# COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

*An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*

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of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*

*Comparative Philosophy* is a peer-reviewed international journal of philosophy, with emphasis on the constructive engagement of distinct approaches to philosophical issues, problems, themes from various philosophical traditions/styles/ orientations of doing philosophy for the sake of their joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise, and/or on general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy. [For further information about the emphasis, coverage and orientation of the journal, see the homepage of its website.]

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*Comparative Philosophy* is to primarily publish original articles of high-quality. Submissions of articles to *Comparative Philosophy* are judged through a blind refereeing process and selected for publication on the basis of their academic quality, relevance to constructive engagement, and significance to comparative philosophy. The editorial team is free to publish as few articles as are judged to meet a high standard of quality. Depending on need, the Journal might include a special column of essays on a specific theme, a "Constructive-Engagement Dialogue" section, or a "Recent Work" section. [For "Authors Guidelines", see the "Submissions" part at the website of the Journal.]

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# COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

**An International Journal of Constructive Engagement
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**JOURNAL THEME INTRODUCTION**

**ARTICLES**

**RECENT WORK**

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# ON CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
# OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY:
# A JOURNAL THEME INTRODUCTION

### BO MOU

**ABSTRACT**: *In this journal theme introduction, first, I explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the journal* Comparative Philosophy *is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the constructive engagement strategy. Second, to characterize more clearly and accurately some related methodological points of the constructive-engagement strategy, and also to explain how constructive engagement is possible, I introduce some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and a meta-methodological framework and endeavor to identify adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles in comparative studies. Third, as a case analysis, I show how the constructive-engagement reflective practice bears on recent studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, especially in the past decade, for two purposes: to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterization of the constructive engagement strategy, and to identify and explain some constructive morals that might have general significance for comparative studies.*

**Keywords**: *comparative philosophy, constructive engagement, methodology*

One crucial feature of comparative philosophy, as understood in a philosophically interesting and significant way and as emphatically explored in the journal *Comparative Philosophy* ('Journal' for short), lies in its *constructive engagement* goal and methodological strategy, which constitutes the theme of the Journal and is highlighted in its full title '*Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*'. The constructive-engagement goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy ('constructive-engagement strategy' for short), briefly speaking, is to inquire into how, via reflective criticism and self-criticism, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issue,

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themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point.

In this journal-theme-introduction essay, first, in Section 1, I introduce and briefly explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the Journal is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the constructive engagement strategy and goal. Second, in Section 2, to characterize more clearly and accurately some related methodological points of the constructive-engagement strategy, and also to explain how the constructive engagement is possible, I introduce a meta-philosophical meta-methodological framework via some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and endeavor to identify adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles in comparative studies. Third, in Section 3, as a case analysis, I show how the constructive-engagement reflective practice bears on recent studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, especially in the past decade, for two purposes: to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterization of the constructive engagement strategy, and to identify and explain some constructive morals that have general significance for other tradition-vs.-tradition (and/or orientation-vs.-orientation) comparative studies.

Among parts of this journal-theme introduction below, some are descriptive in nature and concern certain relevant reflective endeavors, some are interpretative elaborations of them, and some other parts are rather this author's prescriptive reflection on the involved issues. Also, note that some portions of the subsequent discussion are related to the papers included in this issue of the Journal in two ways: first, the suggested meta-methodological framework might be useful for thinking of how to understand the constructive-engagement relation between the distinct approaches under examination; second, some parts directly explore the involved methodological issues of comparative philosophy as addressed by some of these papers.

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The label 'comparative philosophy' is not new. Historically speaking, its usage has been diverse.[1] My aim here is neither to give a review of the usage, nor to evaluate the reflective practice under the label in the past, nor to argue about which word or phrase would be better to label the philosophical scholarship that we currently use the label

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[1] It has been used with the primary historical orientation by some with their primary focus on historical description of similarities and differences of figures or texts under comparative examination. Moreover, whether or not with the foregoing historical orientation, the label is sometimes used narrowly, being limited to comparative studies of different approaches from different ethnic/national traditions or groups; or, more narrowly, it is sometimes considered to focus merely on the works of "under-represented" ethnic/national groups.

'comparative philosophy' to identify.[2] For the purpose of this writing, I will positively and straightforwardly present and explain how comparative philosophy as explored in the Journal is understood and how it is intrinsically related to the goal and strategy of constructive engagement.

One strategic goal and basic methodological strategy of comparative philosophy as understood in a philosophically interesting and significant way can be summarized in this manner: to inquire into how, via reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. This strategic goal and basic methodological strategy might as well be called the 'constructive engagement' goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy ('constructive-engagement strategy' for short). [3] The constructive-

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[2] Indeed, the label 'comparative' can be misleading, as it appears to suggest that comparative philosophy focuses just on, and stops at, mere descriptive comparisons of similarities and difference of views under examination. Nevertheless, such cases in which involved labels for disciplines or subjects tend to be misleading are not odd. Consider the term 'philosophy', whose original meaning can be traced back to the literal sense of its Greek original '*philosophia*'—the love of wisdom. Surely, the love of wisdom is not the privilege of philosophical inquiry; reflective pursuers in any intellectual inquiries can possess the trait. But the label 'philosophy' (or its counterparts in the phonetic languages) can be, and actually is, used *referentially* (if not fully descriptively at the initial stage of using the term) to designate such a generic type of reflective inquiry: (1) philosophical inquiry can ask any fundamental questions, and can have various fundamental concerns, about the world and human beings; (2) philosophical inquiry is critical in nature in the sense that it does not *blindly* claim or accept anything and nothing is *absolutely* excluded from a philosophical inquirer's gaze; (3) philosophical inquiry establishes its conclusion *intrinsically* and *primarily through argumentation, justification, and explanation* rather than being based on faith. The foregoing three crucial features of philosophical inquiry have *thus* become the due contents of the very notion of *philosophical* inquiry as held in the (worldwide) *philosophical* community. By the same token, the label 'comparative philosophy' can be used *referentially* (if not descriptively at the initial stage of using the term) as a conventional and convenient means to designate a kind of philosophical scholarship that is to be characterized here and explored by the Journal. With the foregoing clarification and explanation, the phrase 'comparative philosophy' can thus be rendered harmless but useful and convenient as a label for one significant kind of philosophical scholarship, specifically speaking, and for one significant methodological strategy of philosophical scholarship, generally speaking.

[3] It is noted that exactly how to label this strategic goal and methodological strategy of comparative philosophy is a relatively unimportant thing; one can label it in some other ways one would reasonably prefer. The methodological strategy is characterized in terms of 'constructive engagement' with two major considerations. First, the key words in the phrase ('constructive' and 'engagement') and the phrase as a whole do literally capture some of its crucial features. Second, the label has been historically associated with the strategy both in some relevant documents in print and in recent reflective practice of comparative philosophy that have been guided by the methodological strategy (see the discussion in Section 3). It is also important to note that the key term 'philosophy' or 'philosophical' that appears in this passage is to be understood in the sense as identified in the previous note.

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engagement strategy of comparative philosophy highlights a number of characteristic features of comparative philosophy and thus bears on the coverage, emphasis, orientation and goal of the Journal.

First, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy emphasizes or is featured by the *philosophical-issue-engagement* that aims at how thinkers' ideas and texts under comparative examination can make a joint contribution to a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance that can be commonly or jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation. The philosophical-issue-engagement actually constitutes one major methodological orientation in carrying out comparative philosophy. I will further elaborate and clarify the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Second, the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy emphasizes or is featured by *philosophical interpretation* that aims to enhance our understanding of (ancient or contemporary) thinkers' ideas/texts under a comparative examination and their relevance to the philosophical issue addressed in the comparative examination via relevant and effective conceptual and explanatory resources (including those from contemporary philosophy), whether or not those resources were actually used by those thinkers. This emphasis is intrinsically related to the foregoing philosophical-issue-engagement emphasis. On the one hand, *jointly-concerned* issues or topics in the philosophical-issue-engagement are identified and explained in comparative studies *through philosophical interpretation* and for the sake of enhancing our understanding and treatment of the issues and topics in philosophical inquiry, instead of being (exclusively) relied on or determined by what the (ancient) figures or texts under examination historically said. On the other hand, one's reflective efforts in the philosophical-issue-engagement often (though not always) motivate and guide one to carry out philosophical interpretations of thinkers' ideas or texts[4] under a comparative examination in a certain direction, from a certain broad philosophical vantage point, and through certain conceptual and explanatory resources that are most relevant to the philosophical issue or topic involved in the comparative examination. The philosophical-interpretation concern actually constitutes another major methodological orientation in carrying out comparative philosophy.[5] I will also further

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[4] Indeed, for the purpose of this writing, I intentionally leave it open whether we are trying to enhance our understanding of (ancient) thinkers' *ideas* or their *texts*, by using the phrase "ideas or texts" and being deliberately vague on it, although I have my own position on the issue, which will be elaborated in another writing, and although a thinker's ideas and her texts can be talked about in a compatible way in contrast to the position of (a certain form of) radical textualism to the effect that we simply cannot get behind a thinker's texts to interpret her ideas and that there can be no analysis of an ancient thinker's intentional states. In the subsequent discussion, I sometimes simply use the phrase 'a thinker's ideas' for short to refer to her ideas or texts. I am thankful to Marshall Willman for his helpful explanation of how he views the issue correctly pointing out that one can distinguish a thinker's ideas as were instantiated in her intentional states at the time when a given work was written from the ideas that are implied or determined by the text itself (given a certain relevant framework of interpretation).

[5] Sometimes one can carry out philosophical interpretation of a thinker's idea or text (say, via some appropriate conceptual/explanatory resources of contemporary philosophy to enhance understanding)

elaborate and clarify the philosophical-interpretation-concerned orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Third, the constructive-engagement character of comparative philosophy places its joint emphasis on the philosophical-issue-engagement concern and the philosophical-interpretation concern without ignoring or dismissing the historical-description-giving approach that aims at collecting historical data and giving accurate descriptions of relevant historical matters of fact. What comparative philosophy, understood in a philosophically interesting way (through the foregoing constructive-engagement strategy), alerts us to is this: although historical descriptions provide necessary sources and data bases for further philosophical interpretation and elaboration, comparative philosophy (as *philosophical* inquiry) can neither stop at *merely* giving historical descriptions and being content with seeking apparent similarities and differences of thinkers' views or texts under comparative examination without further philosophical interpretation and philosophical-issue-engagement, nor even take the historical-description-giving approach as the *exclusively* legitimate approach in comparative studies. Likewise, I will further elaborate and clarify the relation between the three orientations or approaches addressed above when elaborating the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation and the philosophical-interpretation-concerned orientation from the methodological point of view in a meta-methodological framework to be suggested in the next section.

Fourth, as far as the coverage of comparative philosophy is concerned, the foregoing first methodological emphasis or feature determines that the coverage of the Journal is not restricted to, but can include, any particular comparative-engagement pairs of distinct approaches from distinct philosophical traditions [6] or different

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without explicitly or directly addressing some philosophical issue. In this way, the foregoing two concerns or orientations are distinct both at the conceptual level and at the level of reflective practice, though they are closely related especially when one carries out comparative studies in philosophical inquiry.

[6] The term 'distinct (philosophical) tradition' narrowly means a distinct culture-associated philosophical tradition: generally speaking, it consists of (1) its various classical movements of philosophical thought in a collectively-distinctive cultural, linguistic and geographic setting and (2) their contemporary studies. For example, by 'Chinese philosophical tradition' here I primarily mean various movements of philosophical thought in China from the *Zhou* Dynasty (roughly eleventh century to 256 B.C.) through the early *Qing* Dynasty (1644 – mid 19th century) and their contemporary developments and studies ('Chinese philosophy' for short below). Due to the purpose of this writing, I neither intend nor pretend to be able to exhaustively identify other distinct philosophical traditions, such as the Indian philosophical tradition (Indian philosophy), Islamic philosophical tradition (Islamic philosophy) and Jewish philosophical tradition (Jewish philosophy). For their identities, the interested reader can look at, say, the relevant book titles on these traditions in the recently published *Philosophy A-Z* book series (such as Bartley 2006, Groff 2007, and Hughes 2006). Clearly, there are distinct approaches that are from the same culture-associated philosophical traditions but represent distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy, such as the analytic and "Continental" approaches whose representative forms have been developed in the Western philosophical tradition. On the other hand, those approaches from different culture-associated philosophical traditions are often distinct approaches of different styles or

styles/orientations of doing philosophy (e.g., the East-West, North-South, or analytic-"Continental", though such labels might be misleading out of context), so long as they contribute to our understanding and treatment of the issues and topics of philosophical interest and significance. Likewise, the emphasis of the Journal, regarding conceptual/explanatory resources and modes of thinking in philosophy, is not exclusive to any particular way of thinking (e.g., neither the Greek-style *nous* alone nor the Chinese-style *dao* alone) but inclusive and open-minded, generally speaking. However, the foregoing inclusive strategic attitude does not mean indiscriminately addressing any distinct approaches, whether they are relevant or irrelevant, without being sensitive to the nature and features of specific philosophical issues/topics and the demand of concrete situations. In comparative philosophy it is noted that as comparative-engagement pairs are typically from distinct traditions or styles/orientations of doing philosophy, their study typically demands or assumes a certain meta-philosophical and meta-methodological cross-tradition/style/orientation of understanding in philosophy. Such a cross-tradition meta-methodological understanding, explicitly or implicitly involved in a comparative-engagement pair, is one defining characteristic of the study of the comparative-engagement pair in comparative philosophy; the meta-philosophical exploration of such a cross-tradition meta-methodological understanding thus constitutes an intrinsic and important concern in general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy. This is one important way in which comparative philosophy can significantly contribute to philosophical inquiry in general.[7]

Fifth, the Journal is inclusive but not merely for the sake of being aware of views from other traditions or styles of doing philosophy or merely for the sake of tolerating different opinions. That bar would be too low, and would miss the point of philosophical inquiry. The inclusive character of the Journal is intrinsically related to its critical character. The critical engagement character of philosophy (generally speaking) and of comparative philosophy understood in the above philosophically interesting way (specifically speaking) has the Journal aim neither at indiscriminately celebrating any *ad hoc* work from any tradition nor at uncritically pre-setting its value. In this connection nothing is taken for granted without critical examination. Rather, the recognition and appreciation of the value and significance of any work under comparative-engagement examination, no matter from which ethnic groups or from which geographic traditions, should result from critical examination in the constructive engagement strategy; for the critical examination in the constructive engagement is not just for the sake of criticism without serious consideration of constructive, positive contribution (if any). Through critical examination, the Journal is to identify and explicitly emphasize the genuine value, significance and relevance (if any) of the thinkers' ideas and their movements of thought to the common philosophical enterprise

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orientations. In this way, the term 'cross-tradition' can be used in its broad sense, including cross-style, cross-orientation as well as cross-culture-associated-tradition.

