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I. President's Report

First of all, may I wish you a very happy New Year? We recently had a Chinese New Year celebration that lasted for two weeks. According to the East Asian calendar, 2006 is the year of the Dog. It is a year, filled with puppy-like healthy energy and a sense of trust and loyalty, in which our best friends are recognized as our remarkable teachers.

Borrowing from this occasion, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Fred Dallmayr, who has led the SACP for the last two years as President. I hope not to waver from the path laid down by my predecessors—a path of serious academic discussions, mutual respect, and convivial relations.

A bit of our past history

I'm writing this report in mid-February, while we are seeing to the business of re-incorporating the SACP as a non-profit organization. I understand that the society's non-profit status lapsed sometime in the 1990s, and we are now redressing this oversight. The history of our Society has come to my attention through this process, and I would like to share some of these findings with you.

The Society was originally incorporated “at a special meeting held on October 1, 1969, at Honolulu, Hawaii,” when those present unanimously adopted the bylaws. This document bears the signatures of Eliot Deutsch (University of Hawaii), Karl Potter (University of Minnesota), and Chung-Ying Cheng (University of Hawaii).

As you see on the website, the bylaws were amended a few times, each time signed by our colleagues: Eliot Deutsch (1970), Thomas P. Kasulis (1987), and John M. Koller (1993). For those who are in gender studies, it may be of interest to note that in 2002 the bylaws were modified to “reflect gender neutral language.” Most recently, we approved the amendment at the general business meeting on June 22, 2004, at Asilomar, as the revision became “necessary because several paragraphs were obsolete or no longer in accord with actual SACP practices” (Fred Dallmayr, “President's Report,” *SACP Forum* 43, 2004).

The actual establishment of the SACP must have naturally preceded its incorporation. On this matter I contacted Eliot Deutsch, the founding member of the SACP, and received this information: Eliot convened the first (founding) gathering of the Society

at a breakfast meeting on March 22, 1968, which was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in Philadelphia. Approximately twenty scholars were in attendance. A special panel was on the program of the AAS—a “debate” on the methods and goals of comparative philosophy. Karl Potter was subsequently elected as the first President of the Society and Eliot held the position of secretary/treasurer for many years (E-mail communication, February 16, 2006).

Eliot graciously sent me more materials on the early years of the Society, which I hope to share with you in the next issues of the *Forum*. The meeting of March 22, 1968, marks the first meeting of the society, which makes next year 2007 its fortieth anniversary.

This is but a slice of our long and rich history. The Society has meaningfully held its place within the North-American philosophical world, which has been more or less dominated by the narrowly defined interests of analytic philosophy, as a unique forum for engaging in active philosophical musing, airing and sharing our ideas, promoting our own and others’ understanding of diverse cultural and philosophical notions and approaches, and examining our own presuppositions on a global scale. In this endeavor, we have stayed remarkably close to the original purpose of the Society, which “would be to serve the professional interests and needs of those [American] scholars who are involved in Asian and comparative philosophy and to encourage the development of these disciplines in the academic world.” (Cf. letter by the organizing committee of the SACP, sent out in December 1967.)

Changes of officers and the importance of the website

I wish to join Fred Dallmayr in thanking Michael Barnhart, the long-time editor of the *SACP Forum*, who resigned from the post in 2005 after a decade of service. Eric S. Nelson is taking over as General Editor of the new online *SACP Forum for Asian and Comparative Philosophy* with Lori Witthaus acting as Associate Editor.

In the year-end election, Joseph Prabhu was elected Vice-President and Michael Barnhart joined the Board of Directors. The new AAR Program Chair is Gereon Kopf, while Ronnie Littlejohn remains Program Chair for the APA Central and Eastern Divisions and Robin Wong for AAS and the APA Pacific Division. Again, please go to the SACP

website (www.sacpweb.org) and click “Program Chair’s Report” in order to submit your paper proposals to any of these meetings.

In fact, you will find almost all important information about the society and its activities on our website. Please visit it if you have any questions. All of the SACP officers also welcome e-mail inquiries.

Amid these new changes, continuity and stability are also being maintained. We are most obliged to Lori Witthaus, Secretary/Treasurer, who has been the backbone of our annual conferences and maintaining the SACP website. We are also grateful to Joanne Birdwhistell, who is helping to organize this year’s annual conference. Karsten Struhl and Frank Perkins have given me invaluable assistance as members of the Program Committee, which is responsible for the program of the 2006 Asilomar conference. There is no need to mention that all officers serve the Society as volunteers.

The annual conference at Asilomar 2005

The 2005 SACP Conference took place at Asilomar, October 20-23, on the theme of “Self-Other Relations: Immanent-Transcendent?” We had over fifty participants, despite the departure from our established June dates owing to the conflict with the Philosophy East West Conference. We had sixteen panels and four plenary sessions, all of which were well attended and involved lively discussions. We also had two birthday boys, not by gender discrimination but by sheer coincidence. The occasions were happily marked by splendid birthday cakes. Curiously, for the entire time of the conference, we were shrouded in mysterious fog. This is apparently not unusual for that time of the year, we were later told. However, the atmosphere created by the fog, which Japanese aesthetes would describe as “*yūgen*” 幽玄 (having mysterious depth and symbolic beauty), added to the intimacy among the conference participants. Arindam Chakrabarti gave the plenary keynote address, entitled “IF I WERE YOU: Analogy, Simulation, Empathy and the Possibility of Friendship.” We missed the presence of Henry Rosemont, Jr. at the conference, but his e-mail message to us, read aloud by Peimin Ni, communicated his current thoughts so vividly that we were all deeply moved. We wish Henry a very swift recovery.

The annual conference at Asilomar 2006

The 2006 SACP conference will take place at Asilomar, June 18-21. We are very much honored to have Professor Wm. Theodore de Bary as the keynote speaker for this year. He is speaking on: "Chinese Classics and a Global Curriculum," which, he tells us, is his response to the views of Lee Kuan Yew and Amartya Sen on the place of the Confucian classics in global education.

We are also very delighted to tell you that, under the auspices of Roger Ames, the Uehiro Essay Contest is underway among the graduate students in the Department of Philosophy, University of Hawaii. The winner of the contest will attend the Asilomar Conference, with the financial support of the Uehiro Foundation.

As many of you know, Leroy Rouner, a long-time member and supporter of the SACP, passed away in February 2006. We are holding a plenary session to honor and remember him and celebrate his contribution to the field.

We hope you have already marked your calendar. You will find this year's conference program at the SACP website. The weather in June in Asilomar promises to have more sunshine than fog. The conference topic this year is "Desire." We will have exciting and engaging presentations and discussions on this deliciously desirable topic. We have also set aside one afternoon so you will be completely free to explore the magnificent 17-Mile Drive and visit the nearby charming town of Carmel for afternoon tea and a stroll.

I hope to see many of you at our annual conference at Asilomar. Also, the first issue of the online *SACP Forum* should be "out" (or "on") in April. Please visit it, and let us know how it works for you. Feel free to tell us your thoughts and suggestions, including what materials may be added and whatever else comes to mind.

I wish all of you a very successful and fruitful 2006, filled with peace, joy, and light!

Yours,

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II. Between Europe and Asia

Fred Dallmayr

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Immanence and Transcendence

The last time I had the honor of acting as President of SACP was at our annual meeting at Asilomar in October 2005. For that meeting we had chosen as general theme: “Self-Other Relations: Immanent/Transcendent”. At the opening plenary session I commented on that theme. Here I want to re-state briefly some of the things I said about the subtitle.

The terms “immanence” and “transcendence” are sometimes used as summary categories in order to pinpoint the difference between Asian and Western Philosophy. In this scheme, “immanence” is said to characterize Asian, especially Chinese, philosophy and culture, as compared with the “transcendentalism” supposedly endemic to Western thought and religion. In my view, comparative philosophy should be reluctant to subscribe to this dichotomy.

At a closer look, things turn out to be more complicated. We know that there is a dispute on this score among scholars of Confucianism, with some upholding the strictly immanent quality of the Confucian world view and others detecting at least traces of transcendental-religious leanings. Questions have also been raised whether the Buddhist notion of “emptiness” (*sunyata*) does not necessarily transgress any conception of immanence. Thus, the situation in Asian thought is complex and hardly clear-cut.

The situation is even more complicated in Western thought. It is probably correct to say that, from early on, Western philosophy and religion have been imbued with pronounced transcendental or metaphysical qualities. These qualities can readily be detected in (versions of) Platonism and in monotheistic religion. However, modernity introduced a profound shift of focus. In the eyes of many students, modern Western philosophy and culture exhibit a steady move toward, and even a head-long plunge into, worldly immanence - away from transcendence. The rise of modern science, with its emphasis on “positive” or empirical knowledge, has been seen as striking a death blow to anything transcending such knowledge. The so-called “secularization thesis”, associated

with the work of Max Weber, seems to point in the same direction of worldly immanence. The trend also appears prominent in so-called Continental philosophy. Even Phenomenology—while clearly opposed to positivism and scientism—has seemed to opt for immanence, given its accent on concrete worldly phenomena and the human “life-world”.

But again, things are not that simple. At a closer look, we find conflicting signals especially in the context of Continental philosophy. As we know, Edmund Husserl spoke of a “transcendental phenomenology”. And Martin Heidegger—famous for defining human Dasein as “being-in-the-world”—wrote in his *Being and Time*: “Being is transcendence as such” (the statement is even italicized). And here are some additional passages from Heidegger's “What is Metaphysics?”: “Human Dasein means: being held out into the nothing [Buddhist sunyata?].... This being held out into nothing ...is transcendence.” Thus, we have here the peculiar situation of a “worldly” phenomenology, or a philosophy of radical finitude, in which the notion of transcendence is not erased.

This peculiar ambivalence has not gone unnoticed. Some observers detect in recent Continental philosophy two conflicting tendencies: one pointing toward radical immanence, the other toward radical transcendence. Thus, Dominique Janicaud—in a book titled *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*—has noted a certain “veering” toward transcendence in European thought, a veering finding expression chiefly in the writings of Levinas, Derrida, Marion, and others. For Janicaud, this trend signals a betrayal of phenomenology, a “veritable *captatio benevolentiae* of the phenomenological method” with its stress on immanent phenomena. In a similar vein, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben finds European thought torn between opposite pulls: those of immanence and transcendence. As he points out (in his book *Potentiality*), the first tendency, rooted in Spinoza, finds recent expression in the works of Deleuze and Foucault, while the second tendency—traceable to Descartes and Kant—has recently been championed by Levinas, Derrida, and others.

In my view, the divergence of trajectories should probably not be overstated. A main reason is that, at least in the confines of phenomenology, the two trends are too much embroiled and implicated with each other. Another reason has to do with the political dangers arising from attempts to absolutize either one of the trajectories. Insistence on pure immanence too readily shades over into a reductive empiricism or “positivism” - which in

turn can give rise to attempts at “this-worldly” mastery and totalitarian domination. On the other hand, the elevation of transcendence into an absolute “value” or universal formula can give aid and comfort to quasi-missionary ideologies (as has happened with the so-called “higher values” criticized by Nietzsche).

For myself, I prefer to take my bearings from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Mindful of Nietzsche's critique of two-world theories (“this world” and “other world”), Heidegger's notion of worldliness is profoundly ambivalent and multidimensional - to the point that one can almost speak of a “transcendent immanence”. This kind of ambivalence or mutual implication has been beautifully expressed by Merleau-Ponty when he wrote: “The invisible is not another visible...It is *Verborgenheit* by principle, that is, the invisible of the visible.” This formulation might also capture the gist of (some strands of) Asian thought. If this is correct, the task of comparative philosophy would not be to ponder an ineradicable contrast, but to explore differences within a broader frame of affinities.

Martin Schönfeld

University of South Florida

What's the Progress Philosophy made due to the Enlightenment?

Can we say that philosophy has advanced much since the Enlightenment? Certainly the Enlightenment—the century from the English Revolution to the French Revolution or the age from Montesquieu's birth to Holbach's death—was a great time in the history of thought. Its beginning, 1689, is marked by Couplet's translations from the *Analects* and the *Book of Rites*. In the 1690s, Newton and Leibniz became known, and 175 titles on China appeared in Europe. In the 1700s, Newton's work on optics appeared, Leibniz taught binary arithmetic to the French by appealing to the *Book of Changes*, and six hundred works on China came out in this decade. The age was off to a good start, it produced scientific, social, and political revolutions, and it peaked with Kant. But comparing its insights with the philosophical quarrels of the nineteenth century and with the bitter parting of the ways in the twentieth century raises the question of subsequent progress. Philosophers today are underpaid or unemployed. There was a time they were advisors to kings.

So, what is the progress philosophy has made due to the Enlightenment? We can arrive at an answer by clarifying the meanings of the words 'progress,' 'philosophy,' and 'enlightenment.'

How should we understand "progress"? The practical meaning of progress is that things are looking up and are getting happier in personal and social ways. In this sense, progress evokes development, evolution, flourishing, and blossoming. The theoretical meaning of progress could be understood as information growth—chemistry makes progress in that its bulk of confirmed data roughly doubles every four years. Important, though, is that information growth hangs together; in this sense, physics would make more progress than chemistry, for although the bulk of data grows at slower speed, it has been quite successful in integrating these data clusters in an increasingly systematic picture. That physics now joins thermodynamics, relativity, and quantum theory into what is called the standard model—that achievement alone, regardless of how other data grow, is a clear-cut case of theoretical progress. An early determination of the patterns of progress was by Francis Bacon in the preface to the *Great Instauration* (1620), of a free endeavor of figuring out what things are, how they work, and in what ways they improve human well-

being. A later determination of the patterns of progress was by Kant at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), of a collective adoption of the scientific method, which means to proceed systematically on a critical path between dogma and doubt. That's progress.

How should we understand “philosophy”? While scientists have a pretty clear idea of the profile of their fields, philosophers have suffered from a parting of their ways for the past eighty years—continental and analytic thinkers define philosophy differently. The marriage is broken, the house is split, and everyone is fresh out of ideas. So it is not clear what progress philosophy made since breaking itself up, and I suppose that is why Steven Weinberg, Stephen Hawking, and E. O. Wilson bemoan philosophy after the Enlightenment as a comedown, as a regress.¹

But this scientific picture of philosophy is also a tad unfair, because if we assume that Kant's *Critique* not only initiated modern thought but also completed the Enlightenment, then the whole point of the philosophical enterprise is to transmogrify itself into a scientific enterprise. Which is precisely what happened: thus philosophy shrank, science grew, and that's progress.

