactions with the cosmos. This impact cannot be immediate. Thinking may not be considered as practical in today’s digitalized virtual way of life. But, bringing about changes in thinking that, in turn, affects human subjects themselves, changes the way of being-in-the-world and the relationship between Human, World, and the “Other.” Similarly, in the case of interculturality, reflection will reveal how each and every philosophy is culturally based. This needs to be neutralized to a certain extent in understanding the other in order to be truly intercultural.<sup>17</sup>

Franz Martin Wimmer presents the concept of philosophy in two ways. First of all, it is a thematic study consisting of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. This is a broader understanding of philosophy, which supports the theory that there are different origins<sup>18</sup> and ways of philosophizing based on various cultures. Secondly, it is based on certain forms of thinking and argumentation. This is a narrow understanding of philosophy. This theory holds that all that is philosophical is rooted in Greek and European traditions and history. The former view has intercultural aspects very much in place, and the latter view reflects ‘westernization’ or ‘occidentation.’ The latter view has no future, as it does not promote the globalizing and cross-cultural aspects of philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Thus, we see that culture and philosophy are intricately related. Hence, it is imperative to analyze and understand what is meant by “intercultural philosophy.”

### *Historical Developments*

Prefixing ‘intercultural’ to philosophy is redundant or tautologous. Every philosophy is ‘intercultural’ in its nature.<sup>20</sup> It should be so. There is no philosophy that is not intercultural – and this fact needs to be recognised now. There have been many attempts at both speculating about and describing the characteristics of intercultural philosophy. But it is worth the effort to know the historical developments of this field.

As mentioned earlier, the term ‘intercultural’ and its function as a method or approach were already present in other fields long before its appearance in philosophy proper. In fact, in the German-speaking world, “intercultural German studies” had long been taking place.<sup>21</sup> In 1992, the “Society of Intercultural Philosophy” (SIP) was founded by Professor Ram Adhar Mall in Cologne, Germany. He is an Indian by birth, living in Germany, and teaching at the University of Munich.<sup>22</sup> Along with him, three other major thinkers, Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Raimon Panikkar, and Franz M. Wimmer, joined hands in articulating this new orientation in philosophizing. This they did by publishing four varied articles, all dealing with what ought to be understood by “intercultural philosophy.”<sup>23</sup> The SIP has a global membership in the hundreds, organizes conferences, and is publishing a series of books. The first International Conference on Intercultural Philosophy organized by SIP took place in 1993 at Bonn, Germany. In cooperation with SIP, there have been conferences held in Mexico City (Mexico), Mysore (India), Ankara (Turkey), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), and Kyoto (Japan). Beginning in 1994 there have been similar initiatives and activities, such as workshops and academic projects taking place in Vienna (Austria) under the banner of the “Vienna Society of Intercultural Philosophy” (WiGiP).<sup>24</sup> In Chennai (India), there is a scholarly bi-annual Journal on Intercultural Philosophy, *Satya Nilayam Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy*.

#### *Intercultural Philosophy Is Not...*

It is best to see what intercultural philosophy is not, so as to arrive at and understand better what intercultural philosophy is. (This is not a ‘negative’ strategy, but a method of clarity.)

First of all, intercultural philosophy is not, a trendy expression.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, intercultural philosophy is not a new philosophical discipline or subject like Eco-sophy or Global Ethics.

Thirdly, intercultural philosophy cannot be labeled or branded off into a system or category. Mall explains this as it is “not a matter of abstraction or aesthetitization...or not even cultural romanticism or exoticism.”<sup>26</sup>

Fourthly, intercultural philosophy does not advocate or uphold any particular culture or system of philosophy to the exclusion or rejection of any ‘other.’ Intercultural philosophy rejects any claim by a culture of its ‘purity in totality’ as simply a myth or a fiction. Similarly, the absolutistic and exclusive claim of any philosophical tradition as being in sole possession of the one philosophical truth is rejected outright.<sup>27</sup>

Fifthly, intercultural philosophy is not the same as ‘comparative philosophy.’ Intercultural philosophy is more than merely comparative in nature.<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, intercultural philosophy is not ‘trans-cultural philosophy,’ as far as this term is meant to refer to a fixed pivotal point, an entity exterior to or above the manifold philosophical traditions. That is one of the reasons why we prefer the prefix “inter” to the prefix “trans.” Moreover, the prefix “trans” is already semantically overloaded and has been frequently exploited in philosophy and theology. The prefix “inter” points to an interstitial space that can be observed and experienced, and that is analogically extended almost in the sense of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, Mall clarifies that the adjective ‘intercultural’ here is not a mere appendage to philosophy. The stress on ‘intercultural’ adds much more than this.

Sixthly, intercultural philosophy is not a branch of postmodernity, even if it endorses and supports it.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Intercultural Philosophy Is...*

First of all, intercultural philosophy is a new orientation in and of philosophy which is inclusive of all its traditions.

Second, intercultural philosophy is a philosophical attitude or conviction that no philosophy of any culture or nation can legitimately maintain an absolute claim to possessing the whole truth or proclaim itself as the philosophy of the whole of humanity.<sup>31</sup> The interculturality of philosophy resides in all cultures but transcends every one of them. The opinion that is built around interculturality – that it deconstructs the real meaning and applicability of concepts, such as truth, culture, religion, philosophy and so on – is certainly a mistake. What it deconstructs is simply the absolutistic, monolithic, and exclusive claims of the use of these terms.<sup>32</sup> That this *philosophia perennis* is not the exclusive possession of any one culture is an intercultural conviction that respects plurality, diversity, and difference of values, and prevents uniformity.<sup>33</sup>

Third, intercultural philosophy stands for emancipation from all types of centrisms (whether European or non-European such as Chinese or Indian). More explicitly, Mall points out that it is “emancipation from the narrow Eurocentric outlook.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, it allows for a differentiating treatment of philosophical traditions. It enables one to view critically and sympathetically one philosophical tradition from the point of view of another. At the same time, it does not mean that there cannot be any centre at all. There cannot be only one centre, but there can be many centres.

Fourth, intercultural philosophy allows for a change of perspective which helps one to cultivate the virtue of tolerance.

Fifth, intercultural philosophy is a “new movement” in philosophy which affirms that, though philosophy is by its nature universal and ideal, yet it has an element of particularity and, hence, cultural. In other words, every philosophy is culturally founded.<sup>35</sup>

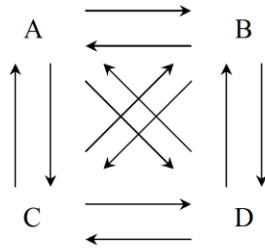
Sixth, according to Raul Fonet-Betancourt, the task of intercultural philosophy is “to reflect on the culturality or religiosity of every kind of thinking on every level, to search for universally valid arguments and concepts; and to do justice to the respective regional philosophic traditions.”<sup>36</sup>

Seventh, intercultural philosophy indicates a conflict combined with a demand. The conflict is between the arrogant and monopolizing dominance of “European philosophy” on the one hand, and the “non-European” philosophy which has long been sidelined, on the other. Consequently, the demand or claim implies that non-European philosophies want to be free of the shackles of Euro-centrism, and demand equal rights in contributing their own insights in solving the problems of the world.<sup>37</sup> This also calls for a task of rewriting the history of philosophy from an intercultural perspective (i.e., a new historiography).

Eighth, intercultural philosophy aims at genuine philosophical truths that are found within different philosophical traditions, and maintains that the difference may itself be the freedom that must be reciprocally recognized.<sup>38</sup> Thereby intercultural philosophy forestalls the tendency of many philosophies, cultures, religions, and political outlooks to spread globally.

Ninth, intercultural philosophy advocates unity without uniformity. The transcultural nature of the formal, technological, and scientific conceptual apparatus should not be mistaken for the spirit of interculturality.<sup>39</sup>

Tenthly, intercultural philosophy does not advocate for any one mother tongue. “It is polylingual.”<sup>40</sup> It implies that intercultural orientations must be aware of the many and varied cultures of human beings. One way of fostering an understanding between cultures is “to create a polylogue of traditions.”<sup>41</sup> What is advocated here is “polylogues” rather than “dialogues.” This indicates the fact that it is ‘many’ (poly) and not just ‘two’ involved. The “dia” in dialogue means ‘through’/ ‘in between,’ and does not imply the number ‘two.’ The “polylogue” is a procedure in the intercultural program of history of philosophy and systematic philosophy. This is an imperative now. This polylogue is a model of complete bilateral influence, and Wimmer gives the following figurative representation<sup>42</sup> of it:



*Hypotheses and Perspectives*

As a new orientation in philosophy, interculturality functions as a construct. It functions at the worldwide level with ease, across scientific and socioeconomic interests. The interculturality of philosophy needs to establish itself not in global or universal interests but in different particular cultures. In this regard, there are four controversial propositions or hypotheses which are prominent in the discussion of intercultural philosophy. These four need to be examined and addressed in order to see what is required for intercultural philosophy and what their consequences are for philosophy as a whole. These propositions<sup>43</sup> are:

1. The historiography of cultures and philosophies are usually Euro-centric.
2. Every proposition in philosophy with its claim for universal validity is culturally bound.
3. The history of philosophy should broaden its horizon by including new sources, traditions, and texts.
4. It is necessary to criticize the presumption and claim of the superiority of occidental philosophical traditions.

For Wimmer, clarification of and argumentation for these points is essential to define the subject matter of intercultural philosophy. In other words, interculturality-oriented philosophy “will have to develop a concept of philosophy both materially and formally defined.”<sup>44</sup>

Intercultural philosophy approves of the notion of ‘overlapping centres,’ since they allow effective communication and enable each centre to retain its individual and varying cultural character. When this is grasped, the comparison between postmodernism and intercultural philosophy loses its ground. Uniquely, intercultural philosophy is said by Mall to have the following four perspectives<sup>45</sup>:

1. *Philosophical*: In this perspective, no one system of philosophy can claim that it alone is universal. It is worth emphasizing that the

origins of philosophy lie not in one culture but in three or more. It is wrong to hold that philosophy has a preference for any language, tradition, or culture.

2. *Theological*: From this perspective, interculturality means interreligiosity. Thus, no one religion can claim or proclaim the full possession of religiosity or its truths.

3. *Political*: Under this view, interculturality upholds a pluralistic democratic attitude. Political wisdom cannot be the possession of one party or group or ideology. If such exclusivistic claims are made in the political arena, then it leads to dangerous fundamentalism.

4. *Pedagogical*: This perspective is the most important one, as it is responsible for implementing the spirit of interculturality in all its aspects in all fields.

#### *Method and Methodology*

One of the most popular magazines in India, *Indian Currents*, has as its motto or caption: "Voice of the Voiceless." Whatever be the reason behind such a vibrant motto, the implications of such a slogan are significant. Taken in an intercultural sense, this motto can mean promoting a variety of views and cultures, especially the unheard and suppressed ones. But in academic circles, discussions on interculturality often focus on the theme, content, and new ideas, forgetting the ways or means of such great discussions. In other words, content gets a better hearing than the methods employed. Hence, intercultural philosophy needs to work out a new method and methodology.<sup>46</sup>

In proposing to address this issue, Wimmer comments: "Methods are determined by a task and by the possible ways to it." He goes on to add, the task being philosophy, the material and formal 'subjects' – note the use of term 'subject,' not 'object' – need to be taken care of. He is of the opinion that there seems to be no adequate method as such in doing intercultural philosophy, and thus working out "new and consensual methods" is a task in itself.<sup>47</sup> However, Mall seems to advocate a "nonreductive, open, creative and tolerant hermeneutics."<sup>48</sup> He wants to avoid dogmatizing hermeneutic circles, and is cautious of a mere hermeneutic of reciprocity (which is employed in comparative studies). Mall opines that intercultural philosophy has the following methodological procedure<sup>49</sup>: Intercultural philosophy

- does not give privileged place for any philosophy, culture, language, or religion;
- rejects the hierarchical gradation of cultures and philosophies;
- takes cultural plurality as a value;
- situates itself beyond any sort of centrism;

- rejects any hermeneutic of identity (in order to uphold tolerance)

In this regard, both Wimmer and Mall strive hard to work out a strong method and methodology for intercultural philosophy. Both have been careful not to fall into the trap of occidental way of argumentation. Both have understood the cultural overlappings, and argue for intercultural overlappings. Both suggest a change of attitude in the way of teaching, deliberating, doing research, and conducting seminars in the field of philosophy. In fact, both of them have called for a new historiography of philosophy.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Hermeneutics for Interculturality*

Though a Western concept, hermeneutics has long been in practice in Eastern traditions of philosophy. As a science of interpretation and understanding, hermeneutics has changed so as to progress tremendously. In its intercultural aspects, hermeneutics cannot claim universal acceptance. Thus, as an introduction to a proper methodology of doing intercultural philosophy, Mall brings in a new ‘analogous hermeneutics.’<sup>51</sup>

‘Analogy’ was a key feature in scholastic philosophy in the Western tradition. In Indian philosophy, the Nyaya and Vedantic traditions have utilized it to the most. In the Western tradition, analogy has been used to bridge two concepts: faith or spiritual thought, and reason or philosophy. Mall spells out his use of this term clearly by denoting it as a “valid cause for the cognition of similarity,” used to relate things and beings of the same species.<sup>52</sup> “Analogy is defined here as a likeness of relation among unlike things.”<sup>53</sup> So, in the understanding of interculturality-oriented philosophy, “analogy stands for, first, a consciousness of non-identity; second, a consciousness of difference; third, a consciousness of not total difference; and fourth, a consciousness of not total identity.”<sup>54</sup> Analogous hermeneutics is a “reflective–meditative attitude” on the different subjects involved, and it is careful not to yield to reduction in any form. It avoids commitment to prejudices (see Gadamer)<sup>55</sup> and traditions. It avoids the two extremes of total identity and radical difference. Finally, “Intercultural philosophy favors an analogous hermeneutics of overlapping structures beyond two fictions of total identity (commensurability) and radical difference (incommensurability).”<sup>56</sup>

#### *Foundational Aspects*

Interculturality is taking place more and more rapidly in many fields, especially after globalization. Though in the fields of science,

commerce, and the arts it is easily done and manifested, the reasons behind all these is not merely understanding and mutual enrichment. Politics and economics play a pivotal role here. We need no in-depth analysis in this regard. But, on the contrary, interculturality in the fields of the humanities needs to be grounded. In philosophy especially, the intercultural aspects must have solid philosophical foundations. Hence, the attempt here is to enumerate a few conceptual elements as a basis for situating intercultural philosophy.

*One and Many or Pluralism.* The meaning of Being/being has been a quest from the time of the pre-Socratics in Western philosophy. But the question of 'Being and the beings' is the same as the question of 'the One and the Many.'<sup>57</sup> The problem or question of interculturality can be ultimately reduced to the problem of the One and the many, or Being and the beings. In other words, interculturality cannot be understood unless one takes cognizance of pluralism. Any hermeneutics of intercultural thought should be preceded by a hermeneutics of pluralism. This will enable the possibility of the appreciation of multicultural thought(s).

*Difference.* The interest for "difference" in the Western tradition of philosophy is particularly present in existentialism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism. It takes its cue from the concept of the "other." The "other" can include all beings and non-beings too. When it comes to denote the Absolute Being specifically, it is referred as the "Other." Since the "other" is outside of me, it is different from me. The "other's" existence and operation are observed, in an objective search. In the Western context, the "otherness" is perceived as an object to be analyzed and conquered.

But, in intercultural philosophy, the "other" is not an object to be studied. In the Asian context, to know something is to become it, to realize the "other."<sup>58</sup> The "other" is a subject to be related, to be listened to, to be learned from, and to be understood. The "other" is pre-given. The "other" extends to beings, Being, and every phenomenon or tradition.

*Interrelatedness.* The human in the world is defined as 'being-in-the-world.' Since this 'beingness' of the self is not apart from beings-in-the-world, humans can be considered as beings-with-the-other. Here again, for a human, the "other" is pre-given. Hence, the philosophical dimension of interculturality is interrelatedness or inter-subjectivity.<sup>59</sup>

*Dia-logue.* Seen from the cross-cultural and religious perspectives, 'dialogue' is an important factor that has evoked interest



and much deliberation. As mentioned earlier (see the section on “Intercultural Philosophy is...”, above), dialogue no longer means ‘between two.’ This understanding is narrow and outdated. Dialogue is taken in the sense of dia-logue, meaning seeing or happening through. If so, dialogue is not just between two but among many; it is understanding by taking the place of the “other.” From the intercultural perspective, this is a welcome insight. Moreover, this does not follow the principle of identity or difference. It does not follow the “either/or” kind of approach. Rather, it works by the “both/and” principle. It is inclusive and open to learn from the “other(s).”

*Humility Space.* After globalization, many international relationships have come to exist on the basis of competitiveness. There is no place for mistakes. There is no allowance for disproportionate undertakings. In an intercultural perspective, a space for humility is required. This is an attitude of listening based not just on difference but on mutuality. It is receiving, without competition. It is a disproportionate value, but ennobling. This is required in order to avoid exclusiveness, centrism, and hegemony.

## **INTERCULTURAL PROJECTS**

One of the recent concerns of Asian, and in particular Indian Christian philosophers, has been to formulate the content and methods of teaching philosophy in the Asian context.<sup>60</sup> This search is for making philosophy not only relevant, but much more effective. Similarly, intercultural philosophy is not just inculturating philosophy but making interculturality effective. This contextualization needs to include cultural elements to penetrate the content and the methods of “doing” philosophy.

In order that interculturality-oriented philosophy takes deep roots in India, we need to consciously make it a project to be effected, a sort of praxis-oriented philosophizing. A few possibilities such as the following could be introduced:

1. The starting point of philosophizing interculturality is to look at the untold suffering of the masses. The varied forms of suffering experienced need “to be made flesh.” Life situations, tragic occurrences, and natural calamities could be the actual seed bed to begin with. The element of suffering is universal, but the attitude of relating to it becomes culturally enrobed.

2. A curriculum of intercultural philosophy should have an openness to learn humbly and with interest about another culture than one’s own. In India, one way of enabling it to come alive could be

unearthing local thinkers who have contributed to the social, political, philosophical and cultural ethos, and examining them in the original language of their contributions. This could be extended to the global level. For example, the European could learn from African or Asian thinkers, and vice versa.

3. Keeping in mind the caste dichotomy and hegemony of Sanskrit, Vincent G. Furtado suggests “the project of developing subaltern philosophical traditions.” This would result in deculturalisation of higher castes and forge an intercultural dialogue among dalits and tribals.<sup>61</sup>

4. Another suggestion of Furtado to be pursued vigorously is the gender sensitive dimension of intercultural philosophy. He explicates this by indicating praxis-oriented activities, such as the critical analysis of the history of philosophy from a gender perspective, supporting the movement of the empowerment of women, rereading philosophical texts from feminine perspectives, and supporting women philosophers.<sup>62</sup>

5. Lastly, intercultural philosophy should not be an arm-chair endeavour. So, instead of restricting the role of philosophers to defining terms and engaging in the critical analysis of texts, intercultural aspects should be part of one’s way of life. Philosophers themselves should in no way be the cause of or a part of partisan, fundamentalistic and discriminatory thinking or processes. Mutuality, openness, willing to converse, and humility to learn could become characteristics of an interculturality-oriented philosopher.

## CONCLUSION

Raimon Panikkar, a great thinker and a contributor to dia-logical culture, opens his essay on interculturality as follows: “Intercultural philosophy situates itself in *terra nullius* (no man’s land), in a virgin place that no one has yet occupied; otherwise, it would no longer be intercultural but would belong to a determined culture. Interculturality is no one’s land, it is utopia, situated between two (or more) cultures.”<sup>63</sup> Though he puts it polemically thus, he indicates interculturality as a “promised land,” in the sense of a promising avenue. He concludes the discussion by expressing that, in a way, interculturality is pre-given. But, this sets the task of transmythicization and transformation. Interculturality is natural. “Interculturality continues to be a no man’s land that we all can enjoy, provided we do not seek to possess it.”<sup>64</sup> This is a challenge in all fields of involvement. Therefore, we can safely say, intercultural philosophy is imperative, a need of the hour.

As a conclusion, we would like to present some ideas from Fred Dallmayr, a noted philosopher, political scientist, and scholar of international relations, who is interested in bringing out aspects of

intercultural encounters. Taking this task on himself, he ventures into “crosscultural” (we can safely understand ‘intercultural’ here) analysis in his work, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*.<sup>65</sup> Dallmayr engages well-known thinkers such as Gadamer, Derrida, Radhakrishnan, Said, Halbfass, Panikkar, Daya Krishna<sup>66</sup>, and less known regional thinkers from around the globe such as Ashis Nandy, Thomas Pantham, T. Todorov, J. L. Mehta, K. Nishitani, M. Abe, I. M. Young, E. Laclau, C. Mouffe and a host of others. He adduces two reasons for his own turning towards interculturality: the political impact of globalization, and the internal self-questioning or self-decentering of European or Western thought.<sup>67</sup> As a beneficiary of cultural learning himself, he articulates that, “as an antidote to ‘one-world’ formulas, dialogue and cross-cultural encounter have acquired both intellectual and political urgency.”<sup>68</sup> This urgency must start with personal engagement and self-decentering of any universalistic or exclusivistic stance. To conclude with this note, it is fitting to quote Masao Abe’s poem.<sup>69</sup>

*We must place mankind within a new cosmology  
Which has extricated itself from anthropocentrism.  
Is not the boundless “expanse of self-awakening,”  
Which gives life to both self and other  
As it sets up the distinction between them –  
Is not this precisely the foundation of a new human society?*<sup>70</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat. A Brief History of the Globalized World in the Twenty-first Century* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Ltd., 2005), pp. 9-11 & 45. According to him, Globalization 1.0 denotes the period between 1492 (when Columbus set sail) and 1800 when the driving force was marked by countries globalizing; Globalization 2.0 denotes the period lasting from 1800 to 2000, when the driving force was marked by companies globalizing. In the third phase, Globalization 3.0, the power is in the hands of individuals to compete or collaborate globally.

<sup>2</sup> Friedman, *The World is Flat*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Franz M. Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” in *Satya Nilayam Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy*, 1 (2002), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent G. Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective* (Bangalore, ATC, 2004), p. ix. It is only Furtardo who calls it as a ‘movement’; not others such as Mall (who sees it as a phenomenon, refer to note 7, below), Wimmer (who calls it as new orientation in philosophy), and Fernet-Betancourt (who calls it as a task).

<sup>5</sup> Furtardo, in *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, notes that the first seminar on Interculturality in India was held in Mysore University as early as October 1994. Another International Conference on Intercultural Philosophy was held at the Shanthi Sadhana Research Institute, Bangalore in September 2001, and yet another conference was held on “Tolerance in the context of Interculturality and Globalization” at Mumbai in March 2002. Besides these, *Satya Nilayam Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy* – a journal founded and edited by one of the great Indian Christian philosophers and renowned Sanskrit scholar of the present time, Dr. Anand Amaladass in Chennai – is a noteworthy contribution. Moreover, it is useful to mention that for many years in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Madras, Dr. L. Antony Savari Raj created and developed a regular course in Intercultural Philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> Culture – like the terms ‘tradition,’ ‘customs,’ ‘mores,’ ‘language,’ and even ‘philosophy’ – has innumerable definitions and descriptions. Ram Adhar Mall refers to the definitions of ‘culture’ described by A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York, 1952). They found some 150 definitions of ‘culture.’

<sup>7</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. xi.

<sup>11</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Franz M. Wimmer, *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2002), p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> Franz M. Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” p. 14; and in his *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy*, pp. 27-33.

<sup>14</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” no. 1. Published in *INTERculture* 135 (1998), p. 99. Online: <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” no. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Brandner, “The Situation of Philosophy Today and the Question of Interculturality,” published in: 1) Mesotes, *Zeitschrift für philosophischen Ost – West Dialog*, 4/1994, Wien, 1995, pp. 491-513, and 2) *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 13 (1996): 1-28.

<sup>18</sup> It is often said that there are three centres of origin for philosophy, namely, China, India, and Greece. But the hegemonic and universalistic claims by Greek or European Philosophy are due to “extra-philosophical factors, such as, imperial, colonialistic and political forces” says R. A. Mall, in R. A. Mall and H. Hülsmann, *Die drei Geburtsorte der Philosophie: China, Indien, Europa* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1989) and in reference to F. C. Copleston, *Philosophies and Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Franz M. Wimmer, “Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?,” in Gregory D’Souza, (ed.), *Interculturality of Philosophy and Religion* (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1996), p. 46.

- <sup>20</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” p. 5.
- <sup>22</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 116.
- <sup>23</sup> Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” p. 6.
- <sup>24</sup> The publication of a journal in German, *Polylog*, is available online at <http://arch.polylog.org/>
- <sup>25</sup> Mall coins the phrase, “trendy expression,” particularly keeping in mind the trend-changing systems such as the contemporary post-modernism and (the background of) globalization.
- <sup>26</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. xi-xii.
- <sup>28</sup> Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” p. 6.
- <sup>29</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, “The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy”, *Polylog. Forum für interkulturelle Philosophie* 1 (2000), no. 22. Online: <http://them.polylog.org/1/fwf-de.htm>
- <sup>30</sup> See Mall, “The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy.”
- <sup>31</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. xii.
- <sup>32</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 15.
- <sup>33</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 106. Cfr also Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 9. The Eurocentric outlook is well described in Wilhelm Halbfass’ work, *India and Europe* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988) in which he analyses the possibility of dialogue between Europe and India with the background of the controversial writings of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer. These four German philosophers and many more before and after them, held that Western philosophy is certainly higher and more universal than Eastern ways of philosophizing.
- <sup>35</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. x.
- <sup>36</sup> Cited in Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. xii.
- <sup>37</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 10.
- <sup>38</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 15.
- <sup>39</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, “The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy,” no. 27.
- <sup>40</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 10.
- <sup>41</sup> Wimmer, *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 25.
- <sup>42</sup> Wimmer, *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 29.
- <sup>43</sup> Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” pp. 12-13.
- <sup>44</sup> Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” p. 13.
- <sup>45</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> We make a slight distinction between these two. Method can mean ‘means,’ ‘ways,’ ‘scheme’ employed; methodology would refer to ‘style,’ ‘attitude,’ ‘slant,’ or even ‘line of attack’ in the method(s) used.
- <sup>47</sup> Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” pp. 10-12.
- <sup>48</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 6.
- <sup>49</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 10; Wimmer, “Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview,” pp. 10-12.

<sup>51</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Gadamer’s *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) and *Vorurteil* (prejudice) are notions not well regarded in the sphere of interculturality.

<sup>56</sup> Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 104.

<sup>60</sup> This can be seen from three conferences organized at the Asian level. The first one was held at Bangalore in September 2002 on the theme “Philosophical Education in Seminaries: Prospects and Perspectives.” The second one was held at Bangalore, India, in October 2003 on the theme “Philosophical Methods: Through the Prevalent to Relevant.” The third one was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in December 2003 on the theme “Teaching Philosophy in Asian Contexts.”

<sup>61</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 122-4.

<sup>62</sup> Furtardo, *Intercultural Philosophy from Indian Perspective*, p. 125-7.

<sup>63</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” tr. from the French by Robert Vachon, in *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 1 (2000), no. 3. Published in *INTERculture* 135 (1998): 99-120. Online: <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” pp. 103, 120 and 140.

<sup>65</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism. Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounters* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> We still mourn the incomparable loss of this great philosophical Indian mind, as he went to his eternal abode on October 5, 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, p. ix.

<sup>68</sup> Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, p. ix.

<sup>69</sup> As quoted by Dallmayr in his book, *Beyond Orientalism*, p. 199; see Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. 250.

<sup>70</sup> An earlier version of this paper was published in: *Culture as Gift and Task: philosophical reflections in the Indian context*: papers presented at the Annual ACPI Conference St. Thomas Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam, 10-13 October 2007, ed. Keith D’Souza (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corp., 2008).

## CHAPTER IV

# WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY?

*HSUEH-I CHEN*

### THE PRECONDITIONS OF ASKING “WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY?”

The question, “What is intercultural philosophy?” raises at least two fundamental sub-questions: the question of philosophy and the question of interculturality. The first sub-question has been discussed from the very beginnings of philosophy, and the latter sub-question seems to be an attempt to align philosophical thinking with the multicultural reality we confront in the present era of globalization. But before we can answer any of these questions, we need to examine the circumstances in which they are raised and how they are constituted, because these contexts will have an enormous influence on how we might answer them. Although we cannot eliminate the influence of these contexts, we should at least be aware of them in order to anticipate the potential biases in our answers.

### LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

There is no doubt that every question is raised in a specific language or by means of a specific communicative form. At the moment of formulating our questions, we are already dependent upon the language that we are using. Language is not only a matter of linguistics, as it is perceived through the analysis of its logical and grammatical structures, or mere methods and relations in communications. It is also an expression of cultural and historical development, and must be understood in the context of its cultural and historical background in order to bear meaning. Every word is a dictionary in and of itself, and contains cultural specificity. Composing the question using English words such as “intercultural” and “philosophy,” which are rooted in Latin and Ancient Greek respectively, would cause complications if the same question were asked in other cultural and historical contexts. When questions have foreign words or are placed into different traditions, they will not be as clear as we might imagine, and they may have odd or unknown references.<sup>1</sup>

### THE “WHAT” QUESTION

We should also be aware of the manner in which we bring a concept into question. The method of questioning already presupposes the methods of response. Each questioning method delimits appropriate and inappropriate answer sources, and predetermines the range of legitimate answers. The interrogative particle “what” suggests an essentialistic inquiry, which appears to be a common method of philosophical questioning in occidental traditions.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the focus of occidental philosophical questioning is to clarify the “whatness” of an idea. If a question fails to comply with this precondition, it will not be regarded as philosophical questioning in the occident. But is “whatness” the only way to approach the idea of “intercultural philosophy”? This is an important question to ask, as the purpose of intercultural philosophizing is to surmount western philosophical supremacy and to take all other cultures into consideration. We should take seriously questions such as, “Who is asking this question?” “Who is going to respond?” Or, “In what conditions was this question raised?” All of these questions have meta/philosophical dimensions. When considered from an intercultural perspective, these questions are not irrelevant or secondary questions. If we want to take other cultures seriously, we should include other forms of philosophical questionings that are foreign and perhaps of secondary importance to our own. Limiting our reasoning to a specific form of questioning and answering would constrain the potential of our reflections.

### THE HISTORY AND SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY

For questioning that tends to focus on the “whatness” of an idea, philosophers expect the answer to be based on some sort of systematic knowledge. The question, “What is intercultural philosophy?” would therefore presuppose the existence of an intercultural philosophy that is integrated in the prevalent philosophical system, and organized into the existing history of philosophy. But defining intercultural philosophy does not mean finding its appropriate place in the system and history of philosophy. It is rather the other way around; that is to say, finding the answer requires ploughing up or toppling down the existing philosophical system. To state the question precisely calls for the deconstruction of philosophy through the idea of interculturality. Intercultural philosophy is therefore neither a new branch in philosophy (such as a chapter in philosophical books in addition to metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and so forth) nor a specific historical era in the history of philosophy. To express it in a more dramatic way, it is an intercultural *turn* of philosophy, wherein the fundamentals, concepts, and extent of



existing philosophy are called into question. After being deconstructed, philosophy is no longer a collection of wisdom and knowledge; it must build up its ground by pursuing the question, “How do we philosophize interculturally?” It is not the cumulative result of our thinking – at least not at the beginning of our effort to philosophize interculturally – but rather an ongoing process of escaping monocultural solitude and turning toward cultural diversity in our philosophical approach.

### **UNIVERSALITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Usually the results of philosophical thinking are expected to be universal, which means that the results should be applicable to every thinkable situation and under all circumstances. For example, principles and values should not be influenced by spatial and temporal mutability, and should be valid at all times and in every location. Generally speaking, it is worthwhile to attempt this, because every question asked should be contested in the light of the truth. In this respect, universality is crucial, because it situates the thinker above cultural diversity and above all culturally-specific values. In order to speak in the name of universality, philosophers are required to think from a viewpoint that should be neutral and free of any cultural reference. But is it possible to think without any cultural influences at all? As mentioned before, languages are culturally constructed and, as we think, we are already culturally influenced because we cannot think without the aid of language and its relations to cultural history.<sup>3</sup> In order to achieve universality, philosophers are asked to put their cultural backgrounds aside and free their thoughts from any cultural influence, and they are asked to not think of themselves as products of their cultural background and traditions. But they and their tools of thinking are culturally biased. Although universality means ‘above all cultural differences,’ any attempt at universal thought still reflects cultural influences. Calling on a so-called metalevel, many philosophers think that they can situate themselves in a truly neutral and universal environment. In reality, they and every one of their tools of thinking are made by a particular culture. The consequence of believing in universality without acknowledging that that universality still has a cultural character is, at best, cultural centrism, or worse, cultural tyranny. In the holy name of universality, mono-cultural-centric philosophers begin to accept one specific form of thinking as universal and will condemn every other form of thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of hiding behind the mask of pseudo-neutrality and pseudo-universality, we should learn how to deal with our cultural specificities. As interpreted by the ancient Greeks, philosophy is not simply wisdom, but the constant pursuit of wisdom. Of course, even this proposition is based in a specific culture (ancient Greece) – but which

proposition could claim that is not based in a specific culture? We must not insist that philosophy has already arrived at a universal level. We should admit that we are always on our way to reaching universality. Furthermore, this universality would not be free of all cultural influences, but would be a universality that is self-consciously comprised of as many cultures as possible. Instead of being complacent with the mono-cultural tyranny of universality, it is time to accept that, like philosophy itself, universality is an intercultural ideal to approach and not an absolute, definite a-cultural universal truth. Fortunately, philosophizing interculturally has the intention of unveiling the a-cultural or supracultural illusion of absolute universality. Intercultural philosophy is the pursuit of, and not *the*, “intercultural philosophy.”