[7] For a thoughtful discussion of the relation between comparative philosophy and philosophy, see Allinson 2001.

and contemporary development of philosophy. In this way, what the Journal emphasizes and promotes is the reflective dialogue, mutual understanding and constructive engagement between distinct approaches from different traditions or styles/orientations of carrying out philosophical inquiry instead of indiscriminately celebrating and promoting any *ad hoc* distinct approach.

Sixth, comparative philosophy understood in the above philosophically interesting way is intrinsically related to *philosophical* scholarship of studies of any philosophical traditions, either Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, or African philosophy, just to name a few. For a philosopher in her philosophical inquiry of such an *ad-hoc*-tradition-related philosophy is to be intrinsically interested in distinct approaches (from other philosophical traditions and/or from different styles/orientation of doing philosophy) to those jointly concerned issues, problems, themes or topics. In this way, the contents of the Journal are to be intrinsically relevant to the philosophical interest and inquiry of philosophy scholars and students, no matter which specific traditions they study (e.g., Chinese or Indian philosophy) and no matter which style of philosophy they instantiate (e.g., analytic or "Continental" philosophy), given that they work on issues and topics under examination in the Journal. For a philosopher would be intrinsically interested in distinct approaches to the issues and topics under philosophical (instead of merely historical) examination and in their reflective relation to her current working approach, whether or not she takes some other distinct approach as her current working approach, which may be related to her training/specialty background, personal research interest or the need of the current study.

Seventh, as far as the relation between comparative philosophy and world philosophy is concerned, they are intrinsically related. For comparative philosophy, understood in the foregoing philosophically interesting way, considers philosophy in a global context and emphasizes the constructive engagement of distinct approaches and resources from various philosophical traditions and styles/orientations of doing philosophy. Generally speaking, world philosophy is construed as a world-wide joint-endeavor of philosophical inquiry that crosses the boundaries of particular traditions, styles or orientations of doing philosophy for the sake of contributing to the common philosophical enterprise. Given that this is one primary goal of world philosophy, a central or crucial issue is how to implement this goal. One way is the constructive-engagement methodological strategy. World philosophy approached in this way is essentially comparative philosophy aiming at constructive engagement. That is why 'Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches *toward World Philosophy*' (highlighted in italics here) is emphatically stated in the subtitle of the Journal.[8]

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[8] Although sometimes the phrases 'world philosophy' and 'global philosophy' can be used interchangeably, the former is considered more inclusive, while the latter might imply globalizing a certain (particular or 'universal') mode of doing philosophy (cf., Searle 2008). To this extent, global philosophy, when associated with the foregoing agenda, might stand as an alternative way of doing world philosophy (at a certain stage).

## 2

In this section, I introduce some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and present a meta-philosophical methodological framework.[9] The discussion in this section serves three purposes. First, it serves as an interpretation framework of how the constructive engagement of distinct approaches is possible and how such engagement can be adequately regulated.[10] Second, as a view concerning the methodology of comparative philosophy, it is also taken as my contributing piece to the ongoing debate on several issues, some of which have been already addressed in the included research articles (such as Xianglong Zhang's article) and the reflective report (i.e., Steve Angle's report). Third, it is hoped that this would provide the reader with one useful meta-methodological framework on how to look at and evaluate the relation and engaging contribution of distinct approaches in philosophy. It is noted that a reader need not accept all of the elements of the framework; for one thing, one characteristic feature of this framework is its open-ended character: the six conditions for adequacy of a methodological guiding principle can be expanded and enlarged. For another thing, one can selectively employ some of the conceptual and explanatory resources introduced here, if they are considered useful and effective.

### 2.1

The suggested meta-philosophical methodological framework [11] has one basic, minimal metaphysical assumption or, actually and more accurately, one intuitive

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[9] Based on the preceding discussions and conceptual and explanatory resources, a methodological framework can be introduced for the sake of enhancing our understanding of relevant methodological issues concerning comparative philosophy and for the sake of cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement in carrying out philosophical inquiries in a global context, generally speaking. The core portion of the methodological framework consists of the adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles that are supposed to regulate how to look at the relation between (eligible) methodological perspectives and how to employ them in legitimate and constructive ways. The suggested framework is methodological in a dual sense. First, it is directly and explicitly concerned with cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement of seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. Second, the framework *per se* is methodological in nature: it is concerned with *how* to look at seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. In the above second sense the suggested framework is *about philosophical methodology*; in this sense, the suggested framework is also meta-philosophical in nature.

[10] I intend neither to imply that the prospective author is expected to indiscriminately follow this framework, nor to imply that it is to be imposed on the reader. Rather, I intend to use the resources and the framework to help elaborate some relevant general points made in the previous section, on the one hand, and extend a reflective framework to the reader in case she/he finds it helpful.

[11] An earlier version of the suggested meta-methodological framework, labeled 'transcendental perspectivism', has been systematically presented, and guided my work on the issue of the philosophical concern with truth, in Mou 2009d. By 'transcendental perspectivism' I mean a kind of objective perspectivism, instead of subjective perspectivism (or a radical "anything goes" version of conceptual relativism), which gives a meta-philosophical methodological framework of how to look at seemingly competing perspectives taken to approach an object of study for the sake of their constructive

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understanding of the nature of an object of study that I believe most of us would have (let me call it, an intuitive 'common-object' understanding):

(C)     Given an object of study, there is a way that the object objectively is such that it is not the case that "anything goes", and we can all talk about that same object of study even though we may say different things about it.

That is, in a more theoretically loaded manner of speaking, given an object of study, and given that the identity of the genuine aspects of the object are thus determined (regardless of whether it is a naturally produced object in physical reality, a socially constructed object in social reality, an abstract object out of theoretic construction, or just a 'linguistic' object which are introduced linguistically), there *is* the *same* object of study that can be linguistically [or, more exactly speaking, semantically in the sense of (iii) below] commonly addressed, though perhaps in different ways of focusing on its distinct aspects, and examined in a minimally objective way (i.e., not a "anything-goes" subjective way). In other words, upon a reflective analysis, the intuitive understanding, (C), can be elaborated into three related components or sub-theses, each of which is more or less intuitive and can be reasonably expected: (i) given an object of study, the object has an *objective* character in a certain sense so that the subjective perspectivism of "anything goes" cannot succeed; (ii) given an object of study, the object possesses its aspects, whether one or many, so that various agent-speakers who point to these aspects actually talk about the same object; (iii) an agent-speaker who talks about the same common object can semantically reach the common object as a whole,[12] whether or not she is currently able to epistemologically reach all the aspects of the object.[13]

It is known that the term 'method' or 'methodological approach' in philosophical inquiries can mean a number of things. Given that the term 'method' or

engagement. By 'transcendental' I highlight one crucial character of such a meta-philosophical framework to the effect of identifying adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles that transcend various (local or finite) perspectives to approach an object of study via regulating how to look at their status, nature and relation and render complementary those eligible perspectives that really capture certain aspects of the object of study.

[12] Given the standard sense of 'semantics' that means the study of the non-linguistic relations between the linguistic expressions and the extra-linguistic objects for which they stand, members of a linguistic community can reach the object that they semantically talk about (or rigidly designate) via a certain communication link (including but not being limited to a Kripkean causal-historical chain), no matter how much cognitive knowledge they would have about the object, and whether or not (some of) their (epistemic) descriptions of it are correct. There is the rich literature and remarkable research achievements on the issue in contemporary study of philosophy of language; cf., Martinich 2008.

[13] In so understanding, one has reached a basic vantage point, indeed one due starting point of the constructive-engagement strategy, which Davidson intends to make in a more theoretic (and thus more or less controversial) terms: "No world views or conceptual schemes are truly incommensurable." (Davidson 2001, p. v). As I see it, all the authors in this issue of the Journal have already substantially committed themselves to this vantage point when they are not limited to this or that *ad hoc* local or finite (methodological or substantial) perspective but transcend them in their reflective explorations as given here, whether or not they intend to explicitly recognize it.

'methodological approach' means a way of responding to how to approach an object of study, there is need, both conceptually and practically speaking, to make the distinction between three kinds of ways or methods, which constitute three distinct dimensions of methodology: a methodological perspective (or a perspective method), a methodological instrument (or an instrumental method), and a methodological guiding principle (or a guiding-principle method).

(1) A *methodological perspective* (or a perspective method) is a way responding to how to approach an object of study that is intended to point to or focus on a certain aspect of the object and capture or explain the aspect in terms of the characteristics of that aspect, together with the minimal metaphysical commitment that there *is* that aspect of the object or that the aspect is genuinely possessed by the object.

There is a distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study. If the aforementioned minimal metaphysical commitment is true in the sense that the object does possess that aspect, the methodological perspective is considered *eligible* in regard to that object. Otherwise, the methodological perspective is considered *ineligible* in regard to that object. If a methodological perspective is eligible for capturing or characterizing (a certain aspect of) an object of study, then one's reflective activity *per se* of taking that methodological perspective alone as one's working perspective to look at the object is philosophically innocent, whether or not one also consciously takes some other eligible perspective as one's working perspective, and whether or not one holds an *adequate* methodological *guiding principle* to be explained below. [For convenience, in the foregoing sense, it is just said that (taking) an eligible methodological perspective *per se* is philosophically innocent.]

It is noted that a methodological perspective as specified above is a methodological-perspective simplex, in contrast to a methodological-perspective complex, which either integrates two or more perspective simplexes into one ('perspective-only complex' for short) or combines a perspective simplex with a certain (adequate or inadequate) methodological guiding principle to be explained below ('guiding-principle-associated perspective complex' for short). In the following, unless otherwise specified, by 'perspective' I mean a methodological-perspective simplex.[14]

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[14] Here and below, for the sake of illustration of relevant methodological points, I use as examples of methodological perspectives two paradigm methodological-perspective models that appear to be so different but can be somehow complementary, i.e., the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective, as suggested and illustrated through Socrates' characterization of virtue, justice and piety in some earlier Plato dialogues, and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective as suggested and illustrated through Confucius' characterization of *ren* (humanity) and *xiao* (filial piety) in the *Analects*. The two methodological perspectives respectively constitute the methodological-perspective dimensions of the two thinkers' methodological approaches, besides their respective methodological-guiding-principle dimensions and methodological-instrument dimensions. Though there are various aspects or layers of any object, what Socrates was concerned with is the aspect of the object that is stable, definite, regular, constant, unchanged or invariant (stably and invariantly existing in all F-things) and thus inter-subjectively accessible by any rational mind, as illustrated in his specified three conditions for any adequate definition of piety in the *Euthyphro* (cf., 5c-

(2) A *methodological instrument* (or instrumental method) is a way in which to implement, or give tools to realize, a certain methodological perspective. If the methodological perspective that an instrumental method is to implement is eligible for characterizing the object, then the instrumental method is also eligible. On the other hand, if the methodological perspective that an instrumental method is to implement is ineligible for characterizing the object, it is not necessary for the instrumental method to be ineligible too; an instrumental method (such as a deductive-reasoning method, an argument-by-analogy method) might be neutral to various perspectives and thus can be used to implement some other eligible methodological perspectives.

(3) A *methodological guiding principle* (or guiding-principle method) is a way concerning a certain methodological perspective (or a group of perspectives), or a certain methodological instrument to implement the methodological perspective, in regard to an object of study, which is, or should be, presupposed by the agent who takes that perspective (or one or more among the group of the perspectives) and its related instrument for the sake of guiding and regulating how the perspective or the instrument should be evaluated (its status and its due relation with other perspectives or instruments) and used (how to choose among the group of perspectives or instruments), and how the purpose and focus that the perspective serves should be set. There is the distinction between adequate and inadequate methodological guiding principles concerning methodological perspective(s) in regard to an object of study. The six sorts of adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles are explored in Section 2.4 below.