The progress philosophy made due to the Enlightenment, at least up to now, has been an ongoing process of emancipating its first-order inquiries from the core of its disciplinary identity, and to set these now independent inquiries on their own scientific and specialized courses. So one shouldn't beat philosophers over their collective heads for just doing what the legacy of the Enlightenment had prompted them to do. That early-modern natural philosophy did actually grow into quantum cosmology, among other things, today, is a brilliant evolution and a great victory. The point is that what counted as philosophy in the Enlightenment subsequently unfolded into our rainbow of academic departments, leaving contemporary philosophers with relatively little to do. We have made so much progress in philosophy due to the Enlightenment that we have nearly progressed ourselves out of our jobs.

¹ Stephen Hawking, *The Theory of Everything: the Origin and Fate of the Universe* (Los Angeles: Millennium, 2003), 166-167; Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: the Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage 1999), 8; cf. *ibid.* chapter “The Enlightenment,” 15-48. Compare also Michael Friedman, *The Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (La Salle: Open Court 2000), chapter “Analytic and Continental Traditions in Perspective, 156-169; and Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory: the Search for the Fundamental Laws of Nature* (New York: Vintage 1993), chapter “Against Philosophy,” 132-151.

Or so we think. The true heirs to the Enlightenment, natural, life, and social scientists, are enjoying a growing methodological and empirical consensus. We are living in an age that discloses over incremental steps the actual character of nature, life, minds, and matter. We know so much about the universe that puzzles and paradoxes notwithstanding there has been a standard model for the past fifty years, which may well tighten into a unified heuristic platform for all rigorous research in the next fifty years. It seems we are at the cusp of true insight.

If the opinions of the scientists are to be believed philosophically, then we must change the way we look at collective human progress. For example, if one looks at scientific progress as an expanding disk of ever larger swaths of outward-looking knowledge, one can get frustrated because it seems as if every question answered is ten new questions posed. As the disk grows, its boundaries into the unknown are an ever longer circumference, and this is a frightening image.

Recent work, in a number of sciences, suggests that the image requires adjustment. Think instead of scientific progress as a fattening donut of data sets. Within the donut, the texture gets ever more tightly woven. This ever tighter interdisciplinary fabric of information about nature strikes many of its workers as wielding regular reiterative patterns, which shine up quite naturally.

All of a sudden, a hole opens up in the middle of the donut. Now science has two moving boundaries: there is the familiar outside rim, bulging into the not-yet-known, with its rapid growth of specific and technical queries about factoids and details, with every answer ten new questions. And there is an unfamiliar inside rim to science—and as the donut keeps getting bigger and fatter, it bulges outward to external details as much as it swells inward into the empty hole in the middle.

That is why scientists are dissatisfied with the progress philosophy has made due to the Enlightenment. They are now wrestling with stunningly profound questions, such as why there is matter, or why we exist in the first place. As they are making progress in sharpening these issues into fertile new insights, they peer into depths of patterned information that call out for philosophy. But neither continental deconstruction nor analytic reduction will do the heuristic trick—what is needed, instead, is a return to the Enlightenment, not just to its empiricist and critical partings, but also to its rationalist and synthetic joinings. The exploration of the ontological hole inside the donut requires ideas

not limited to rigorous regulars such as Locke or Newton or Bentham or Mill, but that can utilize the musical alternatives, such as Kepler or Leibniz or Hegel or Nietzsche. As long as we don't do this, we are not yet living up to all the Enlightenment promises to become, and "what is the progress philosophy made due to the Enlightenment?" remains a trick question.

To conclude: how should we understand "enlightenment"? There are many ways of standing under its banner, but they share a few simple and modest patterns. One fundamental trait has been identified by Peter Gay in his work *The Enlightenment*, whose two volumes have the revealing titles, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966), and *The Science of Freedom* (1969). The first volume starts with what enlightenment means:

There were many philosophes in the eighteenth century, but there was only one Enlightenment. A loose, informal, wholly unorganized coalition of cultural critics, religious skeptics, and political reformers from Edinburgh to Naples, Paris to Berlin, Boston to Philadelphia, the philosophes made up a clamorous chorus, and there were some discordant voices among them, but what is striking is their general harmony, not their occasional discord. The men of the Enlightenment united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom, above all, freedom in its many forms—freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world. In 1784, when the Enlightenment had done most of its work, Kant defined it as man's emergence from his self-imposed tutelage, and offered as its motto *Sapere aude*—"Dare to know": take the risk of discovery, exercise the right of unfettered criticism; accept the loneliness of autonomy. Like the other philosophes—for Kant only articulated what the others had long suggested in their polemics—Kant saw the Enlightenment as man's claim to be recognized as an adult, responsible being. It is the concord of the philosophes in staking this claim, as much as the claim itself, that makes the Enlightenment such a momentous event in the history of the Western mind.²

² Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: the Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Norton 1995), 3-4.

One correction Gay's reading needs is to pay more attention to the Leibnizian-Wolffian School and its context. Of places, Leipzig, Halle, Königsberg, St Petersburg, Macao, Nanking, Peking, and Rome need mentioning. And of persons, Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) fought for the freedom of women from persecution and helped to end witch-burning; Christian Wolff (1679-1754) grounded ontological cognition on the principle of contradiction; Wolffians such as Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1711-1797) recruited women to the ranks; and readers of *La Belle Wolffienne* (1741-53), such as Johanna Charlotte Unzer (1725-82), pioneered phenomenology (*Outline of Philosophy for Females* 1751). Instead of "the men" of the Enlightenment, it better be "men and women" of the Enlightenment.

So what is Enlightenment? Freedom from willful authority and freedom to self-realization; but it is also the pattern of brightening up—an *illuminatio* in the Latin tradition, an *éclaircissement* for the philosophes, an *Aufklärung* for the German metaphysicians, and *ming ming de* for their Mandarin and Jesuit mentors. One brightens up by understanding things that are basic, deep, or earthy. Like sex: hence *Aufklärung* survives in German in the pedagogical sense of sexual education. Whether it is sex or nature or mind, the pattern is rationally coherent and perceptually accessible. All one needs to do is to watch the hole of the scientific donut, to dare to know its ontological nature (*guandao ziran*), and to reflect the light that sensibly shines there as brightly, as purely, and as intelligibly as one can. Then philosophes evolve to *lumières*; they help clearing the minds of other scientific communities, and if we can pull this off, following the model of the early moderns, then, and only then, philosophy will jumpstart progress due to the Enlightenment.

III. Reflections on Comparative Philosophy

Peimin Ni

Grand Valley State University

Traversing the Territory of Comparative Philosophy

Comparative philosophy is still conceived as a relatively new area of study, even though it can be traced back at least to Leibniz, in the West, and to the Daoists and Confucians in the Song dynasty in China. People still feel suspicious about the vagueness of its nature and its value. The territory of comparative philosophy has yet to be defined and issues related to it need to be laid out more clearly. In this paper, I will not be doing comparative philosophy; I will be rather taking comparative philosophy itself as a subject of philosophical investigation and discuss some issues that can be properly described as metaphilosophical. I shall group these metaphilosophical issues roughly under three headings: “What is comparative philosophy?” “Is comparative philosophy possible?” and “the methodology of comparative philosophy.” I would not say that without a good theoretical understanding of these one cannot do comparative philosophy. Just like a person can walk well without knowing any theory of physics, one can talk well without knowing any linguistics; one might as well do a remarkable job in comparative philosophy without any metaphilosophical investigation of comparative philosophy. But I do think that certain reflections about these issues can help us understand comparative philosophy better, both in terms of what it is and why it is important to us.

1. What is Comparative Philosophy?

Robert Allinson, in his article “The Myth of Comparative Philosophy or the Comparative Philosophy Malgré Lui,” raised a good question: What is the difference between comparative philosophy and philosophy proper? Since all philosophy arises in reaction either as a revolution against or as a completion to previous philosophy,” it seems that comparative philosophy is just a myth

(Allinson, 270). What we call comparative philosophy today is merely philosophy proper with a larger data base, which covers not only comparison between philosophies of, say, Plato and Aristotle, or Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, or Kant and Thomas Reid, but also Aristotle and Confucius, Buddhism and Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Lao Zi, or Kant and Mou Zongsan. In other words, comparative philosophy is not an entirely different species; it is philosophy itself, which has been around since the very beginning of the discipline.

But the issue seems much more complicated. To some people, the enlarged data base is exactly what they have problem with. As soon as the data based is extended, one question arises: Can the thoughts of Lao Zi, Confucius, or Buddha be considered philosophy at all? At the most recent International Conference on Chinese Philosophy in Sydney, Australia (July 2005), two presentations were focused on the “hefaxing 合法性” (legitimacy) of Chinese philosophy—a renewed discussion on a century old issue about how to legitimize the claim that there is such a thing called “Chinese philosophy” as an academic discipline.³

The fact that the issue continues to bother scholars in the field is itself an indication of something significant. Theoretically, it does not seem to be a big deal, since it looks like a pure semantic dispute: No one seems to be bothered by the translation of “pen” as “bi 笔” in Chinese, even though the word “bi” traditionally refers to brush, the instrument that Chinese used for writing, typically with animal hair on top of a bamboo stick. Why should we bother to ask whether the thoughts of Confucius and Lao Zi be called philosophy?

While meaningless quibbles about the definition of philosophy should be dismissed, the issue is actually much more significant than a quibble. Chinese philosophy has not been accepted by the mainstream philosophy department curriculums, conferences, and publications in North America until recent decades. Before, it was placed in Asian studies, religious studies, or regional history studies. Until 1994, there were still 54% of the philosophy departments in America

³ John Makeham, “The Legitimacy of Chinese Philosophy: Views from the Periphery,” and Jing Haifeng 景海峰, “Challengers to Chinese Philosophy and Its Identity Reconstruction 中国哲学面的挑 和身份重建 .” For a more comprehensive survey of the literature, see Carine Defoort’s six pages long bibliography of her article “Is ‘Chinese Philosophy’ a Proper Name?” forthcoming in *Philosophy East and West*.

that did not offer Eastern philosophy courses (Schacht). Even though the same ambiguity exists in our understanding of philosophy in general as well, since “the canonical systems of Western philosophy themselves do not fit easily under any one definition of philosophy,”⁴ the enlargement of data base still bothers many professional philosophers.

How should we define the range of philosophy? Before I give you my answer to this question, let us take a look at what is behind the debate. As soon as we ask about the motivations that stimulated the discussion such as “the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy,” we find that the issue has to do with the construction or reconstruction of cultural identity, with contemporary concerns about the domination of Western culture, and with the orientation of contemporary philosophical scholarship.

It has to do with the construction or reconstruction of cultural identity because the merge of the data bases comes with the danger of losing distinctness. Many comparative philosophers try to draw similarities between different cultures, and use the dominant philosophical terminology and methodology to rewrite other cultural heritages or translate their classics. Much of that is motivated by the hope to be accepted by the mainstream as a legitimate part of the discipline. The mentality comes with the feeling of insecurity and lack of confidence of one’s own culture. Chinese philosophical thoughts, for instance, have gone through a long process of being questioned for its value as systems of philosophy. As a reaction, many scholars tried to argue that they should be considered philosophy because they address similar concerns that Western philosophy addresses. This approach seems to enforce the idea that these are universal and eternal concerns, but one wonders also whether it is actually enforcing the idea that only Western philosophical concerns and Western conceptual frameworks are the primordial paradigm for philosophy and other concerns that do not fall neatly into the frameworks set by the Western model should either be kept outside of the game or distorted to fit into the game. The standard History of Chinese Philosophy written by Feng Youlan has been criticized as one typical example of such a distortion. One suspects whether Chinese philosophy has been “subjugated ubiquitously by

⁴ Holder, 3. I would add that the same is true for religion and science as well.

Euro-centrism in the development of its forms of expression, thus becoming a mere handmaid to Western philosophy” (Jing Haifeng, 25).

Contrary to the tendency of using the dominant Western terminology and framework to rewrite the thoughts of other cultures, many have responded to this trend in a reverse way. The post-modern development of philosophy has made people very skeptical about the universal validity of the Western framework—if there is ever such a thing. Sometimes mixed with the motivation to solidify the threatened cultural identity, many called for the indigenization of knowledge. But the tendency to indigenizing knowledge emerges not only as efforts to maintain indigenous culture so that some cherished heritages do not get lost, but more as a reaction to the stress from modernity. Many scholars have made sharp criticisms of the philosophical foundations of modernity and raised the hope that problems come with the domination of modernity may be resolved by reconstructing our consciousness by using/appropriating the resources from other cultures.⁵ Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Tu Weiming, David Griffen, John Cobb, Roger Ames, and David Hall, are just a few familiar names among many others. The lack of confidence in one’s cultural identity may actually exist on the other side as well. I wonder whether those who resist the enlargement of data base to

⁵ In a report of the working group on “Globalization and Conflicts: The Case of Africa” of the Third DPMF (Development Policy Management Forum) Annual Conference on Democratization, Development, and Conflicts in Africa (Held in United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23-26 November 1999), K. Omolo (Kenya) wrote that,

in the case of Africa the whole educational system is western-oriented. The original reasons for this were pragmatic. It was presumed that acquisition of modern western education was a gateway to modernization or development. This was premised on the belief that western education was “scientific” and that by implication other forms of knowledge were unscientific or pre-scientific. This gave a privileged place to western epistemology even at the highest centres of learning, especially in Africa. This was facilitated by the fact that formal education was transmitted through European languages.

On the whole, the vaunted western scientific knowledge has not brought about development in regions such as Africa. Indeed, it is arguable that environmentally it has done more harm than good. In the meantime, the foundations of Eurocentric forms of knowledge are being questioned globally. For the last two decades even African scholars have been calling for indigenization of knowledge (<http://www.dpmf.org/report-group-1.html>).

include non-Western traditions also have the mentality of feeling being threatened by the infusion of other cultures and hence lose their own supremacy and dominance. As Foucault would say, knowledge is always a form of power. Those who resist the enlargement of data base often fear that because they are unfamiliar with other traditions, they would be forced to step outside of their comfort zones and lose their control of the field. They do not see the enlargement of data base as an opportunity for them to reach a new realm of vision and understanding, an opportunity to go beyond the scope set by their ancient masters, but as a threat to their own established position.