### **PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS**

Philosophy, more than any other scientific subject, is dependent upon its historical personalities and, more than any other subject, it separates the being of philosophers from their thinking.<sup>5</sup> All books about philosophy reflect this assumption because they usually list historical personalities. These books are like arenas wherein the arguments of different philosophers are pitted against each other. They are written full of references to their historical predecessors. A typical philosophical argument goes through the following pattern: philosopher A says so, philosopher B contradicts, and philosopher C concludes. Although philosophers A, B, and C are real people with cultural backgrounds, in the books, those people only stand for the variables of universal ideas of different philosophers. Philosophical argumentation traditionally portrays philosophers as only pure ideas, not as culture-capable (*kulturfähig* in German) persons. Philosophers are presented as identical with their universally valid thinking, and the results of their thinking are claimed to be free of any cultural elements. Because of this tradition, philosophers do not think as cultural subjects but as universal subjects, and they are seldom aware of their culturality. Tradition requires them to deny themselves as cultural subjects in order to speak for all other people, regardless of where they are from. Others who refer to philosophers are also requested to treat them like a-cultural subjects, otherwise their statements will not be considered as philosophical. The moment we praise or criticize a philosopher's ideas, we put them culturally into the grave.

What do I mean when I say that we have to treat philosophers as cultural subjects? Philosophers are not pure incarnations of their ideas. As mentioned before, their thinking and their so-called universally valid ideas are, like they themselves, culturally formed. Although their ideas could have a universal intentionality, we have to look at their ideas as

the result of their own specific cultural formation, not as if they came from any human being whatsoever. We have to look at their ideas as culturally formed ideas, not as neutral, culture-free ideas. In other words, we should reconstruct (or better yet, deconstruct) their philosophical ideas – which are, they believe, universally true and free from all cultural influences – from their different cultural perspectives. Reconstructing the cultural elements and interpreting their arguments from a cultural perspective would create the necessary condition for intercultural philosophizing. Only by getting away from the dream of a universal philosophy can we start to philosophize as culturally capable beings. This is a necessary step for advancing toward intercultural philosophizing.

Until now, we have only investigated the conditions under which the question, “What is intercultural philosophy?” is raised. We still have not responded to the question itself. We will now proceed to the first component of our question: the question of interculturality, while bearing in mind that our questioning should occur in an intercultural way. Our questioning has to position itself between cultures. I do not mean that it should be between all cultures, but it should at least be executed with the help of more than a single culture.

## **THE QUESTION OF INTERCULTURALITY**

### *What Is the Meaning of “inter”?*

We begin our analysis by decomposing the Latin-derived word “intercultural.” The adjective ‘intercultural’ is a combination of two words. It consists of “inter,” the preposition used as a prefix, and the post-positioned noun “culture.” Both words originate from Latin. Although an adjective-derived noun “interculture” is possible, we do not usually use it because it is not very clear what is meant by interculture. Is interculture a specific culture, like Indian or Chinese culture, or it is some type of universal culture? Such questions would automatically arise if we use the word interculture.

In order to explain the meaning of the prefix inter-, we should examine its verbal positioning. In our everyday life, we encounter many words with the prefix inter-, such as international, interdisciplinary, interactive, interface, and so on. These are words with political, scientific or technical implications, but the prefix itself does not invoke a particular discipline. The original meaning of ‘inter’ in Latin is simply ‘between.’ But today, we use ‘inter’ in a conjunctive sense. For example, the meaning of the word ‘international’ is not ‘between nations’ but rather ‘connecting nations.’ This is also the case for ‘interdisciplinary,’ which is ‘a linking of different scientific disciplines.’ The word

interface, used in computer language, describes the connection of two devices. In order to become connected, both devices have to find a way to be understood and then to communicate with each other. But a word like ‘interaction’ has a slightly different accentuation, because it refers to mutual actions that link different areas, realms, or systems. To conclude this short explanation of the Latin-derived word ‘inter-,’ we see that in today’s usage, it has the meaning of connectivity and mutuality.

In order to approach the concept of ‘inter’ in an intercultural manner, we should now consider its possible meaning in a different cultural scope. In this paper, Chinese is chosen because it is one of the languages in which the author is proficient. The test language could also be any other, preferably non-occidental, language. Of course, there are several possible translations of the word ‘inter’ and also of the word intercultural, but we should consult the translation which most closely reproduces the original Latin meaning.

The concept of inter- is more or less expressed by the Chinese word “jian.” But into which context does *jian* fit? Our first question here is, “What is the meaning of *jian* in ordinary Chinese language?”

*Jian* is a frequently used word but, unlike the preposition “between” in English or “zwischen” in German, it is not necessarily a preposition. It could also be a noun or even a unit of measurement. With or without combinations with other words, *jian* can signify any of the following:

1. “Between” (preposition and noun)
2. “Room” (noun): rooms in buildings, in Chinese (fang jian),
3. “Room” (measurement unit): a unit of measure for rooms (yi jian fang jian),
4. “Between” (preposition): in the middle of something (zhong jian),
5. “Time” (as part of a noun): (shi jian),
6. “Time” (as a measurement unit for duration): e.g., all day long (yi ri jian), all year long (yi nian jian), and so forth,
7. “During” (as a preposition): e.g., during this week (zhe xing qi jian).

Unlike the Latin prefix ‘inter-,’ *jian* is normally used as a suffix. Although *jian* has both spatial and temporal dimensions and connotations, the spatial appears to predominate in Chinese. Word combinations beginning with *jian* are not so frequent and it is also significant that these combinations are often words of lesser importance, with the exception of “jian jie,” which is often translated into English as “indirect.” In the literal sense, *jian jie* is linking spaces.

Combinations with *jian* as a suffix are by far more significant and richer in content:

1. “shi jian”: time, in the literal sense as time between,
2. “kong jian”: room or space, in the literal sense, space between,
3. “shi jian”: world or world of living, in the literal sense, world between,
4. “yin jian”: underworld, world of the dead, in the literal sense, underworld between,
5. “ren jian”: between men or human beings, in the literal sense, men or human beings in between.

There is no doubt that this is a list of relevant philosophical terms. If we carefully look at the literal translation of these words, we could discover that the word *jian* is always used: time as time-between, space as space-between, and so on.

According to the explanation above, we could characterize *jian* as something which positions itself in between, so we would have the impression that *jian* does not refer to a usual space, but to space and time in between, which appears to be a dimension with immense virtual properties.

#### *Equality and “Equalterity”*

The following section will introduce two intercultural concepts in the form of two technical terms. The first concept is expressed by the German term “Gleichrangigkeit.”<sup>6</sup> “Gleich” is an adjective that means same, equal, immediate or identical. “Rangig” is also an adjective, and it implies rank, grade or degree. “Gleichrangig” signifies something of equal rank and the ending “keit” refers to the nominalization of an adjective. The reason that I introduce this term is that it is a much-discussed term in intercultural philosophy in Germany. The philosopher who shaped the term ‘Gleichrangigkeit’ is a German philosopher of Indian origin named Ram Adhar Mall.

The second term is “equalterity,” or “Gleichandersheit” in German as a noun or “gleichanders” as an adjective. It is a neologism that I introduce here in order to explain the term Gleichrangigkeit. As mentioned before, gleich and equal stand for sameness. The meaning of “alterity” is, to put it simply, other or otherness, which is similar to the German term “anders” and implies difference or unlikeness. Equalterity or Gleichandersheit signifies that we are equally different in the same way.

In contrast to Gleichrangigkeit, which puts the question of power and domination of cultures in the foreground, equalterity accentuates

being equal and being different at the same time. It emphasizes being equal in difference or in alterity. The concept of Gleichrangigkeit liberates external relations, e.g., structures of power, from occidental dominance. Keeping this in mind, we could say that Gleichrangigkeit is an external guiding principle for intercultural philosophy. But the concept of equalterity has to do with internal relations, meaning how to approach incommensurable contents of different traditions. Equalterity highlights differences between various traditions in the same way. In this respect, equalterity is a kind of Gleichrangigkeit on a context-based level, which regards cultures as interdependent on a mutual basis and also equal in their differences. That which is regarded as equal is the non-homogeneity of cultures. For these reasons, the following conclusion is not contradictory anymore: cultures are equal because they are different. In addition to Gleichrangigkeit, equalterity is some type of inner or internal orientation for intercultural philosophy.

People often use their own tradition as the criterion for comparison. However, are philosophies from other cultures not to be considered as offering criteria, if they differ from one's own idea of philosophy?

If we use occidental philosophy as an ideal form of philosophy and consider it as the standard for Gleichrangigkeit, we would not be philosophizing interculturally. In this case, the criterion for philosophy is already presumed. If the standard for Gleichrangigkeit is based on occidental philosophy, it is only the expression of a specific cultural centrism, namely Euro-centrism. This criticism is also valid for all philosophies that intend to set the standard for all other philosophies.

Inter or *jian*, meaning equality in alterity, indicates what is happening between cultures in a mutual process. It represents something between times or something which permanently exists in an interim state. In order to philosophize interculturally, we must put different philosophies on the same level, as the concept of Gleichrangigkeit proposes, and develop a philosophy of equalterity. Intercultural does not mean that non-homogeneous thoughts from different cultures are to be equalized in the same way. Equalterity is to be differentiated from "equal making" ("gleich machen" in German). To sum up, intercultural is not a culture; it is Gleichrangigkeit and equalterity between cultures.

### *The Question of Culture*

The occidental term "culture" originates from the Latin verb "colere," which includes the following meanings: to build on, to inhabit, to refine, and to cultivate. What these various meanings share is the connotation of improvement by intention. Because of the activity indicated by *colere*, something in a natural or raw condition is brought into a cultivated or

civilized condition. A qualitative difference would exist between the condition before and after the activity of *colere*.

The Latin noun “cultura” is derived from the verb *colere*, and implies that an improved condition can be realized only with great effort and by means of the continuous repetition of a certain activity. For example, the word “agricultura,” or agriculture, signifies the maintenance of a field. Thus, the verb *colere* and the noun *cultura* indicate a refining activity and a continuity of this activity.

Franz Martin Wimmer distinguishes two different senses of the concept of culture, namely “cultura creata” (“created culture” or “cultural condition”) and “cultura quae creat” (“culture that creates” or “cultural action”).<sup>7</sup> “Cultura creata” is achieved by carrying out the activity of *colere*. “Cultura quae creat,” on the other hand, does not focus on an achieved result but on the current activity itself. From the perspective of “cultura quae creat,” culture is not a static condition but the result of continuous action and, therefore, is dynamic.

“Cultura creata” and “cultura quae creat” cannot be regarded as independent of one another. Instead, they are “cultura creata quae creat” or “created culture which creates.” In other words, every action is necessarily based on a previously accomplished action.

With the help of Wimmer’s distinction between “cultura creata” and “cultura quae creat,” we recognize that culture does not only refer to the past and tradition, but is also a matter of creativity, as the case of “created culture which creates.”

By identifying culture solely as focused on the past and tradition, we misconstrue culture as something unchangeable and eternal. In that case, culture would never change. From this perspective, culture is nothing but a cemetery of cultural artefacts. Greek, Confucian, and African philosophies do not continue, as such. But their spirits continue to live and to influence different thinkers from other cultures. Philosophizing interculturally signifies that we can understand philosophies and cultures only in reference with and from the perspective of different and past cultures.

Figuratively, the graveyards of Greek, Confucian, and African philosophies should be excavated by philosophers from different cultures. Occidental, Oriental, Indian, or Chinese philosophies are no longer mono-cultural. Their bodies are excavated and buried again according to different rituals in numerous graveyards. After their excavation, we will not be able to bury them in the same way that we dug them out.

It was Elmar Holenstein, a Swiss philosopher, who made the following comment: “Alles hat seinen Ort und Nichts bleibt an seinem Ort” (Everything has its place and nothing stays in its place”).<sup>8</sup>

Philosophies are differently conceived in various cultures in the world. They are reproduced again and again as immigrants in foreign surroundings and occur endlessly in different cultures. Philosophical theses may indeed have a cultural origin, but they do not stay in their places of origin.

*Hybridity, De- and Re-territorialization*

After having discussed the meaning of culture, we understand that there are at least two fundamental consequences for the understanding of intercultural philosophy:

1. Culture is a continuous creative development. It is not solely a memory of a distant past and does not belong only to its origin in the past.
2. Cultural identity is a never-ending process. It does not aim solely at returning to its origin but aims to find a way out of that origin.

Formulated differently, cultural identity is not a static phenomenon but a continuous development. The power of its dynamic continuous development is self-alienation, and the source of this power arises from confrontations with other cultures. The process of identity involves encountering and engaging differences. In other words, identity stems from a process of hybridization and de-territorialization. The following section will discuss these two concepts, which are popular topics in postcolonial and postmodern contexts.

The meaning of hybridity, from a negative perspective, could include impurity. If something is impure, then it consists of at least two elements that are merged into an indefinite entity. It is neither A nor B but an indefinite transgression of A and B. But it would not totally legitimate the nomination of C, because it still has influences from both A and B and at the same time it departs from these influences. In the language of the Indian humanist scholar Homi Bhabha, it is a third space, which is situated as an in-between space.<sup>9</sup> In his view, hybridity is not about the tracing of A and B from which the third emerges, but it “is the third space which enables other positions to emerge.” His emphases consist of the following: the third space is not an entity like A and B. In fact, it is not an entity at all, but an indefinite space. What emerges out of the third space is not only one position but many possible positions. In other words, there are many possible Cs. In this respect, Bhabha’s third space corresponds to the above-mentioned concept of inter or *jian*.

The French postmodern philosopher Gilles Deleuze uses a word which is quite similar to the concepts of third space, inter, and *jian*. The French word “milieu” consists of “mi-,” which signifies middle and



“lieu,” which signifies place. Milieu originally meant “the middle place.” Deleuze points out that “mi-lieu” should be considered as an entrance or, in French, “entrée.”<sup>10</sup> It is not a passage from one condition to another, but the entrance to or the beginning of other possibilities. Speaking in Deleuzian language, it is the entrance of “becoming,” or a transformation into being.<sup>11</sup>

Hybridization may have existed earlier, but it had never occurred so quickly due to the modern formation of technology. We are all now hybridized in some way, but the most important point is that, during the process of our becoming, we are all culturally different shapes and influenced by several cultures at the same time. As a consequence of gradual cultural hybridization, the borders of mono-culturality are blurring. But, at the same time, new formations of mono-culturalization are coming to the foreground. In spite of this repetitive and fast development, everyone keeps his or her different cultural mapping, which is characterized by its unique singularity. Hybridized singularities for their part constitute their own cultural formation. With the help of Deleuzian terminology, these can be called “de-territorialization” and “re-territorialisation.”<sup>12</sup>

In the context of singularities or in an individual context, cultures are like territories. That is to say, everyone or every individual has its own cultural territories as if they were attributes one can possess. Although each individual may belong to a specific culture, each individual can also have composite cultural territories. The influence between territories and the individual are reciprocal. It is the individual who forms his or her own cultural territories and it is the cultural territories that shape the individual. The formation of cultural territories depends on the individual. These territories of each individual, however, are not those of the whole cultural collective. In individual contexts, culture reveals or represents itself as cultural territories. An individual could be a member of a cultural collective but at the same time, the individual is the incorporation of his or her own cultural territories. Cultural territories do not describe the collective affiliation of an individual but the cultural condition of individuals.

De- or re-territorialization does not signify that individuals should alter or change their belonging to a cultural collective, but describes the transformation of cultural territories or the process of cultural hybridization at the individual level. The formation of cultural territories only makes sense in relation to de- and re-territorialization, because there is no de-territorialization without the desire to be re-territorialized. During the process of de- and re-territorialization, however, the destination remains unknown and indefinite, similar to the above-mentioned indefinable third space, which is not an entity at all, but a vague in-between. At the moment of re-territorialization, the beginning

of the successive de-territorialization takes place again. These conditions circumscribe the constant adjustment, modification, or even hybridization of cultural territories of an individual. In summary, it can be stated that cultural territories do not affect one's belonging to a specific cultural collective. But what are the relations of cultural territories to the question of intercultural philosophy?

### **INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND INTERCULTURALLY-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHERS**

In the introduction to this analysis, the hypothesis was formulated that the question, "What is intercultural philosophy?" cannot be answered in the usual way due to the presuppositions that accompany the question.

Given the fact that addressing the whatness of intercultural philosophy will not tell us how to philosophize interculturally, we have to ask who is asking the question, or ask how philosophers can philosophize interculturally. The present analysis acts as a manual that demonstrates how philosophers could philosophize in an intercultural way. Philosophers have to be intercultural themselves in order to engage in intercultural philosophy.

In contrast to other philosophical questions, the question of intercultural philosophy corresponds to the inner cultural mapping of a philosopher. In order to philosophize interculturally, philosophers must be able to de- and re-territorialize their cultural territories or deconstruct their views toward interculturality over and over again. Philosophizing interculturally cannot be engaging in a static, systematic philosophy, because it would limit or bind the philosophy to a specific cultural scheme.

Another important aspect is that intercultural philosophy cannot be approached by a single philosopher. Interculturally-oriented philosophers need philosophers from other cultures in order to re- and de-territorialize their cultural territories. To philosophize interculturally is to philosophize with others from other cultures in plural forms without abandoning one's own singularity.

The question of intercultural philosophy deals with the matter of fundamental philosophical orientation; that is to say, the question presumes that the personality of philosophers is a fundamental part of their philosophizing. Philosophy is not solely the representation of a philosopher's mind. Their inner cultural territories are reflected in their way of thinking. Without engaging themselves interculturally and without being continuously hybridized, philosophers will not be able to philosophize interculturally at all.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ryosuke Ohashi, "Der "Wind" als Kulturbegriff in Japan," in *Japan im Interkulturellen Dialog*, ed. Ryosuke Ohashi (München: Iudicium, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was ist das, die Philosophie?* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Franz Martin Wimmer, *Globalität und Philosophie* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Heinz Kimmerle, *Interkulturelle Philosophie – Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida and Friedrich A. Kittler. *Nietzsche – Politik Des Eigennamens: Wie Man Abschafft, Wovon Man Spricht. Internationaler Merve Diskurs* (Berlin: Merve, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Essays zur Interkulturellen Philosophie*. Ed. Hamid Reza Yousefi (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Franz Martin Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie: Eine Einführung* (Wien: WUV, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Elmar Holenstein, "Ein Atlas der Philosophien," in *Über Europa hinaus. Interkulturelle Philosophie im Gespräch*, ed. Dirk Patrick Hengst and Constantin Von Barloewen (Osnabrück: Der Andere Verlag, 2003), pp. 73-117, at p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus [Mille Plateaux]*, tr. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) [Vol. 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, 2 vols. 1972-1980].

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Hayden, *Multiplicity and Becoming: The Pluralist Empiricism of Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Œdipus [L'Anti-Oedipe]*, tr. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2004). [Vol. 1 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, 2 vols. 1972-1980].



## CHAPTER V

# TAKING DIVERSITY SERIOUSLY: ON THE NOTION OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

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### UNCOVERING DIVERSITY: FROM STEREOTYPES TO INTERCULTURALITY

The relevance of diversity for contemporary societies is one of the major concerns of multiculturalist theories.<sup>1</sup> They all underline the circumstance that a plurality of cultures share the same context (the same space-time, that is to say) without losing, and in fact reaffirming, their own identity just by means of recognizing that “diversity matters.” Yet the notion of diversity is never defined in its own terms, and is always approached from the perspective of an ‘identity discourse,’ whose outcome is the blurring of that very relevance of diversity from which multiculturalism starts.<sup>2</sup> As for interculturality, it seems to focus more directly on the encounters occurring in the concrete situations of everyday life as experienced between members coming from different cultures. As a consequence, the notion of interculturality stresses the relevance of the *interactions* between members of different cultural contexts, and this shift has deep theoretical implications.<sup>3</sup>

The first and most important implication is that shifting from a multicultural to an intercultural perspective implies a shift from identity to diversity as the proper focus of philosophical thinking. This implies a complex definition of ‘culture,’ not least through the acknowledgment of the central role played by individual interpretation in any concrete interaction. As some leading Western social scientists have already pointed out in the course of the twentieth century,<sup>4</sup> interaction is the basic modality through which human individuals co-construct their everyday life environments. Society can be conceived as the largely unintended outcome of the complex web of interactions from which recurring patterns emerge. Such patterns help to reduce the environmental complexity to something individuals can grasp and arrange in mental frameworks that they can safely, and presumably successfully, use for further interactions, as social constructionism has long convincingly demonstrated.<sup>5</sup>

This is a compulsory process, due to the limitations of human cognitive structure that has no tools at its disposal to grasp a complex

situation as a whole and, so, is urged to select only those features that are subjectively perceived as relevant for the actual interactive situation. However, we should bear in mind that this process is performed at the cost of an exhaustive understanding of all the features that *might* be useful to effectively manage that concrete situation, in which individuals enter *equipped with all of their differences*. In other words, each and every encounter occurs between individuals who are different from each other at least to some extent, and it is the mutual perception of given differences – as well as the subsequent awareness of a possible threat – that leads individuals to develop tools to cope with diversity as part of a survival strategy. This is also the process through which a “communicative local context”<sup>6</sup> – that is, a ‘culture’ – arises, as the spatial and temporal site in which a group of individuals takes for granted that the ‘diversity menace’ can be kept under control by means of that particular set of shared organizational patterns of reality elaborated within the group. This same set allows the other members to ‘be taught,’ ‘learn,’ and hence ‘know’ what the most successful interactive strategies are.

As a consequence, the term ‘culture’ indicates the set of information and skills elaborated, shared, and transmitted by a number of individuals co-habiting a given space-time in order to control the possible dangerous effects of individual diversity, by means of constructing a stereotypical comprehensive model of what a normal reality should look like. At the aggregate level, this process simply mirrors the one occurring at the individual level, in which the complexity of becoming and diversity must be reduced to the simplicity of being and identity in order to survive. This is the main reason why cultural or social knowledge is always to be conceived as a set of stereotypes that define what is *normal* – and hence to be reasonably expected – sharply differentiating it from what is *not-normal* – and hence to be reasonably refused as part of ‘reality as it is.’ From this it can be deduced: a) that each and every culture is unavoidably based upon a form of ethnocentrism mirroring the self-centric character of the individual (re)construction of ‘the world’; and b) that the fundamental pattern of the learning process (i.e., the construction of ‘knowledge’) is the categorization, that is to say the stereotype.<sup>7</sup>

Stereotyping is the basic modality of human cognitive activity. It consists in the process through which each human individual learns to delimit material and non-material ‘things’ (including other individuals), to assign them a function in relation to its needs and experience, and to properly collocate each of them in a comprehensive model of reality by attaching a meaning to them. Of course, this process is not entirely performed *ex novo*, because individuals are socialized to the ‘correct’ procedure by adult members of the group, who teach them how reality is

to be perceived and interpreted according to the prevailing set of stereotypes previously elaborated, whose effectiveness has been proved and must therefore be taken for granted. Once it is constructed, a stereotype works literally like a pre-judice in the sense that it prevents a person from running again and again through the process of simplifying reality: it is a judgment delivered *before* interacting with the corresponding 'fact.' As a result, we all have at our disposal a ready-to-use catalogue of stereotypes to make sense of the world by simply applying them to the matching situation, avoiding the trouble of elaborating a reference framework in 'real time'.

Despite the prejudicial character of stereotypes, we are used to understanding them as matter-of-fact judgments, for they seem to reproduce 'reality as it is', by means of extracting from it a model of order already found there. So, if I say that "Women cry more often than men," I can convince myself that this is simply a matter-of-fact judgment, so far as I can share a diffuse enough knowledge according to which "everybody knows" that male and female individuals of the species are likely to react differently to situations that presumably lead a human being to cry. Moreover, by virtue of such 'social knowledge,' I do not need any further evidence that things will actually fit my expectations, because stereotypical knowledge provides me with a tool to distinguish between the 'norm' and the 'exception.' The matter-of-fact judgment is, therefore, only thought to discriminate between true and false statements – of course, at the cost of dismissing the divergent concrete behavior as 'odd.' But this typical reaction to a disconfirming experience offers some hints to uncovering the difficulties arising from considering stereotypes as mere matter-of-fact judgments.

As I said, the cognitive process of stereotyping works not only in order to distinguish between things, but also to assign them a function and a meaning within a comprehensive model of reality. Therefore, the judgment according to which "Women cry more often than men" is not only intended to distinguish between the actual behavior of men and women, but also to give a picture of what a man and a woman *should be*. The 'true' fact that a man *does not* cry gives birth to the evaluation according to which the 'true' man *should not* cry, and hence to the value-judgment according to which "A man who cries is not a real man," for "A man who cries is in fact a woman." In this way, the cognitive stereotype changes automatically into prejudice in the usual sense of the term, that is to say, it ends up by justifying the intervention in reality with the purpose of re-establishing the correct order of things. This implies that a man who cries must either be stopped or be treated like an effeminate man, and if he wants to be considered as a man he must accept that he cannot cry (at least publicly).

The aim of the above argument was to show that there exists an unavoidable conflict between the process of stereotyping and the acknowledgment of diversity as the ultimate feature of 'reality as it is.' This conflict arises from the fact that the stereotypical (*re*)construction of reality is perceived as its *reproduction* both at the individual and the aggregate level, and this clashes with the alternate picture of reality as the realm of diversification and variance from 'normalcy.' I believe that this conflict cannot be eliminated, due to the fact that we need stereotypes and prejudices in order to orient ourselves in our complex environment. This means that it would be vain to think it possible to overcome all of our stereotypes in order to better and more peacefully interact with each other. Moreover, this would be a dangerous assumption, in that it refuses to tackle the question of our limited cognitive structure (our hardware configuration, so to say), which is unable to orientate itself in a complex environment except by resorting to reduction – i.e., to stereotypical knowledge. However, this does not mean that it is impossible for us to control the most perverse effects of erasing diversity through the process of stereotyping.

The first thing we can do is become aware of the fact that all of our knowledge is stereotypical in character, and never able to provide us with an exhaustive picture of reality as it is. This is not least because there is no *reality* except the one we (co-)construct by means of categorization and evaluation, as radical constructivism convincingly teaches us.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, and as a consequence, this could lead us to gradually react less defensively towards perceived diversity, having clearly in mind that it does not threaten 'reality as it is.' And thirdly, this could allow us to modify and update the current system of stereotypes, widening them by means of including increasing degrees of diversity. The result is that, even if we cannot survive without stereotypes and stereotypical knowledge, we still have the possibility to widen, modify, and replace them in order to elaborate more effective strategies to cope with the challenges posed by a highly dynamic and differentiated environment.

In my opinion, this is precisely what the notion of interculturality points to, stressing the central role of diversity and interpretation in the concrete situations occurring at the level of everyday experience. For all the power of stereotyping, the fact remains that individuals are different from each other simply because of their individually being the sum of their own unique life experiences. In this sense, it can be calmly stated that each individual is a culture in and for itself, to the extent that whatever interaction occurs is in fact an intercultural one.<sup>9</sup> We all receive in our culture and co-cultures an indefinite number of interrelating and interdependent reference frameworks, patterns of behavior, and systems of values and beliefs, but we are not passive



recipients – as cultural relativism mistakenly assumes – because we cannot help but re-interpret them on the basis of our life-experience and the variations in the amount of information available to us. Any time we enter an interaction, a very high level of diversity is also re-negotiated, due to the concrete differences we explicitly or implicitly bear and mutually perceive. The stage of concrete interaction is one in which we try to safeguard our diversity by accepting not to exhibit it up to the point that it would be dangerous for us, mainly due to the (largely unknown) reactions of others.

This is the main and most relevant reason why we stereotype ourselves and the world. But the ultimate goal of our interacting with others is to preserve ourselves as we are, that is to say, preserving the highest possible number of our differences. The suggestion of erasing differences in order to interact and avoid overt conflict is but one possible strategy, in that it works only to the extent to which it does not erase us as we are. It is precisely in this sense that, in the case of an increasing level of mutually-perceived diversity hybridization, syncretism, and other possible forms of integrating and modifying the system of stereotypes at our disposal could surely be viable options. What the notion of interculturality suggests is that, as soon as we are confronted with increasing degrees of perceived diversity, our usual reference frameworks are likely not to work properly and so collapse into the total deconstruction of ‘reality as it is.’ This leads to a situation in which we must completely rethink the ability of those frameworks to work as orienting principles. It is in these cases, occurring more often than we would probably be ready to acknowledge, that we should resort to a modification of given stereotypes by decidedly entering into others’ cultures in order to re-construct a new (that is to say, ‘different’) model of reality.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF INTERCULTURALITY FOR WESTERN PHILOSOPHY**

The activity we are used to labelling ‘philosophy’ aims traditionally at giving definite and comprehensive answers to the questions posed by our interaction with ‘the world.’ Such answers must be consistent with the assumption that we, as human beings, perceive and reconstruct reality on the basis of some substantial features, acting in, and reacting to ‘the world’ in a more or less similar way. This understanding of philosophical activity, which is peculiarly Western, led to the belief that philosophy is primarily an activity of ‘the mind,’ its purpose being to give an exhaustive account of “how we work as thinking beings,” and “how the world outside is shaped.” Hence, we are used to understanding philosophy as ‘systematic,’ in the sense that it should provide us with a

comprehensive theoretical framework to which each concrete experience could be brought back, and by means of which we should be able to categorize our various experiences and elaborate effective criteria to act and react in the world.

My point is that such an understanding of philosophy, long prevailing in the West (though not the only existing one), is not the best suited to help us manage the complexity of our everyday experiences because of its reductionism. To be sure, systematic philosophy results, more often than not, in elegant constructions and appealing ways to (re)construct the world as if it would fit our expectations. But it is unable to establish a two-way relationship between our 'rational' construction of 'the world' and the concrete experiences that constitute it at any given moment. In short, although systematic philosophy effectively builds logically consistent interpretative frameworks, it is quite inefficient in building them in such a way that they are flexible enough to adjust to the complex dynamic contexts in which we interact with each other and the environment (e.g., by means of an unceasing exchange of information).

This is the reason why I suggest that we should understand the theoretical answers that philosophy elaborates in order to solve the concrete problems posed by an 'uncertain world,' as provisional explicative hypotheses whose purpose is to orient human beings in a world of *meanings*, rather than in a world of *facts*. In this sense, I fully agree with the need to integrate, in the case of philosophy, the two different approaches that Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen<sup>10</sup> suggest for natural science, namely 'reductionism' and 'contextualism.' Since human beings conceive themselves as complex systems interacting with other variously-shaped systems, both approaches are needed, for the first "explains *how* a system functions by finding out what its components are and how those components fit together," and the second "explains *why* a system functions in terms of the circumstances in which it operates or has come into being."<sup>11</sup>

It is however evident that even contextualism entails a kind of reductionism, since human beings are unable to grasp all the features of the actual context in which they are collocated at any given time, and thus are 'compelled,' so to speak, to extract some of them in order to elaborate effective orientating criteria. In this sense, it can be stated that *we need theories* because they are the conceptual frameworks without which we would be unable to make sense out of the world, and even to perceive the information coming from that world that is relevant *for us*. What we do not need is to convince ourselves that theories are *more* than this, and that they should have a duration in time and an extension in space because they give us the 'proper' understanding of the world once and for all. What theories in general, and philosophical theories in particular, can provide us with is a provisional understanding of a

chosen context at a given time, while preserving the awareness that they should be revised in the face of conflicting information coming from that same context.

Interculturality, here, is a case in point, because it represents a fact – or, better, a set of data coming from the context – that indicates that our traditional theories no longer work, and that their conceptual assumptions need to be radically revised. Interculturality is one of the keywords of our time, and in its broadest meaning it refers – as I pointed out above – to the fact that each interpersonal encounter is ‘intercultural’ at least in some degree, if only because each individual must be conceived as unique, as a culture in itself. More generally, by the term ‘interculturality’ we usually mean the fact that we can no longer avoid everyday encounters with people whom we are not able to perceive immediately as ‘similar to us.’ Hence, ‘interculturality’ indicates the occurrence of interpersonal communication between two partners who mutually recognize themselves as almost ‘entirely different,’ but who perceive diversity as the starting point in communicating with each other. Perceiving the ‘other’ as different implies recognizing incoming information as new to a certain degree, since we cannot grasp diversity in itself but only in a communicative process – that is, in the process of a concrete interaction.

As a concept – that is, as a pattern of reference elaborated through a reductionist process of simplifying incoming information – diversity indicates only that the presently-perceived piece of information does not fit the usual framework(s) that an individual relies on in categorizing, stereotyping, systematizing, or collocating it. In other words, diversity points to the circumstance that there is a divergence between information already ‘stored’ and information being elaborated in the given concrete situation. Therefore, the relevance of diversity cannot be overestimated, because the perception of a difference is what allows the improvement of already-existent reference frameworks. The ability to manage diversity, that is, to recognize, interpret, and organize new incoming information by means of modifying the already existing mental frameworks, is central in order to communicate effectively (that is to say, successfully). But the perception of diversity can have multiple outcomes. When we perceive a difference between incoming and stored information, we automatically process the former in the light of established explicative frameworks and, on this basis, evaluate the relevance of a ‘new’ piece of information. It is according to such an evaluation that we decide if the new data should be stored or discarded.

If we decide to store the new piece of information, we are implicitly affirming its being consistent with our established explicative frameworks, in the sense that we have determined that the degree of difference is not high enough to threaten the logical architecture of the

relating interpretative framework. If, however, we decide to discard the different piece of information, we are implicitly assuming the impossibility of inserting it within the relating framework. A repeated experiencing of a difference to a 'minor degree' or of 'little relevance' leads also to gradually changing one's framework, which is automatically adjusted to the modifications of environment over time. The most interesting case is thus the difference which leads us to feel that we are 'challenged' by entirely new information that we cannot handle within our usual conceptual frameworks. This is just the case of intercultural encounters, in which we are likely to be challenged by an extremely high occurrence of different relevant information that we cannot directly 'explain' by means of previous 'theories.'

Therefore, in the case of intercultural communication, the initial reaction on the part of each partner is to discard new information, because the degree of diversity is too high to manage, and becomes dangerous for the stability of usual explicative frameworks as a whole. Moreover, intercultural communication presents us with a third concern, farther than storing or discarding information – that is to say, the need to adjust our interpretative frameworks to incoming information in real time, so explicitly challenging their very effectiveness. In this sense, intercultural communication implies the need to deal with radical difference to the point that each partner should be ready to question its whole set of mental frameworks in order to adapt them to incoming information. In turn, this requires that each partner should be aware of the fact that frameworks are not universal, but only limited and provisional, and that they should be continuously revised by testing their explicative power in every concrete situation.

This does not mean that we should try to forget or deny our interpretative frameworks before entering a concrete intercultural interaction. It means that we simply should think of intercultural communication as a process which presupposes an ability to interact beyond radical difference. In order to achieve this goal, we should make ourselves aware that experiencing diversity involves a process of transforming established frameworks in order to adjust them to incoming information. What a concrete intercultural encounter requires is gradually achieving the ability to overcome the psychological disturbance caused by the perception of diversity, and trying not to deny differences because they do not fit our conceptual schemata, but rather elaborating more fitting frameworks as a reaction to contextual stimuli.