For the sake of the reader capturing their distinctions in a vivid way, let me use the following "method"-house metaphor to illustrate the relevant points. Suppose that a person intends to approach her destination, say, a house (the object of study), which has several entrances—say, its front door, side door and roof window (a variety of aspects, dimensions or layers of the object of study). She then takes a certain path (a certain methodological perspective) to enter the house, believing that the path leads to the entrance of this side (say, the front door) or the entrance of that side (say, a side door) of the house. If a path really leads to a certain entrance of the house, the path is called an 'eligible' one; otherwise it is called 'ineligible' (thus the distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives). When she takes a certain path to enter the house, she holds a certain instrument in her hand (a methodological instrument) to clear her path, say, a hatchet if the path is overgrown with brambles or a snow shovel if the path is heavily covered with snow. She also has a certain idea in her mind (a methodological guiding principle) that explains why she takes that path,

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d). For convenience, a blanket term, 'the being-aspect', can be used to cover those characteristics of the object, or to stand for the aspect of the object that is characterized in terms of the aforementioned characteristics. In contrast, what Confucius was concerned with in the *Analects* is the aspect of the object under examination that is particular, concrete, dynamic, ever-changing, as illustrated in his characterization of (filial) piety in the *Analects* (cf., 2.5. 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8); all those characteristics are intrinsically connected with various situations in which things reveal themselves. A blanket term, 'the becoming-aspect', is used here to refer to these characteristics of the object that essentially involve dynamic change or becoming.

instead of another, and guides her to have some understanding, adequate or inadequate, of the relation of that path to other paths (other methodological perspectives), if any, to the house. Surely such a guiding idea can be adequate or inadequate (adequate or inadequate methodological guiding principle): for example, if she recognizes and renders other eligible paths also eligible and thus compatible with her current path, then her guiding idea is adequate; in contrast, if she fails to recognize that and thus renders her current path exclusively eligible (the only path leading to the house), then her guiding idea is inadequate, though her current path *per se* is indeed eligible.[15]

Given the above specifications, there are two preliminary points concerning the relation between a methodological perspective and a methodological guiding principle that are especially relevant. First, generally speaking, the merit, status, and function of a methodological perspective (a methodological-perspective simplex) *per se* can be evaluated independently of certain methodological guiding principles that the agent might presuppose in her actual application of the perspective. One's reflective practice *per se* of taking a certain eligible methodological perspective as a working perspective is philosophically positive and innocent in the following senses, whether or not it is associated with or guided by an adequate or inadequate methodological guiding principle in one's application of the perspective. On the one hand, it is philosophically positive insofar as that perspective really points to or captures a certain aspect of the object and is thus eligible; on the other hand, it is philosophically innocent insofar as one's reflective practice *per se* of taking that perspective amounts neither to one's losing sight of other genuine aspects of the object nor to one's rejecting other eligible perspectives in one's background thinking nor to one's presupposing an inadequate methodological guiding principle that would render ineligible other eligible methodological perspectives (if any). In this way, even if an agent's methodological guiding principle is inadequate in her applying a certain eligible methodological perspective, the eligibility of the methodological perspective still needs to be recognized, and her reflective practice *per se* of taking that perspective still has its due value in philosophical inquiry.

Second, however, it is indeed important for the agent to have an adequate methodological guiding principle, which the agent is expected to presuppose in evaluating the status and nature of the eligible methodological perspectives, applying her methodological perspective, and looking at the relation between her current working perspective and other perspectives. For it does matter whether one's taking a certain methodological perspective is regulated by an adequate or inadequate guiding principle, especially for the sake of constructive engagement of seemingly competing approaches. When one's application of an eligible methodological perspective as one's working perspective is guided by some adequate guiding principle and thus contributes

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[15] It is noted that I do not intend to use this "method"-house metaphor here to illustrate, thus presuppose and advocate any *ad hoc* conception of philosophizing; in the context of the preceding inclusive characterization of the identities of comparative philosophy and its constructive-engagement strategy, one is expected to have one's inclusive understanding of this metaphor and the due meanings of its involved metaphoric terms like 'taking a certain path'.

to a holistic understanding of the object of study, one's application of that perspective would be philosophically constructive and sighted insofar as one would constructively treat other eligible methodological perspectives (if any) and their relation to one's working perspective and thus have a comprehensive outlook for the sake of a complete account of the object of study. Otherwise, it would be philosophically less constructive and less sighted (or even blind) in that connection—but, even so, the reflective practice *per se* of taking that eligible perspective can be still philosophically positive and innocent in the foregoing senses, as indicated before.[16]

In the context of philosophical inquiry, for one thing, there is the need to refine the notion of methodological approach into these three distinct but related notions of methodological approach for the sake of adequately characterizing the foregoing three distinct but related methodological ways (in philosophical inquiry). For another thing, in view of their distinction and connection at least at the conceptual level, we might as well regard the three methodological ways as three dimensions of (philosophical) methodology or of the concept of methodological approach, although this by no means takes for granted that any methodological way that has ever been historically taken was

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[16] Let me give an example to illustrate the points here. Consider analytic method/ methodology. Analytic methodology, understood broadly, is a general methodological approach in philosophical inquiry. It is not limited to a single and specific instrumental method (i.e., what 'analysis' means in its technical sense, in contrast to 'synthesis'), but collectively includes (i) a collection of "analytic" instrumental methods and their associated conceptual and explanatory resources, and (ii) a generic type of methodological perspectives that is intended to point to and capture something certain, stable, constant, regular, definite, universal, or unchanging (i.e., the *being*-aspect/dimension/layer, understood in the sense of 'being' in contrast to that of 'becoming') of an object of study (and/or its conceptual characterization). (The two are closely related: the analytic methodological perspective or analytic expectation demands such "analytic" instruments as meaning analysis, conceptual clarity, precise formulation, or rigorous argumentation, by means of which to implement the "analytic" being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective. In this sense, and to this extent, the generic type of analytic methodological perspective underlies various analytic instrumental methods.) It is important to note that analytic methodology as a generic type of methodological perspectives, together with a collection of instrumental methods, is not intrinsically or conceptually related to an *ad hoc* methodological guiding principle concerned with how to look at the relationship between such methodological perspectives and instruments and other types of methodological perspectives and instruments. Historically, analytic methodology was applied by philosophers who might hold or presuppose different methodological guiding principles, some of which were arguably adequate while some others were not. In this way, on the one hand, given an object of study (or its conceptual characterization) does have its being aspect as specified above, a certain analytic (or being-aspect-concerned) methodological perspective in regard to the object of study is to be eligible, and thus an agent's reflective practice *per se* of applying analytic methodology to examining the object of study is reflectively innocent, worthy and reasonable, no matter what kind of methodological guiding principle the agent actually assumes, since analytic methodology is not intrinsically or conceptually associated with any *ad hoc* (adequate or inadequate) methodological guiding principles. However, on the other hand, the application of analytic methodology needs to be regulated by adequate methodological guiding principles so that the agent can have a more holistic or complete understanding of various aspects of the object of study and can easily and adequately make her perspective shift when her current working purpose changes to some other working focus(es) on some other aspect(s) or layer(s) of the object of study than its being-aspect (alone).

actually presented in its agent' ideas and texts indiscriminately as an methodological approach that would manifestly reveal all the three dimensions.

With the above conceptual and explanatory resources, I will elaborate the two (aforementioned) methodological emphases of the constructive engagement strategy of comparative philosophy and thus of the Journal.

2.2

The first emphasis is on philosophical interpretation[17] of the (ancient) thinker's ideas/texts instead of mere historical description. Note that, generally speaking, the primary purpose of this methodological orientation is to enhance our understanding of a thinker's ideas/texts and their implications of philosophical significance via relevant effective conceptual and explanatory resources, whether or not those resources were actually used by the thinker herself. It is clear that a purely historical approach does not fit here: to elaborate and understand the thinker's ideas/texts does not amount to figuring out exactly what resources the thinker actually used and exactly what she explicitly thought/wrote. Instead, such interpretation and understanding might include the interpreter's elaboration of the thinker's points and their subtle implications, which might not have been explicitly considered by the thinker herself, and/or the interpreter's representation of the thinker's point in clearer and more coherent terms or in a more philosophically interesting way, which the thinker herself may or may not have actually adopted.[18] In both cases, given a thinker's ideas/texts (in one tradition or account) under interpretation, some effective conceptual and explanatory resources well developed in another tradition or account can be consciously used to enhance our understanding of, and to elaborate, the thinker's ideas/texts.[19]

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[17] I use the term 'interpretation' in a narrow or straightforward sense as specified in terms of elaborating and understanding to be explained below ('philosophical interpretation' for short) rather than in a broad or implicit sense in which any intellectual exploration (including the historical-description-concerned approach) could be somehow identified as an 'interpretation' or an 'interpretation-concerned' approach. As far as some sample explorations of philosophical interpretation in contemporary studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy are concerned, see Ames and Hall 1995, Graham 1989, Hansen 1983, and Shun 1997, to name a few.

[18] Then, can these implications be said to belong to the thinker's ideas in the text (and thus fall into what the thinker *truly* means/meant or what the thinker's ideas *truly* has/had)? In an important sense, the answer would be yes; for these implications are *truly* implied by the ideas delivered by the thinker, although one can surely say that these implications were not *actually* expressed by the thinker, and one thus might say that they are not what the thinker actually (truly?) means/meant. (At this point, one can see that such expressions as 'what a certain thinker truly means/meant' or 'what she truly has/had' tend to be ambiguous and vague and thus deserve clarification, especially when one intends to make claims about what a thinker truly means/meant or what her ideas truly has/had.)

[19] From the viewpoint of comparative engagement, those conceptual and explanatory resources used are thus tacitly and implicitly, but constructively, in comparison and contrast to those original resources by means of which the insight or vision was somehow delivered, insofar as such comparison of the two distinct sorts of resources is not expressly and directly conducted. The term 'constructively' here means that such tacit comparative approach intrinsically involves how the interpreter of the thinker's ideas/texts could learn from another tradition or account regarding resources to enhance the interpreter's

In this way, the use of external resources might really enhance our understanding of a thinker's ideas/texts or clarify some original unclear or confusing expression of her ideas. Consequently, the endeavor *per se* of using external resources in this orientation is not automatically inappropriate, as it would be in the merely historical orientation. Note that when those explanatory and conceptual resources are used, they are not intended to assign the same degree of articulated systematization and mastering of some conceptual and explanatory resources to an ancient thinker but to enhance our understanding of her ideas delivered in the text. For this interpretative purpose, it is not merely legitimate but beneficial to employ more explicit or clearer conceptual resources to elaborate some otherwise implicit and hidden thing (say, coherence and connectedness) in a thinker's ideas that was sometimes less clearly delivered or expressed in some paradoxical way for lack of those contemporary explanatory and conceptual resources that were unavailable to the ancient thinker but are now available to us. Note also that, when a thinker's line of thought and ideas lack articulated systematicity in their language expressions, that does not amount to saying that the thinker's line of thought and ideas *per se* go without (implicit and hidden) coherence and connectedness deep in a thinker's ideas. Consequently, we cannot base ourselves merely on this lack of articulated systematicity in language expression and therefore judge that the thinker's text itself is not a philosophical work when the text was indeed intended to deliver her reflective ideas. At this point, with the previous and current methodological considerations, some further elaborations of the thinker's line of thought and surrounding reflective ideas via adequate conceptual and explanatory resources available to us are genuinely needed, instead of being the mere issue of preference, for the sake of enhancing our understanding of the thinker's ideas/texts including their due implications.[20]

It is also important to note that an interpreter's project of studying a figure's thought or a movement of thought from a philosophical tradition with the interpretation-concerned orientation, instead of a mere historical orientation often focuses on a certain aspect, layer or dimension of a thinker's ideas based on the purpose of the project, the reflective interest of the interpreter, etc. Indeed, instead of a comprehensive coverage of all aspects or dimensions of the object of study, focusing on one aspect or dimension is a kind of simplification. Now the question is this: Is any simplification *per se* doomed to be indiscriminately a sin of *over*-simplification? Surely, when a project aims at accurately describing relevant historical matters of facts and pursuing what the thinker under description actually thought, and what resources

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understanding of the thinker's ideas; therefore, some constructive philosophical engagement between distinct resources respectively from different traditions or accounts is tacitly involved in this orientation and its corresponding methodological approach.

[20] The "blurring" assimilation might result from "over"-use of external resources when interpreting one or both parties under comparative examination, especially when the external resources used to characterize one party come from the other party. But, for the purpose of interpretation, the resulting assimilation is not necessarily inappropriate but might illuminate the essential connection and common points between the assimilated ideas at the fundamental level so as to enhance our understanding of those ideas.

the thinker actually used, simplification is always *over*-simplification; any simplification is guilty of being negatively excessive and thus identical with falsification. Nevertheless, it should be clear that, if the purpose of a project is to focus on interpreting or elaborating one aspect or dimension instead of giving a comprehensive historical description, charging the practitioner of this project with *over*-simplification would be unfair and would miss the point.

Indeed, a comparative philosophy project should be guided by a comprehensive understanding or an adequate methodological guiding principle whose adequacy conditions are explored in the next sub-section. But a reflective project in philosophy (including those studies in comparative philosophy) that takes a certain methodological perspective by focusing on one aspect of the object of study can be totally compatible with a comprehensive understanding. At this point, what needs to be recognized is an important distinction between a methodological perspective as a current working perspective and a methodological guiding principle that an agent presupposes when taking the methodological perspective, where the principle would be used by the agent to guide or regulate how the current perspective would be applied and evaluated in view of some other eligible perspectives. As emphasized above, one's reflective practice *per se* of taking a certain methodological perspective amounts neither to reflectively rejecting some other eligible methodological perspectives nor to presupposing an inadequate methodological guiding principle that would render ineligible other eligible methodological perspectives (if any). What is at issue is whether the interpreter has assumed an adequate methodological guiding principle to guide and regulate how to look at the relation between the current methodological perspective used as a working perspective and other eligible methodological perspectives that would point to other aspects of the object of study. Consequently, when one evaluates a project in comparative philosophy, what really matters is for one to understand what kind of methodological guiding principle is held or presupposed behind the working perspective.