Here we see that the debate about whether we should define philosophy in one way or another actually has to do with the orientation of contemporary philosophical scholarship. As most liberal minded people today tend to take, that we should tolerate differences, allow people to “write different poems,” and guard carefully the Kiplingesque bias.⁶ But allowing people to do something else by themselves is quite different from engaging in cross cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. The liberalist notion of liberty is often taken as the liberty of being left alone, undisturbed in a place that Plato calls a “cave.” It is a minimalist self-defense mechanism that shields oneself from being challenged or enlightened, and they may even use words like “tolerance” to describe their attitude toward those who are out of the cave.⁷ Some defenders of one’s own cultural heritage are more proactive. They do respond to challenges and criticisms, but they are more satisfied with nonculpability of their own system. “My framework is at least not irrational.” One typical example is Plantinga’s religious exclusivism. Plantinga acknowledges that the facts of religious pluralism could weaken one’s religious belief, but he thinks that it does not have to go this way. “A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one’s religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension of one’s own religious beliefs” (Plantinga, 457). But this attitude is

⁶ Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936, novelist and poet, author of *The Jungle Book*, 1907 Nobel literature prize laureate) maintains that “the white man’s burden” is to “civilize and police the world.”

⁷ As Allinson points out, the use of the word “tolerance” itself entails a sense of superiority (Allinson, 281-3).

subtly different from MacIntyre's, which suggests that, when we face some rival, we have

to understand our own standpoint in a way that renders it from our own point of view as problematic as possible and therefore as maximally vulnerable as possible to defeat by that rival. We can only learn what intellectual and moral resources our own standpoint, our own tradition of theoretical and practical inquiry possesses, as well as what intellectual and moral resources its rivals may possess, when we have understood our own point of view in a way that takes with full seriousness the possibility that we may in the end, as rational beings, have to abandon that point of view. This admission of fallibility need not entail any present lack of certitude, but it is a condition of worthwhile conversation with equally certain antagonists. (MacIntyre, 121)

These questions all point toward the central question which underlies various forms of post modernism—the question of the Other. “Few issues have expressed as powerful a hold over the thought of this century as that of ‘The Other,’” says Michael Theunissen.

It is difficult to think of a second theme, even one that might be of more substantial significance, that has provoked as widespread an interest as this one; it is difficult to think of a second theme that so sharply marks off the present—admittedly a present growing out of the nineteenth century and reaching back to it—from its historical roots in the tradition. To be sure the problem of the other has at times been accorded a prominent place in ethics and anthropology, in legal and political philosophy. But the problem of the other has certainly never penetrated as deeply as today into the foundations of philosophical thought—the question of the other cannot be separated

from the most primordial questions raised by modern thought.
(Theunissen, 1)

The question about the other cuts across all areas of philosophical study, whether it is ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, of science, of art, of language, or social and political philosophy. Even the whole history of philosophy—just Western philosophy—can be read as an attempt to reconcile the one and the many, the identity and difference, or the unity and the multiplicity, or in Levinas' term, to conquer, master, and colonize the other so that the other can be reduced to "the Same." More recently, we see a powerful revolt against the attempt, which only indicates that the question of the other is more prevalent than ever before.

Standing at the far front to address the question of the other, comparative philosophy becomes increasingly an important focus of philosophy today.

Now let us come back to the question of how to define the word "philosophy." We see that the matter actually orient our practice of philosophy in one way or another. Semantically, it does not make a big difference whether we define "philosophy" narrowly according to its Greek origin or broadly to accommodate more remotely similar systems of thought. But practically the two extremes have broad implications. For instance, if we treat the term too narrowly, we either exclude the Other, push the other to react in a similar fashion to us, or we force the other into our own framework. When we exclude the other, we may either do it out of cultural chauvinism, or, ironically, we may do it out of the "tolerance" or "respect" for the other. Levinas' "absolute Other" is an example of the latter. By resisting the temptation to reduce the other to the same, he would not even allow the other to be considered an alter ego" because otherwise the other would be the same as I. Consequently he makes the other forever unreachable. Here we see an interesting example of pluralism that ends up being exclusivism. Whether we do it out of cultural chauvinism or in the name of pluralism, the consequence seems to be strikingly similar.

If we force the other into our own framework, we are actually excluding the real other as well, because what we allow is not the other as other, but the one that

is remodeled to be the same. One consequence of accepting Confucianism into mainstream philosophy is that it is distorted. Not only the indigenous tradition will hence be lost and the identity crises arise, we miss an opportunity to benefit from the rich resources that we might otherwise be able to appropriate.

On the other hand, if we define “philosophy” too broadly, it will also make us unable to see the distinctness of other thought systems. The notion might be stretched too thin to be useful at all. Doing philosophy is not conducting politics. Out of political correctness, we might like to say that every indigenous culture has its own philosophy. But is it too farfetched? If the motivation for saying this is just for being politically correct, we might as well say that every person has his or her own philosophy, which is true, but here the word “philosophy” is used in a very different sense. It means everyone has some basic general outlooks of the world, not that everyone conducts philosophical thinking.

So the proper line must be somewhere in between the two extremes. I think the line cannot be drawn a priori, in a stipulative way; it should rather be left ambiguous with an awareness of the dangers of going toward either extremes. Recognizing the importance and implications of the problem is of course not the same as solving it. But it can help us to take the issue seriously, and not dismiss it lightly on one hand and uncritically falling into one or the other position with regard to the issue on the other hand. What worries us is not so much that the issue seems to have no clear cut answer. After all, how many philosophical questions have clear cut answers anyway? The real concern is that we fail to see the real issues behind the semantic debate, and hence falls victim of either try to gain the legitimacy of an indigenous philosophy by forcing it into the framework of dominant Western model, or as a reaction against the first tendency, draws back into one’s own culture and refuse to engage cross cultural dialogue, or fail to differentiate philosophical thinking from thoughts which entail philosophical implications. Once we are clear about the ambiguity of comparative philosophy itself, we can make creative use of it and engage in drawing new inspirations and energies that will bring philosophy to a new age, and hence bring ourselves to a new level.

2. Is Comparative Philosophy Possible?

“Just do it!” the famous line from Nike says. “But wait a minute,” says professional philosophers. “We have not figured out whether it is even possible to do it yet. The enlarged data base now may include texts so different from each other that they are, in Kuhnian terms, incommensurable. How can we even compare systems that use different languages, ask different kind of questions, and even have different standards of rationality and criteria of good or bad scholarship? You may put them all under a broadened term of ‘philosophy,’ just like you can put alchemy, palm reading, and the use of magic spell together with modern physics under the term ‘science.’ But that does not mean they are commensurable or comparable.”

Questions like this open another can of worms or another path toward wonderland, depending on how you conceive the outcome. Commensurability is different from comparability and compatibility. Two systems that are incommensurable may still be comparable. “You cannot compare an apple with an orange” means not really that orange and apple are incomparable; it means that they are so different that you should use different standards to judge their goodness. In fact it is only after comparison can we realize their difference or incommensurability.

Incompatibility, on the other hand, is a logical concept. The judgment that two systems are incompatible presupposes a common language. But incommensurability, at least in the Kuhnian sense, means that competing paradigms have different lists of problems to resolve, use different standards for their definitions of a legitimate paradigm, their terms have different relationships, and people in these competing paradigms “see different things.” That is why the shift has to be “like the gestalt switch, it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all” (Kuhn, 148). Can incommensurable systems be compatible? Is there a meta-language by which we can judge whether different systems of thought are compatible or not? When we say that two systems are so different that we cannot even say whether they are compatible or not, are we

already supposing that we are using a meta-language or a universal basis?⁸ Whether different cultural systems are incommensurable, incomparable, or incompatible are of course not questions to be settled a priori at a metaphilosophical level. We have to dive into different systems to find out whether they are indeed incommensurable, or incomparable, or incompatible. But on the other hand, without an awareness of these questions, our practice of comparative philosophy may be misguided by our unexamined assumptions.

One way of asking the above questions is: Is cross cultural understanding even possible? The issue cuts as deep as the question about translatability of different languages. Those who work in comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy all feel the difficulty of translating terms like *dao*, *qi*, *li*, etc. into Western languages. Similarly, Western philosophical terms, when they are rendered in Chinese words, often get twisted in their meanings. Since Quine, “*gavagi*” has become a general name for all these untranslatable terms in any foreign language. From here an exposition into the history of philosophy of language will be relevant and helpful. The exposition into the history of philosophy of language will reveal that we can even hardly say that we understand each other within the same language system. Maybe by the word “blue” I actually mean *bleen* but to you it means *grue*? How can we be sure that we understand each other properly? How can we even learn our own native language and know that we are “going on in the same way” as we use any term? Maybe the only universal language has only two terms: “this” and “that”? Are we hopelessly imprisoned in our own cultural tradition?

While modern philosophy of language is very good at destructing our intuitive beliefs about language, it does not offer much constructively. Do we all have a common *mentalese*, an innate language that enables us to understand each other, and even to learn any language at all, including our native ones? All these questions leave us a very gloomy picture of the possibility of comparative philosophy, and indeed, the positive value of philosophy in general.

Here we sense that the prevailing and persistently disturbing question of relativism is lurking in. It is an inevitable subject for comparative philosophy to

⁸ This is obviously from Donald Davidson’s famous article “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” (Davidson, 20).

deal with. While we are increasingly wary of dogmatist universalism or absolutism or fundamentalism, we are equally, if not more, concerned about relativism and the consequential nihilism. Various forms of pluralism have been proposed as responses to both extremes. Yet the very fact that relativism comes back constantly in need of refutation shows its potency. Even if we try to avoid the term like “truth” by replacing it with “rational acceptability” (a phrase that Putnam uses to define “truth.” See Putnam, 224), still what being “rational” means remains a difficult subject. A review of these literature and debate is a topic so large that can easily consume one whole semester. While it is hard to say how much hope we get from this discussion, an awareness of the problems is certainly helpful for us to have a clear assessment of our situation.

But maybe the situation is not as daunting as it appears to be. I can never forget an analogy told by Joel Kupperman when I was in one of his graduate seminars. He said that there is a kind of bird that, according to careful study of its shape, its wings, etc., scientists concluded that it cannot possibly fly. Yet it flies! Similarly, as MacIntyre argues, intranslatability does not mean that “all mutual understanding is precluded,” even though he claims that this mutual understanding of people from rival cultures “is possible only for those adherers of each standpoint who are able to learn the language of the rival standpoint, so that they acquire, so far as is possible, that other language as a second first language” (MacIntyre, 111). This view can be contested from both sides. One might still argue that it is impossible, given all the detailed argumentations from philosophy of language, or one can simply point to our daily life and say: We do seem to understand and communicate with people from other cultures with more or less success, even though we do not learn each other’s language as a second first language. Many people engage in comparative philosophy do not learn the other language as a second first language but they can testify that they still benefit enormously from their engagement in dialoguing with other cultures. In fact Joel Kupperman does not speak Chinese language, yet his book on Learning from Asian Philosophy is full of penetrating insights about Chinese philosophy that I, a native speaker of Chinese language, learned a great deal of my own cultural tradition from reading his book.

Again the questions may never be settled, but an exploration of these questions seems to be beneficial for both comparative philosophy and philosophy proper. At the same time we can ask ourselves more practical questions like how can we communicate with each other more successfully? What is our measure of success? How can we enhance our mutual understanding as much as possible? The question about incommensurability and relativism can be approached from the questions about methodology of comparative philosophy. In other words, the transcendental question about the possibility of comparative philosophy becomes a methodological one: With what kind of approach can comparative philosophy be possible?

3. Methodology of Comparative Philosophy

By the word “methodology,” I mean broadly “ways” or “approaches” of doing comparative philosophy. It may be about selecting different targets for comparison, or using different instruments to approach a target, or with a certain attitude, or expectation, or guiding principle.

When we compare thoughts from different cultures, it is inevitable that we draw similarities and/or differences. But there are different ways of doing it. One of the ways we often see people doing comparative philosophy is trying to find similarities between thoughts from different cultures. Often the motivation behind is to show that some thoughts are universal. Joseph Campbell’s *The Power of Myth*, John Hick’s *God Has Many Names*, are just two examples in comparative religion. In taking this approach one common problem is that those who focus on similarities often ignore differences, and hence result in oversimplifications.

But more are involved here also. As we have briefly stated in section two, there is no overarching language or neutral point of view from which we can judge the similarities. The result of comparison is always an infusion of one’s own culture into the interpretation of the other. In the *Introduction to Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert Allinson noticed two tendencies among the contributors of the volume: One is an attempt to “Westernize the Chinese mind.” It is to use Western methods and terminology to interpret and analyze Chinese thoughts. “In

so doing [the writer] renders an otherwise obscure (by Western standards) Chinese philosopher accessible to Western minds.” The other is an attempt to “Sinify the Western mind.” It does this by expanding concepts of the contents of a subject matter and by using a style of presentation more typical to Chinese. In so doing Westerners are invited to “understand the Chinese mind by themselves becoming Chinese” (Allinson 1989, 20-21). Both attempts actually go beyond mere interpretation of Chinese thoughts; they are also attempts to draw the two sides closer—either by drawing the Chinese mind closer to the Westerner, or the Westerner to the Chinese. The result of which is that we become hybrids, neither purely Western nor purely Eastern. This is different from merely trying to squeeze one system of thought into the framework of the other. For squeezing one into the other is to make one merely footnotes of the other, but reconstruction of one in the language of the other enriches both. The reconstruction can take several forms. For instance, one may give an analytical account of the Chinese notion “dao,” so that layers of rich meaning implicitly entailed in the notion can be articulated more clearly. One can also take the Western notion of “justice,” and ask, “What would be a Confucian theory of justice?”⁹ Still another form is to take up a theoretical dispute in a Western philosophical context, say, mind-body dualism problem, and construct a Confucian theory as an answer.¹⁰ These efforts all presuppose that there is some common ground, such as the fact that we all live in the same world and face similar problems of life (that we suffer, we face death, etc.), that the world is increasingly interconnected to the degree that we can no longer ignore each other, that in communicating with each other we have to at least assume that we are using words in more or less similar ways. But they don’t have to deny differences. In fact they have to recognize differences in order to conceive their projects to be meaningful. This recognition of common ground is different from assuming a universal language or an overarching neutral view point of view because here the commonality is either based on the thickness of real life, or on the basis of necessary assumption without which we cannot function in real life—it is very

⁹ See Cheng 1997, where Cheng “explained the notion of justice in terms of both righteousness (yi) and benevolence (ren) so that one would find that in justice as fairness one must have considerations of others and a control of one’s self-desires and following rules of propriety (as ren is explained by Confucius as ‘keji fuli’” (Cheng, 107).

¹⁰ I own both examples to Cheng. See Cheng, 106-8.

much like theoretically we can be skeptics about everything, yet practically we have to be realists to even conduct the very basic activities of life.