This is, of course, a very difficult task to fulfil, and (non-systematic) philosophy may serve to help, if it is understood as a dedicated tool to construct frameworks moving from contextual information. What philosophy in the usual sense actually does is to elaborate 'mental entities' (so-called concepts) that reduce complex

incoming information to logically consistent and synthetic constructs, in order to allow individuals to confer stability and meaning to perceptions, experiences, and evaluations unceasingly becoming in space and time. In short, philosophy aims at reducing the fluidity of becoming to the stability of being, to echo the well-known Nietzschean position,<sup>12</sup> in order to provide us with the possibility of orienting ourselves in our environment.

### **CONCLUSION: DEFINING INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY**

Concerning the notion of an intercultural philosophy, Ram Adhar Mall states that “intercultural philosophy stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrisms, whether European or non-European,” and is “the name of a philosophical attitude, a philosophical conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of humankind.”<sup>13</sup> I find this definition both convincing and problematic, given that philosophy is unavoidably culturally biased, like any other human activity, since it always occurs within a spatially and temporally limited context (that is to say, a ‘local context’ – a ‘culture’ in the sense described in the first section of this paper).

Like any other kind of human knowledge, philosophy is perspectival in character, in the sense that it mirrors the unescapable narrowness of the visual angle from which human beings perceive, (re)construct, and think of ‘the world.’ This is the reason why intercultural philosophy cannot be ‘built up’ by means of a mere interpolation between the different philosophical approaches elaborated in different cultural contexts. First, each of these approaches is automatically considered the only ‘true’ one by the people who share it or are familiar with it. Second, the perspectival character of our knowledge cannot be overcome, despite all the attempts we might make at interconnecting all possible philosophical approaches.

As a consequence, the starting point for a philosopher to deal seriously with interculturalism is to acknowledge the fragmentary character of every mental construct, even the most carefully elaborated. In this sense, the first aim of a would-be intercultural philosophy should be fostering the awareness that knowledge is but the outcome of a particular visual angle, of a perspective, and that this implies its being unavoidably ephemeral, provisional, and limited. Such awareness also implies giving up the very possibility that any philosophical system – or any philosophical thinking, for that matter – can achieve the ‘truth’ about reality or can elaborate notions able to build up just one possible or legitimate interpretation of the world. Of course, this is nothing new, given that philosophical activity always entails a kind of a ‘critique of culture,’ in the sense that the philosopher is called to radically doubt the

mental entities (the concepts or notions) that its cultural milieu takes for granted, and to show that they are only interpretations of a wider 'reality' elaborated from a particular perspective.

However, this understanding of philosophical activity, which is surely one of its original features, was gradually lost in the West, and mainstream philosophical opinion came to accept the view that we can achieve 'truth' about the world by virtue of its assumed 'rationality.' Anyway, the presupposition underlying this statement is that the world's rationality is similar to the kind of rationality human beings possess and, hence, is clearly recognizable by simply applying human intellectual faculties to the world. Beyond that, I maintain that, for all the efforts of recent Western philosophers (such as Post-structuralists and Postmodernists) to deconstruct the claims of systematic philosophy, this fundamental prejudice is still alive and well today in all 'academic philosophers.' It comes to the fore from the circumstance that no one of us has still radically questioned the very term 'philosophy' and, by neglecting to do so, we have kept on considering 'our' definition as a legitimate comparative tool to evaluate whether the thinking activities of 'others' can or cannot be labeled as philosophy (*as We define and exercise it*).

The same situation exists in the case of 'religion,' one of the most relevant terms for contemporary intercultural communication, in the light of much-needed 'interreligious dialogue.' In this case, moreover, we take for granted a particular definition of religion to which we all automatically refer, without raising any doubt concerning its ability to encompass the variety of religious experiences at hand in our societies. But the term 'religion,' as we currently use it, is not neutral at all, for it is the outcome of a historical and cultural process at the end of which it has acquired the prevailing meaning we currently attach to it. On the contrary, religion – whatever the meaning we assign to the term – should be understood as a 'social institution,' that is, as a (particular) model of order, which emerges from and through the interactions among individuals within a given space-time.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, religion is a culturally-dependent notion, whose definition should be radically rethought if we are to adopt it in an intercultural perspective.

The fact that many scholars happen to use one specific notion of religion as if it were transcultural is directly connected with the persistence of a universalistic epistemological attitude to which so-called 'ethnocentrism' – better, 'Eurocentrism' – is also linked. Religion, like any other concept, can be conceived of as the outcome of a construction originating in the impossibility of human beings to grasp their environment in its complex wholeness, and as emerging from the kind of stereotyping process I mentioned in the first section of this paper. As in similar cases, however, the culturally-biased origin was removed at the

end of the process, leaving room for the belief that *this* particular notion of religion would in fact be able to reproduce *reality as it is*, a belief from which its connotation has also been inferred as a universally widespread concept.

This is the reason why, when we use the term ‘religion,’ many feel confident to claim that such a term encompasses all possible religious experiences, since it putatively correctly represents all of their possible contents. Yet it can be stated that the process works the other way round, since what actually happens is that we try to explain all possible variance in religious attitudes and phenomena by means of the notion of religion at our disposal, at the same time excluding the ones that do not fit the definition, by stating that they are not to be called ‘religion.’ For instance, it is undeniable that some difficulties arise when we try to include East Asian religions in the current academic, as well as public, debate about interreligious dialogue. This is because the concrete religions which could engage in a dialogue are only the three monotheistic ones – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – in their various forms, as if they were the only ones indicated by the term.<sup>15</sup>

To come back to the notion of philosophy, interculturality points to a rethinking of philosophical activity and of the role of philosophers in terms of philosophy’s original vocation, as a means to continuously elaborate ‘rational tools,’ ‘concepts,’ ‘mental entities,’ ‘reference frameworks,’ and the like, that are able to orientate individuals within their environments. Therefore, the first step towards achieving an intercultural attitude in the field of philosophy is the deconstruction of any belief in the universal applicability of concepts, since they are context-dependent. This is because, in the process of elaborating them, philosophers rely heavily upon the information they are able to gain and process within their own given context. The very notion of truth, to take just one example, depends upon the set of existing beliefs concerning what is ‘true’ or ‘false’ within the context philosophers share with their fellow beings, and those beliefs, in their turn, are the result of the enormous number of exchanges of information between individuals sharing the same life-context and through various verbal and non-verbal communication codes concerning the ‘real world.’

What should not be forgotten is that, since we cannot grasp reality ‘as it is,’ but only by means of reductionist interpretative frameworks, the information exchanged in the process of an interaction does not contain any stable truth about the issue involved, but only an interpretation of the features that each of the partners could isolate and (re)construct in a conceptual framework. In this sense, philosophical concepts should be conceived of as interpretations rather than explications of ‘facts,’ and this would allow philosophers to be more

inclined to modify existing theories in order for them to adjust to information coming from a multicultural or intercultural context.

I do think that philosophers are amongst the most suitable persons to efficiently act as intercultural mediators, because they are familiar with contrasting concepts and theories elaborated on the basis of different perspectives and assumptions concerning the world. Philosophers are used to comparing concepts and theories – to let different worldviews communicate with each other, so to speak – in order to find out which one most efficiently answers a given problem or question according to ‘logical consistency’ and ‘rational criteria.’ But I also think that, in order to cope with the challenge of interculturality, philosophers should avoid defining their own presuppositions once and for all. What a philosopher who plays the role of an intercultural mediator can efficiently do is to let the partners of a concrete intercultural encounter acknowledge the culturally-biased character of the ‘mental entities’ at work in that given situation. They may, however, show them that such concepts are but alternative ways to reduce the complexity of the different life-contexts from which each of them comes.

Acting like this – namely, suggesting the perspectival character of all reconstructions of the world, of all concepts and theories, and of their supposed ‘logic’ and ‘rationality’ – the philosopher as intercultural mediator might be able to let the partners grasp the fact that diversity (and all the concrete differences in which it is articulated) is at work in every interactive process, since it depends upon a substantial difference in the innumerable ways in which we may interpret contextual information. Moreover, that kind of philosopher could also show that diversity, although a constitutive feature of human knowledge and a culturally-dependent one, is not insurmountable, because we are able to widen our perspective *through interaction*, that is, by *exchanging experiences* with people who come from contexts in which alternative interpretative frameworks developed in time, and are currently taken for granted by them.

At the end of the day, intercultural philosophy does not *exist*, it *develops* through the actualization of the potentially infinite number of intercultural interactions among individuals who exchange information on the basis of different and even opposed interpretative frameworks concerning the ‘same’ facts. The complex world in which we live is becoming one whose features we are called to isolate and reconstruct in the most efficient way that we are able. This is the reason why I believe that philosophers, who ‘play’ with interpretative frameworks, could be good intercultural mediators. But those, particularly Western ones, who have long been used to ‘mind games’ whose rules have become quite inflexible to incoming contextual information, should be willing to put



the *experience* of interculturality at the basis of their training. By this I mean that philosophers should also consider themselves as ‘anthropologists of the mind,’ so to speak, and should keep on collecting life experiences of intercultural encounters in order to let their own mental frameworks become flexible to real-time change. Acting like this, they might become able to endlessly widen their perspective, through a conscious and continuous interaction with the highest possible number of different conceptual frameworks elaborated within the concrete life-contexts of innumerable individuals. If it is true – as I believe – that intercultural *philosophy* can be but (incessantly) constructed by intercultural *philosophers*, this is the only possible beginning of an intercultural philosophy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See C. Taylor, *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited and introduced by A. Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), W. Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular. Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); S. Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism. Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For a deeper discussion see F. Monceri, *Ordini costruiti. Multiculturalismo, complessità, istituzioni* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> See F. Monceri, *Interculturalità e comunicazione. Una prospettiva filosofica* (Roma: Edizioni Lavoro, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Among others, E. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990); H. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> See especially P. L. Berger, and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1991); K.J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005); M. Gergen and K.J. Gergen, (eds), *Social Construction. A Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> For this expression see Monceri, *Interculturalità e comunicazione*, ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> On which see G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954); T. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998); C. Stangor, (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings* (Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press, 2000); P.R. Hinton, *Stereotypes, Cognition and Culture* (Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2000); also Monceri, *Interculturalità e comunicazione*, ch. 5.

<sup>8</sup> See, for an introduction, E. v. Glasersfeld, *Radical Constructivism. A Way of Knowing and Learning* (London: Routledge, 1995); B. Poerksen, (ed.)

*The Certainty of Uncertainty. Dialogues Introducing Constructivism* (Exeter-Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2004); F. Monceri, *Pensiero e presente. Sei concetti della filosofia* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See M.R. Singer, *Perception and Identity in Intercultural Communication* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1998), p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> I. Stewart and J. Cohen, *Figments of Reality. The Evolution of the Curious Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Stewart and Cohen, *Figments of Reality*, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> R.A. Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. xii.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., R. D. Baird, "Interpretative Categories and the History of Religions," in *History and Theory* [Beiheft 8: On Method in the History of Religions] (1968): 17-30; S. Guthrie, "A Cognitive Theory of Religion [and Comments and Reply]" in *Current Anthropology*, 21 (1980): 181-203.

<sup>15</sup> For a wider discussion of this issue see F. Monceri, *What 'religion' are we talking about? Universalism, pluralism, and the problem of cultural translation*, in *Viele Religionen – eine Vernunft? Ein Disput zu Hegel*, ed. H. Nagl-Docekal, W. Kaltenbacher, and L. Nagl (Wien/Berlin: Böhlau/Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 281-297.

## CHAPTER VI

# INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY: AN 'AFROCONSTRUCTIVIST' PERSPECTIVE

*JOSEPH C. A. AGBAKOBA*

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine some of the problems that militate against the development of a genuine intercultural perspective amongst African philosophers, notably the issues and problems surrounding the notion of an African identity. However, before I deal with this issue, let me first look generally at the notion of intercultural philosophy and how it relates to Africa.

Intercultural philosophy is an attitude towards philosophy and a method of doing philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Its philosophical roots reach into the past; however, it “started as a concept in the 1980s. It mostly emanates from the German-speaking parts of Europe and can be seen as a need to factor other cultures into one’s own philosophical thinking and thus creating an intercultural perspective.”<sup>2</sup> Intercultural philosophy started as an attempt by some European, mainly German, philosophers to break out of the confines of Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism has many aspects, however in the area of scholarship and education, it can be taken as the notion that Europeans – particularly, Western Europeans – and Westerners generally possess superior knowledge, values, and methodologies in all spheres in relation to other societies. Thus the West is in the vanguard, and her intellectual output is the crystallization and fruition of humanity’s best and most advanced experience and effort. Other societies should follow the lead of the West; but the West has virtually nothing to learn from the other societies, largely because her advanced experience and effort subsume those of other societies.

This attitude and approach to scholarship have come under much criticism since the beginning of the postcolonial era. Social scientists, led initially by anthropologists, have tried to jettison the ethnocentrism of their forebears. They have, in approaching societies with more open-mindedness, been able to appreciate the worldviews of other people; their differences from those of the West; their breadth and depth as different systems of knowledge and wisdom; as well as the nature of their values, the logic of their actions, and the richness of their lives. These developments within intellectual circles as well as exogenous

ones (such as decolonization and the breakup of the empires of the great European powers, and the rapid economic growth of some Asian nations) have led to a movement away from Eurocentrism among Western scholars. This reaction to Eurocentrism has been to a very significant degree in the direction of relativism: cultural relativism, epistemological relativism, and even logical relativism. We cannot go into the merits and flaws of relativism here; it should suffice to say that many scholars, especially philosophers, find relativism unacceptable; not the least because it assumes erroneously the impossibility of fairly accurate translations between languages; the impossibility of cross-cultural comparisons; and the non-existence of objective or universal truth or the impossibility of knowing this.

Intercultural philosophy arose in Europe as a way of combating Eurocentrism while at the same time avoiding the pit falls of relativism. As an attitude towards philosophy and philosophizing, intercultural philosophy is characterized by openness and respect for other cultures and the knowledge contained in them; as well as a willingness to explore other cultures in the search for knowledge. Methodologically, intercultural philosophy engages in the comparative analysis of philosophies and aspects of philosophies on an objectively sound basis; on the grounds that, through the application of reason and the use of empirical data, commonly acceptable grounds for truth and knowledge could be found.

What, then, is the African reaction to this development in Europe and the West? To begin with, the notion of intercultural philosophy is still new in Africa, even though the African, in a sense, has long been engaged in intercultural discourse and philosophy. Most Africans live in two worlds: the world of his or her native language and culture, and the world of the language and culture of the colonial powers. Intellectual activity in Africa, however, is mostly consciously geared towards fighting and debunking Eurocentrism. Indeed, the dominant, if not, the sole research programme and scholarly orientation of contemporary Africa has been geared towards challenging Eurocentrism. It is in this context that many disciplines devoted to African studies – including African philosophy – were founded. In addition, within this context, the approach of Afrocentrism has been widely accepted; this approach, like Eurocentrism, is racist, polemical and unscholarly – in the sense that it is disrespectful of the truth and selective about facts; highlighting only things and events with good propaganda value for its course, and suppressing or ignoring others. Therefore, it is by no means automatic that intercultural philosophy will appeal to the Afrocentrist and African scholars generally; and this includes any version of intercultural philosophy that we Africans may develop from our particular circumstances. This is because intercultural philosophy cannot guarantee

the complete disappearance of Eurocentrism and, even if it can, the Afrocentrist project can go on even if Eurocentrists no longer exist. It is therefore necessary to find an alternative and better answer to the perspective of Afrocentrism on issues relating to Africa, in order (among other things) to pave the way for an African perspective on intercultural philosophy. In this regard, in the rest of this paper, I shall address the problem of African identity. This problem very much concerns Africans and African intellectuals given the peculiar history of the continent.

### **THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY**

The question of African identity is one of the most important questions that face us today. The question raises such issues as what it is to be an African (that is, the nature of Africanity), the relationship between Africanity and human nature, the essence of humanity and the question of the change or permanence of Africanity, as well as human, personal, and collective identities generally. In this regard, Olubi Sodipo, Nigeria's first Professor of Philosophy, was right in stating that, in a situation where a people subjugates another group of people with a very different moral and cultural outlook from theirs, a crisis of political and cultural identity will develop for the subjugated group.<sup>3</sup> The subjugated "group would sooner or later be asking itself, who indeed are we?" Moreover, this question of "group identity is very often that of human dignity, and people do not usually ask the question Who are we? unless some doubts have been expressed about their humanity, or aspersions cast on their human dignity." Then, in response to such questions and issues, Sodipo goes on to say: "in the case of Africa, what better place than an African Philosophy seminar and what more qualified people than philosophers to examine both the form in which answers have so far been given and the content of these answers to that question of identity."<sup>4</sup>

The question of a people's identity goes beyond the issue of human dignity because a people's identity has implications for their survival and development. In this regard, human identities have objective and subjective dimensions. The objective dimension is the quality or qualities that actually belong to a group of persons; they do not necessarily have to be conscious of this. The subjective dimension, on the other hand, is the appropriation of an identity by a subject – a person or persons – and the consequent actions or inaction that follow this appropriation. In this subjective form, a people's identity constitutes a motivational force in its own right for their development.

Before going further, let me make clearer the meaning of identity and of a person's or a people's identity. The *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* defines identity as "who or what a

particular person or thing is.” We thus have two related issues in respect of African identity: Who is an African? and What is an African? The answers to these two questions are more or less the same. Therefore, we may answer either of these questions first. The first question can be answered by reference to geographical location; that is, by saying: all those whose homes are in Africa are Africans. The problem with this characterization is that it does not capture the right connotation in the application of the term, because it is too broad. It includes people, for example North Africans, who are domiciled in Africa, who have biological/racial and cultural/ideological attributes that originated or evolved outside Africa or are centred outside Africa, and for whom such biological and cultural properties are more important than their being domiciled in Africa.

One may choose a racial/biological answer to this question, namely, an African is a Negro or a Negroid. But, here, the connotation will not be captured properly. For instance, a third generation Canadian of pure Negro descent, who cannot speak any African language, is guided by no African value, and has never been to Africa, cannot be properly described as an African, except perhaps for racist purposes. We are thus left with the cultural and ideological basis for determining African identity. In this regard, African identity lies principally in the beliefs, values, customs, and practices that are peculiarly African, in the evolution of this culture due to internal forces of change and encounters with other cultures, and in the shared history that goes with such encounters.<sup>5</sup> An African is, thus, a person who shares in African culture and/or the history of African culture, and is involved in its re-creation and evolution. What it means to be an African is to share in this culture, history, and cultural evolution. It should be obvious here that this characterization of African identity makes it essentially the social identity, shared culture, beliefs, values, practices, and history of the peoples of Africa.

Given the preceding presentation of African identity, a number of significant problems arise concerning the permanence and change of this identity. If we locate the identity of a people in their culture or ideology and if culture is dynamic, what is the basis of the permanence of such an identity? Many scholars, including W.E.B Du Bois and Leopold Senghor, take a people’s identity to be something distinctive, immutable, and transmittable from one generation to another; and it is worth noting here that, on this view, the history of a people is the manifestation of their character in time.<sup>6</sup> There will be something almost inevitable about the historical events that pertain to such a people – a kind of determinism. For such scholars, culture on its own cannot provide the basis of identity because it changes; and, going by culture alone, we will be unable to account for shared identity across many generations – for

hundreds or thousands of years. But to have an identity, such as an African identity, requires the existence of properties shared over generations.

We cannot here address all the issues relating to the perspective of Du Bois and Senghor. However, we will try to show the basic errors of this “immutabilist” approach and point out the basis of an alternative approach.

In the first place, immutabilists are unable to show that there is something peculiar, immutable, and transmittable about the African apart from phenotypical features that have been the basis of racial classification. Yet the purpose of the immutabilists is obviously not to simply say that Africans have a different phonological form than other races; every scholar knows that this is the case. The purpose of the immutabilists is to show that there is something about the culture, values, organization, interests, and so on, of the African that is peculiar and immutable. However, if there are such things, they will ultimately rest in the minds of a people. When we speak of the mind of a person, we are referring to the intelligence, emotions, and will, and the way these things are harnessed and channelled to produce specific patterns. Now, there is nothing peculiar about the intelligence, emotions, and will of the African in spite of the efforts of some scholars using questionable assumptions and methods to show that Africans are less intelligent than other races. It is generally accepted that intelligence is equally distributed across the peoples of the world and the same should be accepted for the other capacities of the mind, such as the capacity for moral integrity, creativity (both artistic and technical – invention and innovation), resolve, and resolute action. Concerning resolute action, for instance, we can cite the bravery of some of the African armies that the British encountered in their incursions into Africa, notably the Ashante in the battle over Anomabu Fort in 1807 and the Zulus at Isandlawana in 1878. The bravery of such African armies was widely acknowledged by the British. Rudyard Kipling wrote, catching the perception of British soldiers about the African armies: ‘you are a poor benighted heathen, but a first-class fighting man.’ Their armies were deterred or defeated principally on account of superior firearms; the British knew this and had high regard for the Africans.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there is as yet no biological (scientific) basis for the notion of race, as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues.<sup>8</sup>

If Africans share equally in the various human capabilities, then African biology cannot be the basis of a peculiar, immutable culture. How then can we speak of a long-enduring African identity? Two planks can support the notion of some permanence of African identity on a cultural/ideological platform.

First, we can differentiate between the supreme beliefs and values of a culture that are constitutive of its foundations or core, and derivative beliefs and values. The latter are derived directly or indirectly from the supreme values or at least are compatible with them. This corresponds somewhat to the distinction between substance (supreme beliefs and values) and accidents (derivative beliefs and values), and between substantial change and accidental change in philosophy. Accidental changes do not affect the nature of a thing while substantial changes do. However, unlike physical nature, where substantial change can be rapid and complete, substantial change *in culture* is slow and rarely complete, because some elements of the fading culture are usually found in the ascending one.

Second, the culture and history of a people constitute a heritage passed on from one generation to another. Consciousness of an inheritance and the specific nature of such an inheritance together with the responsibilities, duties, and assets connected to such an inheritance, provide continuity of consciousness of belonging to a particular group – the continuity of subjective identity.

The above arguments lay the foundation of the position of those we may call the mutabilists. For the mutabilists, human nature is the same across races, and we need not assert (and it is inaccurate to assert) peculiar immutable features which give rise to psychological and cultural ones in order to attribute a specific identity to a group of people. For the mutabilists, the common range of human capacities working in different climatic physical locations and historical contexts have generated different cultures, which are sufficiently long and enduring to enable us assign identities.

The different assumptions and perspectives of immutabilists and mutabilists translate into the perspectives of the Afrocentrists and Afroconstructivists in dealing with the question of African identity – or, rather, the African identity crisis (that is, the crisis of confidence, the questions about the dignity and humanity of the African, that has beset the African since his encounter with Western Europeans and the wider world). We can summarize the salient elements of this encounter as slavery and the slave trade, colonization, the technological gap, and the organizational gap, that have bred economic and political dependency. Although we should devote some thought to each of these elements or factors, we should note here that the self-image and self-esteem of Africans as well as the European perception of Africans have hardly changed since the days of the slave trade.

Sir George Young, a naval captain who had travelled to Africa in 1767-8, 1771, and 1772, told the 1790 parliamentary inquiry into the slave trade of an African fable that he heard from a prominent English-



speaking African with whom had dined at Tantumquery Fort (Tamtam), Ghana.

That God Almighty made White man after he had made Black man; that when he made Black man and White man, he put a great heap of Gold upon table, and great heap of bookee (by which he meant learning and knowledge) and when so done, God Almighty said, Black man, which you like – Black man very great fool come chuse Gold; white man chose bookee and in so doing all one come, God himself.<sup>9</sup>

Another view can be had from Thorkid Hansen's presentation of the views of a former Danish slave trader, Ludewig Romer, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The old Negroes on the Gold Coast could philosophise about the state of affairs in the land when they trusted a European enough. It is you, the Whites, they said, who have brought evil among us. Would we have sold each other if you had not come as buyers? The desire that we have for your wares and brandy causes that one brother cannot trust the other, neither one friend the other, yea, hardly even can the father trust his son. In my youth, I knew thousands of families here at the seashore, and now one cannot count one hundred individuals. And what is worse you have become a necessary evil among us, for if you were to leave, the Negroes inland would not let us live half a year, but would come and kill us together with our wives and children; and they carry this hate towards us because of you.<sup>10</sup>

We have here all the ingredients of the African identity crises today. In this, we find low self-esteem, an acceptance of the status of underachiever, and the consequent notion of helplessness and dependency on the West.

Let us then take the principal aspects of Africa's encounter with Europe and show that the patterns they took were due to the African historical and cultural heritage and geographical isolation.

### **THE SLAVERY QUESTION: SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADE**

The institution of slavery and the slave trade existed in many ancient societies the world over. It is not unique to Africa. The unusual thing is

that Africans sold their own people to strangers. In this, however, Africans are not alone; in the Dark Ages, via the Vikings and Norsemen, people of Eastern and Central Europe supplied slaves to the various centres of affluence and power, principally the centres of Islamic civilization in the Middle East. Such activities show that the suppliers of slaves were weak in terms of ideologies and beliefs that reflected respect for persons.

The weakness of the traditional African ideology or belief system in this regard lies in the fact that it relied on and generated a sense of belonging and membership that was limited to clans, groups of clans and, at the maximal level, tribes. In other words, these ideologies centred around and were limited to blood relations and blood bonds. There was hardly any ideology that could bind together groups of clans and tribes, providing an overarching identity and basis of respect for the person. The presence of such an ideology – in this case, Christianity – prevented Western Europeans, especially those from the Christianized part, from selling its members. (The stability that this provided appears to be one of the major background conditions that propelled Charles the Martel, King of the Franks to rally the forces that defeated the invading Muslim army at Tours-Poitiers in AD 732.)

A similar thing happened in Africa about 1000 years later with the Zulu victory at Isandlawana. The Zulus were among the Nguni and Tswana tribes that did not engage in the slave trade because of what has been described as the Nguni tradition. According to this tradition, human beings are the shield of the king and must not be sold; war captives therefore are either killed or integrated into the tribe to constitute shields for the king. Under pressure at the Delagoa Bay, the Ngoni, one of the Nguni groups, under Zwagendaba engaged in the slave trade in a relatively limited way, but the Zulus and other groups further inland largely stayed away from trafficking in slaves. Consequently, the Zulus had enough internal cohesion, order, and manpower to engage and defeat an entire regiment of the British imperial army, the only victory of its kind in the whole of Africa. All these show that one of the major reasons why African states and people were persuaded easily to engage in the slave trade (to collaborate against their own people and their own kind) was the absence of a binding ideology. To attribute the scale of the slave trade to the desire for liquor and to liquor-influenced actions is simply implausible. This is because drinking or not drinking alcohol is an indication of a preference or value; a society that frowns at drinking alcohol, such as a strict Muslim society, cannot be seduced into becoming collaborators by the liquor from slave ships.

## **COLONIZATION**

Colonization is another major social upheaval that Africa has had to face. Colonization is a common experience the world over. Throughout history, societies that are more powerful have frequently had imperial and colonial designs, subjugating the less powerful by military might. However, societies react differently to military defeat and loss of autonomy. First, let us note that military defeat and loss of independence do not amount to ideological subjugation. For instance, the Jews were defeated militarily and subjugated by the Romans, yet they did not lose their belief system or ideology. Indeed, they went on, via Christianity, to effectively conquer the Roman Empire a few hundred years later. The effects on the belief system and organizing principles of a people, brought about by the intervention of a superior military power and the subsequent loss of independence, depend on the tenacity and the resilience of such a belief system or ideology.<sup>11</sup> The way African societies reacted and are still reacting to the forces of colonization and imperialism is an indication of the weakness of the traditional belief systems.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL GAP**

The slave trade and colonization were possible because of the relatively superior technology and organization of human resources of the imperial powers in key areas such as transportation and communication, armaments, and finance. It is superiority in these areas that provided the concrete basis for racism and its attendant problems, including the identity crisis in Africa and its diaspora. From the foregoing, to properly address the identity crisis amongst Africans, we should – rather, must – adopt perspectives that will enable Africans to adopt and adapt foreign technologies and organizational forms, while retaining and adapting the good and estimable aspects of our culture. By way of conclusion, let us now present our reaction to the problem of the African identity crisis.

## **CONCLUSION: AFRICANITY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AFRICAN IDENTITY**

The immutabilists and the perspective they advanced have given rise, one can safely claim, to Afrocentrism. The Afrocentrist tries to show that Africans have values, personality traits and accomplishments that are glorious and comparable to those of the West and, indeed, to all other cultures – and that, therefore, the African should not be denigrated for any reason. However, to demonstrate these accomplishments and to hold on to them, the Afrocentrist is compelled to partly or totally deny

the role and responsibility of Africans for the disasters that have befallen the continent and its people. Africans often fail to acknowledge their share of the responsibility for the devastation caused by the slave trade, by the success of colonization, and by the misgovernance, poverty, and underdevelopment of the post-colonial era. This is because so doing will require a critical and dispassionate examination of the African belief system and the knowledge, organizational and personality forms that it sponsors, as well as the effects of these on the ability of Africans to deal with external forces and internal problems.

The mutabilists' view, on the contrary, anchors the identity of the African in his or her rationality *qua* human being. As rational beings, Africans can and should examine critically the beliefs, values, and actions of their ancestors as well as those of contemporary Africans in order to identify erroneous beliefs and values, and to adopt and adapt. This gives rise to the perspective of Afroconstructivism. Afroconstructivism is the perspective that holds that the African, as a rational being, should construct and reconstruct his or her beliefs, values and, hence, his or her personality and identity. This is to be based on truth (dispassionately, objectively and comprehensively sought out and identified with) and practical creative activity (*praxis*). On this perspective, the African identity crisis will be a thing of the past, provided that Africans construct and reconstruct their belief systems today. In this process, Africans will come to terms with those aspects of their history that they find unpalatable, not by denying them or absolving themselves of responsibility, but by seeing them as human failings and relatively incorrect ideological choices – which are weaknesses that beset all other peoples and races, at some point in their histories.

Finally, let me point out that if we adapt and adopt the Afroconstructivist viewpoint, we are most likely to begin the construction and reconstruction process by examining the slave trade, particularly the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In this regard, it should be pointed out that the view that de-emphasizes the responsibility of Africans and African states in that evil trade is very wrong. African states participated and collaborated in the slave trade by collecting taxes from the slave traders (in some cases on each slave sold) and by state-sponsored raids. This, of course, is in addition to the fact that some Africans participated individually in facilitating the trade, as traders, raiders, and kidnappers. From the above, it should be clear that African states failed to protect and properly guide their citizens, and that African leaders rather acted parasitically, exploiting and destroying African peoples and their wealth, and handing over the wealth and strength of Africa to the West and other people (e.g., Arab slave traders and slaving nations) for personal gain. This gross irresponsibility on the part of

African leaders has largely remained with us. For instance, African leaders from this time onwards have largely been parasitic. The only difference is that the form of the parasitic action has changed. Today, the so-called leaders steal public funds by various means and safely store their loot in foreign banks outside of Africa, where such funds are instead used in the development of the local economies that hold them.

The responsibility of the African, therefore, has to be addressed. The best way to address it is by purgation, and it should be carried out by African states and, particularly, African heads of state. The reasons that they should take these actions are: (1) the existence of the continuity of sovereignty; the sovereignty of former African states now resides in the current states; (2) it is difficult to identify the descendants of the individuals who collaborated in the slave trade, so there is no way of having them render the apology or provide reparation; and (3) the fact that African states failed to protect their citizens.

A first step in this process should take the form of a public apology by all African heads of state to the peoples of African descent all over the world, whose ancestors were forcibly taken out of Africa. In this regard, Ghana has taken a commendable step forward; in what is referred to as the “Joseph Project,” launched in 2007, Ghana aims at reconciling Africans and African-Americans forcibly taken out of Africa. It takes its name from the Biblical figure, Joseph, who was sold into slavery but later saved and reconciled with his brothers who sold him to the slave traders. The Ghanaian President from 2001 to 2009, John A. Kufour, while speaking about the Project, acknowledged the guilt and responsibility of Africans in respect of the slave trade. But Ghana did not go all the way to tendering an apology to African-Americans.

The second step in the process of purgation is to open the doors of Africa to the descendants of those who were forcibly taken out of Africa, and allow them to return. Those of African descent should have a right of return. They should be offered a right of abode and citizenship in any African state of their choice. (In this regard, it should be mentioned that the current system, by which Diaspora Africans are treated as citizens of foreign countries and charged visa fees and residency fees in order to visit or immigrate to the land from which their ancestors were forcibly removed, is a perpetuation of injustice, and grossly unfair).

The third step in the process of purgation is that African states should endeavour to facilitate the settlement of any Diaspora African who wants to settle and live in Africa by providing, as far as possible, free land to such returnees. This purgation should not be a hindrance to reparation. Reparation can be made either to Diaspora Africans (who may be provided reparation in the form of easier access to loans for establishing businesses, access to quality education, etc.) or to individual

Africans and African communities that can be shown to be direct victims of the slave trade.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, "The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy," in *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*, 1 (2000): 5-6. Online: <http://them.polylog.org/1/fmr-en.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> This definition is taken from the Wikipedia article on 'Intercultural Philosophy.'

<sup>3</sup> J. Olubi Sodipo, "Some Philosophical Aspects of the African Historical Experience," in *Proceedings on the Seminar on African Philosophy*: Addis Ababa, 1-3 December 1978, Claude Summer (ed) (Addis Ababa, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1998), p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>5</sup> D. Opatá, "On What is African," in *Critical Review of the Great Debate on African Philosophy*, ed. T. U. Nwala (Nsukka: Niger Books and Publishing Co. Ltd., 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2009), pp. 104-115.

<sup>6</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *African Philosophy*, ed. Albert Mosely (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 30-39; L. S. Senghor, "On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro," in *African Philosophy*, ed. Mosely, pp 116-127.

<sup>7</sup> William St Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2006), p. 195.

<sup>8</sup> Kwame A. Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," in *African Philosophy*, ed. Mosley, pp. 199-215.