## 2.3

The other methodological emphasis of the constructive-engagement strategy is on the relevance and significance of the thinkers' ideas related to the common philosophical enterprise and contemporary development of philosophy. This emphasis is intrinsically related to one significant methodological orientation in comparative philosophy, i.e., the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation that aims to contribute to common philosophical concerns. The primary purpose of this orientation in studies of ancient or contemporary thinkers is to see how, through reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, these thinkers could constructively contribute to the common philosophical enterprise and/or a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance that can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point ('joint

concerns' or 'common concerns' for short below),[21] rather than focus on providing a historical or descriptive account (or on interpreting some ideas historically developed in a certain tradition or account) merely for the sake of being aware of them. Typically, addressing a jointly concerned issue of philosophy, substantial ideas historically developed in distinct philosophical traditions are directly compared in order to understand how they could jointly and complementarily contribute to this issue in philosophically interesting ways. Insofar as the foregoing purpose of constructive-engagement in treating various joint concerns and issues of philosophical significance is most philosophically interesting, this philosophical-issue-engagement orientation and its methodological strategy directly, explicitly and constructively conducts philosophical engagement and is thus considered to be most philosophically interesting. To highlight the characteristic features of a reflective project with this as its primary orientation, let us examine the appropriateness of three sorts of worries or charges that have sometimes been put into doubt or brought against projects with this orientation in studies of comparative philosophy, i.e., the worries about, or the "sins" of, oversimplification, over-use of external resources, and blurring assimilation.

A typical procedure of conducting a philosophical engagement in such projects could be both conceptually and practically divided into three phases:

1. The pre-engagement phase, in which certain ideas from distinct accounts or from different traditions that are *relevant* to the common concern under examination and thus to the purpose of the project are focused on and identified;

2. The engagement phase, in which those ideas *internally* engage with each other in view of that common concern and the purpose to be served; and

3. The post-engagement phase, in which those distinct ideas from different sources are now absorbed or assimilated into a new approach to the common concern under examination.

The three alleged "sins" may be considered to be typically associated respectively with the three phases. The "sin" of over-simplification regarding a certain idea identified from a certain account or tradition may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the pre-engagement phase; the "sin" of over-use of external resources regarding elaborating a certain idea from a certain account or tradition may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the engagement phase; and the "sin" of blurring assimilation may be typically associated with reflective efforts in the post-engagement phase. Now let me briefly evaluate the appropriateness of the three charges respectively in the corresponding three phases; looking at them in this way will help highlight certain features of projects in comparative philosophy primarily with the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation.

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[21] It is arguably right that many issues that were traditionally identified as (some) "unique" issues in different traditions have turned out to be primarily concerned with different aspects, layers or dimensions of some jointly concerned, more general issues of philosophy, especially from a broader philosophical vantage point. This is one point that I have endeavored to make and illustrate in several of my writings mentioned above.

In the pre-engagement phase, it might be not only legitimate but also adequate or even necessary to provide simplification and abstraction of some ideas in one account or tradition through a perspective: this perspective *per se* is presented in most relevant terms to the joint concern addressed, and the purpose served in a philosophical-issue-engagement concerned project, while without involving those irrelevant elements in the account or tradition from which such a perspective comes, though the latter might be relevant to figuring out the point of those ideas. The reasons are these. First, the primary concern of the project is not with how such an idea is related to the other elements in the source account or tradition but with how it is relevant to approaching the jointly concerned philosophical issue. Second, while one needs to understand the point of an idea in the context in which it was raised, once one understands the point (either through employing data provided by projects with the historical-description-concerned orientation and/or the interpretation-concerned orientation or through one's own background project with one of the these two orientations), there would be no present purpose served by discussing the background. Third, it is clear that such an approach *per se* does not imply denying the social and historical integrity of the idea in the source account or tradition; the point is that the existence of such integrity cannot automatically guarantee an indiscriminate priority or even relevance of expressly addressing it in any projects in comparative philosophy without regard to their orientations and purposes.

In the engagement phase, relevant (eligible) perspectives from different source accounts or different traditions would constructively engage each other. From each party's point of view, the other party is something external without; but, from a broader philosophical vantage point and in view of the jointly concerned issue, the distinct views may be complementary within. In this context, the term 'external' would miss the point in regard to the purpose here: the pivotal point is not this or that distinct perspective but the issue (and its comprehensive approach) to whose various aspects those perspectives point; in view of the issue, all those perspectives become internal in the sense that they would be complementary and indispensable to a comprehensive understanding and treatment of the current philosophical issue.

In the post-engagement phase, some sort of assimilation typically results from the preceding reflective engagement; that is, such assimilation would adjust, blur and absorb different perspectives into one new approach as a whole. This would be what is really expected in this kind of reflective engagement in studies of comparative philosophy, instead of a sin.

It should be noted that, if a project in comparative examination, which explicitly has one of the previously mentioned orientations (the interpretation-concerned orientation, the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation, and the historical-description-concerned orientation), is considered a project-simplex, then a project in reflective practice concerning comparative philosophy might be a complex that goes with a combination of two or more orientations. A comprehensive project concerned with historical figures under comparative examination for the sake of their *philosophical* engagement often consists of such a combination of different stages of study with their distinctive focuses. Recognition of the characteristic features of the

above three distinct orientations/purposes and their respective methodological approaches would help us discriminatively treat and evaluate different stages or parts of a project-complex of comparative philosophy.

2.4

For the purpose of cross-tradition/style understanding and constructive engagement, it is especially philosophically interesting, relevant, or even crucial to have an adequate methodological guiding principle, which the agent is expected to hold in evaluating the status and nature of the eligible methodological perspectives, applying her methodological perspective, and looking at the relation between her current working perspective and other methodological perspectives. The suggested meta-methodological framework endeavors to identify six conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles. (Their illustrations via two representative methodological perspectives will be provided in footnotes.) The first four, (1)-(4), and one of the last two, (5) and (6), depending on situations, are expected for a methodological guiding principle to be adequate. This set of conditions does not pretend to be exhaustive, exclusive, or dogmatic; the conditions are open to critical examination for their validity and explanatory force.

(1) The perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle that is held or presupposed by the agent who uses some eligible methodological perspective as her current working perspective is considered adequate (in this connection) when this guiding principle renders other eligible methodological perspectives (if any) also eligible and somehow compatible with the application of the current working perspective. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise. This adequacy condition may be called a 'minimal' condition in the sense that it is presupposed by the remaining kinds of adequacy conditions.[22]

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[22] As explained above, given an object of study, whether or not a methodological perspective is eligible or ineligible is to be determined based on whether or not the aspect, dimension or layer to which the perspective in question is intended to point is really possessed by the object. Consider the two samples of methodological perspectives briefly characterized in Footnote 14, namely, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence (being and becoming) of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most things in nature. Now the object of study under Socrates' and Confucius' examination is (filial) piety. [Surely, it is through arguably appropriate philosophical interpretation, beyond being based merely on the translation of the Chinese term '*xiao*' in the *Analects* into the English term '(filial) piety' or its Greek counterpart, that Socrates and Confucius are considered to have their joint concern with the issue of (filial) piety but take distinct approaches with regard to different aspects or layers of this jointly-concerned issue. It is philosophically interesting and significant to explore how such philosophical interpretation is possible. I cannot pursue this issue here due to the purpose of this writing; but one thing is certain: both Socrates and Confucius were concerned with the issue of how one should treat one's parents in a morally adequate way.] If piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects, Socrates' and Confucius' are both eligible in regard to our reflective examination of piety. In this way, a methodological guiding principle that renders both methodological perspectives eligible on the issue of piety would have the perspective-eligibility-recognizing adequacy.

(2) The agent-purpose-sensitivity condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to have her choice of a certain working perspective, among eligible methodological perspectives, sensitive to the agent's purpose and thus renders the most applicable or the most appropriate (the best relative to that purpose) the perspective that (best) serves that purpose. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.[23]

(3) The equality-status-granting condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it renders all the eligible methodological perspectives (perspective simplexes)[24] equal in the following two senses: being equally necessary for the sake of a complete account of an object of study and being equally local from the global point of view that transcends any local methodological perspectives; thus none of them *absolutely* superior (or inferior) to the others in the above senses. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.[25]

(4) The new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it guides the agent to have an open-minded attitude toward the possibility of a new eligible perspective that is to point to some genuine aspect of the object of study but have yet to be realized by the agent because of the 'unknown-identity' status of that

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[23] Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. Given that the two methodological perspectives are both eligible in regard to the issue of piety, a methodological guiding principle that sets out to decide which methodological perspective among the two is to be taken by an agent herself as her working perspective, or how to evaluate the validity of some other agent's working perspective (either one) should be sensitive to the agent's purpose or her own focus on which aspect of piety to be captured in a certain context. The methodological guiding principle then has the agent-purpose-sensitivity adequacy. Otherwise, that is, when a methodological guiding principle demands the agent indiscriminately to choose one *ad hoc* methodological perspective without regard to the agent's purpose and focus in a certain context, the methodological guiding principle would fail to have this adequacy. Perhaps a most prominent ancient thinker who explicitly addresses the agent-purpose-sensitivity condition (and the equality-status-granting condition) is Zhuang Zi. For a recent discussion of Zhuang Zi's point in this connection, see Mou 2008b.

[24] Clearly, what is talked about here is not a methodological-perspective complex that can be a combination of multiple methodological-perspective simplexes.

[25] Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective and assume that both are eligible methodological perspectives that point respectively to the being aspect and becoming aspect both of which are really possessed by piety. When one resorts to a certain methodological guiding principle to guide one's evaluation of the status of the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective) and thus render it indiscriminately and absolutely superior to the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective), the methodological guiding principle thus fails to have the equality-status-granting adequacy concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. In contrast, if a methodological guiding principle renders one of the two better than another or most suitable only in view of a certain context and in regard to a certain aspect of piety to which the perspective in question points but without viewing it absolutely superior to the other, this methodological guiding principle will thus meet the equality-status-granting condition concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety.

aspect. A methodological guiding principle is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.[26]

(5) The complementarity-seeking condition. Given that multiple, seemingly competing eligible methodological perspectives concerning the object of study turn out to be complementary (in the sense that each of them points to one aspect of the object and is indispensable for a complete understanding of the object), a methodological guiding principle is considered adequate (in this connection) if it captures the complementary character of the involved aspects of the object and thus seeks the complementary connection and harmonious balance between those perspectives for the sake of enhancing the complementary unity of those eligible perspectives. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.[27]

(6) The sublation-seeking condition. Given that there are two seemingly competing guiding-principle-associated perspective complexes whose perspective parts are eligible (i.e., capturing distinct aspects of the object of study) but whose respectively associated methodological guiding principles are genuinely competing or incompatible (either because one of them is inadequate or because both are inadequate), such a methodological guiding principle would be considered adequate (in this connection) if it seeks a due solution through a Hegelian synthetic balance via sublation that keeps what are reasonable or appropriate from both guiding-principle-associated perspective

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[26] Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective and assume that both are eligible methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. If, besides the two methodological perspectives, a methodological guiding principle has its open-minded attitude towards the possibility of new (yet-to-be-recognized) aspects, dimensions or layers of piety and thus the possibility of new eligible methodological perspectives that are to point to and explain them, the guiding principle thus enjoys The new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy. In contrast, any methodological guiding principle that renders exclusive and exhaustive the current working perspective (or the current stock of methodological perspectives that are so far epistemologically available), the guiding principle is thus inadequate because it fails to meet the condition of the new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy.

[27] Again, consider the two sample methodological perspectives, the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence, being and becoming, of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most things in nature. Now the object of study under Socrates' and Confucius' examination is (filial) piety. Suppose that piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects and that both aspects are interdependent, interpenetrating, interactive and complementary in regard to the constitution of piety. Then the Socrates-style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius-style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective are complementary instead of being incompatible or opposed to each other on the issue of piety. In this way, any methodological guiding principle that renders the two methodological perspectives complementary and seeks their complementary connection and joint contribution to a complete understanding of the issue of piety thus meets the complementarity-seeking condition. If otherwise, a methodological guiding principle would be inadequate in this connection on the issue. The complementarity-seeking condition essentially reflects the point of the *yin-yang* model of interaction and transformation. For the *yin-yang* model, see Allinson 2003 and Mou 2003b. For a similar meta-methodological spirit of complementarity-seeking harmonization of seemingly-competing modes of philosophizing, also see Rescher 1994.

complexes (i.e., their eligible perspectives, maybe plus some adequate guiding principle from one perspective complex if any) while disregarding what are not, i.e., the inadequate guiding principle (or principles) in one (or both) of the perspective complexes. In contrast, it is considered inadequate (in this connection) if otherwise.[28]

Among the foregoing six kinds of adequacy conditions, the minimal perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition is presupposed by the remaining kinds of conditions. Which one, between the last two kinds of conditions, needs to be maintained would depend on the nature of the object of study, the character of the involved perspectives and the purpose that a certain methodological guiding principle serves.

It is noted that, as indicated before, although comparative philosophy typically treats prominently cross-tradition/orientation comparative cases, the methodological points of the adequacy conditions are intended to be general concerning the constructive engagement of any distinct approaches in philosophical inquiry, whether they are from different traditions/orientations of doing philosophy or within the same tradition/orientation. That is one value of the meta-philosophical exploration of methodology of comparative philosophy.

<div align="center">3</div>

It is important to note that the constructive-engagement strategy is not merely armchair speculation but has already been reflectively implemented in—and, indeed, has impacted—the reflective practice of comparative philosophy. This is the case with respect to philosophical studies of classical Chinese philosophy and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy[29], especially in the past decade. In this section, I intend to give a case analysis of how the constructive-engagement strategy effectively bears on studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy[30] especially in the

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[28] For example, there might be two seemingly competing guiding-principle-associated perspective complexes as two approaches to build up a social-economic community: the profit-seeking-only perspective complex (i.e., the profit-seeking perspective that is associated with a guiding principle which renders the perspective exclusively eligible) and the welfare-seeking-only perspective (i.e., the welfare-seeking perspective that is associated with a guiding principle which renders the perspective exclusively eligible). It might be the case that a social-economic community does, or should, have both its profit-seeking layer and its welfare-seeking layer for the sake of its well-being. In this case, what really makes the two perspective complexes competing or incompatible would be their respectively associated guiding principles that render their respectively guided perspectives exclusively eligible. Then, when a methodological guiding principle seeks a synthetic balance (via sublation) to bring about a new approach that keeps what is reasonable in the two perspective complexes (i.e., the two involved perspective simplexes *per se*) while disregarding what is not (i.e., the two involved inadequate guiding principles), the methodological guiding principle would be considered to be adequate because it meets the sublation-seeking condition in this case. Though labeled in terms of Hegel's ideology, the idea of the sublation-seeking condition can be traced back to Aristotle's method of saving the phenomena (cf., *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b1-7). For an elaboration of the Aristotelian method, see Yu and Bunnin 2001.