In contrast, some others pay more attention to differences. These are often the people who are more critical to one tradition, and try to show the problems of the tradition through comparing it to other different cultures. Here a common danger is “false essentialism,” again, a form of over simplification. As we often find people claiming, for example, that “the East is community oriented, the West is individual oriented;” “the East is more practical, and the West is more theoretical;” “the East is this worldly, the West searches for the transcendental;” The list can go on. By doing this, they always expose themselves to the criticism of neglecting the actual complexities of both the East and the West. If it were simply an over simplification, the problem can be avoided by replacing “East” and “West” with phrases like “the overall trend in the East” and “the dominant trend in the West.” Sometimes we do wonder whether the worse thing than gross generalization is not to make one. While there are always exceptions, there are indeed dominant tendencies or characteristics that are found more often from one culture than another. Identifying these tendencies may help us to see a larger picture. But behind the tendency to oversimplify the matter, we sometimes find a tendency to romanticizing one side and disparaging the other. Various kinds of books on Eastern Religions, especially Daoism, in bookstores all over the United States, will give us a good sense of how popular the trend of romanticizing the East is. This is actually not doing a favor for Eastern cultures. One wanders whether this is itself a form of Orientalism, since here Daoism and Buddhism are often taken as objects of consumerism—they are good for us because we have a desire to feel romantic, exotic, or “cool.”

Another contrast in methodologies is expressed in a classic Chinese way: “wo zhu liu jing”—I interpret the six classics, and “liu jing zhu wo”—the six classics are used to interpret me. Even though most philosophers would agree that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity in our interpretation of any text, or no pure wo zhu liu jing, still no one would say my interpretation of a text is totally subjective and that it is entirely manipulating the text for my own purpose. But we surely see that some stretch the texts from another culture more toward their own

interpretation than others. While this is generally objectionable, I would say that in some cases it might be acceptable. Maybe we should not ask for the proper reading of a text—after all, there simply is no such a thing; instead, we should ask for a fair reading of a text. Sometimes a misreading can be creative and inspiring. In order to reconstruct a tradition so that it can be appropriated in a post-modern global context, certain stretch is not only unavoidable but desirable. As Peter Hershock says, in his inspiring book *Reinventing the Wheel*, that there is no ideal knower who is “radically individual without being at all personal—a kind of epistemological Everyman” (Hershock, 90). Only because of our solid grounding in our own particularity can we interact and enhance each other. Some may call this “philosophy as engineering” (Morton, 45) or “the art of appropriation” (Tong, 57). One thing that often makes some uncomfortable is that these people tend to “given an unbalanced” account in their comparative study. They sometimes make contrasts between the ideal state of one theory and the worst result of the other. Rosemont and Hershock both have been criticized in this way. But in their mind, they are looking at a larger picture, and are doing something therapeutic: When they see the overall tendency in the world to be dragged toward one direction, they want to stress the other in order to regain the balance.

There are many other contrasting ways of doing comparative philosophy, not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, some use analytical method, while others prefer hermeneutical. Some are more historical oriented, placing texts within historical contexts, while others are more text oriented, focusing on texts themselves. There are people who make very broad stroke comparisons, with a global vision and like to speak the general patterns of the past 2000 or even 5000 years of history, and ranges across all schools of thought, while others are detail oriented, focusing on comparing one philosopher with another, or even one small part of a philosopher’s theory to that of another.

The varieties of methodological approaches to comparative philosophy are obviously beyond what this short paper can summarize. My purpose here is not to list all the possible ways of doing comparative philosophy, but rather to list a few to show that there is no single and proper way of doing it. Whether one is well versed in multiple traditions and languages or not, no one can possibly master all

the languages and all the traditions. On the other hand everyone can make one's own contributions to comparative philosophy as long as one is open to the Other.

Through this brief traverse of the area, I hope I have shown that comparative philosophy is important because it is philosophy proper with an enlarged data base. The enlargement of the data base is not only desirable for generating new ideas and obtain new inspirations as it brings in richer resources, but also because the deeply troubled contemporary world situation and the increasing connectedness of different parts of the world urgently calls for critical engagement of people from all traditions. Whether one recognize it or not, the question of the Other has already been a central issue in contemporary philosophical scholarship, and in this regard, comparative philosophy is already at the cutting edge of the whole field of philosophy.

As I said in the beginning of this paper, comparative philosophy is still developing, taking its shape, and so by using the word "traversing" the territory rather than "charting" it, I want to avoid the misunderstanding that the territory is already set. I hope this paper also serves the function of inviting more people to join the cause of practicing comparative philosophy and bring a new renaissance to philosophy.

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The Purpose and Perils of Comparative Philosophy

I. Introduction: Comparative philosophy defined

My aim in this essay is to address a number of issues regarding the area of study known as comparative philosophy and, further, to recommend a particular approach to comparative philosophy as among the most promising ways of pursuing contemporary philosophical issues.

As a tentative or working definition, let us define “comparative philosophy” as any philosophical inquiry that draws on or relates to the study of the philosophical systems and doctrines developed in two or more civilizations, such as Western, Indian, and Chinese civilizations. Most comparative philosophers would agree with the view expressed by Narayana Moorty when he wrote “the need for comparative philosophy arises chiefly out of the interest in interpreting the philosophical traditions of the East to the West, or vice versa, and re-examining the foundations of Western and Eastern philosophical thought in light of a comparison of the basic tenets of the systems of these traditions, determining whether such a study leads to a discovery of a common foundation for the different traditions...and bringing whatever is of philosophical value in other traditions into the fold of one’s own philosophical tradition.”¹¹

This statement covers several different aims of comparative philosophy, but it is the last point—the practice of bringing resources from culturally disparate philosophical traditions to bear on one’s own tradition—that I think is most significant and want to draw the reader’s attention to in this essay. As philosophers, we must remember that the *telos* or purpose of comparative philosophy is not comparison *per se*. In the parlance of John Dewey, the comparison of two philosophical traditions is not itself the “end-in-view.” Rather, comparative philosophy’s most important contribution is the development of new or borrowed philosophical resources that can be used as tools in solving genuine or “live” philosophical problems. Again, to put the matter in a Deweyan way, I am suggesting that

¹¹ Narayana Moorty, “Is Comparative Philosophy Possible?” unpublished essay, on web at <http://home.pccbell.net/moorty/>, p. 1.

the “comparative” part of “comparative philosophy” denotes an *instrumental*, but potentially crucial, method of philosophical inquiry. I will return to this later.

One more preliminary point needs to be made regarding any definition of comparative philosophy: we must differentiate between comparative *intellectual history* and comparative *philosophy*. Very often the comparison of philosophers and philosophical traditions is not genuine philosophy at all, but only an attempt to demonstrate the similarities and differences of ideas across cultural boundaries. When engaging in comparative work, students and professional philosophers alike have a tendency to offer comparisons that are little more than interesting *lists* that cite areas of agreement and disagreement between the traditions being compared. Such practices have produced dozens of books that relate Kant to Shankara, Wittgenstein to Nagarjuna, or Heidegger to Zen Buddhism, etc. However, such comparisons, by themselves, are intellectual history, not philosophy, because philosophy requires a further step, that is, the *use* of the comparative analysis for the purpose of solving (or resolving) a living philosophical problem. To be philosophy, there must be a commitment to making a case that the position described is right or wrong, plausible or not, as a solution to a given philosophical problem. Let me clarify this point by an illustration. That Plato and the *rishis* of the early Upanishads both held that stability and permanence are marks of the real is a matter of *intellectual history*. But arguing that they were right (or wrong) to take such a position as a way to achieve deeper knowledge of reality is *philosophy*. This distinction is not meant to disparage comparative intellectual history in the least—it is important to develop an understanding of the agreements and disagreements between traditions that are separated by great distances, by cultural contexts or by substantial periods of time. But, while such similarities and differences are historically interesting and may usefully lead to further study of the conditions that produced similar ideas or doctrines, they are, as such, *philosophically* inert. Saying that two thinkers from vastly different traditions agree about something *proves* nothing; by itself, it does not solve any genuine philosophical problem.

II. The origins and current state of comparative philosophy

Comparative philosophy has roots in the West that go back as far as the late seventeenth century, when European philosophers, Leibniz for example, offered their

reactions to the fragments of Asian philosophical systems that had trickled into Europe. But it was not until the first half of the nineteenth century—when significant intellectual contact had been made between Western and Asian philosophical traditions based on the first full translations of Asian philosophical texts into European languages (accomplished mainly by German scholars)—that comparative philosophy began in earnest. Most notable of these early comparativists were the European Romantic philosophers and their American brethren, the Transcendentalists, who saw strains of idealism comparable to their own in the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. Even after this promising start, comparative philosophy languished in the shadows through the first half of the twentieth century until scholars like Charles Moore, Wing-tsit Chan and Theodore de Bary revived and refocused the field around mid-century.

And yet, comparative philosophy remains a field of inquiry that has been little explored, despite the many reasons that comparative philosophers have given for recommending it. The comments of Wilhelm Halbfass offered twenty years ago are just as true today; he wrote: “comparative philosophy, as an open-minded, methodically rigorous, hermeneutically alert, and yet existentially committed comparative study of human orientations is still in a nascent stage.”¹² As recently as fifteen years ago, an important monograph in comparative philosophy opened with the statement: “Within the Western philosophic tradition, comparative philosophy is a relatively new and still marginal movement...despite the promise of mutual enrichment between Western and non-Western philosophical traditions.”¹³ This is both bad news and good news. The bad news is that comparative philosophy seems forever stuck in its infancy. The good news, however, is that the field remains wide open for those who seek uncharted territory for philosophical inquiry.

III. Foundational Problems in Comparative Philosophy

Before I discuss my recommended approach to comparative philosophy, it would be useful to explore some of the reasons why comparative philosophy has been so slow to

¹² Eliot Deutsch, editor, *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

¹³ Joel Marks and Roger Ames, editors, *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).

capture the imaginations of most contemporary philosophers. There are, I think, three problems worth exploring in this essay: first, some philosophers still question whether there is any genuine philosophy outside of the Western tradition; second, among those that grant that philosophy exists in non-Western civilizations there are a substantial number who hold that because of the incommensurability of culturally disparate philosophical traditions, meaningful comparison is impossible; and third, some philosophers see comparative philosophy as a misguided attempt to synthesize all philosophical traditions, blending them into a single “universal” philosophy. Let me say a few words about each of these problems before moving on to my proposed approach to comparative philosophy.

A. Is there “philosophy” outside the West?

The practice of comparative philosophy assumes that there *are* philosophical traditions aside from those in the West. And yet this very claim continues to be challenged right up until the present day. As the comparative philosopher Eliot Deutsch put it, “Philosophy as a field still harbors many, possibly a majority, who think that serious philosophizing has occurred only in the West...”¹⁴ This is no small matter. It is clear from reading the literature over the last quarter century that comparative philosophy has been on the defensive. It has become bogged down by having to argue over and over again that there is something indigenous to civilizations other than those in the West that can be called “philosophy.”¹⁵ The debate continues in some quarters because of the narrow definitions of philosophy (used mainly in academia) that typically exclude from philosophy anything that contains methods or goals that Western traditions would label “religious.” By assuming that philosophy and religion are mutually exclusive classifications, almost all non-Western traditions are excluded by definition from philosophy. For example, Indian traditions are denied the label “philosophy” by some philosophers because they aim at the attainment of religious goals like *moksha* or nirvana, and many Indian traditions accept the authority of

¹⁴ Eliot Deutsch, editor, *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

¹⁵ We have to say “indigenous” because there are many philosophers in philosophy departments from Beijing to Delhi that are specialists in Western philosophical traditions. In fact, many Asian scholars have adopted these ways of thinking and see their own traditions through Western perspectives—part of this is so as not to appear inferior in any way.

sages who claim revelation as a primary source of knowledge. For these reasons, some Western philosophers relegate Asian traditions to a category called “wisdom traditions” and thereby distinguish them from “philosophy” which is purportedly based on logical argumentation alone.

Happily, the end of this debate may be in view. Let me cite several reasons for my optimism. First, many Western philosophers are more knowledgeable about Asian traditions today than they were just a few decades ago. Even if they haven’t carefully studied Asian traditions, most Western philosophers are aware that there is much genuine philosophy in the vast logical and epistemological systems of Indian traditions, as well as in the ethical and social teachings of Chinese thinkers. Second, the boundaries between philosophy, religion and cultural criticism have become so blurred in the West that the conception of philosophy appears to have a wider scope than it once had and that, in turn, breeds greater tolerance for finding philosophy in traditions like Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism that involve religious elements. And third, the canonical systems of Western philosophy themselves do not fit easily under any one definition of philosophy. As Ninian Smart has noted, “trying to put the variety of philosophers recognized in the West under a single definition of philosophy would cause quite a mess... why would we expect things to be different in deciding how to apply the term ‘philosophy’ to thinkers and traditions in Asia?”¹⁶

Frankly, I find this debate rather tiresome, if not parochial. Fred Dallmayr has exposed the worst aspects of the debate, uncovering cases where the Western image of philosophy, fueled by Western cultural hegemony, is used to disregard or denigrate Asian traditions in a way that is nothing short of cultural imperialism.¹⁷ In less biased circles, however, the debate is mostly a matter of question-begging semantics. It just depends on how narrow one wants one’s definition of philosophy to be. But it will have to be very narrow, indeed, to exclude most Asian traditions because Asian traditions address many of the same problems that qualify as philosophy in the West, for example: the justification of knowledge, causality, substance/accident, space and time, free will versus determinism, language analysis, and logical analysis, to name but a few. More importantly, the impetus

¹⁶ Ninian Smart, “The Analogy of Meaning and the Tasks of Comparative Philosophy,” in Gerald Larson and Eliot Deutsch, editors, *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) p. 175.

¹⁷ Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

and method of philosophy—using human intelligence to live excellently—is evident in all civilizations and the results of such philosophizing are preserved for us to study in all of the world’s literate civilizations. Even if Asian philosophical traditions do blend religious elements into philosophy, there is no reason *prima facie* to exclude the search for religious meaning from philosophy. After all, Christian scholastic philosophies in the West take scripture as an authority and see philosophy as a project in service of religious meaning. In my view, comparative philosophy is useful as a corrective to the overly narrow conceptions of philosophy in the Western academy. The conception of philosophy ought to be *inclusive*, rather than *exclusive*, since wisdom—always and everywhere in short supply—should be sought *wherever* one can find it. And is it not ironic that applying the label “wisdom” (as in the aforementioned pejorative term “wisdom traditions”) should divorce a tradition from *philo-sophia*?