<sup>9</sup> St. Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Thorkild Hansen, *Coast of Slaves*, tr. Kari Dako (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), pp. 83-84.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph C. A. Agbakoba, "Globalization, Religious Ideologies and Conflict: A Critical Examination and Exploration of Alternatives," *Contemporary Philosophy*, XXVII, No 1 & 2 (Jan/ Feb & Mar/Apr 2006).

## CHAPTER VII

# INTERCULTURALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICA'S COLONIAL AND DECOLONIZATION EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>

*DOROTHY NWANYINMA UCHEAGA OLU-JACOB*

### INTRODUCTION

In a world marked by uneven development and characterized by assorted forms of economic, political, and cultural aggression, there can be no better time for intercultural dialogue than now. The invasion of new modes of discourse in African society, the dominant form of education that disdains indigenous knowledge and language, the powerful influence of the international media, and the intrusions on traditional African ways of doing things are some of the elements that threaten African culture. It is in recognition of these challenges to culture that interculturality advocates a shift from the domination of one culture by another, promotes a plurality of cultures that respects differences, and fosters an ethic of solidarity and mutual enrichment rather than of exclusion.

In this paper, an attempt is made to critique colonialism in Africa from the perspective of interculturality. It also highlights the role of interculturality in the decolonization process. It argues that interculturality involves building bridges with persons and cultures outside one's own, and that this enabled African leaders at the early stage of independence to construct politico-economic systems for meeting the challenges of the newly independent African states. The perspectives of Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe are explored.

### INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY: THEMATIC CONCERNS

Terms such as dialogue and polylog are central to the 'intercultural philosophy' championed by Heinz Kimmerle<sup>2</sup> and Franz Martin Wimmer,<sup>3</sup> respectively. Intercultural philosophy is an orientation that sees philosophy as being culturally bound, but affirms that communication is still possible between those of different philosophical backgrounds. Proponents of this philosophical method contend that contemporary philosophizing is dependent on a variety of cultural

frameworks, and that philosophy originated not only in Europe but elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> including Africa, the Americas, and Asia.

Following the above, many philosophers can validly speak of their work in reference to their own context or culture, giving birth to such nomenclatures as African philosophy, Asian philosophy, or Indian philosophy. This also implies that a diversity of philosophies, focusing on their similarities and differences for the purpose of the mutual self-examination that issues in mutual enrichment, is a real option.

The basic question of intercultural philosophy, as Wimmer expressed it, is: "how can philosophy, which can never be expressed independently from linguistic and conceptual tools coming from particular languages and cultures, aim to provide us with universally true or valuable answers?"<sup>5</sup> For Wimmer, intercultural orientation aids our argumentation not to collapse into relativism, since more will be found in cooperation rather than separation.

Flowing from the foregoing, it could be argued that intercultural philosophy provides a new conceptual framework that can be employed in thinking, understanding, and relating to other cultures. It is in this regard that some philosophers who are convinced that Western philosophy has dominated the philosophical landscape for too long have started to move into intercultural philosophy in order to urge dialogue and communication among cultures.

The need for a philosophy of an intercultural character grew out of the attempt to forge a dialogue among assorted philosophical world views situated in cultures in Africa, India, and China. Proponents of this approach have grown weary of Western philosophy because of its centrist tendencies and its inability to deal with differences and other cultural philosophies, and to make it possible for other cultures to contribute to core meanings and understanding. One can understand intercultural philosophy, then, as space given to other philosophies to speak.

Clearly, intercultural philosophy gives one the impression that philosophy can be done in an open fashion that is committed to the concerns of philosophies besides Western philosophy. The intercultural philosopher views dialogue and polylog as means of reaching out to other cultures apart from one's own in an attempt to understand or benefit from the other. Beyond philosophical confines, the term interculturality is used in other fields: religion, peace efforts, and so on. Intercultural orientation tries to give meaning and space to other cultures; it tries to build bridges among cultures while denouncing ethnocentrism.

Turning to philosophy specifically, interculturality recognises that while philosophy is culture-bound, it is not the preserve of any one culture. Specifically, it affirms that the place from which we do our



philosophy is our own condition or culture. It is cognizant of the mixture of cultures. It is, thus, a contribution to a new understanding of pluralism, a new way of valuing and embracing diversity and difference. As a philosophical method that situates and locates cultures, interculturality delineates the finite alternatives one has for thinking, conceiving, and expressing our philosophy. Consequently, interculturality is something worth pursuing in order to preserve our cultures in the midst of so many conflicting cultures. As a communicative strategy, intercultural philosophy impacts on mainline philosophies as these pertain to issues of life. It helps philosophers of non-Western or non-European origin to assert their identity in the midst of the globalizing community and other forms of domination.

### **BASIS OF INTERCULTURALITY**

Interculturality takes indigenous culture as the source of the philosophical enterprise. It affirms the capacity of the philosopher to reflect on his culture and the attempts made against certain debilitating experiences in the past – for example, the slave trade, colonialism, wars, corruption, leadership problems, and poverty. It shies away from any assumed “common experience” which seems to mask differences and pretend that there is only one way of knowing. It does not see experience as fixed and universal. Many a critic may suggest, following this, that intercultural philosophy leads to total relativism. However this is not the case. By insisting on cooperation, mutuality, dialogue, and polylog, the isolationism inherent in individualism, the superiority inherent in claims of uniqueness, the hegemonic effects of false universalism – all of which are intrinsic elements of total relativism – dissipate.<sup>6</sup>

Dialogue and polylog, which are methods employed in intercultural philosophy, insist on making philosophy or culture more open. Openness then becomes the core value of interculturality and the search for ways of an ever more inclusive culture.

In no way is the specificity of intercultural philosophy to be taken as an “anything goes” philosophical attitude. It should rather be seen as a denunciation of inadequate and false universalisms that ignore the specific issues and challenges of periphery cultures. It is also a rejection of the denunciation of one's own culture, as it was during Africa's colonial encounter with Europe. It is an attempt to make one's unique experience count, and to question the ‘truth’ spoken by those who have the power to impose their views as normative. It is an insistence for the need for shared beliefs and strategies that affect the human condition.

Intercultural philosophy is a way of understanding philosophy by situating it within our particular cultural environments. This contrasts from the attempts to see philosophy as being about universals instead of

what humans do in their struggle through life. In this way, it challenges the absolutization of mainline philosophy (i.e., 'Western' philosophy) as normative. It rather uses culture as the source of philosophical reflection.

The West, in its encounter with Africans, arrogantly disparaged the ways of native Africans as uncouth, savage, and primitive. This attitude is inconsistent with interculturality, which calls for recognition of one culture by another as credible and a positive reservoir of values. Traditional Western philosophy was devoid of every sense of embracing the diversity that would make it possible for very different elements to influence it, to the point where Western philosophy might even be reformulated. Its contact with African thought was based on an unequal relationship.

Reflecting on the central theme of intercultural philosophy, Heinz Kimmerle<sup>7</sup> and Vincent Shen<sup>8</sup> agree that it is inadequate to do philosophy through the pigeonhole of Western philosophy, and that every culture has its specific type of philosophy which deserves equal treatment. Kimmerle explains the central characteristics of interculturality as consisting in the fact that it is guided by the methodology of listening, equality, and difference. Shen throws light on the epistemological strategies by means of which intercultural philosophy can be undertaken. These are the strategy of the appropriation of language – which means learning the language of other traditions of culture and philosophy – and the strategy of “strangification” – which means the act of going outside of oneself and going over to the other cultural context.

Dialogue is essential to interculturality. This involves a unity of action and reflection by those involved in the dialogue for the purpose of transforming and humanizing the world.<sup>9</sup> It presupposes that the participants in the dialogue recognize each other as equals and abhors the imposition of the truth of one person on another. It is not an instrument for the domination of one culture or person by another. Humility also characterizes dialogue, and this requires that no party in the dialogue should consider himself as the owner of truth or be closed to or offended by the contributions of others. Clearly, self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue for, at the point of encounter, neither should claim to have the monopoly on wisdom or be regarded as totally ignorant. What we have are individuals who are attempting together to learn more than they now know.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, dialogue presupposes an open mind and an acknowledgement of other possibilities or alternatives different from one's own. This overrides the bigotry and fanaticism that ethnocentrism begets. Mutual enrichment and self-actualization are likely benefits of interculturality through the instrumentality of dialogue. To see this perspective more clearly, I wish now to look at the colonial situation and

the decolonization process in Africa as well as the various politico-economic systems adumbrated by Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, and Nnamdi Azikiwe

### **INTERCULTURALITY AND THE COLONIAL SITUATION**

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the African continent was confronted with a new historical epoch. That epoch, which was to last for seventy years, was that of colonialism. It marked a turning point in the social, cultural, economic, and political fortunes of Africa. The contact between Western imperialism and Africa was such that the imperialists considered their ways to be the best and only way – and, so, the ideal – which must replace the mode of life of the natives. This formed the basis of their effort to change the mode of life of native Africans and remold them in the image of Europe. The French in particular were quite brash about this as portrayed in their colonial policy of assimilation, which entailed making the African as much a European as his black skin would allow. Besides political control and economic exploitation, there was a concerted effort made by the French to erode the cultural identity of the colonized. Cultural identity refers to the sum total of the cultural references through which persons and groups are defined and wish to be recognized. The colonized were urged to become like the French – to have a good mastery of the French language and an appreciable dose of French literature, philosophy, and culture. This was achieved through the mechanism of studies in France. The Portuguese had a similar policy of assimilation. Ultimately, the aim was to reproduce France and Portugal, respectively, wherever the two colonial powers had dominion.

The early missionaries saw assimilation as a divine assignment and were ready to risk death for it. Charles P. Groves gives a deep insight into what transpired:

The early missionaries in other words came as censors of the Africans and in preaching their ideals, the emissaries of the gospel were usually fortified by the unquestioning belief not only in their rightness but also in the depravity of so many indigenous institutions. Tribal collectivism, the power of spirit mediums, witchcraft beliefs and ancestral worship had to go for all were impure. The African had to become a new man. In order to bring about this spiritual regeneration, the early missionaries were willing to risk incredible hardships and death.<sup>11</sup>

It is evident from the above that what happened between the imperialists and Africans was a case of two cultures interacting, but not on the basis of equality. It is equally clear from Groves' account that the attempt to retool the minds of Africans and change their values was informed by the fact that, for many Europeans at that time, what was uniquely African was short of the ideal and inconsistent with what they considered to be rational and true – i.e., European values.

Back in the early nineteenth century, the German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel, in *The Philosophy of History* had taken absolute spirit on an itinerary from the East to West proclaiming that “Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning.”<sup>12</sup> In an attempt to enthrone European values as the universal and the ideal, Hegel contrasted four cultural realms in terms of their degree of consciousness of freedom. Africa south of the Sahara desert was written off as being “no historical part of the world,”<sup>13</sup> which had no self-consciousness to exhibit but, rather, “has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world – shut up” and is “the land of childhood...enveloped in the dark mantel of Night”<sup>14</sup>; it “exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state...there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in him.”<sup>15</sup>

All this and more was said to make a case for the alleged intellectual and genetic inferiority of the Negro and to promote European values as superior and universal for all humanity. It was an attempt to order the world culturally, economically, and politically in line with a Eurocentric world view. The colonial invaders believed in the superiority of their religion, race, economy, and culture. This superiority required the colonizers to carry out the vocation of converting and ordering the world toward their own identity.<sup>16</sup> The colonized were imbued with the belief that their religion, race, economy, and culture were backward and inferior.

The effort to remold Africans in the image of Europeans was borne out of perceiving European values as superior. This is incompatible with genuine dialogue and, consequently, interculturality. The colonial situation was itself a negation of what Africans would regard as theirs: their cultural identity, personality, and ways of doing things. It was a thesis, but it found its antithesis in the decolonization process following the Second World War. The synthesis in this dialectical triad came about with the politico-economic constructions of early African leaders.

## **INTERCULTURALITY AND DECOLONIZATION IN AFRICA**

Historically, interculturality impinged on events in Africa. To begin with, Africans who fought side by side with Europeans during the

Second World War became acquainted with the home environment of the colonial overlord and realized that Africans had nothing to be ashamed of. What they garnered from comparing the two cultural frameworks – their differences and similarities – enabled them to reach the conviction that colonialism was unfair and unjust. Africans woke up and forged a common front to fight colonialism. This took the form of what Shen referred to as the epistemological strategy of strangification. As already noted, strangification is the act of recontextualization, of going out of one's own cognitive context into the context of strangers.

Similarly, African intellectuals who traveled abroad for professional training returned to apply and adapt the ideas they garnered from their host cultures. Such political statements as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, issued by the French National Constituent Assembly in 1789, and the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, which emphasized universal principles such as equality, liberty, and fraternity, exposed in grand style the double standard of the colonial intruders. Their acquaintance with the writings of men like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and others, caused them to awaken to the injustices of colonialism. To fight colonialism, they utilized the very weapons that the colonizer used to exploit and oppress Africans. This informed the assorted philosophies for Africa, including negritude. Their existential and social analyses utilized the conceptual schemes and ideas of continental philosophies for reflecting on the African condition at that time, which included the colonial situation and the challenges of the newly independent states.

The role of this crop of African intellectuals in the political liberation and decolonization of Africa, and their analysis of the asymmetrical power relations in terms of which Africa was marginalized as the inferior "other" of European culture, cannot be overemphasized. This enabled them to not only reflect on, interrogate, and interpret other cultures, but also to engage in critical self-examination that would transform the prevailing conditions. This was true of Senghor's African socialism, Nkrumah's Consciencism and Azikiwe's neo-welfarism.

#### *Senghor's African Socialism*<sup>17</sup>

(Léopold) Sédar Senghor (1906–2001) of Sénégal offered a perspective that reflected a three-fold process that captured the erosion of African cultural identity through colonial contact and the rediscovery of this distinct identity. With this, the African found himself in a better position to make a choice as to what to absorb from the cultural contributions of East and West, and what to retain from his own pre-colonial past. The new society adumbrated by Senghor rested on three pillars:

1. An inventory of traditional cultural values which involved studying the mythical past.
2. An inventory of Western civilization and its impact on traditional civilizations. Works of novelists and playwrights were to act as the repository or inventory reflecting the effects of colonialism on cultural patterns of behavior. This was intended to yield a symbiosis between several cultures neither of which should dominate the other, but all of which should be complementary to the others.
3. An inventory of our economic resources, our needs, and our potentialities both material and spiritual. Foreign contributions would be adapted to the African cultural or economic realities.

Senghor does not see Western or Eastern or African civilization as the universal civilization. He highlights the humanistic tinge in negritude, and asserts that it accommodates the complementary values of Europe and the white man, and of all other races and continents. For Senghor, the aim of this revised negritude is to fertilize and put more life into its own values, which can embrace all humanity.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, Senghor's position reflects interculturality. To begin with, he affirms the uniqueness of persons and the rights of such to be different from others as well as the right of a people to its own culture. On account of this, it is wrong for one culture to impose its values on another. But he also creates room for cultural intermingling, and advocates an openness of mind that welcomes the good in other cultures for mutual enrichment and complementarity. Thus, one perceives in Senghor an advocacy for cultural contact devoid of domination, and that aims at cross fertilization. In the modern globalized world, the vehicles for achieving this goal include the mass media, the means of transport, and international political contacts. Through this means, people from different nations, races, creeds, and social classes can get to know one another and invite one another to dialogue.<sup>19</sup> Senghor's philosophy, therefore, appears to be a sort of ideological synthesis consisting of a balancing act between traditional cultural values, which are needed in order to maintain a sense of African identity, and Western values. All this reflects interculturality.

#### *Nkrumah's Consciencism*

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972) of Ghana, shows how the original perspectives of traditional Africa were distorted by the economic and political ideals of the colonial powers as well as by the religions imported by them. His aim was to construct a new philosophy that sought to achieve harmony among all these foreign influences. He called this philosophical Consciencism. According to Nkrumah:

With true independence regained...a new harmony...will allow the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa, so that this presence is in tune with the original humanist principles underlying African society. Our society is not the old society, but a new society enlarged by Islamic and Euro-Christian influences. A new emergent ideology is therefore required, an ideology, which can solidify in a philosophical statement and at the same time an ideology, which will not abandon the original humanistic principles of Africa....Such a philosophical statement I propose to name Philosophical Consciencism.<sup>20</sup>

Evidently, Nkrumah does not believe that African society had entirely given way to other influences. His main focus was how the various influences (Islamic, Euro-Christian) could be harmonized with the original humanistic principles undergirding traditional African society. He aims at a sort of synthesis, which ensues in a greatly improved society. What Nkrumah does in his philosophical consciencism is consistent with the principles of interculturality. He does not elevate traditional values to the position of superiority while arguing for the preservation of some of its aspects. He maintains an open mind, acknowledging the good in other cultures that could complement whatever was lacking in the indigenous culture.

His was an attempt to elaborate a systematic African Marxist theory. He erects his philosophy on the pillars of Marxist dialectics and materialism. Thus, his Consciencism turns out to be a restatement of the classical arguments of dialectical materialism. The core of Nkrumah's adumbrations lies in what he calls categorical conversion. This is defined as the emergence of self-consciousness from that which is not self-conscious. Elaborately, it implies the derivation of mind from matter and quality from quantity.<sup>21</sup>

In line with interculturality, Nkrumah makes the point that philosophy should not be apprehended outside of one's social location. In other words, the raw material for philosophy in Africa should be constituted by the African's existential conditions. This should be a matter for reflection and the stuff out of which the intellectual content of our philosophy is constructed. Thus, his definition of philosophical consciencism is "the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces, which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality."<sup>22</sup>

*Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism*

Before building his neo-welfarist ideology based on the ideas drawn from socialism, capitalism, and welfarism, the Nigerian statesman Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904–1996) highlighted the strong and weak points of these alternative but opposed systems. He defined a welfare state thus:

A state is said to be welfarist when it prescribes minimum standards and provides equal opportunities in education, health, housing, pensions, rehabilitation...A welfare state protects and promotes the social and economic wellbeing of its inhabitants, through systems of laws and institutions.<sup>23</sup>

Azikiwe finds a parallel of the welfarist state in the extended family system, which is indigenous to every African society. Welfarism appears very attractive to him because it promotes the principle of mutual aid with a humanistic basis. Nevertheless, he does not accept welfarism as complete and adequate; it has its shortcomings. He focuses on what he describes as neo-welfarism. In constructing this ideology, Azikiwe eulogizes the eclectic approach, even as he blends elements drawn from socialism, capitalism, and welfarism. In this connection, he affirms that “any person or group can add, subtract, multiply, or divide any idea and adapt it to their situation or historical circumstances.”<sup>24</sup>

In some ways, this eclectic approach is in tandem with interculturality in its recognition that something of value can be found in apparently opposing systems, and that such valuable elements can be appropriated and blended in order to achieve a better understanding of the issues involved. Implicitly, it entails dialogue or polylog, as the case may be, which are all essential ingredients of interculturality. What Azikiwe sees in the eclectic approach, thus, opposes dogmatism and produces an openness of mind for the purpose of understanding truth as it unfolds in its ever-fragmentary form, as revealed both by experience and reason. Dogmatism, an attitude of mind that takes truth as being absolute and apprehended in only one way, is in direct opposition to interculturality as the latter promotes more tolerance for that which is different and compromise through dialogue and polylog.

This, perhaps, was what Wimmer meant by tentative or transitory centrism in his discussion of his four types of cultural centrism. He notes in this connection that this type of centrism allows both the conviction of being right and openness to basically different views of others who are equally convinced of being right. In this respect, plurality rather than conformity is thought to be fundamental, and no concrete stance of thinking is held to be final. Wimmer is convinced that this approach to issues may lead to processes of mutual influencing, persuading, and



convincing each other. Thus, in the discourse, every participant remains a centre, but none of these "centres" is held to be definitive. Everyone fundamentally agrees that there may be views and insights that are different and even contrary to his or her own. Where there are sufficient motives to dialogue, each "centre" will try to convince the others.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the central attraction of interculturality is basically a communicative, dialogical form of knowledge production or problem solving. This immediately raises the following questions: does power-free communication reign? What about the violence, commercial interests, and manipulation that shape the world of discourse and power? If one looks closely at the oppressor/oppressed relationship and at certain levels of inequality, one cannot but conclude that all are a function of asymmetries of power. However, organizing the world along the lines of intercultural principles will provide the much-needed opportunities for each person or culture to have a space and a voice. Interculturality, then, has potential in terms of peace and security, overcoming vertical violence and religious intolerance. One can see this potential as follows:

## **POTENTIAL**

### *Peace and Security*

Many of the peace interventions in recent decades have been entirely antithetical to indigenous and traditional practices, regarding them as contradictory to the enlightened intentions of liberal peace. But intercultural peace encounters provide opportunities for lesson-learning exercises between different African traditional peace-making techniques. The approach is not unilateral but is one of dialogue and complementarity.

### *Overcoming Vertical Violence*

Dialogue as a strategy of interculturality calls for the overcoming of vertical violence between oppressors and the oppressed: between men and women, rich and poor, white and black. Oppressed groups are not in a position to dialogue with oppressor groups because the process of dialogue only functions where there is a position of equality and trust.<sup>26</sup> In interculturality, women and men, black and white, poor and rich, developed and developing nations have ample space to move into a new relationship with each other, in which oppressor groups are not only advocates of the oppressed, but also willing to come to a new understanding of how their access to power hurts others. Sexism, racism, classism, imperialism, and domination are all contradictions that appear

daily throughout the modern world. In light of these, interculturality is particularly important to the life and health of each society and to the world in general.

#### *Overcoming Religious Intolerance*

Proponents of 'absoluteness' in philosophy – usually those coming from Western philosophical traditions – are convinced of the superiority of Western thought in comparison with other forms of philosophy. The same disposition, extended to religion, reflects the high degree of intolerance among religious faiths. The fact of the multiplicity of religious beliefs calls for concerted efforts through interfaith dialogue to get all citizens to respect one another's religion and to see the similarities and connections between them. Such efforts will help to reduce the religious conflicts that have dogged a country like Nigeria since independence.

#### *Development*

In a world marked by uneven development, intercultural techniques are useful in conscientizing the West about the problematic of development, as it pertains to developing nations. These techniques highlight the fact that development programmes that work in some areas may not work in others. They also provide a basis for adapting development prescriptions to the conditions prevailing in the recipient countries. The recipient's needs, plans, and priorities must be at centre stage. This will require insight into socio-political conditions and priorities in the recipient countries. A precondition for interculturality is understanding and respect for other cultures. This enables the participants to know who the other is. This also calls for active public discourse on development in order to stimulate an active, constructive debate, based on knowledge, experience, and insight into the problems and opportunities facing the beneficiaries. Thus, in development matters, interculturality creates room for participation and sustainability. The key ideas in interculturality have found operational expression through grassroots empowerment, civil society enhancement, and cultural appropriateness, all of which have become mainstays of development programmes and projects.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This paper set out to examine interculturality as a philosophical method of apprehending cultural reality in the context of Africa's colonial and decolonization experience. Interculturality not only provided a critique

of colonialism, but had a role in the decolonization process, particularly in constructing politico-economic systems for the newly independent states. From the observations made herein, we can be confident that an intercultural approach to philosophizing can have a central place in responding to the pressing issues in contemporary Africa.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper appeared in *The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network*, Volume 11, No. 1, June 2011. [Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> Heinz Kimmerle, *Dialogue as a Form of Intercultural Philosophy* <http://www.door-dacht.com/files/pages/Dialogues.doc> Accessed 9/1/2010.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, F.M. Wimmer, "Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?," in *Interculturality of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Gregory D'Souza (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1996), pp. 45-57 (reprinted in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (ed.), *Kulturen der Philosophie* (Aachen: Augustinus 1996), pp. 101-118, as well as in: Commission nationale de la Bulgarie pour l'UNESCO (ed.), *Philosophie et Democratie en Europe* (Sofia 1998), pp. 165-182.); H. Kimmerle and F.M. Wimmer (eds.), *Philosophy and Democracy in Intercultural Perspective* (Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997). Online; F.M. Wimmer, *Polylogues on Conflicting Values – the role of Cultural Centrism*. Online. <http://www.bildungsmanagement.ac.at/download/Konferenz%202006/wimmer.pdf> Accessed 2014 November 30

<sup>4</sup> Wimmer, *Philosophy and Democracy in Intercultural Perspective*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wimmer, "Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?"

<sup>6</sup> A.M. Isazi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> See Kimmerle, *Dialogue as a Form of Intercultural Philosophy*.

<sup>8</sup> V. Shen, "Intercultural Philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism," Working Paper. Dutch-Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy. An Address Given at 1998 Annual Meeting of Dutch/Flemish Association of Intercultural Philosophy, 27 November, 1998. Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

<sup>9</sup> P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), pp. 61-62.

<sup>10</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> C.P. Groves, "Missionary and Humanitarian Aspects of Imperialism from 1870 to 1914," in *Colonialism in Africa 1870 – 1960*, ed. L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 488.

<sup>12</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> S. Senghor, *On African Socialism* (London: The Mall Press, London, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> R.E.A. Omi & K.C. Anyanwu, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1984), p. 227.

<sup>19</sup> Omi & Anyanwu, *African Philosophy*, p. 232.

<sup>20</sup> K. Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (London: Panaf Books Ltd., 1970), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> G. C. M. Mutiso and S.W. Rohio, *Readings in African Political Thought* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1975), p. 644.

<sup>23</sup> N. Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism?* (Lagos: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1980), p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria*, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> See Wimmer, "Polylogues on Conflicting Values – the role of Cultural Centrisms." <http://www.bildungsmanagement.ac.at/download/Konferenz%202006/wimmer.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> L.M. Russell, *Human Liberation in A Feminist Perspective – A Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 68.

## CHAPTER VIII

# GLOBAL ECONOMIC JUSTICE DEFINED INTER-CULTURALLY: ALTERNATIVES THAT EMERGE FROM THE NEO-COLONIAL CUSP

*HELEN LAUER*

### INTRODUCTION

In his widely-praised 2005 paper, “The Problem with Global Justice,”<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nagel provides a convincing contribution to the contemporary literature on the topic – one that rests squarely in the Hobbesian tradition of disparaging international law because it is unenforceable.

In this paper, I explore correctives to the various errors that Nagel seems to make in his defence of scepticism about global justice. Here, I rely on lessons learned from and conventions surviving in West African contemporary social and moral contexts, where people engage in divergent, historically-antagonistic, cultural and political traditions. Under intense emotive and psychological strains, rational deliberation is presented as a means of promoting justice in the international sphere. Rather than cultural diversity posing a major obstacle to the deliverance of economic justice internationally, I will consider how it might feature as a central vehicle for its realisation. I will take up the errors in standard reasons for being sceptical about cultural diversity. Then, I will consider ways in which an ethics of care, as suggested by Virginia Held, may be anticipated in the indigenous norms of governance that have survived in the West African cultures that have withstood the onslaught of external colonialism. This will help to show how moral principles might find their way back into the global marketplace of diplomatic discourse and economic policy designs. I conclude that regarding global justice, not as a univocal formula or set of procedures, but as an ongoing collaborative, intercultural work in process, may provide some answers to the question of the feasibility of global economic justice.

### NAGEL’S ASSUMPTIONS

Seeing how Nagel may be wrong in his neo-classical liberal assumptions about the global arena reveals good reasons to be optimistic about global justice as a feasible, ongoing, cross-cultural enterprise. Roughly

sketched, the mistakes I find underlying Nagel's scepticism include the following assumptions:

(i) gross inequalities and international violence cannot be regarded as injustice without a central recognised global sovereign backed by coercive threats of force;<sup>2</sup>

(ii) the absence of certain kinds of institutions in the global arena makes it virtually impossible to make judicial process and constraints applicable among nations;<sup>3</sup>

(iii) persons as legal subjects – that is, as bearers of constitutional and convention-ratified human rights – exist in formal isolation, independent of their communities, cohorts, and co-dependents; so that none of these economic dependencies or mutual caring relationships can motivate moral duties and rights, beyond voluntary inclination, to fuel today's humanitarian aid projects;

(iv) since individuals as rights-bearers are abstract agents, a sharp division can be drawn between humanitarian concerns and "higher-level standards" incurred formally by the demands of justice upon institutions;<sup>4</sup>

(v) the world's cultural diversity poses the chief impediment to a universalisable code of ethics and to legitimating the supra-national political authority requisite for delivering justice globally;

(vi) global justice, if it existed, would be a fixed and unassailable, immutable procedure, culturally neutral, enduring, and omnipresent.

Each of these beliefs demands a thorough analysis. For lack of time, I will point briefly to only a few of them.

The alternatives to classical liberal thinking about the demands and requisites of justice have come to me through the writings of and conversations with scholars in political science, philosophy, sociology, and history in Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. Their varied bifocal orientations as West Africans provide keen insights into contrasting models of democracy, competing notions of good governance and justice, of personhood according to indigenous Akan matrilineal clan ethos, and as defined by modern liberals and cosmopolitans. These perspectives overlap instructively with some Western political theorists who promote an ethics of care, who take seriously the demand for fair trade and distributive justice on a global scale, and who seek an antidote to the dominant free-market-value orientation that ratifies the level of violence and inequity characteristic of the current global economic order.<sup>5</sup> Before exploring these overlaps, let me provide a brief overview of Nagel's explanation for his reluctant scepticism about global justice,

to show the source of errors I attribute to his otherwise very compelling view.

### **NAGEL'S SCEPTICISM**

Nagel insists that the potential for positing a doctrine of *universal* human rights – or any other uniform vocabulary for global justice – is not merely naïve or muddle-headed, but morally illegitimate: first, because there are no universally-recognised standards about what justice requires of individuals or of the state, and second, because even if such rules and obligations were spelled out, there is no way to enforce them. The rules and obligations would not be binding. According to traditional Hobbesian contract theory, laws have to be backed by force; otherwise they are empty declarations of good will, a discursive form of narcissism. Since today there exist no universally binding procedures for fair and impartial adjudication, there can be no legitimacy in imposing any set of rights or principles of justice on all the world's citizens.

The existing institutions that seem to be relevant are the United Nations with its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and its agencies in the Hague: the International Court of Justice, which is the judicial organ of the UN, and the International Criminal Court, which was erected by a treaty in 2002 called the Roman Statute. Since the jurisdiction of these bodies is not universally recognised, their injunctions and proceedings can be, and have been, criticised as arbitrary and capricious. The principles of international law imply no rights and no obligations for states that have not signed the Roman Statute.<sup>6</sup> Several countries including India, China, Russia, and the United States have not ratified the Roman Statute and, on occasion, noisily frown upon the ICC.<sup>7</sup>

On Nagel's view, the notion of global justice is not just currently impractical, the ideal itself is incoherent because no institutional arrangement or legal order exists by which to regulate behaviour across national boundaries, and no juridical body enjoys sufficient credibility worldwide to decide legitimately when an injustice against a person or a state has been committed.

Let me outline the presuppositions underlying Nagel's scepticism which I signalled at the outset as vulnerable to challenge. Nagel assumes [i] that justice requires a sovereign whose authority is backed by force; [ii] that only institutions, not individuals, can deliver justice; [iii] that individuals are bearers of rights as abstract and independent moral agents without distinguishing needs or differentiating contingent features; [iv] that the formal procedures and demands of justice are of a higher order in priority and moral significance than the demands and dynamics of humanitarian care; [v] that cultural diversity is the key

impediment to legitimating the formal mechanisms of universal justice; and [vi] that if it did exist, global justice would be a fixed and immutable procedure.

### AN ALTERNATIVE DEFINITION OF GLOBAL JUSTICE

Constructing a viable alternative to this discouraging picture entails that the way we go about defining global justice will determine the likelihood of its being achievable.<sup>8</sup> Unlike popular versions of Hobbes' contractarianism, consensual procedures of traditional Akan rule by council of elders suggest that a principle of justice may enjoy universal legitimacy, not because its content is regarded as indubitable or because its author is unassailable, but because of the careful collaborative and deliberative means by which the principle was discovered or constructed. Here I extrapolate from Kwasi Wiredu's (1988) suggestive account of indigenous Akan rule by deliberative council. When and if consensus is reached, it is because each ruling is understood as a product of compromise, whereby everyone's ideal of what *should* be done has been granted due weight in the decision-making about what *will* be done. Then the resulting decision is promoted with the status of a refutable hypothesis, potentially revisable in the light of future generations' voices or new stakeholders' perspectives. This process of consensual rule is an ongoing effort of deliberation by conflicting interest groups represented in council by elders whose only shared conviction might be their "will to consent"<sup>9</sup> in an effort to find the way forward, always understood as an amalgam of divergent views about what ideally ought to be done.

This perspective presupposes no capitulation to a demand for conformity.<sup>10</sup> According to Wiredu's depiction of consensual democratic rule, compromise does not mean sacrificing one's own principles or moral ideals; it does mean sustaining those views and yet arriving at a policy for implementation that takes into consideration everyone's represented views. It means preparedness to reflect upon one's moral convictions in light of the moral intuitions of others, and to adjust one's decisive output about what is to be done, in consequence. Such self-reflection through deliberation might have the result of changing one's core moral intuitions as well, but it need not in order to effect the consensual decision required to implement a policy for action.<sup>11</sup>

This process might be adaptable to the pursuit of justice through cross-cultural conjecture and refutation in the global arena. Each procedural rule is qualified as a stage in an unfolding collective realisation of justice, yielding a vision which is always revisable in principle. In practice, it is implemented only provisionally, until a transforming re-vision is called for and then realised. If postulating



principles of global justice is a collective work in progress, then universal legitimacy is achieved because whatever resolutions or pronouncements are made at any point in time are subject to prescribed revision or renewal through further consideration by subsequent sittings of council which will bring updated perspectives with its new representative members. Cultural diversity becomes the vehicle and catalyst for discovering fundamental convictions about global justice, rather than being the main obstacle to its realisation.