[29] For a survey of comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, see Wong 2005.

[30] Without the implication that one is superior to the other, the phrase 'comparative Chinese-Western philosophy', instead of 'comparative Western-Chinese philosophy', is used in view of the following

past decade for three purposes: (1) to illustrate the foregoing theoretic characterizations of the constructive engagement strategy; (2) to show how the constructive-engagement approach has effectively enhanced and promoted studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy; (3) to illustrate how the constructive engagement in the reflective practice of comparative Chinese-Western philosophy can provide constructive morals and methodological templates that can be applied to other tradition-vs.-tradition (and/or orientation-vs.-orientation) comparative studies. Indeed, why this case analysis concerning comparative Chinese-Western philosophy instead of some other case is given here has two related considerations. Comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, through contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy, has been one significant and well-developed part of comparative philosophy. Theoretically speaking, both the Chinese and Western traditions of philosophy are several-thousand-year-long traditions with their distinctively rich resources in various philosophical subjects. Practically speaking, it seems that currently there are notably more research results in the literature, as well as research personnel, worldwide than any other tradition-vs.-tradition comparative studies in philosophy.

In contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy[31] and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy, the label 'the constructive-engagement trend/movement'[32] can be understood in a weak sense and in a strong sense. In its weak sense, the phrase means a more or less collective trend in studies of Chinese philosophy and comparative philosophy as shown in the past few decades in the direction of the foregoing constructive-engagement strategy, whether or not its involved meta-philosophical and methodological issues have been consciously and systematically examined, whether or not the trend has its explicit systematic agenda in print, and whether or not it has been explicitly promoted by a certain academic organization with its articulated constructive-engagement purpose. Nevertheless, in its stronger sense, the term means a trend/movement that has emerged especially since the earlier years of the 21$^{st}$ century with its explicitly specified research agenda, some related academic organizations or institutions as a collective driving force, various coordinated systematic efforts for the constructive-engagement purpose, and some other distinct features to be addressed

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historical fact: such studies have been carried out primarily by scholars whose primary areas of research include Chinese philosophy and through their studies of Chinese philosophy.

[31] As indicated in Footnote 6, by 'Chinese philosophy' I primarily mean various movements of philosophical thought in China from the *Zhou* Dynasty (roughly eleventh century to 256 B.C.) through the early *Qing* Dynasty (1644 – mid 19$^{th}$ century) and their contemporary developments and studies.

[32] As suggested in Footnote 3, exactly how to label the methodological strategy and its associated trend or movement is a relatively unimportant thing; one can label it in some other ways one would reasonably prefer. The point is this: the methodological strategy together with its associated movement is not merely an armchair strategy on paper; rather, it has already substantially implemented and through a variety of collective reflective practice that has resulted in solid scholarship. The methodological strategy and its associated movement are characterized in terms of 'constructive engagement' here with two major considerations, especially in view of the trend/movement in the mentioned strong sense. First, the phrase does literally capture some of their crucial features. Second, the label has been historically associated with them both in some relevant documents in print and in some prominent academic events and projects that have been guided by the methodological strategy.

below. Such systematic efforts have produced some major collective research programs and resulted in substantial outcomes. The nature and methodological features of the constructive-engagement trend/movement in the foregoing strong sense[33] can be characterized in the following ten connections.

First, generally speaking, the constructive-engagement trend as a whole has moved beyond some previous individual efforts, each of which typically featured this or that specific perspective in comparative studies, and has been guided under a broad vision or methodological guiding principle concerning how to look at the relation between various eligible but seemingly competing methodological perspectives in comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy: essentially it renders complementary those eligible perspectives that respectively capture some distinct aspects, layers or dimensions of objects of study, instead of indiscriminately subscribing to one single finite perspective or rendering it exclusively eligible without doing justice to other eligible perspectives. The constructive-engagement movement as a whole is not limited to that between Chinese philosophy and Western analytic philosophy[34] (or Chinese philosophy and "Continental" philosophy) but that between Chinese philosophy and any movement of thought in the Western philosophical tradition (or even any movement of thought in other philosophical traditions) in a global context.[35] In this connection, it is neither to *reform* the studies of Chinese philosophy exclusively in virtue of an analytic approach, nor to *reformulate* studies of Chinese philosophy exclusively by the resources of "Continental" philosophy. Nevertheless, that amounts to saying neither that any specific project that is part of the movement has to be comprehensive in its manifest current coverage nor that it has to take a comprehensive perspective complex as its current working perspective; what makes a difference lies in the foregoing sort of methodological guiding principle that guides the project with a broad vision concerning how to look at the relation between the current subject/concern and other subjects/concerns and between the current working perspective and other eligible perspectives.

Second, as far as the methodological dimension of the trend is concerned, a systematic, in-depth meta-philosophical discussion of the relation between the Western

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[33] It is arguably correct that some of those indicated features are also applicable to characterizing the constructive-engagement movement in the weaker sense, whether they are shown in some explicit or implicit, manifest or obscure, ways.

[34] By 'Western analytic philosophy' or 'Western philosophy in the analytic tradition' I mean a Western mainstream philosophical tradition from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, British empiricism and Kant to the contemporary analytic movement. Note that, besides indicating a historical connection between Western philosophy in such a tradition and analytic methodological approach taken in this tradition, such phrases as 'Western analytic philosophy' used here are not intended to imply that analytic methodology is, intrinsically or conceptually, exclusively connected with Western philosophy. See Footnote 16 where a brief characterization of the identity of analytic methodology is given.

[35] At the most recent stage of the development of modern Chinese philosophy, one of its prominent features (at least in regard to one significant portion of modern Chinese philosophy) lies in its movement towards world philosophy via the constructive-engagement movement. In this sense, and to this extent, the context of the recent development of modern Chinese philosophy and the mentioned global context have merged essentially into the same context.

(especially analytic) philosophical tradition and Chinese philosophical tradition concerning philosophical methodology and the nature of philosophical inquiry has provided a necessary, theoretical and meta-philosophical preparation for a comprehensive, systematic constructive-engagement enterprise. For example, as analytic and classical Chinese philosophy have been considered by many to be less relevant or even alien to each other, some recent systematic and in-depth meta-philosophical discussions of how their constructive engagement is possible, especially in view of their respective methodologies, has provided an indispensable methodological preparation for subsequent in-depth investigations on how they can jointly make a contribution to our understanding and treatment of a series of concrete issues.[36] When a movement of thought in philosophy has its systematic meta-philosophical reflection on its own nature, direction and methodology, this reflective endeavor would be viewed as one mark of maturity and one necessary condition of its long-term healthy development.

Third, as far its subject coverage of the trend is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement in contemporary study of Chinese philosophy is comprehensive, including the engaging examination of a series of fundamental or significant issues and concerns in those central areas of philosophy like metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, epistemology, etc., instead of focusing merely on the issues in ethics and social & political philosophy. In the past, there has been one quite widespread stereotypical understanding of the nature and scope of traditional Chinese philosophy that renders it philosophically valuable only in regard to its thoughts on moral and social-political issues. Though also emphasizing the necessity of Western and Chinese philosophers learning from each other, some scholars consider such mutual beneficial engagement valuable and valid only or largely in regard to limited areas like ethics and social & political philosophy. But this view has turned out to be incorrect, as some individual scholars' explorations in the past decades and some recent collective engagement projects in those important areas like metaphysics, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, together with their fruitful research results have already clearly and convincingly shown it.

Fourth, as far as its engagement mode is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement emphasizes the direct and critical but constructive dialogue between the engaging parties (whenever situations allow) for the sake of effectively carrying out reflective criticism and self-criticism and jointly making contributions to the common enterprise of philosophy. Indeed, this is one of the meanings of the phrase 'constructive engagement' that captures one crucial character of philosophical inquiry, i.e., the critical engagement for the sake of making joint contributions to the understanding and treatment of common concerns. Such a critical engagement character, instead of mere celebration, has effectively motivated relevant engaging parties in participation. For example, two recent projects on constructive engagement, namely, Davidson's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, and of Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, have well adopted such an approach to critical engagement.

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[36] One of such systematic methodological examinations is presented in Mou 2001a.

Fifth, as far as collective and systematic character is concerned, the constructive-engagement trend in contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy is not some individual scholar's personal project but has already developed into a collective enterprise with its systematic character and extensive joint efforts. This shows the degree of its matureness, results from its in-depth theoretical preparation, and helps to bring about its related academic community that can provide decent critical examination of the works in the constructive-engagement scholarship. Especially, the movement is now well implemented through some effective organizational forces. Among others, one contributing force in this connection is an international academic association, i.e., The International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP), which was formally established in 2002. The ISCWP has systematically planned and organized a series of academic events and projects explicitly for the sake of the constructive-engagement purpose and agenda. The foregoing conception of constructive engagement of Chinese and Western philosophy has been explicitly and formally documented in the ISCWP constitution as follows:

> With the preceding general purposes, the Society emphasizes (but is not limited to) the constructive engagement between Chinese philosophy and Western mainstream philosophy (analytic tradition as well as continental tradition in the West in their broad senses); the Society stresses the sensitivity of such comparative studies to contemporary development and resources of philosophy and their mutual advancement; and, through the characteristic path of comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy, the Society strives to contribute to philosophy as common human wealth as well as to respective studies of Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy. The Society also emphasizes building up a channel and outlet for the academic exchange and communication between the homeland of Chinese philosophy and the Western world in philosophy.[37]

The reader can see that the above citation from the ISCWP constitution, though in a concise way, reflects a number of key features of this movement and actually serves as the guiding line of the association for its agenda and organizational activities.

Sixth, as far as the constitution of the participants in the movement is concerned, they are limited to neither those who major in traditional Chinese philosophy nor those who are native Chinese philosophers, but also include scholars from other philosophical communities of the world (for example, the mainstream philosophical circle in English-speaking countries). In this aspect and to this extent, the constructive-engagement movement in contemporary studies of Chinese philosophy has already become an international enterprise (as one significant part of the constructive-engagement-oriented comparative philosophy worldwide or thus oriented world philosophy); it provides one effective channel by which scholars from different traditions and/or with distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy carry out international cooperation, constructive dialogue and comparative engagement in studying Chinese philosophy towards world philosophy or doing philosophy in a global context. For example, in the past decade, some well-respected scholars in the

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[37] The full text of the ISCWP Constitution (both in English and Chinese) is available from the ISCWP website whose current address is http://sangle.web.wesleyan.edu/iscwp/.

analytic tradition, such as Donald Davidson, Michael Krausz, Ernie Lepore, A. P. Martinich, Adam Morton, John Searle, Avrum Stroll, and Samuel C. Wheeler have been drawn to this enterprise. Although Chinese philosophy is not among their area of specialty, on the one hand, they have made contributions to studying Chinese philosophy either via their valuable works on some meta-philosophical and/or methodological issues involved in the constructive engagement of Chinese and Western philosophy, or directly through exploring some jointly concerned issues in such studies; on the other hand, they have also more or less benefited from the relevant resources in Chinese philosophy through such comparative engagement that have constructively contributed to their own studies.

Seventh, as far as its research outcomes are concerned, the constructive-engagement trend or movement, with the aforementioned systematic efforts, has already produced substantial results in research on a series of philosophical issues, neither merely stopping at some sort of armchair speculation of the mere possibility, nor merely remaining at the level of purely meta-philosophical discussion of how such constructive engagement is possible, though the latter discussion is necessary and has provided indispensable theoretic and methodological preparation for its healthy development, as emphasized before. Such in-depth detailed analysis of how distinct approaches (for example, Chinese and Western philosophy) to concrete issues can constructively engage with each other have been given not merely in some individual scholars' works that have contributed to the development of the constructive-engagement movement, but also in some remarkable research results from the recent collective efforts that have been made expressly for the constructive-engagement purpose.[38]

Eighth, as far as its relation to contemporary philosophy is concerned, the movement is especially sensitive to various resources of the post-Kantian stage of modern philosophy, or sometimes labeled 'contemporary philosophy' in its broad sense, especially those of 20th century contemporary philosophy, in both the analytic and "Continental" tradition. The reason is this. One primary purpose of the constructive-engagement strategy in studying Chinese and comparative philosophy is to inquire into how to make contributions to the jointly-concerned issues in the common enterprise of philosophy; for this purpose, the movement as a whole has paid much attention to, and has been concerned especially with, two things: (1) distinct approaches to those issues that have been suggested from other traditions (especially those in contemporary analytic philosophy and "Continental" philosophy in the Western tradition), and (2) new developments of philosophy as explored in various areas of contemporary philosophy. The concern (1) renders the movement comparative in character, while the concern (2) renders the movement sensitive to the updated development of philosophy and conceptual-explanatory resources in contemporary

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[38] Among others, two recent anthology volumes respectively on the constructive engagement of Davidson's philosophy and Chinese philosophy and of Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, for the two aforementioned collective research projects, have already come out in print (see Mou 2006a and Mou 2008a). For my own explorations in these two connections, see Mou 2006b and Mou 2008b.

philosophy; both concerns (1) and (2) render the movement especially active in comparative engagement with various distinct approaches from other traditions or styles/orientations in contemporary philosophy and in adoption of various relevant conceptual-explanatory resources developed in contemporary philosophy.[39]

Ninth, as far as its own standard for philosophical scholarship is concerned, the constructive-engagement agenda and fruitful research results of the movement with the preceding characteristics have raised a *higher* standard for the *philosophical* scholarship of studying Chinese philosophy and comparative (Chinese-Western) philosophy to this extent: the *philosophical* (instead of merely historical) studies of Chinese philosophy needs in-depth understanding and command (not merely introductory-level knowledge) of the developments of contemporary philosophy in various closely related central areas together with their conceptual and explanatory resources, instead of treating them as things irrelevant or alien. It has been realized that such understanding is not a mere preference but a must for the constructive-engagement purpose and agenda. In other words, when carrying out studies of Chinese philosophy for the sake of constructive-engagement, one cannot be satisfied merely with an introductory level of knowledge of relevant subjects and their related conceptual-explanatory resources in contemporary philosophy; rather, one needs to have an updated, in-depth understanding of them, including a careful reading of the relevant literature of contemporary philosophy and being sensitive to its new developments on relevant fronts.