B. The Problem of Incommensurability

Ever since the publication of Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and W.V.O. Quine’s work on translatability (more than 40 years ago), philosophers have been genuinely concerned about the problem of incommensurability. “Incommensurability” refers to the relationship of two contexts or cultures between which there are no common standards to measure or judge ideas and concepts. Were cultural contexts completely incommensurable, there would be no possibility of sharing or comparing philosophical theories or concepts, because such theories or concepts would be entirely unintelligible outside their native cultural context. Some critics of comparative philosophy see this as a potentially insuperable problem for comparative philosophy. At a conference on comparative philosophy several years ago, I listened to the renowned philosopher Richard Rorty assert that he didn’t think he could learn anything important from studying Confucian philosophy. He said that he had tried to read Confucius, but despite his best efforts, Confucian doctrines remained opaque to him. Rather disingenuously, I think, Rorty said that he cannot relate discussions of Confucian thought to his own inquiries without doing an injustice to the Asian traditions under study. He went on to generalize his experience by saying that this is likely to be true of all cross-cultural comparisons—that every philosopher is so deeply grounded in her or his cultural context that there is little

hope of having a fruitful philosophical dialogue across *incommensurable* cultural contexts. To the shock and surprise of conference participants—given that this was a conference on comparative philosophy—Rorty subverted the rationale for the conference by suggesting that Western philosophers should talk only with other Western philosophers and likewise it would be best were Eastern philosophers to keep their conversations to themselves. Needless to say, I don't share Rorty's pessimism on this issue.

Comparative philosophers recognize that there are difficulties associated with interpretation that crosses over cultural boundaries. Differences in categories and conceptual schemas are unavoidable when relating philosophical traditions from different cultures or civilizations. Culturally disparate philosophical traditions often do not agree on what the right philosophical questions are. As Daya Krishna put it, "the world of comparative studies is inevitably an attempt to look at what, by definition, is 'another reality' from the viewpoint of that which is not itself."¹⁸ And that "all comparative studies imply simultaneously an identity and a difference, a situation that is replete with intellectual difficulties, which give rise to interminable disputes regarding whether we are talking about the same thing or different things."¹⁹

While I agree that one needs to be aware of and concerned about cultural and historical context when presenting philosophical concepts and doctrines, I think that it is an exaggeration to say that such concerns pose insuperable difficulties for comparative philosophy. Yes, the unique cultural identity of a philosophical tradition precludes a complete translation of that tradition into the terms of another culture. And the potential for distortions of philosophical ideas when they are considered from a different cultural context is very real. But this problem is not unique to comparative philosophy. The same problems of translation and incommensurability come into play when *any* two people communicate, whether they belong to distinct cultural traditions or not. When two different persons use a certain word, given the different experiences and conceptual systems in two different minds, how could it be determined whether the understanding of the word is precisely the same or not in each case? By the same standard imposed by the critic on comparative philosophy, the minds of all people are "incommensurable" relative to one

¹⁸ Daya Krishna, "Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be," in Gerald Larson and Eliot Deutsch, editors, *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 71-72.

¹⁹ Daya Krishna, "Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be," p. 71.

another and so all meaningful communication would appear to be impossible. (Here the pragmatist in me comes out, because a pragmatic treatment of meaning seems to me the best answer to such epistemic puzzles: we mean the same thing to the extent that we enter into conjoint activities successfully—but that’s another topic.) Furthermore, the problem of incommensurability applies across historical epochs as well—a contemporary philosopher cannot claim to understand Plato’s ideas exactly as Plato did. Yet, the problem of “incommensurability” is rarely raised to argue that persons in the twenty-first century cannot appropriate anything worthwhile from the thought of ancient Greek philosophers.

Two plausible responses to the problem of incommensurability in relation to comparative philosophy occur to me. First, we should recognize that there is a common anthropological context for philosophizing across various cultures and historical periods. Human beings in all cultures and in all historical periods are engaged in intellectual and social activities and at base these activities are grounded in biological and physiological structures shared by all human beings. At a minimum, then, we have this anthropological framework for comparative studies that stretches across cultural and historical boundaries. Second, the project of *philosophy* is not so much to understand certain ideas or doctrines exactly as their proponents did (that’s a problem in hermeneutics that I leave to the intellectual historian), but to appropriate, use or apply these ideas in service of a current philosophical problem. In that context, the justification is whether comparative appropriation works in solving the problem or not. Of course, interpretation must be constrained to some degree by intellectual history. But, since interpretation will inevitably leave matters indeterminate to a certain degree, there will be some latitude for casting ideas in ways that meet the demand of a contemporary philosophical problem, and that justifies bringing such culturally disparate voices into the philosophical conversation.

An analogy might help clarify the matter. Consider the case of an American baseball player who seeks to improve her batting technique. Suppose, having studied the batting stroke of a batsman in cricket, she were to improve her batting by appropriating some aspects of the cricket batting technique. Would a critic decry this as illegitimate because baseball and cricket are two different (read: incommensurable) games? What makes this “borrowing” possible, despite the fact that cricket and baseball are different games, is that there are a whole range of convergences and congruencies between baseball and cricket, specifically as regards batting techniques. The measure of success in this case

is not how accurately the baseball player mimics playing cricket, but how effectively she adapts what she's learned from a disparate game to playing baseball. I think this analogy holds up fairly well for comparative philosophy.

This is about as far as this issue can be discussed in the abstract, because, if I'm right, the decisive evidence that incommensurability is more of a nuisance than an impenetrable barrier can only come from philosophizing comparatively about actual problems.

C. Comparative philosophy as creating a “universal philosophy”

Fifty years ago, philosophical optimism, fueled by a growing awareness of common patterns of thought across cultural boundaries, led some prominent comparative philosophers to attempt a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies into a single “universal” or “global” philosophical system. P.T. Raju's work is a good example of this trend. He wrote that “the aim of comparative philosophy is the elucidation of the nature of man and his environment in order that a comprehensive philosophy of life and a plan for thought and action may be obtained”²⁰ and then went on to argue that the idealism in Hindu Vedanta and Western philosophers like Hegel and Bradley could be joined up to form that “comprehensive philosophy.” Needless to say, such attempts at universalism have failed to attract very many adherents and probably have done some damage to the reputation of comparative philosophy by associating the field with such grandiose projects. While the goal of creating a single universal philosophy is no longer credible to most comparative philosophers, the trend has left a legacy of smaller, less grandiose, synthetic projects—for example, all those books on Shankara and Kant, Hegel and the Upanishads, that I mentioned before. It has also imparted to comparative philosophy a tendency to favor similarities over differences in comparative work—a situation that is not so bad in itself, but has been taken to such an extreme recently that several comparative scholars have recoiled against what they call a “misplaced civility” in comparative philosophy. This refers to the attitude of those comparative philosophers who want so much to establish good feelings and avoid the tensions and enmity of past relations between East and West that they exaggerate the similarities between traditions rather than recognize genuine

²⁰ P.T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970).

differences. I have to say that I agree with this comment: of course, there should be civil discourse between traditions, but a proper respect requires recognition of differences where they exist or else the positions compared are reduced to mere caricatures. I should remark that the defect of “misplaced civility” is more common in comparative *religion* than comparative philosophy these days—for example, many of the recent books comparing Buddhism and Christianity are so sugar-coated as to be nearly worthless as genuine comparisons.

IV. The aims and promise of Comparative Philosophy: A Problematic Approach

Daya Krishna recently argued for an image of comparative philosophy that focuses on “problems perceived and solutions attempted” even if the problems and solutions range far beyond the limits of “philosophy” as construed in the European heritage.²¹ This statement suggests a view of comparative philosophy very close to the one I have been working with in my research. Comparative philosophy, as I practice it, is not just a matter of developing an awareness of what other philosophers in other civilizations have thought, but provides an “opening” to live philosophical problems. Comparisons can be used to illuminate and even solve difficult philosophical questions that confront us in our time. After all, as I said earlier, the point of any philosophical inquiry is not just to comprehend the ideas put forward by a previous thinker, but to use those ideas in the service of a philosophical project. Ninian Smart affirmed a similar conception of comparative philosophy when he wrote: “if we look on the various philosophical heritages as *resources*, then we may hope that ideas drawn from them might help to resolve some of the major world-view problems of the new intellectual world taking shape through the meeting of cultures...[comparative philosophy] can act as a ‘*treasure house*’ of resources for us in our thinking through present and future problems.”²² To borrow more Deweyan terminology, I’d recommend calling this a “problematic approach” to comparative philosophy.

A problematic approach avoids being trapped by the traditional problems associated with comparative philosophy that I outlined above. For example, comparative philosophy always depends on there being significant philosophical convergences between the two

²¹ Daya Krishna, “Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be,” p. 82.

²² Ninian Smart, “The Analogy of Meaning and the Tasks of Comparative Philosophy,” p. 178.

traditions regarding metaphysical, epistemological and methodological considerations—even where the traditions disagree in content, they have to share conceptual structures at some level even to disagree on an issue. As we know from what I said earlier, attempts to articulate such convergences in regard to culturally disparate systems of ideas runs the risk of misinterpretation and incommensurability. And yet by grounding the comparative project in a philosophical problem, the comparative philosopher creates a context for resolving the challenges of incommensurability, because once a particular problem is set, the problem-context determines the vocabulary, the conceptual schemes and, most importantly, what would count as a solution to the problem. So long as one does not insist on perfect translatability from the Western tradition to the non-Western tradition (or vice versa), the project remains on safe ground. As I said before, I am not advocating the position that we have license to read into a text or a system of ideas just anything we want. But if comparative philosophy is to add anything useful to a contemporary philosophical conversation, then there must be some allowance for discussing non-Western systems of thought through the use of Western philosophical concepts and vice versa. The philosophical test of a comparative project is not the precise congruence of ideas across cultural boundaries but the progress the comparison achieves in regard to the philosophical inquiry.

It truly surprises me that the critics of comparative philosophy think that the issue of cultural differences counts against comparative philosophy. On the contrary, the differences between cultures should be seen as a positive aspect of comparative philosophy. It forms the reason for doing comparative philosophy in the first place, since if other cultures conceptualize philosophical issues just the way we westerners do, there would be little point in doing comparative research. By engaging alternative conceptual schemes, comparative philosophy draws our attention to those ways of thinking that have been neglected in our own perspectives. And by confronting different conceptual mappings, one is not only challenged to defend a certain conceptual scheme, but may well be led to either a radical revision of one's own conceptual framework or the creation of a whole new framework. Comparative philosophy provides hope that apparently intractable problems in Western traditions may be recast in new conceptual frameworks and thereby either solved or resolved.

One might say that comparative philosophy functions a lot like an extended metaphor. Metaphors create and communicate new meanings by putting together concepts drawn from disparate domains of meaning. For example, the metaphor “man is a wolf” communicates something non-literal that is not reducible to an analysis of the component concepts. It would be impertinent to object to the metaphor because humans aren’t really wolves in literal terms. And so it is in comparative philosophy; new philosophical ideas are created from the synergy and tensive force of cross-cultural comparisons. As philosophy is best done dialectically, it follows that comparative philosophy, which is dialectical in the highest degree, holds substantial promise in this regard.

For many professional philosophers, comparative philosophy is hard to accept because it covers more than the traditional, institutionalized, formula of philosophy, spilling over into religion, political science, anthropology, etc. Rather than take this as a problem, I see this expansion of philosophy as a significant advantage. Through comparative philosophy, the genre “philosophy” itself is potentially and usefully expanded. Thus, at its best, comparative philosophy functions as a liberator of a philosophical tradition from the limitations imposed upon it by its own past and cultural context.

So far I have been discussing my approach to comparative philosophy in the abstract. But the abstraction lacks precisely what I think demonstrates the plausibility of the approach, namely, the context of a definite philosophical problem or issue. The charge of incommensurability appears to be a much stronger objection to comparative philosophy when there is no problematic context. So let me give an illustration of what I mean by a problematic approach to comparative philosophy by a very brief reference to one of my own research projects in comparative philosophy.

V. An Illustration of a Problematic Approach to Comparative Philosophy: squaring religious experience with naturalism

For sometime now, I have been exploring the philosophical viability of a naturalistic theory of religious experience. This inquiry was motivated by my commitment to John Dewey’s pragmatism and the profound sense that something is missing in life without religious kinds of meaning—religious in the sense that I want answers to the big existential issues like the incomprehensibility of life, old age, sickness and death. The

initial clue that suggested this project came from Dewey's *Art as Experience*, where he offers a naturalistic interpretation of art as the amplification of meanings within experience. In that book, Dewey drops the hint that the pattern of aesthetic experience could be used to explain the emergence of religious levels of meaning: religious experience might be considered as a transformation of meanings more radical still than aesthetic experience and tinged with ethical values. But Dewey himself never developed his own suggestion. He wrote his only major work on religion, *A Common Faith*, at about the same time as *Art as Experience*, but this book mostly criticizes traditional religious institutions and offers only a very vague account of religious experience. So I have taken up the project of developing the naturalistic theory of religious experience where Dewey left it. It has become a project in comparative philosophy because I have found in early Buddhism—by which I mean the ideas contained in the earliest Buddhist scriptures called the Pāli Canon—a religious tradition that shares significant parts of Dewey's philosophical approach and on that basis can provide key concepts and doctrines that augment Dewey's philosophy regarding the possibility of religious levels of meaning within a philosophical naturalism. Put another way, the early Buddhist tradition, which has its own forms of naturalism and empiricism, has something of profound importance to offer to pragmatism in a way that is consistent with pragmatism's own philosophical commitments. So the comparative problematic in my research is to demonstrate that a naturalistic theory of religious experience is at least conceptually possible by drawing on two culturally and temporally disparate traditions, John Dewey's pragmatism and early Buddhism.

While I think there is a mutual enrichment that results from a dialogue between pragmatism and early Buddhism, my main interest is in showing that pragmatists who have not developed a theory of religious experience have much to gain by studying a tradition like early Buddhism in which the development of religious experience is the core of the tradition. Another reason to emphasize the Buddhist augmentation of pragmatism rather than vice versa is due to the contingent fact that many of my colleagues in philosophy are pragmatists (rather than Buddhists). And a substantial number of pragmatists are frankly antagonistic toward religion because they do not see how religious experience is possible given their commitments to empiricism and naturalism.