To think about the promethean nature of normative judgments in this way, I interpret moral beliefs as being subject to criteria of validity as well as other logical properties. In this respect, I regard value judgments as subject to a “cognitive interpretation.” They need not be regarded on a par with bursts of emotion, to which revision based on rational systematic reflection cannot apply.<sup>12</sup> This position needs further review, but on first brush it seems that a non-cognitive interpretation of moral judgment renders impossible any rational introspection about one’s own moral convictions and those of others. Pick any non-cognitive theory of moral claims – for example, one that interprets moral utterances as emotive and ejaculatory. Then there is no reasoned way to assess or revise our respective standpoints. For similar reasons, staunch moral positions must be recognised as porous and accessible to all disputants in a moral deliberation. This is a requirement if judicial policy and verdicts are to be regarded as the outcome of rational debate rather than axiomatic decrees backed by force and issued by a supra-sovereign central authority. That is, it must be the case that moral perspectives of people in cultural traditions radically different from each other are nonetheless understandable and reliably interpretable by each participant in a dispute. Otherwise they could not make sense of the idea of a substantive moral disagreement, let alone of modification or transformation of one’s own convictions through reflective accommodation of other contrary points of view. Unlike judgments about the physical world as we find it to be, our interpretation of how others think they would like the world to become involves recognising the cogency of perspectives different from our own. Understanding other moral agents requires attributing to them beliefs *about* justice according to principles that both define and regulate the notion of justice as we understand it ourselves. What is arrived at through deliberation and consensus concerning a given case or policy thereby *defines* what gets counted as justice at a given place and time in history. The definition of justice may change with the subsequent deliberation of future generations.<sup>13</sup>

On this view, a council of global justice is not a supreme authority; it functions as one of the several ongoing communities of discourse and generates one among the many conversations that

influence the practices and conventions of major and minor agents in the global arena. Along with other organisations that act as technical consultants, or as lobbying groups for the accumulators of capital or for the concerns of labour, there could be a council that is honoured and respected for acting as a moral conscience and deliberating body for the decency and political welfare of humanity as a whole. This approach to moral judgment implies we have to give up the widely-accepted conviction that the only rational method of engaging in effective conflict resolution is either through the threat of military force or through negotiation backed by such threats. A third option, which has proven effective in reaching a ceasefire in guerrilla actions but which might still be undermined both by threats of force and by bargaining self-interests, includes appealing to our initial and enduring state of interdependence, appealing to the vulnerability of innocent loved ones, to our mutual need for care, and to our common humanity.<sup>14</sup>

Interdependence is not a fixed relationship, understood the same way from all sides and in all situations. As justice presupposes interdependence of some kind, so too what counts as a just resolution to conflicts of interest or damages incurred will depend upon how agents perceive their dependency upon one another. A global council for deliberating and constructing the dictates of global justice does not need to fix a rigid structure that is impenetrable to contestation or reconstruction; it does not need to demand absolute conformity. Deliberation that yields consensus need not presuppose moral universals that everyone must ultimately share or be forced to accept. Appeals to mutual need and to our common humanity prescribe no fixed universals, no pre-set obligations established *a priori*. The needs of humanity and common calls for justice, when practically applied, may change – and are likely to change. Without profound disagreement, there can be no progress in understanding the direction of that change, no way to restore a harmony or balance<sup>15</sup> that has been lost in the inequities of gross injustice, the contours of which change over time. The camps in Dachau, the castles in Cape Coast, the oil rigs in the Niger Delta, the barbed wire throughout Palestine's West Bank, the blood stains all over Kigali in Rwanda, all look very different, and require different kinds of judicial preventive measures or restorative responses. But in the violation of human integrity that they all display, and by virtue of the demands for restitution that they all provoke, they are the same.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, let me suggest the propriety of a characteristically West African capacity for serving the needs of a council – a council that possesses global justice as its remit – due to their highly cosmopolitan

history of cross continental trade. Schooled in the international languages of their former colonizers, contemporary citizens of post-colonized West Africa typically adjudicate between divergent procedures of justice, conflicting norms of feasibility, incompatible senses of propriety, contrary moral codes and multiple definitions of family. African intelligentsia assess current events from a wider, richer repertoire of political experience than do their counterparts floating in capital-controlled technocratic cyberspace. Thus, the various African understandings by which today's global inequities can be viewed, at least in part, as the perpetuation of historical injustices, serve as a foundation upon which to build protocols that can serve the goals of a council devised for deliberating global justice.

One such incorporation of divergent frameworks is the West African familiarity with contrasting notions of justice. (I am grateful to the Ghanaian historian Divine Amenumey for explaining the following purpose and structure of legal arbitration in un-centralized, non-state polities.) This shifts the very notion of justice away from the competitive model of juridical process that dominates Western legal systems. When two or more parties in a West African primordial public are in conflict, they seek a neutral party to mediate. If this fails, a formal hearing is sought in an established legal structure presided over by a recognized authority, who might be a chief. When called upon to resolve the conflict, this authority is not expected to establish which party is the winner and which the loser. Judicial process is not a competition; justice in this system is not served by determining who is legally 'right' and who is 'wrong.' Rather, conflict resolution through these procedures of justice is the "restoration of an equilibrium that previously prevailed before the conflict arose."<sup>16</sup>

In these lights, it becomes clear why concepts serviceable in the global arena require a genuinely intercultural provenance and basis. Classical Western liberal criteria are inadequate, if not irrelevant, for building the potential structures for pursuing justice globally when taken in isolation from other political traditions. Alternative models of judicial procedure and intra-regional diplomacy of post-colonized societies – for instance, in West Africa – provide models of justice and reparation that are pertinent to the inequities existing in the international arena, from viewpoints predominantly shared in the Two-Thirds World.<sup>17</sup> The Western liberal competitive democratic model fails to generate criteria that are relevant for evaluating injustice in the global arena because it sustains the pretensions of capitalist *laissez faire* ideology, unchallenged in any non-ancillary way. According to free market dogma, a strict demarcation exists between the public domain of state accountability and responsibility, and the private sphere of personal pursuits and freedoms. The latter sphere is allocated to the operations of

multinationals in their profit accumulation activities, wherein they command and control the lives and welfare of individuals globally, yet with no obligation whatsoever on the part of invasive firms and business networks to respond to needs or to repair damages incurred due to their activities. What remains at the top of the current global human rights agenda is an over-riding juridical concern to maintain efficiency in the extraction of resources. Currently, good governance around the world is measured according to its contribution to the feasibility and security of efficient, long-term foreign returns on investments and ventures labelled euphemistically as economic aid for development, as enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, justice once concerned itself with individual welfare, human rights (however defined), and constitutional law. This perspective has lost all rational purchase in the global arena. It is in this respect that Thomas Nagel's cynicism is absolutely on the mark, though I do not think for all the reasons he claims. Currently, thanks to those in authority who do control affairs and maintain very robust institutional arrangements in the international arena by use of force, the very idea of global justice has indeed become virtually incoherent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "On the Problem of Global Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 33 (2005): 113–147. Page references throughout this critique are to the reprint of his paper in Thom Brooks (ed.), *The Global Justice Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 416–438.

<sup>2</sup> Nagel states this unequivocally: "[t]he full standards of justice, though they can be known by moral reasoning, apply only within the boundaries of a sovereign state, however arbitrary those boundaries may be. Internationally, there may well be standards, but they do not merit the full name of justice." (p. 421).

<sup>3</sup> Nagel, pp. 420, 434 *et passim*. Amartya Sen in *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin, 2009) p. 82, has accused Robert Nozick of "institutional fundamentalism," whereby Nozick mistakenly regards institutions as promoting justice rather realizing they are the manifestations of justice. See Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). An example of Nagel's excessive confidence in sovereignty and its formal institutions is evident in this passage: "Without the enabling condition of sovereignty to confer stability on just institutions, individuals however morally motivated can only fall back on a pure aspiration for justice that has no practical expression, apart from the willingness to support just institutions should they become possible" (p. 418).

<sup>4</sup> Nagel (p. 434) differentiates humanitarianism from the "higher level" standards of justice. I rely here on the notion of abstract individualism characteristic of classical liberal political theory as succinctly spelled out by

Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Theories of Human Nature* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983), pp. 27-33.

<sup>5</sup> Some examples: I am indebted to Virginia Held for her application of care ethics to strengthening respect for international law (see her "Morality, Care, and International Law," *Ethics and Global Politics*, 4 (2011): 173-194); to Barrie Karp for conversations and introducing me to this article, to Katrin Flikschuh, "On the Cogency of Human Rights," *Jurisprudence*, 2 (2010): 17-36, for her analysis of contemporary limitations of international human rights instruments in light of their historic focus since post-WWII; to Michael Sandel, "A New Citizenship," *BBC Reith Lectures*, Lecture I: "Markets and Morals," first broadcast on BBC Radio 4, June 9, 2009. <<http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/04/bbc-reith/>> Accessed November 13, 2011; to Anne Cutler ("Locating 'Authority' in the Global Political Economy," *International Studies Quarterly*, 43 (1999): 59-81), for exposing the covert yet coercive authority sustained in the global arena by an entrepreneurial multinational business elite class camouflaged by neo-liberal ideology; to Thomas Pogge ("Moral Universals and Global Economic Justice," in *The Global Justice Reader*, ed. Thom Brookes (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 358-384) for his analysis of the vulnerability of individuals to global human rights violations; and to Divine Amenumey, professor emeritus of the History Department, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, for explaining alternative notions of justice.

<sup>6</sup> The 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

<sup>7</sup> Under the George W. Bush administration, bilateral agreements were created with countries that signed on to the ICC, whereby the US threatened to terminate economic aid, or to withdraw military assistance to these countries if they could not help protect US citizens' immunity from ICC proceedings. This was particularly crucial in saving America's face in the exposé of human rights violations at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> The germ of this idea to depend upon a collective, gradual process for legitimating moral principles cross culturally, was first given to me with respect to a universal code of ethics for higher education in December 2009 by my former Vice Chancellor, the medical Professor Clifford Nii Boi Tagoe, when we were preparing his contributions for a roundtable question and answer session to which he was invited as a panellist by the International Association of Universities, at their annual conference, June 25-26, 2010, "Ethics and values in higher education in the era of globalization: what role for the disciplines?" Mykolis Romerus University, Vilnius, Lithuania.

<sup>9</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, "The State, Civil Society and Democracy in Africa," *Quest* [Special Issue: *State and Civil Society in Africa*], 12 (1998), p. 243. The italicized emphases have been added.

<sup>10</sup> Wiredu, p. 243.

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Bernhard Weiss' presentation "Disagreement," at the University of Ghana, Legon, Philosophy Department, where he presented various stances that illustrate different normative epistemic strategies in situations of uncertainty and divergent opinion.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful here to Virginia Held for her correction; initially I claimed that value judgments bear truth values, but this puts them too closely in

alignment with empirical judgments whose veracity depends upon non-discursive evidence such as observation reports. I am following Geoffrey Sayre-McCord when I treat value judgments to a “cognitive” meaning. I do so because, as he argues, non-cognitive readings of value judgements defeat realist interpretations of moral relativism, see “Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence,” in his *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 256-281.

<sup>13</sup> I follow here Michael Root’s characterization of interpretation principles as regulative and constitutive, when he contrasts our attribution of beliefs to people in radically different cultures with our attribution of properties to things in the physical world. See his very useful “Davidson and Social Science,” in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 276-277.

<sup>14</sup> Gratitude is owed to Daniel H. Levine, Maryland School of Public Policy, for sharing his theoretical proposal, based on research in Liberia, in the talk “Threat/Negotiation/Appeal and Civilian Protection,” September 28, 2011, presented during his tenure as Fulbright Scholar in the Department of Philosophy and Classics, University of Ghana, Legon.

<sup>15</sup> Wiredu, pp. 242-243.

<sup>16</sup> Divine E. K. Amenumey, professor emeritus, History Department, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in conversation July 2003.

<sup>17</sup> I borrow this improvement on ‘third world’ from David Bussau, the founder of Opportunity International (OI).

<sup>18</sup> An excellent albeit controversial example of human rights concerns serving the interests of capital investments can be illustrated by a cynical interpretation of the global arena on Darfur and the janjaweed in 2003, which justifies militarizing the Western Sudanese border, now heavily patrolled by foreign troops to protect foreign interests. The pipeline’s construction has attracted storms of escalating outrage in its own right, and considerable attention since its completion in 2001, about the time when the violence in Darfur is reported conveniently to have begun.

## CHAPTER IX

# TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY AS EXPRESSION: APPROACHING INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY FROM A ZEN BUDDHIST PARADIGM<sup>1</sup>

GEREON KOPF

### PHILOSOPHY IS GOING GLOBAL

The last fifty years have seen a rise in interest in so-called comparative, intercultural, and global philosophies.<sup>2</sup> What these terms indicate, to albeit varying degrees,<sup>3</sup> is an attempt to liberate the academic discipline of philosophy from the confines of the European and North American traditions and open it up to the intellectual traditions from around the globe.

The distinction between “philosophy” *per se* and “global philosophy” seems to be artificial since most definitions of philosophy seem to imply a universal relevance as well as scope, and seem to make the qualifier “intercultural” or “global” redundant and unnecessary. Philosophy has been alternately defined as the “examined life,”<sup>4</sup> “a persistent attempt to think things through,”<sup>5</sup> “the study of wisdom and truth,”<sup>6</sup> “the attempt to understand the nature of the world and our place and destiny in it,”<sup>7</sup> and the “battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, though, despite these definitions selected from the greats of the philosophical traditions of Europe and North America, philosophy is still predominantly understood to be a European or North American project, if textbooks and curricula of philosophy are any indication. In other words, it is taken for granted that there is philosophy in Europe and North America, while philosophers in the field of comparative, intercultural, and global philosophy, as well as philosophers from traditions other than that of Europe and North America, are expected to prove in what way their tradition or work qualifies as philosophy, a task rarely expected of thinkers in Europe and North America.<sup>9</sup> Even scholars who are wholeheartedly supportive of the comparative enterprise tend to make the Euro-American traditions of philosophy their paradigm and attempt to identify similar methods, projects, and discussions in other traditions. The intellectual achievements in other traditions are then deemed philosophy if they, in some way, resemble the philosophical output from the tradition that

stretches from the Pre-Socratics to contemporary analytical and continental approaches. To paraphrase Thomas P. Kasulis' insightful observation with regards to the academic search for a "Zen ethics," "the hidden assumption in the conversation is...that a philosophical system in Buddhism...would be immediately recognizable to a Westerner as a philosophical system."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, inquiries such as "Is there philosophy in Japan?" almost never serve to foster understanding of the intellectual achievements of the tradition in question, but rather constitute an attempt to ascertain whether these are on par with philosophy done in Europe or North America. In the final analysis, these pursuits boil down to the question of whether cultures outside of Europe and North America can be counted as their intellectual equals or not. The key problem here is simply Eurocentrism. If philosophy, however, is understood as the attempt to make sense of the human predicament and to take a self-reflective and critical attitude to our interactions with the world, the question should not be "Which cultures possess a philosophy?" but rather "What cultural forms do philosophy take?"

In this paper, I will thus not attempt or pretend to show that there is philosophy outside of Europe and North America. On the contrary, I will commence my discussion with the assumption that there is. As indicated in the previous paragraph, I define philosophy as reflection about the human predicament and a self-reflective and critical attitude to our interaction with the world. It is this self-reflection that has given rise to the traditional sub-disciplines of European philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, but also philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and so on. It is the goal of this paper, then, to sketch out an alternative way to think about philosophy as the discipline of systematic self-reflection; an approach that is grounded in Zen Buddhist philosophy and its adaptation by the philosophers of the Kyoto school at the beginning of the twentieth century in Japan. I pick this tradition for three reasons: First, quite a few thinkers from this tradition such as Keiji Nishitani 西谷啓治 (1900-1990) explicitly identified philosophy as self-reflection. Second, it seems that there is almost no tradition whose ability to produce academic philosophy has been doubted as much as that of Zen Buddhism, which has become in/famous for its use of paradoxes and the stylistic form of the *non-sequitur*. Third, not only did the tension between universality and particularity – that is, the center of the debate surrounding intercultural and global philosophy and the question "What is philosophy?" – play a significant role in Japanese Buddhist philosophy, but the members of the Kyoto school also applied this discussion of universality/particularity with varying success to the question of cultural specificity. Their philosophy thus not only makes an exquisite case study of an "alternative" approach to



philosophy, but also contributes to the controversy surrounding comparative, intercultural, and/or global philosophy itself.

### THE PHILOSOPHER'S STANDPOINT

Philosophy commences with critical self-reflection, that is, the “examined life.” It was the genius of René Descartes, as well as the reason for his lasting significance for the philosophical traditions of Europe and the Americas, to locate the beginning of philosophy in the self-reflective subject, the *cogito*. This *cogito* is inextricably linked to the division of the human experience into two realms, the realm of ideas and the realm of phenomena. Philosophy primarily investigates the realm of ideas, that is, the concepts we use to describe reality, political dynamics, language, art, and so on, rather than the “phenomena of experience” themselves.<sup>11</sup> However, even though the separation between philosophy and the natural sciences more or less coincided, at least from a historical perspective, with Descartes’ distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, I am not sure his metaphysical dualism captures the scope of philosophy adequately. It seems that philosophy primarily investigates what Immanuel Kant calls “forms of knowledge” or, at least, the *res cogitata* rather than the subjective knower or even a substance qua *res cogitans*. It is for this reason that Kitarō Nishida 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945) assigns philosophy as scholarship to the standpoint of objectivity and not of subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> In other words, philosophy constitutes the activity of thought investigating itself and, thus, the externalization and objectification of an internal and subjective activity, thought.<sup>13</sup> What makes philosophy unique among all academic disciplines is that it is inherently self-reflexive and, thereby, reminiscent of the fundamental structure of self-consciousness – and any study of the mind for that matter – wherein an epistemic subject studies itself as its own object.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, philosophy commences with a moment of self-consciousness, the “I of the philosopher.” This self-consciousness is not the thought of a *cogito* about something else, but about itself. It is further not a thing (*res*), but thought thinking about itself.<sup>15</sup> In this act of thinking, the *cogito* differentiates itself as “I” from its surroundings and from other “I’s.” It delineates itself thus, not from a *res extensa*, but from a multiplicity of individual others, be they material (e.g., trees) or mental (e.g., other selves and the world as a collective sense of otherness). This self-conscious act of thought – or, more precisely, the act of self-consciousness – is not identical with personal identity or the self. First, self-consciousness is not a thing. It is active, dynamic, and changing. But more importantly, this act of self-consciousness also differentiates itself from the aspects of the self that Sigmund Freud calls

the “unconscious” (*das Unbewusste*) and the “uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*) in the acts of “repression” (*Verdrängung*) or, what C. G. Jung called “dissociation” (*Dissoziation*). Finally, self-consciousness does not experience itself, for the most part, as disembodied thought but as embodied self-awareness.

On a basic level there is, as the naturalists claim, no self-consciousness without the brain. But, in addition, the brain requires a body that moves and perceives, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty observed in his *Phénoménologie de la perception* [*Phenomenology of Perception*] – Nishida refers to this bi-directional modality of embodiment of self-consciousness as “acting intuition” (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観) – to give rise to self-consciousness. In short, the *cogito* I am talking about here is not a disembodied mental substance, but an embodied act that conceives of itself as different and, in some sense, independent from a world that consists of a multiplicity of inanimate objects and other minds.

By positing itself as the “I,” self-consciousness divides, as the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (5<sup>th</sup> century) observed, the actuality of experience into a subjective and an objective dimension, rather than two substances. Nishida refers to these two dimensions, using Husserlian language, as the “noematic” (*noemateki hōkō* ノエマ的方向) and “noetic directions” (*noeshisuteki hōkō* ノエシス的方向) of consciousness. This fundamental bifurcation of the human experience engendered by the self-conscious “I” is expressed in the various dichotomies that are characteristic of the human construction of the world, such as internal-external, mind-matter, and self-world, and presents the philosophical inquirer with a series of alternatives: consciousness is either mental or physical, reality either internal or external, and the body either a subject or an object. These seemingly reasonable dichotomies reveal a series of paradoxes or at least conundrums: 1) the self that conceives of itself as in opposition to the world is in actuality a part of it; 2) consciousness is always embodied; 3) the body that the embodied self-consciousness calls its own is simultaneously subjective and objective, active and passive; 4) the distinction between the internal and the external is conceived of alternatively as the juxtaposition of self and world, conscious and unconscious, as well as emotion and rationality, and thus proves to be a shape-shifting target.

Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers who inherit Vasubandhu’s phenomenology of self-consciousness tend to interpret these paradoxes and conundrums, not as an indication of the ineffability of reality or a rejection of logic, but rather as a critique of the dualistic framework that underlies it. The problem of the dualistic framework is highlighted by

the impossibility of the subjective self to know itself as object. To Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers, the key to understanding the way a self knows itself and the world lies in self-consciousness, wherein the cognitive subject becomes its own object and the self externalizes itself.<sup>16</sup> For these thinkers, it is through the exploration of self-consciousness that respective attitudes toward the objectified reality reveal themselves as the product of particular standpoints and methodological presuppositions, and thus the philosopher gains a glimpse into the working of the cognitive processes and the human mind.

One philosopher who explicitly identifies introversion and self-discovery as his starting point is Keiji Nishitani. In his famous essay “*Zen no tachiba*” 禪の立場 [“The Standpoint of Zen”],<sup>17</sup> Nishitani suggests that both philosophy as well as Zen practice make “the investigation of the matter of the self” (*koji kyūmei* 己事究明)<sup>18</sup> – a term that he borrows from the Japanese Zen master known as Daitō Kokushi 大燈国師 (1282-1337) – their basic concern.<sup>19</sup> Nishitani is, of course, not the first thinker to connect Zen Buddhist thought and practice with introspection and self-awareness. The medieval Japanese Zen master Eihei Dōgen 永平道元 (1200-1253) famously equated Buddhism with self-discovery. In an often-cited passage, Dōgen observed: “to study the Buddha-way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas; to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas is to cast off body and mind of self and other.”<sup>20</sup>

In general, it is no secret that the search for self-awareness has always been at the forefront of the Zen Buddhist project. Nishitani, however, does not limit this search for self-awareness to religious practice or the realm of spirituality, but draws explicit parallels between Zen Buddhist practice, the philosophical project in general, and the Cartesian *cogito* in particular. In “The Standpoint of Zen,” Nishitani evokes the phrase usually referred to as the “four principles of Zen” – “there is a tradition outside of the scriptures – it does not rely on words – just point to the heart of the person – and become a Buddha by seeing your nature” (教外別伝 不立文字 直指人心 見性成佛) – as evidence that the projects of Zen Buddhist practice and the practice of philosophy coincide in that both urge self-reflection and self-analysis à la Socrates’ *dictum* “know thyself.” This reading is all the more surprising since, for the most part, Zen practitioners and scholars have interpreted the four principles (which are extremely popular in the Zen canon<sup>21</sup> and have been attributed to the legendary founder of Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma) as an indication for the presumed anti-linguistic and anti-philosophical nature of the Zen Buddhist project. According to

mainstream readings in the Zen Buddhist tradition, the four principles seem to postulate the superiority of the experience of “seeing one’s nature” (Chinese: *jianxing*; Japanese: *kenshō* 見性) and “face-to-face” transmission (Chinese: *mianshou*; Japanese: *menju* 面授) over reflection and language. This is where Nishitani’s reading comes as a surprise. Nishitani is convinced that Zen practice and the practice of philosophy are similar, as they both not only attempt to investigate the self but also attempt to reveal the fundamental structure of human experience and thus provide the key to understanding why we perceive and conceive of the world the way we do.

### ZEN PRACTICE AND PHILOSOPHY

While most people with even only a superficial understanding of Zen Buddhist practice and the philosophical project will be ready to agree that both enterprises deal, in some shape or form, with self-reflection and self-awareness, it seems that most authors of essays on the subject of “Zen and philosophy” suggest that comparisons like Nishitani’s require a considerable leap of faith. In short, the term “Zen Philosophy” is generally considered to be an oxymoron, particularly since D. T. Suzuki’s 鈴木大拙 adamant exclamation that “Zen” is “decidedly not a system founded upon logic and analysis. If anything it is the antipode to logic, by which I mean the dualistic way of thinking...Zen teaches nothing”<sup>22</sup> It is assumed by most philosophers, scholars, and occasional readers alike that philosophy is an academic discipline and Zen Buddhism a spiritual practice, that philosophers use logic and rational thought, and Zen masters reject both, that philosophical writings clarify meanings while Zen texts deliberately obscure them. While this dichotomization has some grounding in the respective traditions and enjoys popular acclaim, in the final analysis it is misleading and disingenuous. First of all, this dichotomization makes the mistake of essentializing the traditions of Zen Buddhism as well as academic philosophy; secondly, it falls prey to the rhetoric that is used on both sides for ideological purposes, and fails to take seriously the respective texts themselves. Even reflections on spiritual practices that purport to explore the realms of the unconscious and the less rational vestiges of the human mind cannot but at least imply some sense of meaning and rationality if they do not want to admit their own irrelevance. The present paper is not the appropriate forum to discuss this topic, but even texts that appeal to and even use paradoxes do so, not to destroy logic and reason – that would be self-defeating or evoke, at best, a *credo quia absurdum* – but to subvert or, if you will, “deconstruct”<sup>23</sup> the unspoken assumptions lying at the foundation of every discourse and argument in

order to attain greater clarity, awareness about the language we use, and, ultimately, self-awareness. On the other hand, if philosophy is at all concerned with the “life of the mind” and the “examined life,” as many philosophers like to claim, it cannot be reduced to logical forms but must have concrete application and relevance to practice itself. It is for these reasons that I believe that the use of dichotomies is not helpful when examining the parallels between Zen practice and academic philosophy that Nishitani evokes. A more constructive approach is offered by Shizuteru Ueda 上田閑照, the first among the Kyoto school philosophers to consistently and persistently connect the terms “philosophy” and “Zen.”

In order to be able to discuss the question of “Zen philosophy” proper, Ueda avoids the dichotomizing essentialized language of “Zen” and “philosophy,” and introduces his own categories. In “*Zen to sekaï*” 禪と世界 (“Zen and the World”), he distinguishes between “the study of the highest reflection” (*kōji no hansei no gaku* 高次の反省の学) and “the practice of without-thinking” (*hishiryō no gyō* 非思量の行).<sup>24</sup> His word choice, here, is extremely interesting and revealing. While the characters for “hansei” 反省 do occur in the Buddhist canon – an especially high number of occurrences can be found in the *Yiqiejing yinyi* 一切經音義 (*Sounds and Meanings of all Scriptures*)<sup>25</sup> – the term has been used in the Japan of the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods to indicate “Western-style” philosophical reflection. However, it is not “reflection” proper that Ueda identifies with the term “*kōji no hansei no gaku*” but, rather, the meta-discourse of “reflection about reflection”<sup>26</sup> – that is, the discourse that clarifies the basis of the philosophical thinking itself. The second phrase “*hishiryō no gyō*” clearly evokes the Buddhist tradition. “*Gyō*” 行 comprises the Japanese term for Buddhist practice, while the term “*hishiryō*” has its roots in the Buddhist canon. The latter term constitutes the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *acintayitvā*, “not to think” or “not to discriminate.” However, while the phrase “*fushiryō*” 不思量, which is also translated as “not to discriminate” or “not to think,” was frequently used to designate the negation of “*shiryō*” 思量, that is, “to think” or “to discriminate”<sup>27</sup> (a term used by Buddhist philosophers to identify the basic function of consciousness), “*hishiryō*” appears in its earliest notations as a solitary phrase indicating a lack of discrimination.<sup>28</sup> It is only later in the literature collected in the *Xuzangjing* and especially in Dōgen’s fascicles “*Zazengi*” 坐禪儀 [“Principles of Sitting Meditation”] and “*Fukanzazengi*” 普勸坐禪儀 [“General Promotion of the Principles of Sitting Meditation”] that “*hishiryō*” is included in a phrase with the other derivations of “*shiryō*,” to make up the famous line “How does one

think (*shiryō*) of not-thinking (*fushiryō*)? Without-thinking<sup>29</sup> (*hishiryō*).<sup>30</sup> In this phrase, the term “*hishiryō*” denotes the middle term between “thinking” and “not-thinking” without, however, losing its connotation of “not to discriminate.”

In a second step, Ueda explains that the “practice of without-thinking” renders a “pure experience” (*junsui keiken* 純粹經驗), while “the study of the highest reflection” constitutes the attempt “to explain everything” (*subete wo setsumei* すべてを説明).<sup>31</sup> Ueda borrows these phrases from Nishida who stated in his introduction that his goal in writing the *Inquiry into the Good* was exactly to “explain everything” based on “pure experience.” Nishida then continues to explain that “experience is to know things as they are...; to say it is pure...is not to add discriminating thought but to point to the condition of the experience itself.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, pure experience precedes the differentiation of the epistemic subject and object. Ueda thus describes the “practice of without-thinking” as a preconscious and prelinguistic experience, while he uses the term “study of highest reflection” to denote the attempt at systematic knowledge about reality.

What is important here is that Ueda does not proceed to identify philosophy with “reflection” or “the study of the highest reflection,” and “Zen” with the “practice of without-thinking.” He rather distinguishes three kinds of discourses within the Zen tradition: “Zen” (*zen* 禅),<sup>33</sup> the “Zen thought” (*zenshisō* 禅思想), and “philosophy” (*tetsugaku* 哲学). The first is concerned with the “practice of Zen” (*zenshugyō* 禅修行) and the “concrete experience” (*gutaiteki na keiken* 具体的な経験), the second with the “understanding of Zen” (*zenrikai* 禅理解), and the last with the “understanding of the world” (*sekairikai* 世界理解).<sup>34</sup>

A “Zen person” (*zensha* 禅者) is solely interested in the practice that leads to self-awakening and “pure experience,”<sup>35</sup> both of which Ueda locates at the heart of Zen practice. The project of a Zen person is to verbalize<sup>36</sup> and to provide an analysis of the experience of awakening. (Ueda identifies as the main representative of this project Shin’ichi Hisamatsu 久松真一 (1889-1980), a Zen master and disciple of Nishida.) A Zen thinker (*zenshisōka* 禅思想家), on the other hand, is someone who interprets “pure experience as sole reality”<sup>37</sup> and reflects on self-awareness. As such s/he is interested in some kind of second order reflection and in conceptual structures. What distinguishes “Zen thought” from “Zen” is that the former requires the process of theorization (*shisōka* 思想化) above and beyond the verbalization of the “pure experiences” characteristic of “Zen.” This difference between “Zen thought” and “Zen” seems negligible, but I will return to the difference between these two categories shortly. (Ueda names D.T.

Suzuki, Nishida's lifelong friend and the popularizer of Zen Buddhism in the English language as the prototype of Zen thought.) Finally, a "philosopher" (*tetsugakusha* 哲学者) within the Zen tradition is a person, who, like Nishitani – Nishida's student and second successor at the helm of the Kyoto school – develops a philosophy of self-awareness. The goal of "Zen philosophy" is "to explain everything,"<sup>38</sup> that is, to systematically reflect on the Zen experience by adopting the methodology, terminology, and agenda characteristic of the philosophical tradition as it was developed in Europe. Ultimately, these three standpoints sketch three ways of reflecting on the Zen practice of "studying the self" as well as three modalities of self-awareness.<sup>39</sup> "Zen," which Ueda paraphrases as "awakening" (*kaku* 覚), provides the "foundation" (*kongen* 根源) of self-awareness, "Zen thought" illuminates self-awareness proper, and "philosophy" renders the understanding of self (*jikorikai* 自己理解) as well as world and, ultimately, the "understanding of understanding" (*rikai no rikai* 理解の理解).

However, Ueda does not merely distinguish these three discourses by their method. A second and at least equally important feature is the discursive language they employ. For example, what makes Hisamatsu the prototype of the Zen person, Ueda claims, is not a particular interpretation of Zen texts but rather that he is mostly locked into the Zen idiom itself and rejects other discourses completely. While the later Hisamatsu seems to open up to other idioms, by using phrases such as "the way of the absolute subject," "active subject," and "the formless self," his domain is clearly the Zen discourse and his thought could be characterized by what Ueda calls a "monism of Zen."<sup>40</sup> The term "monism" here is not to be taken as indicative of a metaphysical system but, rather, should be understood to indicate a methodological solipsism or exclusivism, which, according to Ueda, eschews thought and methods from thinkers and texts outside the Zen tradition. Hisamatsu thus does not reject linguistic expressions *per se* but, rather, ideas and features of the "Western culture" as incapable of doing justice to the "pure experience," and resorts to the language of the "fundamental *kōan*" (*kihōnteki kōan* 基本的公案) as well as the rhetoric of negation used by Zen texts throughout history. What is of central interest to the present discussion is that the criteria of "Zen" primarily concern a discourse and not ideology. "Zen persons," according to Ueda's analysis, restrict themselves to idioms developed in the Zen tradition, refuse to "translate" them.<sup>41</sup> As a byproduct, they emphasize a dichotomy between "East" and "West,"<sup>42</sup> which is at odds with the overall non-dualism that "Zen persons" such as Hisamatsu seem to propagate.<sup>43</sup>

Ueda argues that the main difference between Suzuki, the “Zen thinker,” and Hisamatsu, the “Zen person,” is not an ideological one – each emphasizes, in its own way, the centrality of a non-dual paradigm to their system<sup>44</sup> – but, as John Maraldo has pointed out, one of idiom.<sup>45</sup> While Hisamatsu rejected all discourses external to the Zen tradition, Suzuki turns towards the “West” and “philosophy.” Ueda emphasizes the fact that Suzuki lived in the United States and was married to an American, in order to illustrate his contention that Suzuki “lived in the world”: “Suzuki himself, who had left the world and lived in the world was aware that he had altered the meaning of Zen by which he lived.”<sup>46</sup> In this process, Suzuki not only attempts to reconcile two traditions, but also the paradigms of pure experience and pure reflection. The implications of his methodological strategy are conceptually far-reaching. If experience and reflection are conceived of as diametrically opposite, reflection on the ineffable necessitates a paradox; that is, it requires what Suzuki calls the “differentiation of no-differentiation” and his infamous “logic of is-not.”<sup>47</sup> Suzuki himself leaves no doubt that, in his mind, “Zen thought is expressed in slogans and phrases such as the knowledge of no-knowledge, the thought of no-thought, the mind of no-mind, consciousness of no-consciousness, differentiation of no-differentiation, the correlativity of the unrelated, the unobstructed penetration of phenomena, and the likeness among the ten thousand dharmas.”<sup>48</sup> While formulations such as these are often construed as a rejection of rationality and logic, Ueda argues that they do not indicate an inherent irrationality or even a-rationality of “Zen thought” but are, rather, reflective of and necessitated by Suzuki’s attempt to reconcile two paradigms. It is because these paradigms were constructed as polar opposites and the two spheres of “Zen” and the “world” were defined as mutually exclusive that the paradoxical language becomes necessary. Ueda thus seems to suggest that, in the same way in which Hisamatsu’s rhetoric of negation was born out of a rejection of paradigms incompatible with the Zen idiom, so also Suzuki’s rhetoric of the paradox arose from the attempt to “trans-late” across discursive boundaries and to adapt the Zen idiom to a new paradigm.