Tenth, as far as its fundamental nature and direction is concerned, the movement is part of world philosophy (or part of comparative philosophy in general as doing philosophy in a global context), instead of a mere local one associated with Chinese philosophy alone or comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy alone, in the following two senses or connections. (1) As far as its fundamental direction is concerned, as already highlighted before, one fundamental agenda of the movement is a general constructive-engagement strategy: to inquire into how, via reflective criticism and self-criticism, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or from various styles/orientations of doing philosophy (including those from the complex array of distinct styles/orientations of doing philosophy within the same tradition), can learn from each other and jointly contribute to the common philosophical enterprise and/or a series of issues or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. In this

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[39] For example, to jointly implement the two related concerns in this connection, the ISCWP as one contributing force to the movement has established its workshop-roundtable series, i.e., ISCWP's *Beijing Roundtable on Contemporary Philosophy*, which directly and explicitly address the two concerns in a joint way. Now the *Beijing Roundtable on Contemporary Philosophy* has already successfully held five workshops respectively in the summers of 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 and well implemented the agenda in this regard.

way, the issues and concerns under its reflective examination are eventually general and associated with cross-traditions instead of idiosyncratically holding for Chinese philosophy alone. (2) As far as its basic methodological strategy is concerned, in view of its foregoing fundamental agenda, the constructive-engagement movement in modern Chinese philosophy is not limited to its constructive engagement with *Western* philosophy but also with other philosophical traditions, as well as constructive engagement between distinct movements within Chinese philosophy. To this extent, constructive engagement between Chinese and Western philosophy can serve as a methodological *template* for the constructive engagement between any two (or more than two) seemingly competing approaches in philosophical inquiries towards world philosophy, say, between the Chinese tradition and other non-Western philosophical traditions.

I contend that the foregoing ten characteristic features shown in the recent prominent case of the constructive-engagement trend or movement in contemporary studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy have their general philosophical implications and morals for our colleagues whose primary expertise lie in other traditions or other styles/orientations of doing philosophy but who share the same fundamental constructive-engagement goal in their philosophical inquiries. Indeed, I hope that this case analysis has illustrated how, through the reflective practice of constructive-engagement, those (individually and/or collectively) whose primary research areas lie in one tradition (in this case, Chinese philosophy) or whose primary methodological approach focuses on one style/orientation (in this case, some representative style in Chinese philosophy) can learn from other traditions/orientations of philosophy and thus enhance the *philosophical* scholarship of their home area and/or their primary approach and contribute to the common philosophical enterprise. The same moral can be presented from the point of view of a philosopher from another tradition.[40]

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In this "Journal Theme Introduction", first, I have characterized the identity and nature of comparative philosophy as understood in a philosophical way and as explored in this Journal. Second, through needed conceptual and explanatory resources and a meta-methodological framework, I have further elaborated some central methodological emphases of the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy and explained how the constructive engagement strategy is possible. Third, I have illustrated the strategy of constructive-engagement and drawn some morals and methodological templates that have general significance through a case analysis

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[40] In this connection, we might take a real-life figure, John Searle, as example: the morals of such constructive engagement are well recorded in print through the engaging contributions by the participants of the foregoing two identities (those whose primary research areas include Chinese philosophy and those whose primary research areas do not include Chinese philosophy but analytic philosophy) in the monograph anthology *Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (see Mou 2008a).

concerning studies of Chinese and comparative Chinese-Western philosophy,

Now, with all the foregoing explanation, elaboration, clarification and illustrations, I summarize the orientation, emphasis, coverage and goal of the Journal in a way that prospective authors and readers can easily capture its points. The coverage of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* is not restricted to, but can include, any particular comparative-engagement pairs of traditions/styles of doing philosophy (e.g., the East-West, South-North, or analytic-'Continental'), in view of the common philosophical enterprise and series of issues or topics of *philosophical* interest and significance. Generally speaking, the emphasis of the Journal, regarding conceptual/explanatory resources and modes of thinking in philosophy, is not exclusive to any *ad hoc* way of thinking (e.g., neither the Greek-style *nous* alone nor the Chinese-style *dao* alone) but inclusive; but, specifically speaking, this emphasis is also sensitive to the nature and features of specific philosophical issues/topics and the demand of situations. On the other hand, the Journal is inclusive but not merely for the sake of being aware of views from other traditions or styles of doing philosophy without critical engagement. The Journal emphasizes critical engagement but does not go without serious consideration of positive constructive contribution. As highlighted at the outset, the Journal explicitly emphasizes the *constructive engagement* of distinct approaches in light of critical examination: it is to inquire into how, via reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual and explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions and/or different styles/orientations of doing philosophy (within one tradition or from different traditions) can learn from each other and jointly contribute to our understanding and treatment of a series of issues, themes or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. The international journal *Comparative Philosophy* sets out to make its substantial contribution to the common philosophical enterprise through this way.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ON THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY:
# THE LATIN AMERICAN CASE

## MANUEL VARGAS

**ABSTRACT**: *There is very little study of Latin American philosophy in the English-speaking philosophical world. This can sometimes lead to the impression that there is nothing of philosophical worth in Latin American philosophy or its history. The present article offers some reasons for thinking that this impression is mistaken, and indeed, that we ought to have more study of Latin American philosophy than currently exists in the English-speaking philosophical world. In particular, the article argues for three things: (1) an account of cultural resources that is useful for illuminating the fact of cultural differences and variations in cultural complexity, (2) a framework for understanding the value of philosophy, and (3) the conclusion that there is demonstrable value to Latin American philosophy and its study.*

## 1. PHILOSOPHY'S CULTURE OF SILENCE ABOUT CULTURE

At least in the United States, there are not many philosophers in the "analytic" core of the profession who make it their task to write about the nature, status, and direction of culture. What work there is tends to be about the implications of culture, its social construction and its effects. Almost nothing is done at the level of offering a fundamental ontology of culture. There are a number of reasons why this might be so. Perhaps there is a sense that culture is too amorphous a thing for serious, rigorous philosophical reflection. Perhaps many philosophers simply prefer to avoid running the risks that are endemic to reflection on culture. Philosophical writing on cultural differences has been plagued by an unflattering collection of vices—racism, sexism, Eurocentrism, and so on—so, maybe we are better off passing over these topics in silence.

Nonetheless, there are things to be said about culture. My aim here is to examine the relationship of culture to philosophy, and in particular to explore some consequences of thinking about philosophy in terms of something I call *cultural*

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*resources*. This account is not intended to provide anything like an all-encompassing picture of the fundamental ontology of culture. At best, it is a very small contribution to a part of that much larger task. All I hope to show is that thinking in terms of cultural resources can help us make sense of a range of different phenomena, including one of several values in philosophical work, and the value of doing the history of philosophy. I go on to extend this account to the somewhat peculiar case of philosophy done in Latin America, and the issue of whether we ought to treat it as a significant or relevant part of the study of philosophy in the United States. I will argue that — contrary to what many might assume— it is plausible that philosophy here in the United States would have benefited if we had been allocating some resources to the study of Latin American philosophy all along. So, really, I aim to argue for three things: (1) the utility of my account of cultural resources for illuminating the fact of cultural differences and the existence of differences in cultural complexity, (2) a framework for understanding the value of philosophy, and (3) the conclusion that there is demonstrable value in the study of Latin American philosophy. But first—some preliminaries.

## 2. SOME TRUISMS AND OVER-SIMPLICATIONS ABOUT CULTURE

In what follows, I will assume the truth of the following two claims:

(1) There are cultural differences.
(2) Cultural differences can have consequences.

Regarding the first claim — that there are cultural differences — I take it that this much is obvious. Any doubts you might have about this will go away very rapidly if you do much traveling.[1] Even though it is easy to get consensus about the fact of cultural differences, it is remarkably difficult to say philosophically illuminating things about these differences. Demarcating differences and similarities is no easy task. It is notoriously difficult to describe cultural differences without building in biased or otherwise partial assessments of what is being described. Even so, those differences are there. There are, of course, all the obvious differences we point to in our varied cultural celebrations — food, music, dance, language — but there are also the harder to specify differences of implicit values, social organization, and what we might somewhat romantically call "the rhythms of life." To a greater and lesser extent all of these differences, both obvious and subtle, are the domains of various disciplines— cultural

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[1] One does not have to leave one's home country for this to happen. I was born and raised in the U.S. However, I experienced some degree of culture shock when I moved from the Central Valley of California to Northern Indiana. What made it especially shocking was that I had recently returned from a trip to Mexico City, and in comparison, Indiana was considerably more foreign to me than Mexico City was. I never expected to undergo culture shock in my own country, much less *more* culture shock than when visiting a different country.

anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and so on. But it is notable that most Anglophone philosophers have had little interaction with these various fields.[2]

The second claim, that cultural differences have consequences should be obvious as well. Empirical work speaks to this claim, but if you accept that there are cultural differences (which you should), then it would be very difficult to argue that those differences do not have consequences. Indeed, it is difficult to see how cultural differences could be obvious and detectable if they did not have consequences.


## 3. SOME TROUBLES ABOUT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

So, I will assume the truth of these two ideas: that there are cultural differences, and that these differences make a difference. This is where the trouble starts, though. Once we admit that cultural differences can make a difference, it looks like (at least in principle) there is no reason why the differences made by culture are always positive. We tend to emphasize the benefits of cultural diversity. We tend to celebrate the various advantages that multiple cultural affiliations can bring to an organization or to the life of individuals. But if cultural differences can bring with them various advantages, there is no obvious reason why they cannot bring with them various disadvantages. And, this makes cultural differences problematic in a number of ways. It raises troubling questions about what sorts of cultures individuals, groups, or populations are better off having. It makes us wonder about both the costs and benefits of cultural changes. It raises worries about group identity and autonomy. It also raises worries about whether cultural change is threatening to group identity. But perhaps most troubling is what happens when the varied benefits and costs of a culture interact with what Nietzsche called "the instinct for rank." If cultural differences can make better and worse differences, you might start to wonder whether there are better and worse cultures. You might even go on to say things like this:

> The fact that, out of the many cultures which have appeared in history, only three survive — the Indian, the Chinese, and the Western — seems to suggest that these three possess some particular advantage over the others. In my judgment, this superiority consists in the fact that the three, in contrast to all the others, contain an answer (each a radically different one, of course) to the most profound and permanent questions and needs of man . . .. But while others were unable to supply more than myths, which in the course of time wear out and lose their charm, or halfway goals that proved unsatisfactory, the three mentioned above have each found a great clue or goal which has determined their organization.[3]

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[2] On this matter, things are somewhat better in the ostensibly "Continental" parts of the profession. But my aim here is to offer a philosophical framework for understanding some culturally complex matters for those parts of the profession not already enriched by systematic reflection on culture. So, consider this a tentative first step at establishing one kind of bridge between those parts of the profession invested in reflections on culture and that large part of the profession detached from reflections about culture as such.

[3] I've substituted 'Western' for the translation's 'Occidental'. The original text is (Romero 1949, 403).

That is a passage from a 1949 essay "Man and Culture" by Francisco Romero, perhaps the most influential Argentinean philosopher of the 20th century. It is, I think, clearly problematic in a number of ways. Among the problems are these: (1) Romero simply assumes that it is obvious what culture is —but it is not;  (2) he gives us no way to make sense of cultural identity over time: that is, how to understand the idea that we are talking about the same Western culture from 10AD Athens, Greece to 2009 upstate New York; (3) He seems to assume that the survival of a culture is straightforwardly a matter of a culture's response to issues of meaning and "permanent questions" and not, for example, a function of accidents of history, technology, geographic location, and so on; (4) He ignores the fact that there are plenty of cultures that have survived for considerable time (or that are currently existing) that are not obviously Western, Chinese, or Indian. For example, there are several varieties of African cultures, various cultures throughout what we call "The Middle East", Japan and other parts of the world, that have had or continue to have considerable longevity; (5) He does nothing to justify the obviously problematic reduction to umbrella categories what are, at best, webs of distinct cultures *internal* to the West, China, or India; (6) Finally, Romero seems blind to the possibility of cultures that might survive in various unobvious ways, as in the case of crypto-Judaism, or in Bonfil Batalla's idea that lurking under contemporary Mexico there is a *México profundo* that is the cultural legacy of an older Mesoamerican civilization.

So, there are a number of troubling aspects to this passage. Still, we should be careful not to overclaim what is objectionable about it. Susana Nuccetelli has maintained "[Romero's] assertion plainly implies that the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, among others, were inferior compared to the Indian, the Chinese, and the Western cultures. If Romero is right, the consequence would indeed be unfortunate, for then the pervasive neglect of indigenous Latin American cultures would be entirely justified" (Nuccetelli 2002, 83). This diagnosis is erroneous or misleading on several accounts.