While comparative projects need not depend on point-by-point agreements between the traditions compared, there are, in fact, many such agreements between early Buddhism

and Deweyan pragmatism. For example, both traditions are forms of empiricism, both assert that change and interdependence (not permanence and self-subsistence) are marks of the real, both hold a rich theory of human experience that gives substantial attention to the non-cognitive or affective dimensions of experience, both reject speculative metaphysics on empirical and pragmatic grounds, and both philosophies propose theories of human nature that deny the existence of a permanent essence or soul, but see human beings (including human consciousness) as a complex of dependently arisen natural conditions.

“Naturalism” and “religious” are two terms that are crucial to this project and benefit significantly from the comparative framework that crosses cultural and historical boundaries. The forms of “naturalism” proposed in Dewey’s work and early Buddhism are both emergentist, that is, non-reductionist, forms of naturalism. Emergentist naturalism rejects the reductionist position that all of existence is reducible to matter-only as well as the other extreme which says that higher order phenomena like human consciousness require reference to a reality or substance that is beyond nature. An emergentist naturalism suggests that higher order phenomena like consciousness have continuities with biological and physical phenomena, but are not reducible to them—that is, where there is a high degree of complexity within the structure of a phenomenon there is the potential for a new order of quality to emerge (for example, organic functions out of chemical processes, or mental phenomena from brain processes). The high point of emergentist naturalism is the amplification of experience that is art for Dewey and nibbāna as spiritual liberation for early Buddhism.

It is obviously true that “naturalism” in early Buddhism cannot have exactly the same meaning as “naturalism” in Dewey’s philosophy—the latter being developed within the conceptual framework of modern science. But, within the problematic context, the different forms of naturalism can be seen as complementing one another where they don’t overlap and this opens up new possible connections that enrich the concept of naturalism. Thus, using an emergentist version of naturalism, reconstructed in light of both early Buddhism and Deweyan pragmatism, I believe I can show that religious meaning *is possible* within the bounds of such naturalism.

Of course, others may object to the project because of my use of the word “religious” in connection with naturalism, because, for many, “religious” by definition relates to supernatural things like God or gods, souls and heaven. By that definition of

“religious,” certainly, naturalism and the religious would be mutually exclusive concepts, because naturalism, even of the emergentist sort, rules out supernatural or transcendent realities. But this definition of “religious” begs the question I think ought to be asked, that is, whether there is something that can be called religious in human experience that can be squared with naturalism. Here, again, comparative work on early Buddhism provides important resources for a different conception of the term “religious.” Early Buddhism is not founded on the supernatural, and yet its aims are “religious” because it teaches a radical transformation of the person as a solution to the problems that motivate all religious inquiry, namely, the suffering attendant on old age, sickness and death.

This is not the place to argue for the conclusions I have drawn from my research, but I should point out that the inquiry has shown some promise and is certainly not the dead end described by Rorty and others who declare the fruitlessness of comparative philosophy. By comparing early Buddhism and pragmatism I have found a richer conception of nature, a more highly detailed account of the emergence of consciousness, a psychology that rejects essentialism and supernaturalism, and have come to see as crucial to the transformation of experience the non-cognitive or affective factors that enter directly into cognitive modes of experience and actions.²³

While some Buddhist scholars or Deweyan scholars may want to argue that I have distorted the views of the traditions I have appropriated, I think such objections miss the point. I claim only that the Buddhist or Deweyan ideas converge to the extent that they are the catalyst for my attempt to build a naturalistic theory of religious experience; it is not my claim that what I am saying accords exactly with what the early Buddhists or Dewey said. Of course my interpretation of these traditions must be reasonably consistent with the teachings of the Buddha and the writings of Dewey—it would be inappropriate to attribute an idea to a philosophical tradition that it clearly does not hold.

VI. Some Practical Perils of Pursuing Comparative Philosophy

²³ David Kalupahana’s book, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) explores the Buddhist theory of consciousness by using the conceptual framework of William James; as such, it is a comparative project working in the opposite direction to mine, borrowing from pragmatism to augment and reinterpret early Buddhism.

Since I am recommending that the reader take up projects in comparative philosophy, let me conclude by mentioning a few of the practical perils of working in comparative philosophy. Three such perils come to mind and these are especially relevant for the students reading the essay.

First, a comparative philosopher must master not one but two or more widely separated philosophical traditions. This is not easy. As the literature in all fields of philosophy grows and changes rapidly these days, it is hard enough to develop expertise in one philosophical tradition, let alone two or more. Also, for a comparative philosopher there ought to be a substantial depth of expertise regarding the several traditions compared. No doubt, it is very rare to find a philosopher who is equally at home in two civilizations, but at a minimum the comparative philosopher must be more than a novice in all the specific traditions that are compared. Where this is not the case the comparative work becomes the easy target of experts in the field where scholarship is thinnest. Witness the case of Fritjof Capra's book *The Tao of Physics* in which Capra demonstrates his expert knowledge of physics, but reveals his weak comprehension of Asian traditions by failing to acknowledge the important differences between Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. For this reason, Capra's work has been severely criticized by many Asian philosophers.

Second, expertise in Indian or Chinese or African philosophical traditions requires extensive training in the language or languages of the relevant texts. There is no way around this. Language training is probably the biggest obstacle for aspiring practitioners of comparative philosophy. Some never develop the requisite language skills and many of those who do wind up deserting philosophy for philology. In my recent experience at Oxford University, I came across numerous ex-philosophers who were drawn away from philosophical questions by issues in Sanskrit and Pāli philology. Language study appears to be a Siren's song for many would-be comparative philosophers. Unfortunately, many philologists believe that only philologists have sufficient language skills to interpret and comment on the meaning of texts in non-Western languages. I encourage philosophers to ignore the philologist's bias and assert their prerogative as philosophers, because philosophers bring interpretive perspectives and tools to the study of texts that are often overlooked by philologists. Comparative philosophy will benefit greatly from the teamwork of philosophers and philologists—but so far that has not been the common practice.

Third, the comparative philosopher must get used to the idea of being marginalized or treated like an outsider by those who focus only on one philosophical tradition. In my case, for example, although I wrote my doctoral dissertation on John Dewey's pragmatism, I don't participate in Dewey scholarship to the extent that my colleagues do in the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. Likewise, I don't spend all of my research time keeping up on every new idea in Buddhist studies, as my colleagues do in that field. To work at the cutting edge of either field, one would have to concentrate on one tradition alone; however, that's not an option for those engaged in comparative philosophy. But, not to despair, this is a trade-off that pays dividends in other ways. Besides, there seem to be more and more philosophers who are frustrated with the limitations of current state of Western philosophy and who are curious about other traditions. If the work of comparative philosophers fills these emerging philosophical needs, the field should soon receive more of the attention and recognition that comparative philosophy deserves.

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1The Future of Comparative Philosophy

Even though comparative philosophy represents a very small part of the overall academic world, a specialty within a speciality as it were, it nonetheless covers a large amount of terrain. Especially as a younger scholar I feel a very strong sense of limited experience. So, to tackle a large question about the future seems a daunting prospect indeed. The only way that I can do this, in all honesty, is to speak from my own experience of trying to both understand and advance the scholarly and institutional best interests of our discipline.

As an introduction and to lay out my own prejudices, my academic training is primarily in philosophy, though since college I have had a profound interest in the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. This interest has lead me through a study of texts in many different varieties of Buddhism and thence on to the other major Asian religio-philosophical traditions. Of course, reading widely in this fashion, I have had to read in translation, although I have always tried to read several of the same work. And this is an admitted limitation. I haven't had the time or energy to pursue anything like a specialist's understanding of the world of such texts. But then I have justified it in the same way I do my inevitably limited understanding of the Greeks. I am a philosopher, and this is what philosophers do. They mine for ideas knowing full well that there are limitations to the process.

Thus, my perspective and interests have always reflected both a sense of the current debates percolating through what we call "Western" philosophy as well as an awareness of a vast reservoir of material through which to refract these concerns. I don't think I'm unique in feeling that such awareness has offered an enriched philosophical vocabulary on the one hand and a kind of critical detachment or independence on the other. You can't help but feel that whatever it is you're dealing with—moral consciousness, the mind/body problem, truth and objectivity—there's always another way of looking at it.

Professionally, in trying to square these various interests and influences I've always focused on minimizing the East/West issue and the sense of inaccessibility that many have regarding Asian texts. Personally, I've never felt that sense of barrier, and I've always felt

that when it's natural there should be no more obstacle towards reaching into the Hindu or Confucian tradition for a handy point than there is towards reaching into the Greek, or the German for that matter. I really doubt that we understand the Greeks as they truly were any more than we understand the Chinese or Japanese. We certainly have more stories about the Greeks, but I often feel they have a fairy-tale quality. I'm not sure I would have felt any more comfortable with a Hegel or a Herder than with a Dogen or a Shankara.

My interests have always lain in the direction of integrating philosophical texts, which is of course different from either lumping or splitting. I'm not saying that all traditions ultimately have the same message or deal with the same issues, or anything of the sort. But there is always conceptual diversity within any given tradition. Given such conceptual resources, I believe that elements within traditions can selectively speak to others outside their native tradition, sometimes more easily than they can speak to intra-tradition neighbors. Madhyamika Buddhists might very well have found French deconstructionists a more receptive audience, or perhaps they might have preferred Meister Eckhart. As a consequence, I have tried in my teaching and writing to both engage with philosophy as I have experienced its interests and concerns in my own time and my own cultural context with as wide a palate of material as possible.

In effect, I've tried to leave behind the Eastern or Asian on the one side and the Western or Anglo-European on the other as useful labels and try to do philosophy. So, philosophy has been comparative for me, but not in the sense of comparing and contrasting whole traditions or civilizations, but in the sense of comparing different philosophical options when reflecting on problems. Of course, in doing so, one must be cognizant that such voices do hail from very different places and times as well as civilizational contexts. So, I'm not suggesting this is an unproblematic pursuit. But I am suggesting that it is a problem that isn't unique to my approach.

In any case, I would also like to suggest, in all modesty, that there is a future in this. I think the future in terms of research and philosophical reflection is fairly clear, but I believe there is also a kind of institutional future in the sense of defining a purpose and program for this kind of comparative philosophizing. On the one hand, I have found a number of fellow travelers in the effort to expand the range of intellectual resources available to the scholarly world. I have had the honor of working on a project at Columbia University entitled "Expanding East Asian Studies." The focus of this group has been to expand the presence

of East Asian material, texts, films, issues, and so on within the traditional university curriculum, and not just in the sense of promoting more East Asian courses. Our intent has been to inject this material into traditional history, sociology, political science, or philosophy curricula, to normalize reference to Asian and Western intellectual and cultural voices.

In a sense, the vision of the future that this sort of effort offers is a vision where the Asian or even the comparative drops out as a disciplinary category. However, this requires a sort-of paradigm shift both in the way the academy sees our work and in the way we “Asianists” and “Comparativists” understand our scholarship. The primary justification for these latter terms is that they indicate the foreign. And as long as we understand the material we deal with as foreign, non-Western, then the issue of accessibility and relevance will continue to haunt us. It makes us defensive about what we do, perhaps too insistent that it *does* have a place in the academy. And it makes other academics reluctant to take this material on, to feel as comfortable reading and referencing it as they are with the Greeks. Of course, I am overstating things somewhat in terms of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ aspect, but a sense of ghettoization has always haunted our sense of place and purpose. But it need not be that way.

I think we need to endorse a kind of “cosmopolitanism,” as say articulated in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s recent work. (See *The Ethics of Identity* for example.) From a cosmopolitan point of view, we are all mongrels to some extent, all impure, and always borrowing a cup of sugar from our neighbors. It is no longer strange to reach out intellectually in the ways that I think are generally second nature to members of SACP. This perspectival adjustment addresses the foreign perception that I believe works to our detriment. Furthermore, it is an adjustment that I find increasingly evident in the so-called ‘academy’ itself. After all, my ‘home’ disciplinary institution, the American Philosophical Association, has been attempting to incorporate new perspectives—African-American, Native American, even Asian—for some time now. And while these attempts still tend to divide the world along ethnic/cultural lines, I think they represent an opportunity to make our intellectual and conceptual resources less foreign and ethnicized, more approachable, more cosmopolitan.

IV. Of Oxen and Rabbit

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Ox-Herding

In my experience one of the most effective ways to introduce students to Zen is through the ox-herding pictures. The ten ox-herding pictures, along with their verses and commentaries, depict the stages of practice leading to the enlightenment at which Zen (Chan) Buddhism aims. Because they dramatize the fact that practice reveals the true self, showing it to be the ordinary self doing ordinary things in the most extraordinary way, they serve to emphasize the importance of practice and also to help overcome the tendency to reify enlightenment and the enlightened self.

The story of the ox and ox-herd, separate at first, but united in the realization of the inner unity of all existence, is an old Taoist story, updated and modified by the twelfth century monk Guo-an Shi-yuan (also known as Kuo-an Shih-yuan or Kakuan-Shien). Guo-an revised and expanded the traditional Taoist story of the ox and the oxherd by creating a series of ten images and accompanying verses to simultaneously depict and narrate this well-known teaching. Guo-an's version subsequently became one of the most popular and enduring versions of the parable, especially in Japan. Nevertheless, despite the dominance of Guo-an's paintings, other Chan and Zen Buddhists and artists have repeatedly repainted and retranslated Guo-an's immortal pictures and verses throughout the following centuries. While the illustrations vary, the verses tend to be either direct or indirect translations of Guo-an's original verses, and their message stands unchanged.

Ox-herding is a wonderful metaphor that captures the importance of being constantly attentive to our experience and taking care of our mind. The ox symbolizes the enlightened mind which is the ultimate, undivided reality, the Buddha-nature, which is the ground of all existence. But the unruly ox that needs to be tamed and controlled also symbolizes the deluded, grasping mind. The transformation of the afflicted, deluded mind into the

enlightened mind points dramatically to their ultimate non-difference, captured by Huineng's saying, "Deluded, a Buddha is a sentient being; awakened, a sentient being is a Buddha." The oxherd symbolizes the self, who initially identifies with the individuated ego, separate from the ox, but who, with progressive enlightenment, comes to realize the fundamental identity with the ultimate reality which transcends all distinctions. When this happens, the oxherd realizes the ultimacy of all existence; there is nothing that is not the Buddha-nature. He now understands the preciousness and profundity of the most ordinary things of life, illuminating ordinary living with his enlightenment.

The Images

Although Guo'an's images are widely available, I prefer the images painted by Master Gyokusei Jikihara while in residence at New York's Zen Mountain Monastery in 1982. They are readily available on the Zen Mountain Monastery website:
<http://www.mro.org/zmm/zenarts/oxherdinggallery.html>.