Finally, the feature of Nishitani’s project that Ueda’s highlights is, as in the case of Hisamatsu’s “Zen” and Suzuki’s “Zen thought,” not a particular understanding of “Zen” or an idiosyncratic ideology but, rather, his location within the discursive landscape. What qualifies Nishitani as a “Zen philosopher” vis-à-vis Suzuki is that he does philosophy from the standpoint of “Zen.” Ueda outlines Nishitani’s project as follows: “It is not that the question is posed from the East, rather one commences with a common problem and possibly makes the answer from the East the common answer.”<sup>49</sup> Ueda emphasizes that, for Nishitani, philosophy addresses common problems in a global context.



The framework of Nishitani's project is the "one world" *hitotsu no sekai* (一つの世界) – as Nishitani observes, "the condition of the current time period is that the Eastern and Western worlds rapidly consolidate into one world"<sup>50</sup> – and its goal is a "world philosophy" (*sekai tetsugaku* 世界哲学).<sup>51</sup> The key to a "Zen philosophy" and "philosophical Zen" (*tetsugakuteki zen* 哲学的禅),<sup>52</sup> Ueda suggests here, is in the vision of a "world philosophy" that articulates the self-awareness of the "one world" and what Nishida calls the "worldly world" (*sekaiteki sekai* 世界の世界).

### PROLEGOMENON TO A JAPANESE ZEN BUDDHIST CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

While Ueda introduces a typology that seems to be geared towards one specific tradition, I think it also provides valuable insights for our discussion of philosophy in general and of intercultural philosophy in particular. First, Ueda does not think of philosophy as a tradition but as a discourse and, by implication (as Maraldo suggests), the idiom<sup>53</sup> of a particular discourse. This may seem rather obvious but it has far-reaching implications. If philosophy is a form of discourse, it cannot be limited to one tradition, but can be found or at least envisioned in every intellectual tradition, including the Zen Buddhist tradition. A Zen Buddhist philosophy, then, constitutes one among many discourses that Zen thinkers utilize in order to reflect on the experience, practice, and worldview central to Zen Buddhist texts and practices. Ueda identifies three discourses, since he is primarily interested in the intersection between Zen Buddhist thought and the philosophy of the Kyoto school, but one could supplement this list with *haiku* poetry and encounter dialogues, as well as with ink brush paintings, chants, and even rituals such as the tea ceremony, if Jacques Derrida's observation that "there is nothing outside of the text"<sup>54</sup> holds true. It is very clear that Ueda does not consider "the practice of without-thinking" or even "Zen thought" as philosophy; however, the difference is not one of essence but one of degree and discourse. Just as there is "philosophy of literature" as well as "philosophy in literature," there can be philosophy of and in Zen thought, *haikus* 俳句, and even ink brush paintings and tea ceremony (*chanoyu* 茶の湯). What makes the discourse of Zen philosophy "philosophy," according to Ueda, is, as John Maraldo suggested, the translation of a cultural idiom into a global context. Encounter dialogues and dharma talks are held in the language of the Zen Buddhist tradition and thus can be denied universal significance. Zen philosophy, on the other hand, is written with a global, that is universal, appeal and, thus, transcend cultural and ethnic specificities. However, despite various

attempts at a universal language, language is always culture-specific. Even essays that translate formal logic into a specific language cannot deny their cultural specificity. Maraldo suggests that philosophy does not constitute a “universal tongue” but, rather, depends “on a community.”<sup>55</sup> I would go a step further and suggest that the fact that philosophy is not (exclusively) written in formal logic illustrates that philosophy as self-reflection and the “examined life” cannot avoid the cultural and individual dimensions of human existence. In short, every philosophy as “world philosophy” reveals at least three basic facets: personal self-consciousness, cultural specificity, and global appeal. Consequently, any definition of philosophy has to account for and reconcile the moments of universality, particularity, and individuality.

The Japanese philosophers of the Kyoto school, especially Nishida, Hajime Tanabe 田辺元 (1885-1962), and Risaku Mutai 務台理作 (1890-1974), developed a terminology that captures and resolves this conundrum. Nishida identifies the act of self-consciousness, that is without essence and duration and postulates itself vis-à-vis a world of things and self, as the individual (kotai 个体). As we have seen above, this individual act of self-consciousness is inherently embodied and, as such, not essentially different from the physical world that surrounds it. By the same token, the content of the self’s consciousness is not essentially different from the mental world that surrounds it. In the same sense in which the embodied self consists of the same stuff, cells, molecules, and so on, as the world that surrounds it, the thought of the individual is not essentially different from, but inspired by, the conversations the self had, the books and newspaper the self had read and, in general, by the *Zeitgeist* of its time. Nishida goes so far as to claim that the embodied self-consciousness not only constitutes a being-in the world (*in-der-Welt-sein*), but constitutes an “expression” (*hyōgen* 表現) of the world it lives in. It is only as the determination and expression of the world that the individual determines itself and, by the same token, it is only as determination and expressed content of self-consciousness that the universal determines itself.<sup>56</sup> Mutai adds to this dialectic of “mutual determination” a third term. As I have explained elsewhere, “Mutai suggests that the abyss between the infinitely small and ephemeral individual and the all-encompassing but never completed totality (zentai 全体) has to be “mediated” (baikai 媒介) by specific identities such as personal identity, culture, and religion.”<sup>57</sup> Following the terminology of his teacher Tanabe, Mutai refers to this “specific” (*shu* 種) as a “particular totality” (tokushuteki zentai 特殊の全体),<sup>58</sup> a “particular orientation” (tokushuteki hōkō 特殊の方向)<sup>59</sup> of the “historical world,” and, ultimately, as a “small world” (shōsekai 小世界).<sup>60</sup> Thus, the specific seems to constitute the spatio-temporal

totality we live in, but, in fact, is particular, impermanent, and one of many. Ideologies are created when this specific is taken to be the absolute. This particularity of human existence that is expressed in the various identities that persons claim – in culture, religion, the vernacular, and so on – is indicative of the predicament that human experience is always individual-and-yet-universal or, as Nishida would say following the rhetoric of Huayan Buddhism, “many-and-yet-one” (*issokuta* 一即多).<sup>61</sup>

Philosophy is such a specific expression of the totality from a perspective and through the activity of embodied self-consciousness in discursive form. It differs from other forms of expression, such as art, morality, or religion, in that it takes on the form of an externalized discourse and arises from what Yasuo Yuasa 湯淺泰雄 (1925-2005) calls the “attitude of explanation” (*setsumeiteki taidō* 説明的態度).<sup>62</sup> It differs from other discourses in that it constitutes the systematic elaboration of self-reflection by an embodied self-consciousness. As a particular expression, it is indicative of one individual standpoint and expresses the one truth fully but not completely. As a particular discourse, it expresses the human predicament to some degree but fails to do so to another. Every particular expression of a self-conscious “I” expresses its own perspective, but fails to highlight those of others. The same applies, of course, to discourses. Every expression of the truth, at the same time, obscures it, since it privileges one standpoint over the other. Dōgen identifies this predicament when he explained that “[w]hen we express expression we do not express non-expression...In me, there is expression and non-expression...In the way there is self and other and in the non-way, there is self and other”<sup>63</sup> This dialectic of self and other, expression and non-expression, is characteristic of particularity and points to the tragic predicament of the philosopher who “is haunted by the gulf that separates philosophic reflection and unreflective experience, a gulf which he seeks to bridge not by speculative constructions but by intermediate phenomena, though never quite completely.”<sup>64</sup> The basic criterion for good philosophy, then, is not necessarily its form but the degree to which it includes or allows for the inclusion of other standpoints. If the truth as ideal, albeit evanescent, constitutes the “one” (*itsu* 一) as expressed by the multiplicity of selves (Nishida’s “many” (*ta* 多)), then its completion must include the multiplicity of – and, thus, infinite – standpoints.<sup>65</sup> This is where we come full circle. Philosophy as the self-reflective discourse of self-consciousness is always intercultural and global. It is global, insofar as the reflection of embodied self-consciousness that lives and thus expresses the world includes the whole world. It is intercultural, insofar

as, in order to express the world and the truth thereof completely, an individual self-consciousness has to include all other standpoints.

From these rather cursory reflections, we can conclude that at least one group of the philosophers from the Kyoto school whose thought is influenced by the Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition suggest that philosophy should be conceived of as expression. They argue that philosophy commences with self-consciousness, takes on discursive form, and expresses the predicament of the self-consciousness in this historical world. Of course, philosophy is not the sole expression of self-consciousness. However, philosophy differs from other discourses, such as poetry and “thought” (*shisō* 思想) as well as from other expressions such as art, morality, and ritual, by degree and not in essence. It differs in that it provides a critical reflection, thought about thought, to “explain all things” in the context of what Nishida calls the “worldly world” and, thus, cannot absolutize or even prioritize one perspective or one cultural idiom. Consequently, philosophy so defined is inherently intercultural and global, insofar as, in dialogue with philosophies developed from other standpoints, it attempts to reach that ever-elusive one truth that encompasses all perspectives and standpoints.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professors Victor Sogen Hori, Jin Y. Park, James W. Heisig, Graham Parkes, and Kent Simmonds for their suggestions and comments on various drafts of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> “Global philosophy” is often alternatively called “world philosophy.”

<sup>3</sup> The term “comparative philosophies” implies a certain consistency if not coherence within individual traditions, which can be compared to each other, even though the term has now been used to identify comparisons *within* traditions – so-called “intra-traditional comparisons” – as well. The terms “intercultural” and “global,” on the other hand, seem to indicate that philosophy draws from a multiplicity of traditions in its discussion of specific problems. Thus, the former term seems to emphasize differences between, and the latter two terms commonality among, individual philosophical traditions.

<sup>4</sup> Kent Simmonds translates the famous line from Plato’s *Apology* as “[t]he unexamined life is not worth living for a human being” (38a).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis White Beck, *Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Cornforth, *Science Versus Idealism* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1962), p. 219.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> John Maraldo critiques this tendency to essentialize philosophical traditions when he observes that “[s]eldom is considered the possibility that traditions are shifting entities, and that the traditionalizing of a select group of texts has become the condition for doing philosophy.” John Maraldo, “Tradition, Textuality, and Trans-lation: The Case of Japan.” *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Charles Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas P. Kasulis, “Does East Asian Buddhism Have an Ethical System?,” *Zen Buddhism Today: Annual report of the Kyoto Zen Symposium* (Vol. 8, pp. 41-60), p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests that “[t]he object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of ‘philosophical propositions’, but to make propositions clear. Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C. K. Ogden (New York: Cosimo, 2009), 4.112, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> In his lecture on “*Shūkyō to gakumon oyobi dōtoku*” 宗教と学問及び道德 (“The Relationship of Religion to Scholarship and Morality”), Nishida argues that scholarship is grounded in the standpoint of objectivity, and morality on that of subjectivity. Kitarō Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 (hereafter abbreviated “NKZ”) [*Collected Works of Kitarō Nishida*], 20 volumes (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), vol. 15, pp. 331-335.

<sup>13</sup> In the third section of his *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 [*Inquiry Into the Good*], Nishida suggests that reason occupies an interestingly ambiguous place: It is internal to the self insofar as it comprises the thought of the individual, and external as its universal validity transcends the individual.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly J. Lenore Wright notes that “[f]irst-person autobiographies” disclose “the dual nature of the self – self qua self-examiner and self qua self-examinee.” J. Lenore Wright, *The Philosopher’s “I”: Autobiography and the Search for the Self* [hereafter abbreviated as “*The Philosopher’s ‘I’*”] (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Scholars of Descartes generally agree that if the Cartesian *Meditations* prove anything it is the existence, and even the methodological primacy, of thought but not of a disembodied substance.

<sup>16</sup> Wright similarly suggests that the autobiographical process bifurcates the self into an “Inner self” and an “Outer self.” Wright, *The Philosopher’s “I,”* pp. 5, 55-107. She further suggests that in this process the self becomes “someone other than oneself.” *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Keiji Nishitani 西谷啓治, *Nishitani keiji chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 (hereafter abbreviated as “NKCSS”) [*The Collected Writings of Keiji Nishitani*], 26 volumes (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1986-95), vol. 11, pp. 3-257.

<sup>18</sup> The term “matter of the self” (Chinese: *jishi*, Japanese: *koji* 己事) as well as the phrase “investigating the matter of the self” (Chinese: *jiumingjishi*,

Japanese *kyūmei koji* 究明己事) occur with some frequency in the Zen literature.

<sup>19</sup> Similarly Makio Takemura 竹村牧男 argues that the phrase “investigation the matter of the self” lies at the core of Buddhist philosophy. Makio Takemura 竹村牧男, *Nyūmon: Tetsugaku toshite no bukkō* [Introduction: Buddhism as Philosophy] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2009), p. 240.

<sup>20</sup> Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, 6 volumes, ed. Kōshirō Tamaki [hereafter abbreviated as “SBGZ”] (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan Kabushiki Kaisha, 1993-4), vol. 1, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the *Linjilu* 臨濟錄 [Sayings of Zen Master Linji], *Taishō Taizōkyō* 大正大藏經, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe (Tokyo: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankōkai, 1961) [hereafter abbreviated as “T”], 47.1985.495b.

<sup>22</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Zen Buddhist philosophy tends to subvert dualistic frameworks and conceptual preconceptions. Gereon Kopf, “Language Games, Selflessness, and the Death of God: A/Theology in Contemporary Zen Philosophy and Deconstruction,” *Japanese and Continental Philosophy*, eds. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, & Jason Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 160-178.

<sup>24</sup> Shizuteru Ueda 上田閑照, *Ueda shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 (hereafter abbreviated as “USS”) [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), vol. 5, pp.11-2.

<sup>25</sup> T 54. 2128.

<sup>26</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, the *Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經 [Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch] (T 48.2007.339b) and the *Xu zhuandeng lu* 續傳燈錄 [Transmission of the Lamp] (T 51.2077.518c).

<sup>28</sup> See the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* [Sūtra of Perfected Wisdom] (T 8.232.731a) and the *Transmission of the Lamp* (C. *Xu zhuandeng lu* 續傳燈錄) (T 51.2077.675b).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Kasulis renders “*hishiryō*” as “without-thinking,” to distinguish it from the negative attitude of “*fushiryō*” and to express his belief that it signifies a “non-positional” attitude. Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action – Zen Person* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> Dōgen, *SBGZ*, vol 4, p. 334.

<sup>31</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Nishida, *NKZ*, vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> The term “Zen” here is a bit misleading since it implies an essence of Zen or at least a qualitative difference from the other two types, since the term “zen” here is used as noun and not as an adjective as in the other two cases. What Ueda has in mind here is a form of discourse used within the Zen Buddhist tradition to reflect on and encourage Zen practice such as “dharma talks” (*seppō* 説法).

<sup>34</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, pp. 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Despite the rhetoric of many a Zen master, many Zen thinkers did not deny the importance of words. Dōgen, for example, interpreted Shakyamuni's famous, albeit not necessarily historical, flower sermon at vulture peak, not to illustrate the superiority of silence over the "[t]alk of no talk (Zenkei Shibayama, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* [New York: Harper & Row, 1974], p. 62) as some Zen teachers suggest. Instead he comments rather sarcastically, "if The-World-honored-One hated using words but loved picking up flowers, he should have picked up a flower at the latter time as well" instead of explaining his actions verbally (Dōgen, *SBGZ*, vol. 4, p. 153).

<sup>37</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Ueda goes so far as to suggest that these three types mark three snapshots of the bilateral process of progressive "objectification" (*kyakkanka* 客観化) from "Zen" to "Zen philosophy," and of progressive "subjectification" (*shukanka* 主観化) vice versa, that is involved in any Zen discourse. Ueda, *USS*, vol.5, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> In his brilliant essay "Tradition, Textuality, and Trans-lation: The Case of Japan," John Maraldo defines philosophy (p. 233) "as an idiom of translation."

<sup>42</sup> Hisamatsu's orientalist rhetoric exemplified by the phrase "oriental nothingness" (*tōyōteki mu* 東洋の無) can be traced through most of the essay bearing this name. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu 久松真一, *Tōyōteki mu: Hisamatsu shin'ichi chosakshū 1 東洋の無 : 久松真一著作集第一* (hereafter abbreviated as "HSCSS") [*Oriental Nothingness: The Collected Works of Shin'ichi Hisamatsu Vol. 1*] (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1969). Hisamatsu, *HSCSS*, vol. 1, pp. 11-81.

<sup>43</sup> Hisamatsu refers to the "oriental nothingness" as "indivisible one" (*ittaifuni* 一体不二). Hisamatsu, *HSCSS*, vol. 1, pp. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Suzuki calls this paradigm the "logic of is-not" (*sokuhi* 即非), and gives it the logical form of "A is-not A" [see Daisetsu Suzuki 鈴木大拙, *Suzuki daisetsu zenshū 鈴木大拙全集* (hereafter abbreviated as "SDZS") [*The Collected Works of Daisetsu Suzuki*], 30 volumes (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968-1971): vol. 5, p. 381], while Hisamatsu uses phrases connecting opposites with the word "is" (*soku* 即). Hisamatsu, *HSCSS*, vol. 1, pp. 30.

<sup>45</sup> See Maraldo, "Tradition, Textuality, and Trans-lation: The Case of Japan."

<sup>46</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> Suzuki, *SDZS*, vol. 5, p. 382.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 13, pp. 10-1.

<sup>49</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> Nishitani, *NKCSS*, vol. 11, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ueda, *USS*, vol. 5, p. 49.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> See Maraldo, “Tradition, Textuality, and Trans-lation: The Case of Japan.”

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 158. Wright, *The Philosopher’s “I,”* p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Maraldo, “Tradition, Textuality, and Trans-lation: The Case of Japan,” p. 233.

<sup>56</sup> Ueda explains this relationship with following example: “There is no escaping the fact that England and I cannot be separated. England is the country in which I reside, and I reflect England by living there....Insofar as I reflect England, England is reflecting itself from within....By internalizing the fact that I reflect England, I am also reflecting myself.” Shizuteru Ueda 上田閑照, *Nishida kitarō o yomu 西田幾多郎を読む* [Reading Nishida Kitarō.] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), p. 309.

<sup>57</sup> Gereon Kopf, “Nationalism, Globalism, and Cosmopolitanism: An Application of Kyoto School Philosophy,” *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*, eds. Raquel Bouso and James Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2009), pp. 170-189, at p. 176.

<sup>58</sup> Risaku Mutai 務台理作, *Mutai risaku chosakushū 務台理作著作集* [Collected Works of Mutai Risaku], 9 volumes (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, 2000–2002), vol. 4, p. 84.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 83.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> It is highly fascinating and not without relevance for the current topic that Michael P. Lynch argues, in a completely different context and discourse, that truth is simultaneously many and one: “Truth is many because different properties may manifest truth in different domains of inquiry....Truth is one because there is a single property so manifested and ‘truth’ rigidly names this property.” While there are obvious differences between Lynch’s project and Nishida’s, it is interesting that Lynch as well locates the plurality of truths in a multiplicity of discourses and the singularity of truth in a shared commonality “manifested” or “expressed” therein. Michael P. Lynch, *Truth as One and Many* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 78.

<sup>62</sup> In his “Shūkyō keiken to rinri no mondai” 宗教経験と倫理の問題 [“Religious Experience and the Problem of Ethics”], Yuasa contrast the academic project qua “attitude of explanation” with the religious standpoint qua “attitude of conversion” (*kaishinteki taido* 回心的態度). The former expresses what Nishida calls the *noematic*, the latter the *noetic* direction. While seemingly irreconcilable, both attitudes are pivotal to human experience in general but also the cognitive process in particular, in that they constitute two kinds and expressions of the fundamental modality qua “attitude of practice” (*jissenteki taido* 実践的態度). Yasuo Yuasa 湯浅泰雄, “Shūkyō keiken to rinri no mondai” 宗教経験と倫理の問題 [“Religious Experience and the Problem of Ethics”], *Yuasa yasuo zenshū 湯浅泰雄全集* [Collected Works of Yasuo Yuasa], 16 volumes (Tokyo: Hakua Shobō, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 6-65.



<sup>63</sup> Dōgen, *SBGZ*, vol. 2, pp. 368-9.

<sup>64</sup> J. N. Mohanty, *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytical Account* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, as Satomi Takahashi 高橋里美 (1886-1964) observed, this will have to wait until the end of time.



## CHAPTER X

# FOUR DIMENSIONS OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>

*YAO JIEHOU*

As global communication expands, we find a trend of increasingly developing and diversifying cultures. Both intercultural studies and studies of world civilizations have become popular branches of research, and interdisciplinarity is an increasingly important concern in international academic circles. This interdisciplinary study may be called “civilization-ology.” Its primary object is the identity and diversity of world civilizations, and research into it should be conducted and deepened in virtue of intercultural studies, especially the theoretical exploration of intercultural communication. Since the nineties of the last century, Chinese academics have produced a number of studies which lay particular stress on intercultural communication at the microcosmic personal level of speech acts. But this has also been of important applied value, from the teaching and study of foreign languages to the management of transnational enterprises. Intercultural studies has a broad range, being involved in a variety of disciplines. Intercultural philosophy, then, is an important branch, if not pillar of such studies, and studies on intercultural communication at the microcosmic level should be deepened in virtue of it. Thus, one of the primary objects of intercultural studies is the intercultural understanding and communication that is involved in every discipline – such as economics, politics, and cultural studies, and the like – and that penetrates into every facet of world civilization today. Therefore, the discipline of intercultural philosophy ought to be explored in its multifold intercultural theoretic dimensions, incarnating the communication of world civilizations with a macroscopical field of vision and philosophical height. It will also be of great theoretical value and practical significance for maintaining world peace and promoting common prosperity and the development of diverse civilizations.

Intercultural philosophy, including both philosophical studies on intercultural communication and intercultural studies on philosophical communication, provides a distinctive, essential perspective. This essay, then, briefly discusses four dimensions essential to the study of intercultural philosophy.

## THE DIMENSION BASED ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The history of civilization is, in its essence, the history of humanity. Civilization consists in that human beings realize their essence through practice; civilization represents itself as an organic integration historically formed by the economic-political structure and the basic cultural ethos, in a process of mutual penetration and mutual influencing. Culture in a broad sense (including material culture, system culture, and spiritual culture) is the concrete meaning of civilization, and culture in a narrow sense (with philosophy as its theoretic core) and the spiritual conforming of civilization are embodiments of the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time).

Throughout history, the nations of the world have created distinct cultures, traditions, beliefs and values, and have given birth to time-honored and dynamic civilizations. Diversity is the essential trait of world civilizations. Diversity means difference, difference necessitates communication, and communication facilitates development – thus making our world more dynamic. If we take a comprehensive view of history, we see that a civilization could hardly develop and advance if it were self-enclosed and in isolation. It is by being in the mainstream of progress that various civilizations have been enriched and developed through harmonious communication and mutuality. Intercultural communication has been a vital impetus or motive force of evolution in world civilizations throughout the ages.

Civilization, communication among civilizations, and intercultural communication, are three categories in the philosophy of history that are closely connected. Intercultural philosophy, which is part of this philosophy of history, aims at exploring the various complicated phenomena and theoretical problems that occur in the history of a civilization, and at arriving at certain general, historical lessons. Thus it aims at arriving at and advocating a sort of peaceful, rational, mutually-compatible and mutually-complementary view of intercultural communication, with a view to the history of inter-civilizational communication.

If we scan the whole of human history, we can see that the conflict and fusion of different civilizations have led to much diversity. Peace and violence are the two basic modalities of inter-civilizational communication and intercultural communication. The modality of peace is the frequent, substantive and primary form of communication, displayed in every mutually-related domain of economic-commercial communication, political communication, societal communication and spiritual-cultural communication. Peace is the key motive force of historical progress. The modality of violence has, of course, also

appeared in human history, as seen in repeatedly in conquest, plunder, theft, destruction, murder and especially war. Since the origin of human society, such violence has had a variety of causes, but it has always been cruel and has always violated moral conscience. The theory of perpetual peace proposed by Kant expresses the desirability and progressiveness of humanity and rational society. Arnold Toynbee, Fernand Braudel, and other experts on the history and theory of civilization, have noted that, though there have been temporarily devastating conflicts among civilizations, harmonious communication, cultures coming to know one another, and the mutual convergence of different civilizations, are the impetus and mainstream of progress in human civilizations through all the ages.<sup>2</sup> “Harmony is the most precious thing,” is the guideline for the communication among civilizations. The tenet to direct the rational communication of civilizations should be the elimination of violent communication, combined with the promotion of peace and development, so as to bring each civilization into the orbit of legal order and moral norms.

The peaceful and rational communication of mental culture is an important motive force for the progress of human society and civilization. A philosophy that embodies the spirit of the times is the theoretical core of the whole culture as well as the living soul of the civilization. Therefore, the intercultural communication of philosophies (including related religions and religious philosophies) has played an important role in the development of different civilizations. History, from the ancient to the contemporary, shows that the continuing evolution of both the Chinese and Western civilizations has profited from their harmonious and rational communication with other, “alien,” civilizations.

If we look at western history, the ancient Greco-Roman civilization continued for more than a thousand years; it is the source of the civilization of Western Europe – indeed, of the whole of western civilization – and it laid down a sound foundation for the tradition of scientific reason and humanism. However, its evolution was not based on being self-enclosed and insular. Though there were eminent differences between the ancient Greco-Roman civilization and the eastern (Near Eastern and Northern African) civilizations, the former absorbed the finest fruits of the eastern civilizations early, having obtained important cultural results through intercultural communication with the latter, so that the Greek and Roman nations were inspired, the wisdom of multi-nationalities in both western and eastern areas was combined, and the resplendent Greco-Roman culture was created. The forming and developing of Greek classical philosophy benefited considerably from the scientific and religious thought of western Asia and Egypt. In particular, the prominent achievements of astronomy,

mathematics and myth in Egypt and Babylon played a foundational role in the birth of Greek philosophy and religion. Cosmopolitan communication between eastern and western cultures was the chief trait of the Hellenistic and Roman civilizations. Late Greek and Roman philosophy directly and readily accepted the influence of the scientific knowledge, religion, and philosophies of the eastern world, and almost all the major doctrines of the chief philosophical schools reflected a convergence of eastern and western cultures. In particular, Jewish and early Christian culture, as a special pattern of monotheism, gradually converged with Greek and Roman philosophy, and it led later Greek and Roman philosophy to unifying with religion. The theology and philosophy of Christianity which came out of such a convergence exerted a strong, deep, and long-standing influence on western civilization.

By means of multiform intercultural communications, accepting the alien, and aiming at harmony, the centuries-old and splendid Chinese civilization also imbibed the manifold fine fruits of outside civilizations so as to enrich and develop itself. From about the first century, China, India, the Middle East, and Europe initiated and expanded the "Silk Road on Land" and the "Silk Road on the Sea." The resulting intercultural communications, including economic and spiritual ones, effectively promoted the progress of Chinese civilization and a number of other civilizations in Asia and Europe. As a result of the intercultural communication between China and India from the Han and Tang dynasties, Indian Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy spread among the common people and intellectuals of China. Such communication engendered a number of schools of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy with Chinese characteristics (for example, the Tiantan School, the Faxiang School, the Huayan School, and the Chan School, and so on), and they have become part of Chinese cultural tradition. Their mutual penetration and integration with Chinese Confucianism and Taoism profoundly influenced the evolution of the Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions. This is a successful example of intercultural communication. Since the Tang dynasty in the seventh century, there have been several examples of harmonious, successful intercultural communication between Chinese civilization and Islamic civilization. A mosque having a Chinese pattern may be found in Xi'an, an ancient capital of China, and it has an epigraph made by an emperor of the Tang dynasty. In it, we can see communication and harmonization between traditional Chinese culture and Islamic religious culture. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, because of the intercultural communication between China and the western world brought about by western missionaries in China, Chinese intellectuals began to understand western or Greek scientific and philosophical thought. Comparative

studies of Confucianism and Western learning started with the arrival of Matteo Ricci, an Italian missionary; Limadou was his Chinese name. On the other hand, many missionaries brought a number of classical Chinese texts back to Europe. Chinese civilization exerted a positive influence on the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and it was especially praised by French physiocrats. Scientific reason and the humanistic spirit of western philosophy and culture, especially its ideas of science and democracy, spread into China through Yan Fu and other Chinese philosophers beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, and this contributed to the enlightenment of modern China.

From the above historical sketch, we can draw a conclusion: The conflict of different civilizations in world is always temporary, and it is not the driving force of cultural development. The peaceful communication and harmonious convergence of different civilizations in the world is the mainstream of humanity's progress, and an important driving force of cultural development. Humanity's historical development is due to a process of incessant exchange, convergence, and innovation between different civilizations. Throughout the history of humanity, many civilizations have made distinctive contributions to human progress. The world today should avoid the danger of a clash of civilizations. Differences of ideology, social system, and mode of development should not become barriers to communication or reasons for antagonism. Peace and development are essential common interests and values for the whole of humanity. It is important in particular to respect the diversity of civilizations and cultures in order to have rational intercultural communication, to realize harmonious unity, and to promote the common progress of world civilizations.

### **THE DIMENSION OF INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS**

In the globalized world today, we must avoid forcing different civilizations to merge into a single civilization or making cultures homogenous. We should maintain the existing diversity of world civilizations and cultures. Still, it is necessary to promote a dialogue among the various civilizations to increase mutual understanding, to close some gulfs, to reconcile antagonisms, and to oppose a "clash of civilizations," so as to actualize existing civilizations and cultures as well as to achieve a globalization of humanity based on both the diversity and the identity of world civilizations. Rational intercultural communication is just one important channel to achieve this lofty goal. It is, therefore, necessary to establish a sort of intercultural hermeneutics.

There has been a long tradition of hermeneutics in Western intellectual history. The philosophical hermeneutics established by the

twentieth-century philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer exalts human understanding and interpretation on the ontological level of human existence, and contains many insights which might be used. However, it has some limitations or shortcomings. An intercultural hermeneutics arguably may transcend Gadamerian hermeneutics in the following three respects.

First, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics focuses mostly on human understanding and interpretation in individual cultural traditions and on the evolution of the "history of effect" [*Wirkungsgeschichte*] in each tradition. Intercultural hermeneutics, taking understanding and interpretation beyond singular traditions, focuses on the understanding and interpretation among different cultural traditions and their common evolution through mutual communication. Such intercultural understanding and interpretation are rather complex.

Second, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in its exploration of diachroneity in human understanding and interpretation, looks at the relationship between text and context, prejudice and tradition. But intercultural hermeneutics should multi-laterally or multiply probe into the interactive relationship of various texts and contexts, and into the prejudices and traditions in different civilizations and cultures. Moreover, it should explore their different historical structures in the deeper levels behind different contexts and traditions, and should elucidate their more complicated interactive relationships.

Third, Gadamer's *philosophical* hermeneutics is rooted in an ontology of human existence, with a *unique* philosophical basis. But an *intercultural* hermeneutics allows a *pluralistic* philosophical basis and engages different philosophical theories – including even post-analytic philosophies. (For example, it could draw on Donald Davidson's ontology of language and the classical hermeneutics of Chinese traditional philosophy, in order to explore the basic categories of intercultural activity.) Such an intercultural hermeneutics does not demand a philosophical explication of absolute uniqueness, and strives to see that different philosophical theories reach a kind of "overlapping consensus" in their general goal, each learning from others' strong points to offset one's own weaknesses, for the common progress of different civilizations. On this point, Chinese traditional philosophy offers a positive role in the study of intercultural hermeneutics. For example, the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius advocated "Harmony in diversity," which means that we should respect our differences and diversities, but seek harmonious coexistence through communication with each other in order to fulfill humanity's common interests and values. Civilizations and cultures have the characteristics of both diversity and identity. The kind of identity I wish to focus on is 'dynamic identity residing in diversity.' It can be found in two ways: one



is the identity of national culture within a particular civilization; the other is that different traditions of civilizations and cultures may achieve a certain complementarity or positive culture, aiming at goals and values of common progress in their rational communication.

Intercultural hermeneutics requires research into a series of categories dealing with communication; among them are the three following intercultural ones.

The first category is the intersubjectivity of intercultural communication. Since the time of Edmund Husserl, a number of philosophical schools have attached importance to studies of intersubjectivity and have proposed respectively different doctrines. It is necessary, however, to carry out a more concrete and deeper exploration into the relationships among communicative subjects in intercultural activities. The principle of communication between different subjects here should be able to take into account different models of civilization and different cultural types, and the relationships among subjects should be that of free, mutual, and equal interaction, so as to achieve an equality of discourse that accords with the rationality of communication. The intersubjectivity of intercultural communication ought reflect diversity, openness, mutual transformation, and the unity of dialectical dependence.

The second category is intercultural understanding and interpretation. Rational intercultural communication should be bilateral and based on mutual understanding, including the mutual interpretation of “texts” in different cultures. This means that “indigenous culture” as well as “the self,” “alien culture,” and “the other,” are to be conscious of their counterparts as the “other,” and to transcend the “self” by entering into the “other” in order to reflect one’s own culture in the other. Both the “self” and the “other” mutually manifest themselves in the contrast. “Indigenous culture” and “alien culture” may be sublimated in a new interpretation of oneself. Genuine intercultural understanding can thus embody mutual understanding between dynamic cultural traditions, such as “indigenous cultures” and “alien cultures.” (A culture may not, of course, want to, or be able to, get rid of certain traditions.) H. G. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics maintains that tradition, as the confluence of prejudices kept by history is the premise of the human activity of understanding, and human beings also participate in the evolution of their traditions through their creative understanding and interpretation. We may apply this viewpoint to say that the two different traditions – “indigenous culture” and “alien culture” – attain a confluence and harmonization of their two horizons in their mutual understanding, and respectively promote their own evolution, through intercultural communication. In such a dialectical intercultural communication, a certain “overlapping consensus” – a sort of positive

interculturality – may come into being. That is, there will be a “consensus” containing difference, sameness in differentia, and a dynamic identity residing in diversity. Both “indigenous cultures” and “alien cultures” may respectively transcend themselves as a result of mutual understanding, and gain new, even innovative, knowledge, so as to promote innovation in culture and the common progress of civilizations.