First, we should not be mislead about the inferiority/superiority distinction used by Romero. In this passage, Romero makes it clear that the sense in which he is evaluating a culture as superior or inferior simply has to do with its survival.[4] Cultures that survive for longer (or perhaps, at until the present) are *at least with respect to survival* superior to those that do not survive as long (or, perhaps that do not currently survive). This entails nothing about superiority in some overarching sense, and it entails nothing about the intrinsic value (or possible lack there of) of these or any other cultures, including those that have not survived, or have not survived for very long. It is entirely consistent with what Romero claims in this passage that a culture might have a high intrinsic value but be inferior with respect to the issue of survival. And, it is entirely consistent with this that the indigenous people of Latin America might have had

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[4] This is also consistent with his usage of these ideas in the rest of the chapter from which this passage is taken.

cultures that were superior to Indian, Chinese, and Western cultures with respect to some standard other than survival.

Second, contrary to what Nuccetelli suggests, nothing in the quotation from Romero speaks to whether "the pervasive neglect of indigenous Latin American cultures is justified". Judgments about the longevity of a culture do not entail that shorter-lived cultures are not worth studying. Nor would this be entailed by something like a judgment of the all-things-considered superiority of Indian, Chinese, and Western cultures. That I think Chrysippus is superior to Leibniz does not mean that I have to think Leibniz isn't worth studying, or that we would be justified in neglecting his work. Similarly, even if Romero were saying that Indian, Chinese, and Western cultures are all things considered superior cultures, it does not follow that we are justified in neglecting other cultures. Or, to put the point differently, the justification for studying a culture need not flow from (i) whether the considered culture is long-lived, (ii) whether it is excellent at answering what Romero calls the "profound and permanent questions and needs of mankind" or (iii) whether it is superior in some all-in sense. We might have a fully adequate justification for studying a culture if we have something to learn from it, or if we simply find it interesting. We need not draw the conclusion that a view like Romero's requires that we dismiss indigenous thinking, or for that matter, the study of Latin American thought more generally.

Although there is still plenty that is problematic about Romero's remarks, I do think there are provocative kernels of truth in them: cultures do vary, cultures provide resources for individuals and societies, those resources may vary from culture to culture, and there might be a way to think comparatively about the cultural resources had by societies. What I'd like to do now is to think about one way of making sense of these ideas in a fairly systematic way, and to explore what some of the consequences of these ideas might be for the value of philosophy.

## 4. SKETCH OF A THEORY OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

The fundamental nature of culture, the theoretical work of the category, and the ontological commitments of talk about culture are all subjects of contention across a variety of disciplines. Fortunately, I am not going to try to say anything interesting about culture *per se*. For present purposes, we can define culture as a pattern of learned, shared norms and attendant behaviors, judgments, and affective responses. One can surely quibble with aspects of this construal of culture, but nothing much depends on its particulars. Instead, my focus is on something I will call a *cultural resource*.

A cultural resource is, in the characteristic case, any entity, practice, pattern of judgment, or collection thereof whose nature and origin depend at least in part on the shared norms of a community of intentional agents.[5] To some ears, this may sound

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[5] This is not intended to be anything like necessary and sufficient conditions for what constitutes a cultural resource. Instead, my hope is to characterize some of the typical features and functions of cultural resources, recognizing that there will surely be degenerate cases, cases that only partially or

very mysterious. The reality of such objects, however, is completely familiar. When I speak of cultural resources, I speak of ideas or practices with a kind of significance that depends on the fact of our being intentional, norm-using creatures. So, objects as diverse as novels, wedding ceremonies, philosophy lectures, *telenovelas*, birthdays, felonies, and handshakes all count as cultural resources in my sense. These objects may be in some sense physical, but their reality is importantly dependent on our collective mental life; their currency is ideational or symbolic, and their structure is at least partly given by the cognitive, affective, and behavioral norms in virtue of which the objects or products are apprehended. The ontology of cultural resources thus has less to do with the arrangement of physical objects and more to do with the arrangement of new norms or the reconfiguration of old norms, whatever that comes to.

We might say that cultural resources are the result of the operations of sophisticated forms of agency in the world. Some cultural resources arise as happy accidents arising inadvertently. Other times, the development of cultural resources is the principal aim of an activity. In either case, cultural resources tend to have *cultural utility*. Cultural utility is anything that assists in the flourishing, survival, or perpetuation of a given culture, understood in very broad ways. So, for example, a way of greeting ones neighbor might have the cultural utility of perpetuating certain kinds of social relations that are in turn part of a web of practices that jointly contribute to the survival, flourishing, or perpetuating of a people or culture. Depending on the cultural resource, cultural utility will frequently overlap with other kinds of utility, for example: economic, practical, or hedonic utility. However, connections between cultural and other kinds of utility will typically be contingent and historically bounded.

*Cultural production* is just that— the production, by whatever means, of cultural resources. Sometimes this production is original and other times it is reproductive (that is, reproducing an already existing cultural resource). Cultural resources can also be renewable resources. That is, a given cultural resource can be repeatedly used as a source of new or reproductive cultural production. For example, part of a song might be sampled for a newer musical composition, and in turn that newer composition (including the sample) might be sampled and transformed for the purposes of a newer instance of music.[6]

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incompletely manifest the functions and properties I am about to outline. As I use the term, *cultural resources* is a broader category than *meme* (e.g., Dawkins) or *cultural capital* (Bourdieu). Some sociologists use a notion of cultural resources to track something like Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. As will be clear in a bit, if it isn't already, I have a somewhat different notion at work in my account.

[6] An example: consider the rhythm line used in Missy Elliott's track "Get Ur Freak On." It was subsequently sampled, and played backwards as a rhythm line in Bubba Sparxx's "Ugly." Part of what makes this an innovative instance of cultural resource recycling has to do with the contrasting content of the songs and the nature of the performer— Missy Elliott is an African American woman touting her sex appeal ("I look like a Halle Berry poster") and exhorting listeners to sexual activity whereas Bubba Sparxx's song is about, among other things, his resignation to the fact that he and his friends' sexual appeal is limited ("let's face it, none of us will ever date a model . . . it's getting ugly"). The significance of context for cultural recycling can extend out quite broadly from the particulars of a given case. Cultural recycling can be cultural appropriation, and the mainstreaming of "black" music has historically

Importantly, cultural resources can range from *simple* to *complex*. That is, cultural resources exist on a continuum of complexity where some resources contain features that are more complex than others. It is hard to give any well-defined account of these things, but the idea should be intuitive enough— other things being equal, a symphony is more complex than a single note, a painting is more complex than a single daub of color, an epic poem is more complex than a single word.

The distinction between simple and complex cultural resources does not track a distinction between "high" and "low" culture. Something we learned from both Shakespeare and Jazz is that *low culture* resources can turn out to be as complex as any *high culture* resource. Moreover, that there is a distinction between simple and complex cultural resources does not mean that we have perfect epistemic access to every instance of that distinction. We can be insensitive to complexity for a variety of reasons. For instance, features of our own culture, or a lack of the right kind of acculturation, may prevent us from recognizing a complex cultural resource. A striking example of this kind of imperfect epistemic access comes out in Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz* (as quoted in Nussbaum 1997, 163):

> Schuller describes the difficulty Western musicologists had in even notating African music, when they first began to do fieldwork in Africa. Before the fieldwork of Jones (an Englishman who had lived most of his life in Africa), the expectation of visiting scholars was that they would encounter 'primitive' musical forms. But European-trained musical ears, accustomed to hearing all voices strike together on a downbeat, proved unable to notate correctly the complicated polyphonies of African ensemble music, in which often each of twelve or more voices will go its separate way, weaving and interweaving. Reconstructions based on the flawed notation seemed to Africans laughably crude, in the way in which a child's copy of complex artwork would seem crude. Nor could European ears catch the small rhythmic differences that were crucial to the correct notation of African song, as intervals of a twelfth of a second or less were routinely deployed by the African performer. European music simply did not operate with such small rhythmic intervals, so European-trained notators made errors.

This example is remarkable for several reasons. First, it illustrates the difficulty of recognizing cultural complexity even when presented with it. European musicologists were not equipped to recognize or detect the complexity that was actually there. In particular, being familiar with one species of complexity in a domain of culture —for example, European symphonies— is no guarantee of accurate detection, and in fact might be a hurdle to it, when dealing with a different species of complexity in the very same general cultural domain. Second, the example illustrates that cultural complexity is hardly uniform internal to a culture. That a group of people might have complex cultural resources in one domain (e.g., symphonic music) does not mean that it

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worked through the redeployment of black musical forms by non-black performers. In this case, though, Missy Elliott was working with considerable success in an already mainstreamed music genre, whereas the less famous Bubba Sparx (presumably perceived as something of an outsider to the genre even after it became mainstream) explicitly acknowledges his piggybacking on a version of Missy Elliott's beat— albeit while noting her insistence that her music is "copywritten, so don't copy me." In short, context can play a large and complex role in determining the content and significance of a recycled cultural resource.

possesses all the possible complex cultural resources in the more general domain (music). And, that one has complex cultural resources in music tells us nothing about whether that group of people has similarly complex cultural resources in other domains. As the music example reminds us, the possession of economic and technological power is no guarantee or even an indicator of complex cultural resources in the myriad of domains of human concern. Writ large, this means that we should not expect that our society — immensely complex in some economic and technological ways — is complex in other ways, or even in all ways economic and technological. Similarly, we should not expect that societies with comparatively simple technological and economic resources are comparatively simple in most or all domains.

Complex cultural resources provide a distinctive opportunity for reuse. A simple object usually permits a wide variety of reuses, but a complex cultural resource is partitionable to a degree unavailable to simples. On one level, a complex cultural resource typically involves a range of more basic cultural resources, so in some sense it has the potential utility of whatever its constitutive resources might possess. More importantly, however, complex cultural resources typically involve an arrangement of relations among more basic cultural resources that is oftentimes novel, useful, or illuminating.[7] At least in the typical case (and there are doubtlessly atypical cases), the greater the complexity, the more ways in which it is likely to have some kind of usefulness, both as a matter of decomposition into its more basic resources but also in terms of the relations it suggests or makes possible. Consider, for example, the *Iliad*. Without the *Iliad*, there would be no *Aeneid*, without which there would be no *Inferno*, without which there would be no *Paradise Lost*, and so on, right up to *O Brother Where Art Thou*. One need not appreciate all the resultant products to appreciate that the cultural utility produced by the *Iliad* is vast. It is something that was made possible, if I am right, in substantial part because of the complexity of the work.

Of course, it isn't *just* complexity that accounts for the *Iliad*'s fecundity. Partly it is a matter of how accessible it is to audiences. But this is just to return to the epistemic point— different objects are differently accessible, and accessibility is a function of object, context, and perceivers. But that we have imperfect access to complexity does not mean that it isn't there.

In sum, then: (1) the complexity of a cultural resource can be independent of the knowing powers of any particular individual (2) a resources' complexity may have nothing to do with the ethnic or social-economic status of its producer, (3) and *ceteris paribus*, complex cultural resources typically provide more long term cultural utility than simple cultural resources.

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[7] It is possible that a simple cultural resource might turn out to be more valuable in the long run than a complex cultural resource. One never knows what the vagaries of history will make true. But it does seem to be safer to bet on the long-standing value of a cultural resource with great complexity (like the *Iliad*, for instance) than one without a great deal of complexity (a Coca-Cola advertisement, say). Though, as Andy Warhol taught us, even a Coke ad can turn out to have some potential for cultural reuse.

What these points allow us to see is how those kernels of truth in Romero's reflections on culture need not be as problematic as they might initially seem. While we might acknowledge that there may be differences between the number of complex cultural resources had by a culture or society, these differences need not be connected to the actual survival of a culture, or its technological or world-historical status. However, the difference-making elements (the number of complex cultural resources) will be often be invisible to cultural outsiders. Indeed, as a matter of our actual epistemic circumstances, it may *never* be possible to make reliable judgments about comparative cultural sophistication. But this does not deny that there are genuine cultural differences, and that differences can and do have real consequences.

## 5. NEW WORK FOR A THEORY OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

One upshot of my account is that it provides one explanation of why humanities departments in U.S. universities are vital to the production and preservation of culture. In our society, universities are one of the primary institutions responsible for the discovery, development and propagation of complex cultural resources. Of course, universities have other functions as well. And, other institutions have functions that overlap with these aspects of a university (e.g., libraries and museums). But a crucial justification of the university system is its unique role in the traffic of cultural utility. By preserving, producing, and propagating complex cultural resources, the university contributes in a profound and systematic way to the attainment of cultural utility— something that often overlaps with other more familiar forms of utility.

It goes without saying that these functions do not operate in a vacuum. The relationship of a university system to the other parts of society is also important for how well a university does with respect to the aims of protecting and producing those resources with cultural utility. But in the contemporary context an effective university system will be involved in a complex exchange of cultural resources both internal and external to the academic world. Individuals and institutions take cultural resources discovered or propagated internal to an academic context and transform them, in turn creating new cultural resources (movies, music, literature, tennis shoes, sports, etc.) which feed back into the academic system.

The humanities, those oft-unappreciated disciplines in the university system, are deeply involved in the production and preservation of complex cultural resources. The discipline of philosophy is a species of this more general project of producing and preserving complex cultural resources. Philosophy shares with other disciplines the general task of discovering, constructing, and preserving complex ideas with a wide degree of cultural utility. What is, I think, distinctive about philosophy is that it is concerned with, roughly, the development and preservation of complex cultural resources in domains where we have no reliable method for determining truths. This is why the scope of philosophy is so broad, and at the same time, it is why, if we focus on identifiable, demonstrable truths that it has produced, those achievements can fade to invisibility. On the model I am suggesting, philosophy is, roughly, our collective

attempt to puzzle out issues in just those contexts where we have no reliable method for determining what is probably true. When we do determine a methodology that is reliable in some domain, and we can point to markers of its success, we tend to regard it as something other than philosophy in the strict and proper sense (Vargas 2007, 64). But this is only to say that the barrenness of philosophy is only apparent. If, instead, we conceive of it as a field that specializes in generating tools and ideas for precisely those places where we have impoverished ways of understanding things, philosophy's contribution becomes more visible. Indeed, by this measure, the body of complex cultural resources produced by philosophers likely outstrips most known disciplines.