I. The Search for the Bull

The first picture shows the oxherd desperately looking everywhere for his lost ox. He is dissatisfied with his life, unable to find the true happiness that he seeks. His efforts to secure wealth, friends, fame, and pleasure have not brought him the fulfillment he is seeking. Like many of us, he is seeking something, though he is not sure exactly what it is, that will make life meaningful and bring him lasting happiness.

II. Discovering the Footprints

The second picture shows that the oxherd has now caught sight of the tracks of the ox, bringing hope that his ox is not lost forever. This could be interpreted to mean that he has recognized his distress and has begun to seek for a solution in the teachings of Buddhism or in other teachings. But he is still at the stage of thinking and talking about his problems and various possible solutions. He has not yet found a path to follow and has not yet started to practice.

III. Perceiving the Bull

In the third picture, the oxherd actually catches sight of the ox. Now, having started to practice, he glimpses the hidden powers to heal his suffering. But he does not yet understand the source of these powers and how to apply them in his search for peace and contentment. The verse, in saying that “I hear the song of the nightingale.//The sun is warm, the wind is mild, the willows are green along the shore,” suggests that the reality the oxherd glimpses is not something separate from the ordinary things that he experiences, even though he does not yet know this.

IV. Catching the Bull

The fourth picture shows that the oxherd has now caught hold of the ox, using the bridle of discipline to control it. This symbolizes the rigorous discipline required of the Zen practitioner. Although he now realizes that the power to transform his life lies within himself, in his Buddha-nature, all of his previous conditionings are pulling and pushing him in different directions. Holding the rope tightly means that he must work hard to overcome his bad habits of the past that developed through the ignorance, hatred and craving that gave rise to all of his afflictions.

V. Taming the Bull

The fifth picture shows that disciplined practice can overcome the bad habits of previous conditioning and bring one into accord with the true nature of reality. Although discipline is still needed because the old habits of mind still have power, living in greater awareness of the true reality gives one the energy and direction to live a wholesome life. Now the ox willingly follows the oxherd home, meaning that the separation between oneself and true reality is being overcome.

VI. Riding the Bull Home

The sixth picture suggests the tranquility and joy that reunion with the source of existence brings; now the oxherd rides on the back of the ox, joyously playing his flute. The verse suggests that he has been freed from old fears and anxieties, and that so free, he can now express his creative energies in celebration of life.

VII. The Bull Transcended

In the seventh picture the oxherd has realized his identity with the ox; the ox can be forgotten, for it is none other than the experience of everyday things. This can be interpreted to mean that the separation of practice and realization has been overcome, as has the separation of ordinary reality and the ultimate reality. Until now he has been practicing meditation as a means of achieving enlightenment. But with realization of the non-duality of existence comes awareness of the identity of means and ends; practice itself is realization.

VIII. Both Bull and Self Transcended

The eighth picture tells us that when the duality of self and reality has been overcome not only is reality (the ox) forgotten, but so is the self (the oxherd); the circle symbolizes the all-encompassing emptiness that constitutes the ground of all things. Now, in the awareness of unceasing transformation and total interconnectedness in every experience one is freed from all craving and hatred for the other. In this freedom there is a sense of the wholeness and perfection of ordinary things.

IX. Reaching the Source

As the ninth picture shows, when self and reality (as constructs) are left behind, then things are revealed to be just what they are in themselves; streams meander on of themselves and red flowers naturally bloom red. In the ordinary events of life are found the most profound truths. Only by seeking the ox as a separate ultimate reality could the oxherd discover that there is no separate reality; that the ultimate is to be found in the ordinary.

X. In the World

Finally, the tenth picture shows the enlightened oxherd entering the town marketplace, doing all of the ordinary things that everyone else does. But because of his deep awareness everything he does is quite extraordinary. He does not retreat from the world, but shares his enlightened existence with everyone around him. Not only does he lead fishmongers and innkeepers in the way of the Buddha but, because of his creative energy and the radiance of his life, even withered trees bloom. Now, having experienced enlightenment, he can really practice the Buddha-Way.

Further Reading

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Jacques Amato, the Rabbit

A Rabbit's Report

Hi, I'm Rabbit who periodically visits Professor Dr. Doonaught, who is a grandniece of Dr. Doolittle, or so I understand. Around this time of the year my hind legs get the itch to hop over to her place. "Hello, Mr. Rabbit," Professor Doonaught warmly welcomed me, and said, "In 2004, natural disasters hit many parts of the world, but I think the most terrible one was the *tsunami* that assaulted the coasts of the Indian Ocean, wasn't it?" Yes, I totally agree, I said. Professor Doonaught continued: "You know, when I heard the news of the *tsunami*, the first thing that came to my mind was the story narrated by Lafcadio Hearn." So, here is the story.²⁴

Lafcadio Hearn's story

In a small Japanese fishing village with a population of 400, there lived an old man Hamaguchi Gohei and his grandson, Tada. Gohei's knowledge and compassion won the respect of the villagers, who addressed him as grandfather (*jiisama*).

In one late-summer evening, after a repressively hot and muggy day, Gohei, also known as *chōja* ("the wealthy old man"), looked down towards the village and the sea from his house up on the hill. Villagers were getting ready to celebrate the rice-harvesting festival that evening. He thought to himself: on a day like this with heavy oppressive atmospheric pressure, an earthquake tends to happen. Then, indeed, a quake shook the ground. The *chōja* "rose to his feet, and looked over the sea. It had darkened quite suddenly. It was acting strangely. It seemed to be moving against the wind. *It was running away from the land.*"

Although he himself had never seen such a phenomenon before, he remembered what his grandfather had told him. He understood what the sea was going to do.

"*Tada! Quick, very quick! Light me a torch.*" Without losing a second, the old man ran to his rice field with the torch in hand. The water had already been drained from the

²⁴ Lafcadio Hearn, "A Living God," *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1971), pp. 1-28. Its first edition was published in 1897 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin).

rice paddy. All the rice plants were cut and being dried, ready for the grains to be harvested. The old man put the torch to each stack of rice plants. Tada, shocked by this sight, ran down to the village and cried out, “My grandpa is gone mad! Help!” Villagers noticed fire and smoke rising from the hillside, and ran one after another in order to extinguish the fire. Soon, every villager was on the plateau.

The old man looked to the villagers, then the sea, and shouted: “Here it comes!”
(We shall quote Hearn in full:

“Through the twilight eastward all looked, and saw at the edge of the dusky horizon a long, lean, dim line like the shadowing of a coast where no coast ever was,—a line that thickened as they gazed, that broadened as a coast-line broadens to the eyes of one approaching it, yet incomparably more quickly. For that long darkness was the returning sea, towering like a cliff, and coursing more swiftly than the kite flies.”

“Tsunami!” Shrieked the people; and then all shrieks and all sounds and all power to hear sounds were annihilated by a nameless shock heavier than any thunder, as the colossal swell smote the shore with a weight that sent a shudder through the hills, and with a foam-burst like a blaze of sheet-lightning. Then for an instant nothing was visible but a storm of spray rushing up the slope like a cloud; and the people scattered back in panic from the mere menace of it. When they looked again they saw a white horror of sea raving over the place of their homes. It drew back roaring, and tearing out the bowels of the land as it went. Twice, thrice, five times the sea struck and ebbed, but each time with lesser surges: then it returned to its ancient bed and stayed—still raging, as after a typhoon.²⁵

“That’s why I put the fire on the rice plants,” the old man said, breaking the silence. Villagers realized that their lives were saved by the old man’s pretending to be mad. In an unspeakable surge of thanks, they knelt on the ground before the *chōja* and bowed in deep respect. The old man, out of relief and now exhausted, cried a little, and then said: “My house can shelter many people, and the temple over there on the hill can shelter many more people. Everyone will sleep under a roof.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

It took many years for the village to recover from the devastation of the *tsunami*, but they did. And the villagers, in order to express their gratitude for the old man, who had lost all of his wealth, built a shrine and worshipped him as a deity (*kami*), “*myojin*,” the deity of light.

This, in short, is Hearn’s narration.

Natural disasters & children’s psychological rehabilitation

As the title of Hearn’s story, “The Living God,” shows, Hearn’s main interest in telling this story was to make sense of the phenomenon of how living human beings could be deified in Shinto, the native religion of Japan. But for us, perhaps, a more relevant point is that we may learn from Hearn’s story how we could escape from a *tsunami* or a natural disaster like it, said Prof. Doonaught. She further said: “I recently read in a Japanese paper that a man by the name of Kojima Tadashi, who had experienced the Kōbe earthquake of 1995, has been staging a production of a puppet show for children suffering from the psychological trauma after the quake. Mr. Kojima noticed then that the children, absorbed in the puppet theatre, were cheered up by the story and smiles returned to their faces. Mr. Kojima saw the potential of puppet theatre as a means to impart to children the knowledge of how to protect oneself from natural disasters. Therefore, Mr. Kojima and friends arranged this story by Hearn into a puppet play, ‘Fire on the Rice Plants,’ and have been performing it to children and parents since 2003. In the wake of the recent *tsunami* over the Indian Ocean, they performed the puppet play on the last day of the U.N.-sponsored international conference on the prevention of natural disasters.²⁶ After reading this news, Prof. Doonaught said, “I was even more eager to bring this story by Hearn to the attention of the people.”

Moreover, Prof. Doonaught discovered that Hearn’s narration of the *tsunami* story has been adapted into a picture book for children, entitled *the Wave*, by Margaret Hodges and illustrated by Blair Lent.²⁷

²⁶ *Asahi Shinbun*, January 22, 2005: “Tsunami ningyō-geki, sekai e jōen, kokuren bōsaikaigi de Shizuoka no gekidan” [A puppet play on tsunami to be performed by the troupe in Shizuoka to the entire world—at the U.N. disaster prevention conference]. According to this newspaper article, Hearn based his story on the actual *tsunami* disaster that struck the village of Hirokawa in Wakayama Prefecture in December 1854.

Now, it is my turn to share my story. My animal friends told me some heroic deeds of colleagues at the time of the *tsunami*, which I now would like to tell you.

The tsunami and the instinct of animals

A certain Mr. Dan, who trains elephants and runs a small tourist business in a resort town in southern Thailand, heard his eight elephants make a strange call he had never heard before on the morning of December 26, 2004. It was around 8 a.m., the exact time when the earthquake occurred off the Island of Sumatra. About an hour later, those elephants again got excited and began to rush up the nearby hill, carrying tourists on their back. When Mr. Dan looked back, he saw the wave rising in the offing. The elephants used their trunks to pick up the tourists, who were by then scuttling to flee from the quickly approaching menace, and placed each one of them on their backs. Thanks to these elephants, the tourists managed to escape the danger.

Another piece of news I heard was that in a nearby county about 100 water buffalos were leisurely grazing. Then they all looked to the sea and broke into a frenzied run towards the hill. Villagers, thinking that their buffalos were running away, chased their livestock to the hill. By the time the wave hit the village, the villagers were all safe on the hill, without even a scratch.²⁸

As a rabbit, I cannot help but feel extremely proud of my colleagues for their deeds! Ahem, we animals have an instinct to perceive imminent physical danger!

Nature as a teacher

Having heard my story, Prof. Doonaught was quite impressed and said: “We human beings must learn to observe your behavior better, don’t you think?” She also said that “understanding” the power of nature may be the first step towards averting a natural disaster. That is, so long as human beings inhabit the earth, “listening to nature” is indispensable for humanity’s survival. Eventually, our conversation moved on to topics

²⁷ Margaret Hodges, illustrated by Blair Lent, *the Wave*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964).

²⁸ *Asahi Shinbun*, January 3, 2005, “Tsunami chokuzen, zō ga kankōkyaku nose takadai ni, Tai nanbu de nan nogareru” [Right before the tsunami, elephants took tourists on their back to a plateau, tourists escaped from the disaster].

such as the problem of global warming. There are a lot of things humanity must do concerning these issues, but perhaps the most essential thing is to depart from the worldview that is rooted in economic profitability. Would the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, for instance, then even be an issue? I took leave on that note. Till next time. Adieu!

V. Reviews

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James Behuniak Jr., *Mencius on Becoming Human* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2004).

In *Mencius on Becoming Human*, James Behuniak provides a comprehensive reading of the *Mencius*, ranging from cosmology and metaphysics to familial relations to human ethical development. This reading is frequently enlightening, sometimes surprising, and consistently interesting. Behuniak displays a thorough knowledge of Warring States texts and a remarkable ability to draw these together into a coherent perspective on the *Mencius*. The basic claim of the book is that the early Chinese world-view is oriented by processes rather than substances and that the language we use to discuss it should reflect this difference. While this basic claim is fairly common, connecting to claims that the early Chinese worldview is non-dualistic and organic, Behuniak is particularly thorough in reconstructing its details and applying it to the *Mencius*. This work is done primarily in chapter one, which argues for a common world-view that explicates the structure of the world through transformations and patterns of *qi* (氣), which Behuniak follows Manfred Porkert in translating as “configurative energy.” This configurative energy takes on various arrangements or shapes, which in their particularity influence but do not determine subsequent changes:

Given that fact that no shape is immutable in this cosmology, shape must be considered not as the fixed ‘nature’ of a thing but rather as the momentary consummation of an ongoing process—one that is, in itself, the dynamic starting point for the next phase of transformation. Shape, then, is something that indicates a ‘disposition’ rather than a fixed ‘nature.’ By virtue of causal propensity (*shi* 勢), the ‘disposition’ of any configuration

issues spontaneously into features that both define and reconfigure the trajectory of its discursive formation.²⁹

In establishing this worldview, Behuniak draws on a number of early texts, including *Zhuangzi*, *Dao De Jing*, and *Yi Jing*, as well as the recently unearthed Guodian bamboo strips. He ties these together nicely with a discussion of Tang Junyi's "Exposition on the Unique Kind of Basic Spirit in Chinese Culture."