The third category is interculturality. Interculturality is an essential attribute and function of intercultural understanding and an effect of intercultural communication. Interculturality is complicated and multiform. Intercultural communication interweaves the complicated relation of sameness and difference in the interaction and mutual interpretation of “indigenous culture” and “alien culture” through modes like complementarity and symmetry, or dissonance and asymmetry. In general, they might be reduced to two kinds. Lack of communication and extreme dissonance and asymmetry between “indigenous culture” and “alien culture” all represent negative interculturality, and result in estrangement – even conflict – of different cultures. Positive interculturality, as the true end of intercultural communication, denotes a mediating role occurring in the interaction and interpenetration of the “indigenous culture” and the “alien culture.” It is similar to the rule of the “golden mean” in Confucianism. On the other hand, it means that two different cultures form an “overlapping consensus” in cooperative interpretation and mutual construction, and so realize an identity in cultural diversity. Seeking common points while maintaining difference – “harmony in diversity” – shows rational, positive interculturality as the true end of intercultural communication; that is, realizing the identity of diverse civilizations and promoting the harmonious coexistence and common progress of various civilizations.

### **THE DIMENSION OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY**

Comparative philosophy, produced by the method of intercultural studies, should be an organic part of intercultural philosophy as well. By comparative philosophy we do not mean some simple and mechanical comparison between any two kinds of philosophy, based on superficial – even farfetched – similarities or antagonisms. The study of comparative philosophy, in essence, is also a mode of intercultural communication, transcending time and space, in virtue of scholars doing comparative studies. Comparative philosophy involves taking different philosophical texts that embody the cultural ethos of different civilizations, as well as scholarly insight, in order to achieve a special mutual understanding and communication which aims at discovering both diversity and identity within different philosophical and cultural traditions. The differences

that one finds reflects traits contained in each tradition; this manifests the diversity of world civilization and culture. The identity that one finds is not some simple, pure, and absolute common point, but a dynamic identity residing in diversity. There are two aspects to this identity: first, the similar or common factors of different traditions, grounded in common human experience and common human rationality – it is an “overlapping consensus”; second, the complementarity of different traditions which enables them to learn from others’ strong points in order to offset one’s weaknesses. Both aspects represent the positive character of the interculturality in studies of comparative philosophy. Different philosophical traditions are indeed comparable; there is a dialectical commensurability among them.

Comparative studies of different philosophies and their traditions can avoid inter-cultural misunderstanding and dispel crude, simplified, and distorted understandings of other traditions; find common truth; reach an “overlapping consensus”; engender new knowledge through cooperative interpretation and mutual construction; and achieve unity in this diversity. Comparative philosophy is creative, can broaden and develop respective philosophical traditions, and can help different philosophies to transcend their cultural boundaries, in order to reach broad insights about truth. Such a comparative philosophy would serve to show similarities or identities in diverse civilizations, including in their cultural traditions, and promote harmonious coexistence and the common progress of the varied civilizations.

Here, let us take an example. The philosophical doctrines of Confucius (551-479 BCE) and Socrates (469-399 BCE) profoundly influence Chinese and Western traditions to this day. Both reflect identity and particularity. Thus, both Chinese and Western philosophical traditions can understand each other, and can achieve positive interculturality through intercultural communication.

Confucius and Socrates lived in virtually the same era, and each founded a new type of philosophy with ethics at its core. The doctrine of Confucius initiated the Confucian civilization existing today; the philosophy of Socrates provided the foundation of scientific reason and the humanistic spirit for Western civilization. We might find many similarities between them so as to reflect an identity of two traditions of philosophy and civilization. Here, I would note three principal common points. First, both the Confucian doctrine of Ren (“Benevolence”), and the theory of agathon (“Goodness”) incarnate a humanistic principle of philosophy. Second, both Socrates and Confucius hold a rationalist epistemology and theory of morality, from which emanates the glory of reason and morality. Third, both masters advocated an ethical politics and the social ideal of realizing humanity and universal harmony.

Due to their different historical backgrounds and cultural contexts, there are naturally differences between Confucian and Socratic doctrines – these are the elements reflecting the differentiae between Confucian and Western civilization. First, Confucian doctrine attaches importance to patriarchal hierarchy and to the consanguinity of the family; a state is considered an expanded family. Traditional Chinese ethics, as strongly influenced by Confucianism, has the characteristic of holism and places an emphasis on community values. Socrates also emphasized public ethics and cultivating the virtues of the city-state, although without insisting on the central value of the family. Second, the constructive method of Confucian philosophical doctrine involves interpreting the meanings of categories in some classical texts through intellectual insight or intuition but also through dialectical reasoning (as implied in the *Book of Changes*). (Perhaps it could be called a method of classical hermeneutics.) This influenced the traditional Chinese mode of thinking. However, Socrates applied his “dialectics” to an exploration into the definitions of virtue, and his discourses on other issues contain a strong measure of logical analysis.

As the sources of two great civilizations – of China and the West – both Confucian and Socratic philosophy and ethical doctrines have similarities and differences. This demonstrates that the philosophical and cultural traditions of every nation have both creative diversity as well as complementarity. Thus, one might increase rational communication by efforts to engage in mutual understanding and cross-fertilization, so as to pursue common cultural prosperity and social progress.

### **THE DIMENSION OF THE ETHICS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Intercultural activity, as a practice, requires ethical criteria; the ethics of intercultural communication should be an organic branch of intercultural philosophy, and it is something that would benefit from further studies. Here, having an intercultural attitude is pivotal. ‘Intercultural attitude’ denotes an attitude where human beings focus on the relationships between “indigenous culture” and “alien culture” in their intercultural practical activity. A rational intercultural attitude should comply with an ethical principle of intercultural communication so as to make communication successful and effective. In the context of globalization and the challenges of pluralistic countries, taking a rational intercultural attitude is important, and studies of international ethics related to intercultural communication should be further deepened.

An intercultural communicative ethics bears on many domains, including economics, politics, culture, and society. Each has its

respective ethical norms of intercultural communication. In general, three basic ethical principles of communication can be identified.

First, mutual respect. We live in a society where globalization and local context are connected to each other. Mutual respect of national cultural traditions is the primary premise of rational intercultural communication. Diverse cultures are equal; whether the country is a big one or a small one, all should respect the relevant cultural traditions of the other side and acknowledge their important role in maintaining the identity of that national culture. Only by adopting an attitude of mutual respect, which mutual intercultural understanding can do, can we have a peaceful coexistence of world civilizations instead of a clash of civilizations; dialogue instead of antagonisms; harmonious communication instead of rejection and isolation. Only in this way can we truly realize “harmony in difference” as a form of positive interculturality.

Second, mutual toleration. In addition to respecting alien cultures, rational intercultural communication requires an attitude of tolerance towards those cultures. Tolerance is its first requirement and constitutive factor, and it embodies positive interculturality as a virtue of communication. It denotes the bi-directional acceptability and the recognition of the differences of the other side; tolerating the “other” is equal to tolerating the “self.” It also means not imposing anything on the “other” that the “other” cannot accept. It implies the golden rule of Confucius: “What you do not want to be done to yourself, do not do to others.” Mutual tolerance instead of rejection may provide us with a ground for mutual understanding and communication, and engender a healthy and equal dialogue among the various cultures and civilizations, instead of antagonism or conflict. (The preceding ‘mutuality’ means that different cultures and civilizations mutually understand, absorb, and admit the merits of the “other.”)

Third, mutual cooperation. This sort of cooperation not only means a coordination in the communicative behavior of one another, but also denotes the active, harmonious interaction and interpenetration of “indigenous culture” and “alien culture” – a convergence of two horizons, mutually studying and using one another for reference, as well as mutually absorbing beneficial factors from the other – in order to enrich and develop its own culture and to promote the common progress of civilizations. Of course, imbibing an alien culture is not some kind of mechanical transplant or graft; otherwise, it could cause rigidity or a rupture in the indigenous culture. Both sides should respectively bring the rational, beneficial factors of the other side into their own contexts, adjust and integrate them, and make them useful for the development and innovation of their respective cultures, thereby realizing a truly positive interculturality and unity of diverse world civilizations.

Thus, the ethics of intercultural communication is virtually a type of discourse ethics, embodying the above-mentioned basic principles of communication ethics. It demands that “indigenous cultures” and “alien cultures” carry out dialogue on the basis of equality, seek to increase mutual understanding, and be open to reciprocally absorbing the reasonable attainments of the civilization of the other. Such a dialectical communication aims at both validating the diversity of world cultures and attaining some overlapping consensus – with the ultimate aim of achieving cultural innovations in both the “indigenous culture” and the “alien culture.” It is, in other words, to achieve positive interculturality. Such a discourse ethics of intercultural communication is also the international ethics of peace, as it seeks to advance the culture of peace. It emphasizes that the different civilizations in the world should seek to carry out peaceful communication by means of intercultural dialogue; to increase mutual understanding and cooperation; and to reveal a rational process of negotiation – one that is quite different than that described in the so-called “clash of civilizations.” The essential goal of discourse ethics consists in peace and the development of the world and, therefore, it is important for the harmonious common progress of diverse civilizations in the world.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of globalization, the world today is faced with the challenges of pluralistic cultures and diverse civilizations. We should adopt a rational intercultural attitude, comply with basic ethical principles of intercultural communication as mentioned above, advocate for mutual understanding and communication among diverse civilizations, and make efforts to achieve a positive interculturality, so as to eliminate local conflict of civilizations and to promote the common progress of different civilizations. Faced with increasingly complicated situations in the world today, we should attach an even greater importance to harmony – i.e., emphasize harmony and promote harmony. Building a harmonious society and establishing a harmonious world of perpetual peace and common prosperity is the common desire of people in every country of the world, and a necessary requirement of social development. In order to establish a harmonious world, we should make efforts to achieve harmony in the progress of diverse civilizations, particularly through peaceful and rational intercultural communication. Yet we must also recognize diversity – we must recognize the differences in the cultural traditions, social systems, ideas of value, and paths of development of every country. Through dialogue and exchange based on equality, through an open and reasonable communication among civilizations, diverse civilizations can learn from others’ strong

points in order to offset their own weaknesses, and can seek common points while respecting differences, so that they commonly advance the lofty enterprise of human peace and development. This is also the lofty goal of intercultural philosophy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper appeared in *Rethinking Philosophy*, ed. William Sweet and Pham Van Duc (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> In his *A Study of History* and later works, Arnold Toynbee points out that in history, there has been conflict and convergence among different civilizations, but there has also been co-existence. Moreover, Toynbee abominates war, and emphasizes that the convergence of civilizations would help to push history forward. In his treatment of the relationships among the various civilizations in the contemporary world, Toynbee upholds pacifism and cosmopolitanism, and expects that the unity of world civilizations can be achieved by means of peaceful culture. Unlike Toynbee's practical goal in the study of civilizations, Samuel Huntington unilaterally emphasizes the clash of civilizations, and even declares that the clash of different civilizations has dominated global politics, especially, the clash between Western civilization and the Islamic civilization, but also the Confucian civilization. This clash has threatened and will threaten the interests of western nations and their dominant status across the globe. It is obvious that, though Huntington has absorbed some of Toynbee's understanding of civilization, his own theory on the clash of civilizations is inconsistent with Toynbee's philosophy of history on several key points. We should not look at both equally or confuse the two. Compared with Huntington's, Toynbee's account has much more merit in its understanding of civilizations.





## CHAPTER XI

# COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OR INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY? THE CASE OF THE RUSSIAN BUDDHOLOGIST THEODOR STCHERBATSKY

*VIKTORIA LYSENKO*

In the Russian language, there are two mutually exclusive proverbs: “Everything is known through comparison” and “Every comparison limps.” The former points to the heuristic value of comparison, the latter makes us aware of its highly subjective character. In terms of heuristic value, it is evident that comparison has a double advantage – it helps to understand the Other but, at the same time, it sheds new light on one’s own situation, and gives the distance that is necessary to assess it from a certain outside perspective. Thus, any intercultural comparison introduces a certain xenological play between one’s own Self-image and an image of the Other. In this respect, it can be just as much a tool of Self-estimation and Self-affirmation, as a tool of Self-criticism and Self-transcendence. In the final analysis, the image of the Other firmly rests upon one’s own culturally constructed Self-image or Self-identity. In the history of comparative philosophy we can see that the constructions of Otherness depend not only on “objective” circumstances – such as the scope of our knowledge of other cultures, and access to documents, texts, or artifacts – but also (and not to a lesser degree), these constructions rest upon the intellectual situation in one’s own culture – problems discussed, methods used – methods that the community of scholars in a particular period esteems as “objective” or “scientific.”

What scholars of the past wrote about other cultures we can now recognize as reflecting culturally-determined interests and quests. Every epoch asks foreign cultures its own questions and gets its own responses, refracted through the prism of these questions. This interdependence between questions and answers is a matter of interest and analysis that is especially important because it helps to show that our pretensions to “objectivity” and our claims to use a “scientific” or “scholarly” approach are also culturally determined, as far as our concepts of what is “objective” and “scientific” evolve along with our historically changing *Zeitgeist*.

Since the comparison of concepts and systems within one particular tradition, Western or Eastern, may also be called comparative philosophy, was the term “intercultural philosophy” coined to refer to

intercultural communication in a wider sense? Does intercultural philosophy necessarily imply making comparisons? Could it not be something like a discourse which takes into account different cultural perspectives – philosophizing in terms of different philosophical traditions? Among the contemporary philosophers who profess the idea of intercultural philosophy (Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Franz Martin Wimmer, Heinz Kimmerle, Ram Adhar Mall, and others), there are persons who have had a multicultural education or experience (here, Western and some other: e.g., Indian, African, Latin-American, etc.). If we understand intercultural philosophy in the sense of a merging of horizons or a combination of different cultural perspectives by those who have a command of different traditions, do we have valid criteria to distinguish it from inculturation<sup>1</sup> or inclusivism<sup>2</sup>?

The main challenge for intercultural philosophy in this sense is to avoid two extremes: 1) rash universalism, with its superficial synthesis of different traditions on the basis of only one particular tradition, namely the Western one, and 2) dogmatic particularism, with its idea of the total incompatibility of cultures and the impossibility of understanding any culture from another cultural perspective. In the final analysis, what is at stake here is whether it is possible for an individual, group, or society to keep intact its cultural identity while accepting other cultural experiences. The example of Buddhism, which was assimilated by different cultures without a loss of its identity, shows that this is quite possible.

If, for intercultural philosophy (in the contemporary sense of the word), a multicultural philosophical experience is an indispensable condition, does the same hold for comparative philosophy? Let us look at some of the historical circumstances which gave birth to it. Starting from the “discovery” of Sanskrit (by Sir William Jones), the appearance of comparative linguistics in the late 18th and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (by F. Schlegel, A. Schlegel, F. Bopp, and A. von Humboldt) marked the beginnings of the development of a number of disciplines like comparative literature studies (Th. Benfey), comparative religion studies (F. Max Müller), and so on. One of the initiators of comparative philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer, was the first major modern Western thinker who acknowledged the value of philosophical ideas belonging to other cultural traditions – namely, the Indian (e.g., the Upanishads and the Buddha). However Schopenhauer’s use of Indian philosophy makes us suspect that, for him, the fact of its cultural otherness and distance in time did not make any difference. Challenging Hegelian historicism, he claimed that philosophical thought is beyond time and space (later this approach was called *philosophia perennis*): “Hegelians who believe that the history of philosophy has its purpose, are unable to understand the fundamental truth that at all times everything is all the same, all the

formation/becoming and origination/occurrence are illusory, only ideas are eternal, time is ideal.”<sup>3</sup> According to Schopenhauer, the world is constantly changing, but it is not a progressive change; rather, it is a process that has neither beginning nor end nor any particular direction. The will is blind and blows where it wants. Therefore, it is not surprising, from his point of view, that similar ideas relate modern Germany and ancient India. He recognized that his thought was directly influenced by the Upanishads but, as far as his relationship toward Buddhism is concerned, the situation was more complex. Schopenhauer remarked that his philosophy was already formulated when he came to know about Buddhism, so it was rather a matter of expressing the same ideas across time and cultures, than a question of influence.

If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others. In any case, it must be a pleasure to me to see my doctrine in such close agreement with a religion that the majority of men on earth hold as their own, for this numbers far more followers than any other. And this agreement must be yet the more pleasing to me, inasmuch as in my philosophizing *I have certainly not been under its influence* [emphasis added]. For up till 1818, when my work appeared, there was to be found in Europe only a very few accounts of Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

However, he claimed that his expression of the truth of this Buddhist insight was more genuine and exact:

Buddha, Eckhardt, and I all teach essentially the same...Eckhardt within the bonds of his Christian mythology. In Buddhism, these ideas are not encumbered by any such mythology, and are thus simple and clear, to the extent that a religion can be clear. Complete clarity lies with me.”<sup>5</sup>

Schopenhauer took Indian thought existentially as having a deep kinship to him, to his own *Weltanschauung*. It was a kind of “selective affinity of souls,” with all its inevitable reductionism, that is a tough selection in which those aspects of other cultures that may come into conflict with this “search for affinity,” and are not noticed or discarded. He did not seek more deep acquaintance with India, never studied Sanskrit or tried to verify his intuitions against the texts, and did not show any interest in Indian literature or Indian history. Finally, he preferred the Latin translation, or, rather, interpretation, of the

Upanishads based on the Persian “Upnekhat” or “Oupnekhat” [Book of the Secret] by Anquetil Duperron, to the translations from the original Sanskrit available in his time.<sup>6</sup> Although he proclaimed Indians (Buddhists and Hindus – above all, Vedantins) as “equals” to himself, this “equality” was quite relative, because it had been fully constructed or imagined according to the principles of his own philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Schopenhauer’s charismatic discourse attracted enormous interest in “things Indian,” and gave impetus to the development of comparative philosophy, but what could it propose in terms of heuristics or hermeneutics? Was Schopenhauer’s use of Sanskrit terms or notions (e.g., *māyā*, *nirvāṇa*, *dharma*, *ātman*, and so on) to express his own ideas an example of that intercultural philosophizing we are looking for? As much as Schopenhauer regarded Indian ideas and concepts to be nothing but manifestations of his own intuitions, is it not more appropriate to refer to his approach by the term “inclusivism”?

What could be achieved by someone taking as a methodological basis the idea of *philosophia perennis* is exemplified by the comparative philosophy project proposed by Paul Deussen, Schopenhauer’s follower and disciple, the author of the classic text *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen* (“General history of philosophy with special emphasis on religions,” in seven volumes, 1894-1915).<sup>8</sup> Could he be regarded as the first comparative philosopher? His credo was clearly formulated in *Vedanta und Platonismus im Lichte der Kantischen Philosophie*: “In all countries and at all times, in all that is near or far, there is one and the same kind of thing, in front of which stands a single mind which sees. How could it be then, that the thinking mind cannot necessarily achieve the same results everywhere, in India as in Greece, in ancient or recent times, if it is not blinded by the traditions and prejudices, it stands pure and impartial towards nature in its exploration of it?”<sup>9</sup> He believes, then, that since the world is one and the mind exploring it is one, philosophical truth must be necessarily one and the same (i.e., that of Upanishads and Vedanta). All that differs from this single primarily, primordial truth is a result of the corruptive and destructive impact of local traditions and prejudices. For Deussen, there is only one philosophical tradition – that which starts from the Upanishads to Vedanta, through it to Parmenides, Plato, and Kant, and arrives at its culmination in Schopenhauer. The historical discrepancies of this schema (Vedanta was much later than Parmenides and Plato) were of no importance for him. As Vladimir Shokhin remarks: “Deussen “makes both ends meet” when he “vedantized” Kant, projected the “vedantized” Kant onto Vedanta itself, and then “reads” them through Plato.”<sup>10</sup> This project of comparative philosophy manifestly runs counter to the ideas of the historical and cultural determination of the philosophical enterprise and the value of

cultural otherness which are so important for us today. Though Paul Deussen and his compatriot and fellow Indologist Friedrich Max Müller<sup>11</sup> made quite a number of valid comparisons between Indian and European philosophies which could be justly estimated as real contributions, their philosophical framework of comparison is now outdated and superseded by modern comparativist thought. As Wilhelm Halbfass has justly remarked, this framework, while being universalist, still remains quite inclusivistic.<sup>12</sup>

Now let us turn to the Russian scholar Theodor Stcherbatsky and his contribution to both comparative and intercultural philosophy.

The cultural situation in which all the pioneers of comparative disciplines found themselves was more or less the same – in Europe and the USA as well as in Russia, it was Eurocentrism, with its mono-civilizational, cultural, and religious ideology which constituted a predominating paradigm of research and reflection. After Hegel, the idea of the impossibility of philosophy outside Western civilization began to constitute the basis of the academic history of philosophy. So, anyone who discovered “philosophy” somewhere else, ran into an impassable dogmatic barrier. This was exactly the case of Theodor Stcherbatsky.

The pioneers of Indian studies displayed a quite restrained interest in Buddhism. For some of them it was either a dissident sect of Brahmanism<sup>13</sup> or a purely practical philosophy, i.e., ethics.<sup>14</sup> The Buddhologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Rhys-Davids, Geigers, H. Oldenbourg and others, engaged primarily in the study of the Pāli canon, and readily opposed the ethical teaching of the Buddha to what they called Brahmanical “metaphysics.” Their approach to Buddhism was connected with the principles of the Protestant liberal theology which identified “true religion” with the teachings of its founder, and which regarded all later developments as “corruption” and immersion in superstitions. Another important feature of their approach was the positivist critique of metaphysics, also extremely fashionable at that time.

In the early 20th century, Buddhism was the dominant religion in many countries of South, South-East, and East Asia, but Buddhologists argued that the “true Buddhism” (“the genuine Buddhism of the Buddha himself”) – was not that which Buddhists actually believed in, but that which they, the scholars, discovered in the ancient (as they thought) texts of the Pali canon, which was, above all, the *Buddha’s* ethical teaching.

Stcherbatsky wrote about this situation: “Some scholars pick up out of the whole Canon, the Canon containing a wealth of scholasticism, the single utterance from Mahāvagga (vi. 31), “Make good actions, do not make bad actions,” and contend that this alone is the genuine Buddhism of Buddha himself. All the remainder is of later origin and

‘church-made.’ Others, like Professor B. Keith, think that Buddha was nothing of a philosopher since we cannot possibly admit ‘reason to prevail in a barbarous age’<sup>15</sup>...<sup>16</sup> This statement of the respected Indologist Arthur Berriedale Keith (1879–1944) referred to by Stcherbatsky is quite revealing. It shows the state of mind of many Orientalists of that time, that which was later called “Orientalism” by Edward Said.

In contrast to the Anglo-German Buddhological school, the French-Belgian school (Louis de La Vallée-Poussin, Sylvain Levi, Jean Przyluski) brought to the fore the religious aspect of the Buddhist Mahāyāna texts, but also denied the presence in them of an independent philosophical system. Stcherbatsky – despite his personal friendship with de La Vallée-Poussin and with whom he attended a seminar of the German professor Hermann Jacobi – strongly criticized his views on Buddhism. According to de La Vallée-Poussin, Buddhism is “a teaching of obscure magic and thaumaturgy coupled with hypnotic practices and simple faith in the immortality of the soul, its blissful survival in paradise.” As Stcherbatsky remarks, “This characteristic the author then seems willing to extend so as to cover a period of above a thousand years, the whole period of Hinayana.... That the philosophy of the Canon was not seriously meant, but served only to produce hypnotic states, we are informed on p. 128.... We have thus to imagine the Buddha as a magician who did not preach Nirvana, but was engaged in hypnotic exercises during which he uttered some confused thoughts (*idéologie flottante*)”, but never believed in them. He used them as a soporific stuff in order to induce his audience into a state of hypnotic slumber.”<sup>17</sup>

Stcherbatsky was the first among his fellow European Indologists and Buddhologists who saw in Buddhism a full-fledged philosophical system, with a sophisticated logic and theory of knowledge and even a metaphysics. Not only did he come to acknowledge the existence of the original Buddhist philosophy in its own right, but he also believed that the role of philosophy in Buddhism itself was of crucial importance.

There was another aspect which shows Stcherbatsky’s deviation from mainstream Buddhist studies and, in a sense, from the entire humanistic science of his time. “The Queens” of academic research – History and Philology – set the standards of textual criticism, largely preserved to this day: to explore the text meant to ascertain its authorship, the time of composition, to set out the different historical phases of its evolution, to separate the “facts” it describes from “fiction,” and so on. What interested Stcherbatsky in the Sanskrit texts were, above all, the ideas and concepts. Therefore, he was not involved, like the majority of his colleagues, in the obligatory search for the oldest original texts. He preferred to deal with late commentaries which expounded the ideas more fully and convincingly, as well as with the

living tradition, which continued to develop and to deepen the traditional arguments.

Much of what Stcherbatsky wrote about the originality and philosophical importance of Buddhist thought, about Indian and Buddhist logic as an alternative to European logic, and so on, today may seem something obvious, even a banality or a commonplace. But we should not forget that in his time the banality and commonplace consisted in the firm conviction that Indians were an uncivilized backward people, their religion barbaric as well as their manners, they had no systematic thought, and so on. What we now call “Eurocentrism,” was not only a common worldview of the general educated public, but even of the majority of the Orientalists themselves.

How did Stcherbatsky, a linguist and philologist by training, come to the study of Buddhist philosophy? We know that he was fond of modern philosophy (especially the neo-Kantian *one* – he attended the lectures of the Russian Neo-Kantian philosopher Alexander Vvedensky, 1856-1925) and was well aware of its latest developments.<sup>18</sup> When he became acquainted with Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāya-biṇḍu* – a quite distinct and lapidary statement of Buddhist logic and epistemology – the “search query” fostered by his classes in modern philosophy served as a helpful device to interpret Buddhist Yogācāra texts. Thus, we may suppose that it was a wonderful “recognition” in another tradition of the elements pertaining to one’s own tradition.

Stcherbatsky resorted to Kantian terminology to give “respectability” to the Buddhist ideas and to attract the attention of professional Western philosophers to the original Buddhist philosophy. In collaboration with them, he intended to introduce Buddhism into modern philosophical discourse and into modern philosophical education in order “to make the names of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti as close to us and as near and dear to us as the names of Plato and Aristotle or Kant and Schopenhauer.”<sup>19</sup>

It was to Alexander Vvedensky that he gave the first volume of his *magnum opus* on Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāya-biṇḍu* with Dharmottara’s commentary, entitled *Theory of Knowledge and Logic According to the Doctrine of the Later Buddhists* (1903). This was the first Buddhist epistemological and logical text translated into any European language. However, his hopes that Vvedensky would become interested in Buddhism were cruelly disappointed. Vvedensky was in fact rather outraged: how could Stcherbatsky “dare” to put on the same footing Kant (!) and Dharmakīrti! In the Introduction to the second volume of his *magnum opus*, Stcherbatsky bitterly remarked: “While the hope expressed in the first part that the system of Dharmakīrti should cause the interest not only among the small circle of Indologists, but among historians of philosophy in general, is still not fulfilled, however,

nothing has appeared that would have shaken our confidence in its value. *Superficial judgments, shot from the hip, of persons who did not prove their opinions by a careful study or by thinking through Buddhist teachings, or even by a simple acquaintance with the subject* [italics mine – V.L.], of course, are the least to shake our confidence.<sup>20</sup>

Stcherbatsky believed that the task of comparative research would be more appropriate to the “specialists” (by which he meant his Russian Neo-Kantian philosopher colleagues), and that is why he, considering himself not a professional philosopher, deliberately avoided Indian-Western parallels in the second volume of his *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*. Besides, he had acknowledged that comparing the Buddhist theory of knowledge with Western systems “puts an edge and solves many of the issues that are just now the subject of dispute among philosophers of different directions. Therefore, any comparison involving the comparative assessment of Indian speculation, cannot avoid subjectivity.”<sup>21</sup>

Stcherbatsky, then, clearly connected the interpretation of other cultural traditions with problems and discussions in the interpreter’s own tradition. For him, the example of such “subjectivity” is Schopenhauer, who claimed that the Indian sages “discovered” the same ideas as he, Schopenhauer, did. The Russian scholar emphasizes the one-sidedness of this “subjective excitement”:

The agreement between the results of Indian and European thinking is easily mistaken for the truth of the position that truth is one, while falsehood is infinitely varied. But as there is hardly a Western system, which would not be *met* in India, *the mere coincidence does not prove anything* (my italics – VL), since it can be referred to by the dualist, monist, skeptic and dogmatist, as well as by the realist and idealist, materialist and spiritualist.

In other words, these coincidences could be interpreted from different points of view, depending on the perspective of the author of this or that comparative initiative.

However, the critical position so clearly stated did not prevent Stcherbatsky, right in the same work, from rendering some Buddhist notions in Kantian terms without any justification or explanation. Was it an inconsistency? In my opinion, it was not, because Stcherbatsky without resorting to the appropriate terms, makes, in fact, a distinction between comparative philosophy (constructing of East-West parallels) and intercultural philosophy. By using Kantian terminology in the translation of the Buddhist epistemological texts, he gives us an example



of intercultural philosophy – thinking in terms of both traditions, which are, in fact, considered as equal and interchangeable.

The most spectacular example of his “intercultural philosophy” may be found in his famous “Indo-European Symposium on the Reality of the External World,” at the end of his first volume of his late work *Buddhist Logic*.<sup>22</sup> It contains the arguments and statements of Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti and other Buddhists, as well as of Sāṃkhya, Realists (Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā), from the Indian side, and Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Descartes, Berkeley, Hegel, Kant, Herbart, Mach, J. Stuart Mill, and E. von Hartmann from the Western side.

What makes this kind of intercultural philosophizing possible? In the second volume of his *Theory of Knowledge and Logic* (1909), the Russian scholar sympathetically refers to a now-forgotten German philosopher, Willy Freytag, the author of the comparative work *Über die Erkenntnistheorie der Inder* (1905): “As correctly noted by Freytag, if anything follows from these coincidences [between the Indian and European systems – V.L.] it is the idea that neither accident, nor arbitrariness determine the development of philosophy, but the internal law of human nature, and philosophical issues it solves: under the most different conditions, philosophical thinking leads to the same results.”<sup>23</sup>

By supporting this clearly expressed universalist stance, Stcherbatsky seemed to demonstrate his adherence to the ideas of *philosophia perennis*, *perennial philosophy*. The human mind in different conditions and in different forms continually raises the same questions and reveals the same truths. It can be argued that the Sanskrit term in his translation (for example, the term *sarūpya* [“similarity of forms”]) can be rendered by a Kantian term (in this case – a “schematism of reason”), on the basis that both have the same denotation – a mechanism of consciousness, serving as an intermediary between mind and senses. In this case, what is “perennial” is not a concrete concept, but a problem: the problem of the relationship between senses and reason, which was raised by both Kant and the Buddhists. Thus, for Stcherbatsky, the bases of intercultural philosophy (if he had used this term) would be the universal character of some problems, like the relationship between mind and senses, or the reality of empirical world, or the existence of other minds, and so on.

That does not mean that the Russian Buddhologist was not interested in comparative philosophy proper. In his early work, *Logic in Ancient India*, he compares Indian logic with Aristotelian syllogistic and also proposes a number of parallels (between Carvakas and Epicureans, between Indian and Greek atomists, etc.) which aimed at undermining the view of the “Greek origins” of Indian logic, atomism, and so on.<sup>24</sup> In

his opinion, the external influences were excluded by the very fact that Indian culture “has been much higher than that what could be offered to it [from the Greek part].”<sup>25</sup>

Vladimir Shokhin believes that this paper of Stcherbatsky signaled a Copernican revolution in comparative philosophy: “The real discovery made in this first historical and philosophical essay of Stcherbatsky consisted in that he tried to determine the differences and similarities of Indian logic, with Aristotle’s and with modern European logics. It was a comparison not only of the accomplished results of the two philosophical traditions, but also of the types of rationality, of how actually the carriers of these traditions conceived the process of thinking.”<sup>26</sup>

All Stcherbatsky’s works written after the *Late Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, contain more or less parallels and comparisons, and the final book, *Buddhist Logic* (1930-32) contained a comparative section on almost every topic discussed. Along with these comparative parallels, Stcherbatsky, notwithstanding his failure with Vvedensky, attempted equally unsuccessfully to engage in a dialogue other professional philosophers (Theodor Losev and Bertrand Russell). But even in the absence of real partners, this dialogue still took place – in the mind of Stcherbatsky. Though he did not, for the reasons explained above, always engage himself in comparisons, he continued to think “comparatively” or, rather, “interculturally,” constantly trying to erect bridges between Indian and contemporary Western philosophical thought. As the eminent Russian Sinologist Vasilii Alexeev (1881-1951) said about him: he is one who “firmly holds two worlds in himself.”

Stcherbatsky’s method of translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts can also be called “intercultural” rather than “comparative.” He was the first to notice that the translation of philosophical texts, as compared with other Indian literature, ran into quite special problems:

...the difficulty of their [philosophical texts] translation has increased by the fact that philosophy hasn’t a language of its own and it expresses the concepts it has to operate with, using metaphors. The translator now and then has to deal with the words, well known to him, but referring to some concepts that clearly have nothing in common with the ordinary meanings of these words. Only through a hypothetical reconstruction of the philosophical system in question, can one at the beginning only approximately define the concept, which is metaphorically denoted by such a term. A literal translation would be completely useless as it does not express a thought of the author.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, a word-to-word translation will present the translation of the metaphor, rather than of the term.

Stcherbatsky continues: “We generally tried where possible to penetrate into the thought of the author in its entirety and to express it in Russian as it would be expressed by the author himself, if he could have written in that language.”<sup>28</sup> Here Stcherbatsky refers to the famous Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev who formulated the following requirements for the translation of the Greek classics, especially Plato: “After having mastered the ideas of the original text in their fullness and accuracy of expression, in any particular case, representing some difficulty for the literal translation, it is necessary to put to yourself a question: How would this author – say Plato [one easily can replace Plato by Dharmakīrti or Shankara – *V.L.*], with all the peculiarities of his mind, character, style and way of thinking as we know them from the historical sources – have expressed this thought in all its shades of meaning had he known Russian, and had he written in that language...It should inseparably present clear signs of its dual origin from the two live sources – the Greek and the Russian languages.”<sup>29</sup>

A good translation, according to Soloviev, is a translation in which a translator so to say platonizes himself – makes Plato think like a Russian thinker – so a good translation of Plato must draw upon the two sources represented by the Greek and the Russian languages. If we replace Plato by Dharmakīrti, the situation of a good translation of the Sanskrit text would be as follows: The Russian translator must make himself Dharmakīrti and make Dharmakīrti think in the spirit of the Russian language. In this text, the dual origins from the Sanskrit and Russian languages must be also present. Is not that the situation of intercultural philosophy?

In the event that we believe intercultural philosophy to be something of this kind, some problematic issues suggest themselves. First, it looks as if Stcherbatsky implicitly believes in the absolute transparency between each other of the input Sanskrit language, and the output Russian language. Thus, neither the philological nor the interpretive methods of translation outlined by Stcherbatsky purport to be a hermeneutical reflection. In spite of the structural Indo-European similarities between Sanskrit and Russian, there are different modes of cultural and historical specification – textual as well as contextual – which should also be taken into account. Moreover, the hermeneutical position of the translator or interpreter him or herself has to be specified or determined in terms of his or her cultural presuppositions and limitations.

Being fully aware of this cultural and historical determination, as I have shown before, Stcherbatsky’s main guide in his philosophical translation was to identify a problem, whereas the languages expressing

it may be different and interchangeable. The historical and cultural dimensions are secondary compared with the number of eternal philosophical problems that may be expressed in different languages, and in different cultures and historical periods.

Those European thinkers who, like Stcherbatsky, believe in a *philosophia perennis* profess a certain understanding of language: according to them, language is merely a docile instrument for the expression of thought. So the main task is to identify this or that idea, considered to be *perennis*; the question of formulating it in different languages is of a secondary order. If Dharmakīrti had come to the same ideas as Kant (time and cultural distance are of no importance), we commit no error in rendering his thought in Kantian categories. But before judging the Russian scholar from the position of modern scholarship, let us remember that his task could be regarded as primarily that of a *Kulturträger* and, from this perspective, his Kantian terminology was a kind of *upāya kaushalya* (skilful means) of introducing Buddhism into European philosophical culture.

Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the fact that it is his “Kantian” translations that were and still are the subject of the most ardent discussion and criticism.<sup>30</sup> Though his contribution to the study of Buddhist and Indian philosophy is widely acknowledged, his philosophical method of translation has evoked a more reserved response. The case of Stcherbatsky makes us aware of the necessity of distinguishing between translation and interpretation. In every translation there are different degrees of interpretation, reflecting different degrees of “otherness” and “selfhoodness.” The regulative idea of the translator is to render the otherness of the other in those terms of one’s own language that were not overloaded by one’s own quite specific cultural connotations. In Stcherbatsky’s Kantian interpretation, the otherness of the Buddhist *pramānavāda* almost disappeared out of sight.

As for his attempts at intercultural philosophy, we can clearly see now that Stcherbatsky was not fully aware of the hermeneutical pitfalls and barriers of this enterprise which are now known to us. But still, in spite of its naive and romantic character, his idea of a symposium in which philosophers of different times and cultures are engaged in a dialogue, or, rather, polylog, is quite appealing.

Stcherbatsky’s strategy, as we have seen, was largely determined by his *Kulturträger* task, but, in the final analysis, it could not crash the citadel of Eurocentrism in the minds of Western (Russian) philosophers. That citadel is still there, but this does not mean that the project of intercultural philosophy as such is doomed to failure. It can play the role of a counterweight to the Western model of globalization, provided that it will be taken, not as a veridical propositional discourse, but as a kind

of experimental intellectual enterprise aimed at developing a common ground for the encounter of different cultures *in terms of all these cultures*.

Nevertheless, I believe that the awareness of an irreducible distance between cultures is nowadays an altogether more attractive challenge than the awareness of their similarity. In this perspective, as it seems to me, it is more important to show the difference in seemingly similar ideas, than the similarity in apparently different ideas. So, if comparative philosophy historically began with similarities, now it is time for it to emphasize differences in cultural perspectives. In this respect, it is only on the basis of multicultural education that our modern comparative philosophy can give otherness its proper place and value, and can contribute to the development of intercultural philosophy, based on the equality of different cultural identities. It is only through differentiation and distinction that the true understanding between distinct cultures can be established. This understanding will pave the way for a new kind of unity based on the polyphony of different voices.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Inculturation is a term used in the Roman Catholic Church, to refer to the adaptation, by missionaries, of Church teachings to different non-Christian cultures. Some of them took advantage of their knowledge of local languages and traditions to express Christian ideas and dogmas.

<sup>2</sup> According to W. Halbfass, inclusivism is “a subordinating identification of other teachings with parts or preliminary stages of one’s own religious system, which is thus presented as a superior structure, and an implicit anticipation of competing views” (*Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr., E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol 2, Supplement to the Third Book, Ch. 38 “On History”.

<sup>4</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, Ch. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> As he wrote about *Oupnekhat* in the preface to the first edition of *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818): “In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Oupnekhat*. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death!” (p. xiii). At the same time, Schopenhauer’s opinion concerning contemporary translations from the Sanskrit was rather reserved: “I cannot resist a certain suspicion that our Sanskrit scholars do not understand their texts much better than the higher class of schoolboys their Greek” (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena, Short Philosophical Essays*. Vol II. Ch. 16: Some Remarks on Sanskrit

Literature, § 184. Cited in: *The Sacred Books of the East: The Upanishads* (pt.1), tr. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. lx. See: <http://www.naderlibrary.com/lit.paregaschopen.II.16.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer's Indomania has become a topic of many books and papers. See, for example: Robert Cowan. *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765-1885* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010); Douglas T. McGetchin. *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> The first three volumes were connected with Indian thought; the others were also full of parallels and comparisons between Indian and mostly Western or Christian (Biblical) philosophical traditions.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Deussen, *Vedanta und Platonismus im Lichte der Kantischen Philosophie* (Berlin: A. Unger, 1922), pp. 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Shokhin, *Th. Stcherbatsky and His Comparative Philosophy* (Moscow: Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Like some of the first Indologists, Max Müller was in search of the ancient cradle of all civilizations, which he and certain romantics identified with India. It was in the same vein as the search of the pra-language, pra-religion or Indian and specially Buddhist origins of Christianity in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

<sup>12</sup> Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 411.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, "On the Philosophy of the Hindus," *Miscellaneous Essays*. Vol. II (London: Trubner and Co., 1873).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Max Müller's position.

<sup>15</sup> *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 25. (Stcherbatsky had in mind the book by Arthur Berriedale Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon* [Gordon Press, 1923] – V.L).

<sup>16</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky's review of the book: L. de la Valle Poussin. *Nirvana* [Etudes sur l'Histoire des Religions, No. 5] (Paris, 1925) which appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 4 (1926), pp. 357-360. Stcherbatsky's name is given as "Sterbatsky."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

<sup>18</sup> At this time, the rector of the St. Petersburg University was M.I. Vladislavlev (1840-1890), who made the first academic translation into Russian of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

<sup>19</sup> T. Stcherbatsky (sometimes transliterated as Stcherbatskoi and Sherbastky), *Teoriya poznaniya i logika po ucheniyu pozdneishikh buddistov* [*Theory of Knowledge and Logic According to Later Buddhists*], Vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg, 1909), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (2 vols., Leningrad, 1930–32), vol. 1, p. 536-545.

<sup>23</sup> *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*, Vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Stcherbatsky, *Logika v drevnei Indii* (Logic in Ancient India) – *Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkogo Archeologicheskogo obshchestva*. 1902, tom 17, vypusk 2-3, s.172 (in Russian).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The differences in both logical traditions were quite shrewdly explained by the difference in main goals: European logic was connected with “formal truth,” while Indian logic aimed at obtaining new valid knowledge about reality. See V. Shokhin, *Theodor Stcherbatsky and His Comparative Philosophy*, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky. *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*, vol. 2, 1909; modern edition, 1995, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Among the critics of Stcherbatsky’s method we can mention S. Schayer, A. Warder, E. Conze, R. Robinson, A. Tuck, Herbert V. Guenther, and others.





## AFTERWORD

# THE PROSPECT OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

WILLIAM SWEET

What is the prospect of intercultural philosophy? In the preceding chapters, the authors have sought to address such questions as: What is intercultural philosophy? Is intercultural philosophy a distinctive approach to, or a sub-discipline of, philosophy? What would justify pursuing an intercultural philosophy? Have the challenges to it – noted throughout this volume – been addressed or met?

Despite the variety and range of their perspectives, many of the authors in this volume argue for the project of intercultural philosophy – which is perhaps apposite, in a world that is increasingly intercultural.

### WHICH INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY?

Before one can determine the *prospect(s)* of intercultural philosophy, however, some might argue that the first issue that needs to be addressed is which models or models of intercultural philosophy are involved? Several of the authors in this volume have referred to the efforts of figures such as Ram Adhar Mall, Franz Martin Wimmer, Raimon Panikkar, and Heinz Kimmerle, and some of them have offered their own arguments and accounts as well. Some have also argued, however, that these particular approaches may fall short of a robust intercultural philosophy or are problematic – and raise other challenges to the project, besides.

Carrying out comparative work is arguably a necessary part of an intercultural philosophy; at the very least, one needs to examine “the ways in which human beings of all races and cultures reflect upon their actions and act upon their reflections.”<sup>1</sup> Paul Masson-Oursel’s proposal that philosophers draw on a wide range of content but focus on method, is certainly valuable. Such a strategy calls on philosophers to open up their understanding of what philosophy is and how it is done. Yet, Masson-Oursel’s “comparative philosophy” seems to be a largely descriptive enterprise – akin to a history of ideas – rather than providing a philosophical method for identifying, clarifying, and addressing philosophical problems (including problems across cultures).

R.A. Mall is one of the early figures to propose an explicitly “intercultural philosophy.” While it is based on comparative studies, it

seeks to go beyond description to undertaking efforts to mediate between or among traditions. Again, however, while philosophers are called to emancipate themselves from various 'centrism,' and to be familiar with, and to be open to, different ways of understanding philosophy, it is not at all clear what positive approach or agenda follows from this. At best, one may see Mall's approach as more of a critique of philosophy, particularly as it has been carried out in the modern 'West,' than a positive account.

Franz Martin Wimmer's conception of intercultural philosophy similarly criticizes certain philosophical traditions for their 'exclusiveness' and proposes, as a solution, both a broader understanding of philosophy and a stronger methodological emphasis on mutual dialogue and exchange. Yet again, while this approach shows an interest in opening up philosophizing or the doing of philosophy, it is less clear about what exactly is to be discussed, what exactly is to be achieved (e.g., results or answers), and how exactly one is to be sure that one is getting it right. What is the "practice" of philosophy; how might "claims...prove themselves interculturally," and how are "culture and cultures [to] be consciously kept in view as the context of philosophising"?<sup>2</sup> While "polylog" is undoubtedly intended not to propose a particular method or content, the 'openness' of this approach does not seem to bring us very far in the way of addressing issues or going beyond consensus in finding answers to problems.

The 'comparative philosophy' of figures such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, P.T. Raju, and Alban Widgery also proposed going beyond simple description and comparison to achieve active engagement among a range of philosophical traditions – seeing not only a complementarity of different major traditions, but also a way of building upon them. These scholars had, then, a genuine intercultural project in mind. Yet, here again, the objective of their approach was somewhat ambiguous. Was its aim simply to bring philosophical traditions into contact? Or into dialogue? Was it to compare concepts or arguments or traditions? Or was the 'comparative activity' to be something more substantive – for example, to provide some "integrative outlook," based on assumptions about "a common platform" from which philosophical reflection is to begin, namely certain common interest and aspirations of humanity?<sup>3</sup> Radhakrishnan and Raju, for example, were aware of such concerns, but they did not seem to address them completely. Moreover, despite the efforts to bring different traditions into the mix, their attempt to synthesise different traditions, or show how they were complementary, seemed to meet with substantial resistance.

In light of these concerns, are there other models or approaches that are less problematic or more viable? And even if there are, do not the challenges raised to the project of intercultural philosophy, implied

by ideas in the writings of R.G. Collingwood and Alasdair MacIntyre, but also raised forcefully by Flavia Monceri and, indirectly, by Viktoria Lysenko, show that there are fundamental issues that still need to be addressed?

Given these concerns and the range of models of intercultural philosophy described in this volume, it may be difficult to settle which or whose intercultural philosophy is to be pursued. Still, it is worth recalling the number of examples referred to in the preceding essays, where we see the encounter and exchange of philosophical ideas and traditions, and that suggest that the project of, and prospects for, intercultural philosophy are positive.

#### **ENCOUNTERS AND EXCHANGES AMONG TRADITIONS<sup>4</sup>**

Intercultural philosophy as *intercultural* holds that there can be an exchange among philosophers from different cultures that is mutual and reciprocal, and in which they can fruitfully engage one another – perhaps on a par. Consider, briefly, three examples of this.

To begin with, consider the communication of Western philosophy to China in the seventeenth century by Jesuit philosophers such as Julius Aleni (1582-1649).<sup>5</sup> How did this occur? First, Aleni and others recognised the need to find ways to make Western philosophical ideas less ‘foreign’ to the Chinese. Their solution was to attempt to find suitable texts – and they focussed on the work of Aristotle. Specifically, the approach they took was to begin by presenting Aristotle the person – telling the story of Aristotle (e.g., identifying him as a sage) – and then introducing elements of his philosophy that reflected Chinese interests. Aleni and others, then, produced Chinese translations of certain of Aristotle’s works (or, to be more precise, summaries and introductions to them in Chinese, sometimes presented in the form of a dialogue). One famous example is Aleni’s *Xingxue Cushu* (1621), which was a translation and paraphrase of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. By starting with areas such as moral philosophy and ethical values, the Jesuits were then able to present Aristotle’s theory of the soul and his philosophy of nature in Chinese terms. In this way, Aristotelian thought was ‘introduced’ into a Chinese context, but also was able to engage and be appropriated into that context. A further result of this, arguably, was the articulation of a new philosophy; the product was not ‘Aristotle in Chinese,’ but a kind of Aristotelianism that was responsive to Chinese concerns and interests.

Another example of the encounter and exchange of philosophical ideas from different cultures is that of the (primarily British) idealist tradition and its influence in India in the late nineteenth and particularly the early twentieth century. A number of Indian scholars of the period – such as A.C. Mukerji, K.C. Bhattacharya, G.K. Malkani, P.T. Raju, R.

Tagore, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – were introduced to Western philosophy during their university studies. Not infrequently, however, their European-born teachers were critical of classical Indian or Hindu thought. In response, these Indian students engaged that critique – but, in doing so, they drew on the Western traditions for a vocabulary and a methodology and, in the process, provided either new interpretations of classical Indian thought or new philosophies that reflected elements of both Indian and Western traditions.

Radhakrishnan, for example, brought Indian thought into contact with European/British idealist thought.<sup>6</sup> In his two volume work, *Indian Philosophy*<sup>7</sup>, Radhakrishnan argues for the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara as the “crown” of Indian thought. While noting the importance of Indian philosophy for the modern world, in his Conclusion, Radhakrishnan acknowledges the “unprogressiveness” of Advaita Vedanta after the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE, and the paradox that, just as Indian thought was ceasing to appear “grotesque” to the West, it was becoming so in its homeland. Radhakrishnan argued, moreover, that one can reinterpret and extend Advaita Vedanta by appealing to some of the insights of the then-influential school of British Absolute idealism, particularly that of F.H. Bradley.

What is particularly interesting about Radhakrishnan’s work is, to begin with, how the encounter and exchange with ‘Western’ thought led him to seek a kind of synergy among the philosophies of the different cultures. Radhakrishnan insisted that the solution to contemporary problems required “the recognition of the essential oneness of the modern world, spiritually and socially, economically and politically.” As evidence, he argued that the basic insights of the “different religions have now come together.”<sup>8</sup> But the work of Radhakrishnan and of other Indian scholars also led several European philosophers, then teaching in India, not only to engage Indian thought, but to develop a broadly sympathetic view of it (e.g., Alban Widgery, but also A.G. Hogg and W.S. Urquhart).<sup>9</sup>

A third example of the move towards interculturality in philosophy can be seen in the work of an increasing number of Western scholars who have argued that there are many important similarities between Buddhism and Western ethical thought (e.g., particularly, contemporary neo-Aristotelianism). Both, for example, focus on the transformation of character, based on a moral sensitivity or a capacity for discernment. And while it is true that there are notable differences between Buddhism and neo-Aristotelianism (e.g., in how one acquires virtue), and while some of the virtues identified may vary (e.g., compassion), the affinity of these traditions may, in part, explain how Buddhist traditions have been encountered and engaged in the West in a way in which other Asian traditions have not – and why, for some

philosophers, Buddhist thought may be seen as a way of completing the Aristotelian project.<sup>10</sup>

These and other examples of interculturality in philosophy<sup>11</sup> – including those offered by Joseph Agbakoba, Dorothy Olu-Jacob, and Edwin George in this volume – suggest, then, that some kind of philosophizing or philosophy across traditions and cultures can be achieved. This result may set the state for what can plausibly be called an *intercultural* philosophy. Before proceeding further, however, it is necessary to determine whether or how far the essays in this volume have addressed the challenges to intercultural philosophy, referred to by some of the authors.

### **RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES<sup>12</sup>**

How, and how far, do the preceding examples and remarks help to address the challenges to intercultural philosophy noted in the Introduction and referred to in some of the essays that followed?

First, recall the claim, noted in the Introduction, that philosophy is so culturally embedded that an intercultural philosophy is difficult, if not altogether presumptuous.

As suggested above, however, this challenge seems to presuppose a rather rigid view of what constitutes the migration, exchange, and engagement of philosophies of different cultures. If we expect the meaning and use of a term or concept or a philosophy to be univocal in its use in different cultures, then we are certain to be disappointed. But this is not obviously what the encounter of different philosophical traditions requires. Terms can be refined and even redefined after initial exchange. They can broaden, or narrow, in meaning. There can be an ‘integrity’ in the meaning of a term without an ‘identity.’ To assess the challenge that philosophical terms and ideas cannot break free of their cultural sources, perhaps all that we need do is to see how the terms in question are ultimately used and how claims are accepted and judged within different philosophical traditions.

This leads to the second challenge noted earlier. Recall the ‘Collingwoodian’ point that an ‘answer’ – and, by extension, a philosophical claim or tradition – can be understood only if we know the question(s) that gave rise to it. If we wish to draw on another philosophical tradition for answers to a philosophical problem, then this would require a ‘mini history of philosophy’ before one can begin to make sense of it.

Such a challenge may be forceful in those cases where one has a very specific, perhaps idiosyncratic, question in mind. But if the issue is broader, and not just an isolated claim, Collingwood’s own solution may not be so problematic after all. Carrying out a ‘mini philosophical

history' on the issue or of the insight is precisely what any historian of philosophy would do – and, in this way, one may be able to determine not only the meaning but the relevance of the answer – and the relevance or helpfulness of a different philosophical tradition.

A third challenge, derived from a view found in Alasdair MacIntyre, states that turning to another culture or philosophy for illumination on an issue or an answer is often not merely unenlightening but problematic. Yet the possibility of looking outside one's culture and traditions, and finding resources in another to respond to the crises within one's own tradition, is clearly part of MacIntyre's own view. MacIntyre points out that traditions may experience 'epistemological crises'<sup>13</sup> – times when practices or the tradition as a whole seems to run into a dead end. And even though we are all rooted in a specific tradition, should we ever be confronted with certain grave problems or limitations, he writes, we might find ourselves turning to another outlook or tradition for help. When we do this, it is not because this other view possesses some sort of transcendental truth or objective validity,' but simply because it enables us to address problems in our own view, "and so constitutes an advance on it, in relative but not absolute terms."<sup>14</sup>

Such a move is not arbitrary. Indeed, according to MacIntyre, it is 'rational' – something that a practically wise person would see – and the notion of rationality, here, can remain that of the tradition from which one comes. It is in this way that MacIntyre believes one can talk about 'rationality' and 'progress' in ethics, and, one might argue, about rationality and progress in philosophy in general.

MacIntyre's warning, then, is not that people cannot go outside their philosophical traditions or engage with other traditions, but that they should be extremely careful in doing this. For, in order to be of help or of relevance, the insights of 'other' traditions cannot remain entirely 'other.'

Finally, it is important to note that the encounter of cultures, and the effects of cultures on one another, are far from unknown. What encounter brings, when one culture has contact with another, is novelty – and it is very rare that any culture can control this phenomenon of novelty for very long. At best, what a culture can do is attempt to control the way in which it deals with the novelty. Thus, a culture cannot ignore new ideas altogether, and its response will often lead to some change in the culture. But this is not obviously something negative. Change is a property of anything that develops and flourishes; what does not change, can neither develop nor flourish. A culture that seeks to respond in a positive way, does so such that that culture retains a certain integrity through the change. What the project of intercultural philosophy brings

to philosophies characteristic of particular cultures and traditions, then, is simply novelty – novelty that incites development.<sup>15</sup>

There remain, of course, a number of other challenges concerning the possibility of intercultural philosophy. To begin with, some might ask whether intercultural philosophy requires a genuine dialogue or polylog, exhibiting mutuality, reciprocity, and equality – or whether it can include the appropriation of other views and perspectives by a dominant culture for its own purposes. In other words, need the encounter and exchange be genuinely reciprocal? Moreover, some may ask whether there are genuine examples of intercultural philosophy in the past, or whether they, again, have involved the appropriation of another's ideas without mutuality or dialogue. One may ask as well whether *all* philosophical traditions can, in fact, enter into such an intercultural exchange – and, further, whether there are any philosophies that should not be engaged at all.

In determining whether intercultural philosophy can meet these and related challenges, there are some more general considerations concerning intercultural philosophy that should be signalled. As noted earlier, is intercultural philosophy, in the end, a content or is it a method – a way of doing philosophy? And, as we have seen, is intercultural philosophy more suited to exchanges among certain philosophical traditions or conceptions of philosophy, but not others? To illuminate some of the responses to these questions posed in this volume, it is useful to return to the topic of the different models of intercultural philosophy.

#### **OTHER MODELS OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY**

The preceding examples and responses to challenges suggest that some kind of intercultural philosophy is possible, even if it is not precisely that of Masson-Oursel, Wimmer, Mall, or Radhakrishnan. Yet for the prospects of any intercultural philosophy to be more than a possibility – i.e., positive – such a philosophy would have to address the concerns raised in this volume. It might be close to one or more of the models described earlier, or it could be something different again. One further model that may be fruitful – although it does not describe itself explicitly as an intercultural philosophy – is that of the British-South African philosopher, R.F.A. Hoernlé.

R.F.A. Hoernlé was a man of many cultures. Born in Germany, his early childhood years were spent in India where his Indian-born father (and, therefore, a British subject), A.F.R. Hoernlé was a leading Sanskrit scholar. The dominant language of the household in R.F.A.'s early years was Hindi; he was sent to school in Germany and then studied in England, before going on to teach in Scotland, and

subsequently moving on to Professorships in England (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), the United States (Harvard), and South Africa (Cape Town and Witwatersrand).<sup>16</sup> In a number of his later writings, Hoernlé employs what he calls the ‘synoptic method.’ For Hoernlé, a synoptic philosophy is simply one that “seeks to achieve a coherent world-view”<sup>17</sup> “or...an integration [by the individual] of the various [conflicting or disparate] aspects of...culture.” It “rests on the assumption that truth has many sides, and that to the whole truth on any subject every point of view has some contribution to make.”<sup>18</sup> But achieving this coherence requires at least “a desire to enter into [the life around one], and to share it from the inside, rather than to stand outside as a mere spectator or even to reject it as foreign to [one]self.”<sup>19</sup> In short, then, the synoptic method is an attitude and an ideal – an ideal of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness.<sup>20</sup>

For Hoernlé, knowledge of other cultures and traditions than one’s own was necessary, first because all cultures and traditions were reflections of human responses to the world, and each of these reflections said something that was, at least partly, true about the world. At the same time, the divisions, tensions, conflicts, and the like, that one finds in a culture, and in the world, needed to be brought into some measure of coherence and consistency. This approach held that no culture or tradition was complete – nor could it be, so long as there was new experience to be encountered and engaged.

Hoernlé’s approach, then, can be understood as reflecting an intercultural philosophy. Such an intercultural philosophy was primarily a *method*. Hoernlé was not offering a particular content to philosophy – though he would hold that philosophy – and indeed all knowledge – was broadly coherent, that this coherence was a demand of (what one might call) ‘rationality,’ and that the reality one sought to know had to be ultimately coherent. To know what a thing is, is to know it in its relations to other things.<sup>21</sup> (Whether one could say that one fully and adequately knew anything was, however, doubtful.)

For Hoernlé, what has been broadly described in this volume as ‘intercultural philosophy’ is simply what philosophy should be. He insisted on the openness of philosophy and to philosophies of different cultures, although admittedly the kind of model that he offered was the product of an idealism developed in the West. Yet, the result of this method would be, Hoernlé would argue, no more Western than non-Western. In it, we can see affinities with Masson-Oursel, but also with Radhakrishnan and Raju. While Hoernlé did not develop the dialogical character of intercultural philosophy that we see in Mall, Wimmer, Panikkar, and Kimmerle, arguably the search for coherence and consistency cannot be pursued without such a character.



What Hoernlé seems to argue is that an intercultural philosophy is not a content but a method of doing philosophy – as suggested in this volume, for example, by Edwin George (following Raimon Panikkar) and Monceri – of philosophizing interculturally or, at least, cross-culturally. Whatever model is pursued, however, must have certain features, and the present volume has provided some direction or lessons about the kind of characteristics an intercultural philosophy would have.

## LESSONS

The preceding examples and the ‘alternative’ model offered by Hoernlé are, by themselves, only suggestive, but they provide more evidence for the claim that not only can there be philosophical ideas from different cultures, but an encounter and exchange, or an integration of them, or the development of new philosophical traditions, so that a kind of ‘intercultural philosophy, or better, perhaps, intercultural philosophizing, can occur.

What, then, is the character of – and what is the prospect for – an intercultural philosophy, given the direction of the studies in this volume?

1. The philosopher(s) concerned must be open to different perspectives, to change, or to the integration of new insights – i.e., not be resistant to change. Only then can other traditions or approaches be engaged, or appropriated, or contribute to ‘new’ philosophies, or lead to philosophizing across cultures or interculturally.

2. Intercultural philosophizing may occur if philosophers are able to engage one another because (or to the extent that) there are related *traditions* or philosophical schools or histories that are already present in the cultures concerned. Some philosophies (e.g., rationalistic, realistic, and idealist traditions) may be found, independently, in a range of cultures, and so engagement of cognate traditions is possible. Moreover, some philosophical traditions – e.g., those that emphasise ‘the empirical’ – may provide more initial ‘discussion points’ and be more likely to enable one to bridge (and therefore to engage) other philosophical traditions and cultures.

3. Again, philosophical traditions from different cultures may be able to learn from one another and exchange because (or to the extent that) there are underlying *concepts* – or, at least, concepts that appear to be common (such as ‘community,’ ‘duty,’ or ‘sacred’), already present in the respective cultures.

4. Further, philosophical traditions from different cultures may be able to engage with and learn from one another because (or to the extent that) they are responses to underlying questions that are also present in

the cultures or traditions involved. Engagements with different philosophical traditions are successful to the extent that what animates or provides the context of the exchange in one culture is (at least to some extent) that of another culture.

5. There needs to be a methodological openness, adaptiveness, and even a humility of philosophical traditions if intercultural philosophy is to take place. Exchange and mutual development may be facilitated to the extent that the interlocutors can talk from and about their respective traditions in a way that reflects one of the above features (of shared questions, concepts, or traditions), or using the discourse or the methodologies of the tradition(s) one wishes to engage.

6. When there is a (deep) familiarity with at least one other culture or philosophical tradition, the possibility of philosophizing interculturally, and of effective communication across or among cultures, is facilitated.

7. Finally, a combination of as many of the preceding features as possible would seem to indicate or lead to a genuine mutual engagement of ideas and philosophies.

From what has been presented in this volume, features such as the preceding may characterize (and perhaps provide lessons for) intercultural philosophizing.

It may be useful, however, to note some additional comments on the project of intercultural philosophy, that seem to follow from the essays in this volume..

First, intercultural philosophy is not a body of doctrine or even a kind of history of ideas; it is primarily a method. Nevertheless, intercultural philosophy has an end or purpose in view: mutual understanding and mutual philosophizing about matters of shared or sharable concern.

Second, not all 'exchange' is a case of intercultural philosophizing. The mere presence of concepts and terms from one tradition in another is not sufficient evidence of an encounter and exchange based on mutuality and reciprocity. One tradition may borrow or adapt from another for a limited purpose, and without an openness to that tradition as a whole.

Finally, while intercultural philosophy does not necessarily involve dialogue across cultures and can be done on one's own, it is more likely to show a grasp of the distinctiveness and differences of cultures if it does.

## CONCLUSION

In light of the studies in this volume, what can we say about the project of and the prospects for intercultural philosophy?

If, as some hold, philosophy is not only rooted in, but inseparable from culture, it is difficult to see how philosophies from different cultures can engage one another, or how there can be a broadening of perspective or philosophizing interculturally.

From the examples and instances enumerated throughout this volume, however, there is little doubt that there *has* been migration and contact of philosophical ideas and traditions – even if not as extensively as some have claimed. In different ways, at different times, and to lesser and greater degrees, ideas and philosophies from various cultures have encountered one another (e.g., as shown through the coining of new terms or the freeing of familiar terms from old meanings, and the development of new philosophies). Clearly, however, more needs to occur for there to be intercultural philosophy.

There needs to be, for example, a humility or a recognition of the potential limits of one's own philosophical traditions and cultural views. There also needs to be an openness to, and more than a merely superficial knowledge of, other philosophies and cultural traditions. And there also needs to be a conviction that something constructive – some knowledge, or truth, or better understanding of ourselves and others – comes of this.

Thus, intercultural philosophy – as the authors in this volume repeat – does not require a relativism, or a denial that truth can be had – even though one may acknowledge that any truth may be quite difficult to attain. Nor, arguably, does intercultural philosophy require a commitment to a specific model of intercultural philosophy – simply a willingness to engage other philosophical traditions with respect and with a view towards reciprocity.

There is, the authors in this volume have shown, great value in an intercultural philosophy. At the very least, it helps to illuminate the presuppositions of existing philosophies – that the nature and limits of one's own philosophical views can be better seen by contrasting and comparing them with those of other cultures and traditions. The idea, in fact, is something more.

Intercultural philosophy also reminds us of the importance of being open to experience; that more truth can be uncovered or more deeply understood, and that philosophy is truth seeking and not just problem solving. Intercultural philosophy promises not just doing one's 'local' philosophy differently, but giving rise to new philosophies. To remain enclosed and closed up in the philosophical traditions of one's culture is to condemn that philosophy to confinement in a cultural

ghetto. In a world that is itself intercultural, the prospect of an intercultural philosophy is arguably not only inevitable, but also liberating.

Intercultural philosophy invites all philosophers, then, to rethink what it is to do philosophy. In doing so, it may shift the emphasis of philosophy from the resolution or dissolution of philosophical problems, to the search for, and the love of, wisdom. If that is the *prospect* of an intercultural philosophy, then perhaps one need not regard it as something particularly new, but as a return to philosophy's classical roots.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul Masson-Oursel, "True Philosophy is Comparative Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West*, 1 (1951): 6-9, at p 6.

<sup>2</sup> See the statement of "Objectives" in the 'Polylog' website: <http://ev.polylog.org/presentation-en.htm>

<sup>3</sup> P.T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 293 and 295.

<sup>4</sup> The first part of this section draws extensively on my "'Faith and Reason' and Intercultural Philosophy," in *Thomism and Asian Cultures: Celebrating 400 Years of Dialogue across Civilizations*, ed. Alfredo P. Co and Paolo A. Bolaños (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012), pp. 43-54, at pp. 49-51

<sup>5</sup> See Vincent Shen, "The Migration of Aristotelian Philosophy to China in the 17th Century," in *Migrating Texts and Traditions*, ed. William Sweet (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012), pp. 21-37.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Radhakrishnan here, see my "British Idealism and Ethical Thought in South Africa and India," in *The Moral, Social, and Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, ed. William Sweet (Essex, UK: Imprint Academic, 2009), pp. 289-331, at pp. 310-323.

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, vol. 1, 1923; vol. 2, 1927).

<sup>8</sup> *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1939]) p. 350.

<sup>9</sup> See Alban Widgery, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1923); A.G. Hogg, *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (London: SCM Press, 1947); W. S. Urquhart, *The Vedanta and Modern Thought* (London: H. Milford, 1928).

<sup>10</sup> See Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); see also Anne Muldoon, "A Comparison of Aristotelian and Buddhist Ethics and the Implications for a "Moral Way" for Young People," M. Phil thesis [Departments of Computing Science and Religious Education], University of Glasgow, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> We see this in the way that classical Greek culture influenced Greek philosophy, that Christianity influenced mediaeval Western philosophy, that

French culture influenced a range of philosophies in France from Cartesianism to post-modernism, and so on.

<sup>12</sup> This section reprises directly my “‘Faith and Reason’ and Intercultural Philosophy,” pp. 55-56.

<sup>13</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 361.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Stern, ‘MacIntyre and Historicism’, in John Horton and Susan Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this issue, see my “Cultural Integrity and Liberty Rights,” *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, vol30 (2003): 479-494.

<sup>16</sup> See my entry on ‘Hoernlé, (Reinhold Friedrich) Alfred (1880–1943)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, first published May 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See Hoernlé, “Philosophy of Religion in the Context of a Synoptic Philosophy,” p. 1 [in the Hoernlé papers, Witwatersrand University Archives, Johannesburg, South Africa].

<sup>18</sup> See I.D. MacCrone, “Introduction,” to Hoernlé’s *Race and Reason: Being Mainly a Selection of Contributions to the Race Problem*, ed. I.D. MacCrone (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1945), p. xvi.

<sup>19</sup> MacCrone, “Introduction,” *Race and Reason*, p. xvi. This approach sounds very close to that articulated by Paul Cardinal Shan, during his remarks at the opening of The International Symposium in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of Matteo Ricci 1552-1610, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan, 22 April 2010.

<sup>20</sup> MacCrone, “Introduction,” *Race and Reason*, p. xvi.

<sup>21</sup> The preceding three paragraphs are based on my “‘Faith and Reason’ and Intercultural Philosophy,” in *Thomism and Asian Cultures: Celebrating 400 Years of Dialogue across Civilizations*, ed. Alfredo P. Co and Paolo A. Bolaños (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012), pp. 43-54, p. 49.



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# The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

## PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

## PROJECTS

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

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