This placement of the *Mencius* in a broader context is one of the greatest strengths of this book, and reflects one of Behuniak's greatest skills as an interpreter, his insistence on context and continuity, emphasizing that the *Mencius* should make sense in the broader context of Warring States thought and that its ethical and political views cannot be isolated from its (and our) metaphysical assumptions. The difficulty, as he admits, lies in discovering what these metaphysical assumptions were, particularly in Confucian texts that rarely discuss ontology. Some readers may object to reading the *Mencius* in the context of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Yi Jing*, but Behuniak's interpretation is strengthened by placing *Mencius* in a narrower context as well, that of Si-Meng thought, which refers to a line of Confucian thought running through Zisi to *Mencius*. *Mencius* has long been associated with the *Great Learning (Da Xue)* and *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong)*, but most Chinese scholars have taken the Guodian texts as supporting this linkage and filling out one line of Confucian thought. Behuniak is the first person in English to use these materials extensively to inform the *Mencius*, and this is one of the great values of his book. Although the reconstruction of *Mencius*'s own cosmological and metaphysical views necessarily remains speculative, Behuniak rightly concludes that the burden of proof lies with those who want to read the *Mencius* as discontinuous with this broader context. He nicely summarizes the place of his own interpretation:

To those accustomed to a more generic reading of human development in the *Mencius*, the argument ahead might be anticipated as radical. I feel, however, that what follows is the more conservative reading. To read the notion of human development as end-driven in the *Mencius* is to present *Mencius* as a truly revolutionary theorist of 'human nature' in classical China. I am not prepared or inclined to argue such a radical interpretation.

²⁹ James Behuniak, *Mencius on Becoming Human* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 9.

The following assessment is more modest. I maintain that Mencius is working within the parameters of certain commonly held assumptions: assumptions about botanical growth, transformation, development, and about the behavior of ‘configurative energy’ (*qi* 氣).³⁰

This broader context serves to establish a more particular point, concerning the nature and function of human *xing*, often translated as “human nature,” but translated by Behuniak as “dispositions.” Following the framework set up in chapter one, *xing* is taken as a conjunction of forces which are inherently active, thus resulting in determinate dispositions. This *xing* is not the instantiation of some universal ‘essence’ and thus does not inherently contain an end which can be actualized or fallen short of. It is generated in a concrete context that is partly biological but also social, historical, and cultural, and it develops through interaction with this context. Behuniak summarizes:

Rather than entailing the notion of a fixed ‘nature,’ I maintain that this cosmology more readily sponsors the notion of dynamic ‘dispositions’ that ‘take shape’ in transaction with formative conditions and issue into unique qualities over the span of their development.³¹

Behuniak develops his interpretation of *xing* first by examining these dispositions as they emerge in feelings, which have a direction or disposition inseparable from the context in which they emerge and develop. In chapter three, he moves to consider the most important context for the most important feelings—the family. While it is common to point out the importance of family in Confucian thought, this chapter is the most thorough account I have found of *why* the family is so central and how the centrality of family among ethical concerns is integrated with the importance of family as the context from which these concerns emerge at all.

Chapters four and five work out how this foundation in the family extends into ethical development. Some of Behuniak’s claims in these chapters will be controversial, particularly the argument that *xing* is not primarily biological and universal but rather produced through culture and family, but his claims are well supported and difficult to dispute. His fresh orientation toward the *Mencius* leads to many insightful interpretations,

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. xx.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. xxi.

often illuminating passages that tend to be neglected. For example, in a discussion with Chanxiang, who had become a follower of Xuxing's ideology of simple agrarianism, Mencius gives a history of his own culture that includes:

People have a dao—if they eat their fill and wear warm clothes, resting at home but are without education, then they are close to animals. The sage had concern for this, and made Xie minister to them, teaching them the human relations: father and son have familial affection, sovereign and minister have rightness, husband and wife have distinction, old and young have order, and friends have sincerity. (3A4)³²

Behuniak emphasizes that Mencius here projects a time when even the most basic responses of our *xing*, feelings between family members, did not exist and that human beings were then close to animals. According to this passage, the most basic context necessary for the appearance and development of human feelings was culturally instituted. He concludes:

The Chanxiang episode would suggest that the human disposition, if understood in terms of germinal, moral sensibilities rooted in one's family upbringing, is understood by Mencius more as a historical, genealogical inheritance than as a genetic or biological one.³³

This is just one of many examples in which Behuniak's reading prompted me to see things in the *Mencius* that I had not previously noticed or taken seriously. Even if one remains ultimately unconvinced by the basic argument of the book, these insights make it necessary reading for anyone interested in the *Mencius*.

While the main focus of *Mencius on Becoming Human* is on the *Mencius*, it is also clearly intended as a contribution to a methodology for inter-cultural philosophy, where the greatest danger is accidentally importing our own assumptions into the foreign text. Perhaps the nicest application of this approach is to our understanding of botanical metaphors. While most interpreters agree that these metaphors play a central role in the *Mencius*, Behuniak is the first person I know of to explicitly raise what should have been an obvious question—what conception of plant life is at work in these metaphors? He

³² My translation, based on Jiao Xun, *Mengzi Zhengyi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987).

³³ Behuniak, p. 76.

argues that most interpreters have unconsciously taken a certain view of plants for granted, relying largely on Aristotelian assumptions, and that this interpretation does not fit the context of Warring States thought. Regardless of whether or not one accepts Behuniak's answer to the question, the question he raises must be addressed and the significance of the metaphors cannot be taken for granted.

This concern for methodology manifests itself most clearly in a concern for translation, which again points to Behuniak's focus on continuity and context—we cannot separate the words we use from the metaphysical contexts in which they arise. Following the work of David Hall and Roger Ames, Behuniak argues that differences between classical Chinese and European metaphysical and cosmological views make the use of European philosophical terms dangerous and misleading. He focuses his criticism particularly on the importation of an Aristotelian vocabulary into the *Mencius*. Many of his own translations are surprising and probably controversial, for example, translating *xin* (usually “heart/mind”) as “feelings,” *tian* (usually “Heaven”) as “forces,” and *dao* as “most productive course.” These translations can be disorienting and even frustrating for someone familiar with other translations, but this disorientation cannot but be a good thing—why do we pursue intercultural philosophy if not to render the familiar and obvious more strange and disorienting? At the very least, the issues of translation raised by Behuniak must be addressed and taken seriously. Surely he is right that translating *xing* as “nature” has misleading connotations. Similarly, there are clear dangers in applying an Aristotelian vocabulary that arose through a distinction between potential and actual being and a derivation of teleology from the striving of all things to imitate the eternal, both of which have no place in early Chinese thought. At the same time, there surely is some value in maintaining a vocabulary consistent with earlier translations, and one might plausibly argue that the interests of intercultural philosophy are served by bringing a text like the *Mencius* into the terms of European philosophy in order to allow for dialogue, as, for example, those working on an intercultural approach to virtue ethics have done. At root, one basic question emerges from Behuniak's concern with translation—can terms developed in a substance oriented European philosophy be sufficiently stripped of those connotations in order to be used in discussing Chinese philosophy? If they can, then there is some practical good in doing so, but if they cannot, we must develop a more radical vocabulary. The dilemma is essentially that same as that faced by the Jesuit missionaries who debated whether or not

Shangdi could be used to translate *Deus*. The persistence of this dilemma suggests that no simple answer lies on one side or the other, but in struggling to find some middle ground between them. This struggle to work out an appropriate English vocabulary for discussing Confucianism clearly remains a long way from resolution, but in any case, Behuniak makes a valuable contribution to that struggle.

In short, *Mencius on Becoming Human* is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding early Confucian thought and will be of great value for anyone interested in comparative or intercultural philosophy more broadly.

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Hiroshi Nara, *The Structure of Detachment: the Aesthetic Vision of Kuki Shūzō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004). Pp. x + 185. Hardcover \$38.00. Paper \$16.00.

The centerpiece of *The Structure of Detachment* is Hiroshi Nara's translation of Kuki Shūzō's *Iki no Kōzō*. Yet Nara's volume also contains a good deal more to interest both seasoned Kuki scholars as well as newcomers to this intriguing work. In addition to the explanatory remarks that introduce iki to the contemporary reader and provide a contextual background to Kuki's thought, three critical essays have also been included to reexamine this text in a fresh light. These essays, written by Nara, J. Thomas Rimer, and Jon Mark Mikkelsen, provide thoughtful commentaries on Kuki's historical and philosophical legacy.

Nara opens the book by presenting a brief account of the iki sensibility, defined loosely as an "urbane, plucky, stylishness" that emerges as a fashionable yet reserved way of life in early eighteenth-century Edo (p. 1). Although the elegant coquettishness of iki has garnered comparisons to European dandyism, the resemblance remains superficial at best. Indeed, as Nara asserts, Kuki's aim is to present the social and cultural phenomena of iki in such a way as to convey its spirit within the context of Western aesthetic terms while still preserving its unique and irreducibly Japanese character. Realizing that iki is more than merely a concept that can be described by words and is instead something lived, a "mode of being," Kuki makes use of Heideggerian hermeneutics as his bridge between the two worlds (p. 4). Faced with the inundation of Western modernism that prevailed in the time shortly prior to publication in 1930, it is through this hermeneutic approach that he attempts to give voice to the experience of iki in a way that is both authentic to the past yet germane to the culture of his day. Following Heidegger's methodology, Kuki depicts iki as having a historicity of Being which is not simply that of a bygone tradition, but one that continues to survive as an ethnically specific aesthetic.

It is no surprise, then, that the first section of Kuki's *Structure of Iki* begins with a discussion of meaning, language, and the inability to universalize certain particularities. That is, though we may draw comparisons between iki and non-Japanese aesthetic notions,

there will always be an element of *iki* that remains untranslatable. *Iki* is described by Kuki as a “phenomenon of consciousness” that resists encapsulation by eidetic terms (p. 18). Hence, Kuki turns his attention to the objective expressions of *iki* in the clothing, hairstyles, artistry and architecture created by its Edokko adherents. In these expressions, the inherent sophistication of *iki* is exhibited by three main characteristics: a romantically inclined *bitai* or “coquetry” that seeks the conquest (if not fulfillment) of romantic desire, a “brave composure” of *ikiji* modeled after the Bushido way of the *samurai*, and finally, a Buddhist element of detached *akirame* or “resignation” which ultimately distances a person from attachment to worldly concerns. Based upon this intensional structure, *iki* may be thought of as the lived experience of the interplay between these relations. It is a way of being in the world that may be sharply contrasted with all that is vulgar, unrefined, or otherwise fails to realize the delicate subtleties of its definitive taste.

Nara later reproaches Kuki, seemingly correctly, for taking too much liberty with his linguistic interpretations in order to make some imaginative etymological leaps. A similar suspicion arises in regard to Kuki’s exhaustive consideration of all things *iki*, complete with a three-dimensional prismatic diagram and an analysis of horizontal versus vertical stripes. On a related note, it is in addressing Kuki’s detailed presentation that one of the book’s strengths may also be one of its weaknesses. Namely, although Kuki’s references are supported by copious explanatory endnotes and illustrations, they are inconveniently positioned in the middle of the volume. The result is an ongoing, and at times tedious, process of shuffling back and forth between sections. This frustration is a shame, given that many of these notes are quite informative and should not be overlooked.

Kuki concludes by reemphasizing that the nature of his project is meant to display *iki* not as something reducible to its parts (referred to as a series of elusive, revelatory “conceptual moments”) but as a mode of access to the experience of meaning in Japanese life (p. 55). In this regard, his words are to be employed solely as a guide and it would be “a grave error” to think that one can comprehend *iki* in its entirety simply by studying its objective manifestations (p. 56).

Given the prominence of the hermeneutic approach throughout *The Structure of Iki*, a key focus of the ensuing response essays in Section Two is the association between Kuki and Heidegger. Despite their mutual admiration, famously documented in Heidegger’s *A Dialogue on Language*, Nara asserts that it is misguided to presume that this relationship

justifiably overshadows the broader range of engagement that Kuki held with other Western thinkers. Perhaps less acknowledged but potentially more significant, Nara believes, are Kuki's exchanges with Husserl and Bergson. It is Bergson who is acknowledged early in the book and with whom Kuki seems to have a genuine affinity in regard to considerations of memory and time. Moreover, strands of Bergsonian thought are especially evident in Kuki's attempts to develop an understanding of *iki* as something experientially meaningful and continuously present over time.

Other potentially French facets of Kuki's thought are taken up and expanded upon in "Literary Stances," the subsequent contribution by J. Thomas Rimer. Departing from philosophical connections, Rimer seeks to disclose the literary influences that may have played a part in shaping Kuki's authorial style. Comparisons are made between Kuki's treatment of *iki* and similarities found in Alain's playful writing technique, Stendhal's cultural commentary, and Baudelaire's dandyism. Although some correlations are more speculative than others, Rimer's essay provides a glimpse into the personal side of Kuki's professional activities.

In the book's final essay, "Reading Kuki Shūzō's *The Structure of Iki* in the Shadow of L'affaire Heidegger," Jon Mark Mikkelsen resumes the debate surrounding the appropriate degree to which Kuki may be linked with Heidegger. While he is careful not to deny the obvious, prevailing influence Heidegger's phenomenology had on Kuki's work, Mikkelsen nevertheless concurs with Nara that the extent of their philosophical kinship should not be overstated. First, Mikkelsen argues that a comparison between Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* and Kuki's *Structure* shows that the two thinkers differ dramatically in their perceptions on art and, furthermore, that Kuki's work ultimately takes his hermeneutic approach in a separate direction than that of his mentor (p. 156). Secondly, Mikkelsen calls attention to the disservice that is done to Kuki by attempting to read his work as though it were being filtered through the lens of a Heideggerean perspective. Not only does this unfairly diminish Kuki's stature as an innovative thinker in his own right, Mikkelsen claims that it subjects Kuki's work to inaccurate interpretations and, consequently, unwarranted criticisms. Most damaging, he contends, is that a combination of these factors has led to erroneous allegations that Kuki's ardor for a distinctly ethnic aesthetic can be viewed as comparable to Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism and, in addition, as a contributing cause to the rise of imperialist totalitarianism

in 1930s Japan. Mikkelsen maintains that there is no substantial evidence to suggest that Kuki held any such political motivations. Rather, the more accurate conclusion seems to be that Kuki's objective is to illuminate the experience of the *iki* sensibility and assert the value of its cultural particularity so that *iki* might be recognized and appreciated on a global level.

Kuki remained loyal to Heidegger and, in the years following his return home, continued to advance Heidegger's ideas with Japanese audiences. Nonetheless, the caveats against reading Kuki's work primarily as the product of external influences should be heeded. By reaffirming the independent standing of *The Structure of Iki* and the importance of Kuki's aesthetic vision, Mikkelsen's observations bring Nara's book to a satisfying close.

VI. News and Announcements

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The editors of The SACP Forum for Asian and Comparative Philosophy welcome specialized and general papers in Asian and Comparative philosophy.

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Essays and discussions should be no longer than 8,000 words.

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Manuscripts should be prepared for electronic copyediting and typesetting. Prospective authors should follow the style of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Fifteenth Edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) and *Philosophy East West*.

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