(Please note that this story does not exclude the possibility of other accounts of the value of the humanities, philosophy, and so on! I believe that there are other, non-mutually-exclusive accounts of the value of these things, but the present argument shall just make use of this particular conception of the value of these things.)

This also goes some distance towards explaining why the study of the history of philosophy should have an important place in the profession and teaching of philosophy. The history of philosophy is the history of a succession of immensely complex cultural resources, by some of our best minds. Although our current beliefs differ significantly, and in some cases differ radically from the presuppositions of many historical figures, we cannot say in advance which historical ideas will turn out to have utility in the future. We cannot anticipate when some conceptual innovation, some idea, or some turn of argument will yield a new framework for understanding ourselves, or the universe. However, one effective way of aiding this process is to not lose track of those innovations, ideas, and arguments that we have already developed. The only way to preserve our access to those resources, then, is to ensure that our community of scholars includes those whose business it is to study the history of philosophy. Only then can we have some hope of not losing the resources that are already ours. This task requires genuine, dedicated scholars. It is not a simple matter to study resources created in a context remote from our own. Recall those African musicians whose music was so badly reproduced by early European musicologists.

Thus far, my account has been operating at a fairly abstract level of description. It may help to think about a handful of concrete cases of what are at least prima facie examples of the sort of complex cultural resources developed, discovered, and/or propagated by the discipline of philosophy. Here are three examples.

*Social expectations and the construction of individual capacities*

An important recurrent theme in foundational philosophical work on gender and race has been the idea that social expectations can construct the kinds of capacities that people have. So, for example, Dubois argued that social expectations concerning "Negroes" structured the actual capacities they came to have. And, perhaps even more famously, John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft each argued that social expectations about women structured the kinds of capacities that women have (Mill 1869). If you don't believe that women are capable of scientific achievement, then you won't bother to provide them with the sort of education required for scientific

achievement. As a result, in societies with those expectations, few if any women will have the requirements for producing scientific achievements, which in turn vindicates the view that women lack the capacity for serious scientific work.

*Values and theory underdetermination*

Over the past few decades there has been an interesting discussion in the philosophy of science on the appropriate role of values and social and political ends in the interpretation of scientific data (Anderson 1995, 27-58). An important development in this literature was the argument, advanced by some feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science, that value-laden aims (e.g., the aim of gender equity) play an appropriate role in theory selection in cases where the evidence underdetermines what scientific theory we should accept. And, since the evidence at least very frequently is consistent with a range of possible scientific theories, value-laden selection of theories may be frequently permissible. Although this remains a subject of dispute, it is clear that reflections on these issues have constituted a general contribution to philosophical reflections on knowledge and scientific theorizing.

*The relevance of psychology for ethics and political philosophy*

In her landmark 1958 paper, "Modern Moral Philosophy" G.E.M. Anscombe argued that we cannot profitably engage in normative ethics without having a better grasp of a range of psychological issues (Anscombe 1981, 26-42). This is an idea that is picked up and developed by a number of influential figures in moral political philosophy, including Richard Brandt and even (surprisingly enough) John Rawls. In his essay "The Independence of Moral Theory" Rawls writes that:

> the further advance of moral philosophy depends upon a deeper understanding of the structure of moral conceptions and of their connections with human sensibility . . . We must not turn away from this task because much of it may appear to belong to psychology or social theory and not to philosophy. For the fact is that others are not prompted by philosophical inclination to pursue moral theory; yet this motivation is essential for without it the inquiry has the wrong focus" (Rawls 1999, 302).

Only recently have philosophers begun to make good on these calls to action, attempting to incorporate work in the various sciences of the mind with philosophical work in ethics and normative theory (Doris and Stich 2005). Though this project is still young, it is clearly bearing important fruit. Empirically informed work on philosophical intuitions, character traits, the nature of rationality, moral motivation, and so on, are increasingly important for some branches of normative philosophy.

This trio of ideas (or collections of ideas) are instances of complex cultural resources. These ideas have considerable utility, or at least promise of utility, and they are the kinds of things with a wide range of re-application and downstream fecundity. And, I think, the development and propagation of these resources constitute a cultural achievement that philosophy can rightly claim as its own.

## 6. THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY: THE LATIN AMERICAN CASE

Suppose you accept my account of complex cultural resources, and suppose you accept the global account of what the humanities (and philosophy) are engaged in. Additionally, let us suppose you accept that the examples I have offered constitute prima facie good cases for a complex cultural resource of the sort that philosophy is appropriately concerned with. Now let us turn to the Latin American case. Is there any reason to think that Latin American philosophy might have similar value, from the perspective of a concern for complex cultural resources? I believe that a compelling case can be made for the conclusion that there are valuable complex cultural resources in Latin American philosophy, and consequently, that it merits sustained scholarly attention in the United States.[8]

Note, though, that even if we *currently* have no reason for thinking that the study of Latin American philosophy will yield the discovery, production, or preservation of complex cultural resources, the general philosophical community in the United States simply isn't in a position to make a negative assessment about the value of Latin American philosophy as a field of study. Given the fact that there is little or no systematic study of Latin American philosophy in the United States, it would surely be premature to draw a negative conclusion on the basis of a failure to gather evidence. This would be akin to deciding that a particular person has nothing valuable to say — without having ever bothered to speak to that person, without having read anything that person has written, and without learning anything at all about that person. So, to be in a position to make a negative assessment we would first have to learn something about Latin American philosophy.

Conveniently enough, however, there is excellent evidence that Latin American philosophy can and has made contributions of complex cultural resources comparable to the ones I've cited above. Consider the following passage from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (de la Cruz 2004, 59-60):

> You foolish and unreasoning men
> Who cast all blame on women,
> Not seeing you yourselves are cause
> Of the same faults you accuse
>
> . . . You combat their firm resistance,
> And then solemnly pronounce
> that what you've won through diligence
> is proof of women's flightiness . . . .
>
> . . . .Why then are you so alarmed

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[8] None of what follows precludes the possibility that Latin American philosophy is valuable on other grounds. I am sure that it is. However, what follows is an argument for why given the present account of cultural resources, it is plausible to think that Latin American philosophy is valuable and worth studying.

by the fault that is your own?
Wish women to be what you make them,
Or make them what you wish they were.[9]

The poem from which this is taken, as well as a letter written in defense of her pursuit of education in the late 1600s, are well-established texts in the canon of Latin American philosophical texts, and familiar to some readers versed in the history of feminism. Part of their importance centers on the issue she gives expression to in the above passages: social expectations and social context structure the capacities and dispositions of people of her time, and in particular, a strongly patriarchal social structure is what made women the kinds of persons (flighty, unlearned, etc.) faulted by the men of that time. This is, of course, to make the point that social expectations can play an essential role in the construction of capacities in people. And it is a point that was made by a woman philosopher —a Mexican nun —, in a philosophical context, literally centuries before similar claims by John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, and W.E.B. Dubois. So, a complex cultural resource like the idea that social expectations can structure capacities of individuals and groups not only can be developed in the Latin American philosophical context— it was developed there, and earlier at that.[10]

I now want to turn to briefly consider the work of a more recent Latin American philosopher, José Vasconelos. Though he wrote extensive treatises on metaphysics, aesthetics, and the history of philosophy, in the United States Vasconcelos is principally known (if he is known at all) for his work, especially in *The Cosmic Race,* on philosophical issues about race, and in particular, his promotion of race mixing in Latin America. However, some of his best work is in a neglected essay from *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*. There, he concludes that the scientific evidence about the benefits and costs of race mixing are unclear. The available biological, genetic, and cultural data of his time did not, in his judgment, settle whether race mixing is generally positive, or even what its principle effects might be. What is interesting, though, is what he goes on to argue. Vasconelos maintains that practical or normative considerations can play an appropriate role in theory selection, especially in light of the particular cultural role played by theories of mixed race. As he puts it: "If all nations then build theories to justify their policies or to strengthen their deeds, let us develop in Mexico our own theories; or, at least, let us be certain, that we choose among the foreign theories of thought that stimulate our growth, rather than restrain it."

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[9] In Gracia and Millán-Zaibert, eds. *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century,* Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004, pp. 59-60.

[10] Notice that the success or failure of the argument does not directly hinge on chronology. I mention chronology for two reasons, though. First, the earlier advent of these ideas in Latin America makes it clear that their development in Latin America weren't simply later appropriations of the more familiar examples known to Anglophone philosophers. Second, the development of a valuable notion elsewhere can suggest the possibility that the utility of that idea might have become available to us (in the Anglophone world) sooner if we had been paying closer attention to philosophical work in Latin America. I return to this idea and its limitations later in the article.

(Vasconcelos 1926, 96)[11] His view is not just that we can pick any scientific theory we like. We are appropriately constrained by what the available empirical data shows. However, in cases where the data does not favor one particular theory over another, and given that the issue is something we have reason to settle, then consideration of things like cultural uplift, national development, and so on, can provide adequate reason to favor one view over another. And, as he observes, these value-laden considerations drive theory construction in a good number of cases.

Vasconcelos' move is, of course, the kind of thing that has been said in recent debates in the philosophy of science and in epistemology. And, notably, Vasconcelos' explicit use of this idea antedates by half a century the deployment of these ideas in the context of Anglo-American epistemology and philosophy of science.[12]

I want to conclude by briefly considering the work of one more philosopher in the Latin American canon. In 1934, the Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos published an extremely influential book, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (Ramos 1962). In that work, he endeavored to describe the character flaws and attendant cultural defects of then-contemporary Mexicans. Though the book was part of an already existing tradition of Latin American speculation about what was flawed or problematic about various national or regional characters[13], Ramos' book spawned several generations of competing and counter-diagnoses of widely variable philosophical sophistication, the most prominent of which is Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*. What is remarkable about Ramos' text is his insistence that the key to understanding the moral and cultural defects of Mexicans is to be found in the careful deployment of scientific psychology, particularly the work of Alfred Adler. On Ramos' model, moral psychology is subject to regional variation, and variations can only be illuminatingly studied against the backdrop of an empirically informed investigation in to the psychological mechanisms that underpin moral, social, and political phenomena. Similarly, any normative theory about how Mexicans *ought* to be, whether morally, culturally, or politically, would have to be similarly sensitive to the best going accounts of psychology (especially what we would now call social psychology). Of course, Ramos's vision of these things, and his use of Adler are importantly at odds with what we would recognize as the best current accounts of human psychology. But that is not the point. The point is that as early as 1934, there were philosophers who thought that normative theory needed to be informed by empirically adequate pictures of human beings.[14] In other words, this

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[11] These remarks are echoed in *La raza cósmica,* where it is clearer the way in which this sort of view is of a piece with views about metaphysics and epistemology (Vasconcelos 1997).

[12] It is also worth recognizing that Vasconcelos' deployment of underdetermination is also comparatively early in the history of this idea. While versions of it show up prior to Vasconcelos' work (e.g., the late 19th century), his use of this idea nevertheless antedates (for example), Quine's famous discussion of theory underdetermination.

[13] This tradition extends well back to the origins of Western philosophical and proto-philosophical reflection in and about Latin America— including early figures such as Sepulveda, Vitoria, and Garcilaso de la Vega.

[14] One might reply that something true has been going on for much longer in the Anglo-American tradition. One might cite Herbert Spencer, for instance. But Latin American positivists (inspired by

too constitutes prima facie evidence that there are complex cultural objects to be found in Latin American philosophical work that antedates similar achievements in the Anglo-American context.

These examples all derive from philosophical work on race, identity, and gender in Latin America. To those familiar with the history of Latin American philosophy, this will be no surprise at all. Social and political philosophy, of which discussions about culture, ethnicity, race, and gender all play a part, has been something of first philosophy in much of the various strands of Latin American philosophy. So, if there were something of value to be found in the context of Latin American philosophy, it would likely be found in these areas, areas where Latin American philosophical traditions are complex and long-standing

Still, it is plausible that with more detailed scholarship, we might successfully challenge whether one or more of the examples really do constitute an instance of anticipating ideas well known and celebrated in the Anglo-American tradition. Or perhaps there are genre considerations that might incline us to throw out one of these works. For what it is worth, I think these examples will hold up well to extended scrutiny. And, we would do well to remember that the history of philosophy is littered with instances where recognizably philosophical works were produced in genres other than those we currently favor.[15]  But all this would be to miss the point. My aim is not to convince you that these cases really do constitute important anticipations of the Anglo-American tradition. Rather, my point is that we have good prima facie evidence for thinking that if genuinely complex cultural resources are to be found in philosophy they can be found in Latin American philosophy.


## 7. FURTHER OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

What might a determined critic say in reply to the general line of argument I have been developing thus far? I find it remarkable that the most common reply is not one that rejects the substance of the argument, or one that takes issue with my account of the worth of philosophy and Latin American philosophy's similar worth. Instead, the most

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Comte) were committed to scientific approaches to the study of moral and social theory around the same period. And if you really want to push dates, one might construe the position of Las Casas in the famous debate at Valladolid (in the 1600s) as hinging, in part, on the idea that natural slave theory and the resultant political theory presumed an empirically irresponsible picture of human motivation and practices. One might reply by finding an even earlier figure who thought that normative theory in one or another domain could not fruitfully proceed without getting some of the empirical facts straight. Irrespective of how all of this all turns out, it should be clear that there is an interesting discussion to be had about these things. Perhaps the figures we typically celebrate as having sparked this development might well have been unneeded had we had a philosophical community familiar with ideas produced in Latin America.

[15] For example, if we are to judge as "not philosophical" any work done in the genre of poetry, we would have to dismiss many works by pre-Socratics, as well as important texts such as Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. It would certainly have come as a surprise to many figures in the post-Hellenic period of philosophy to learn that Lucretius' work did not count as philosophy.

common reply is, as best as I can make out, one that insists on moving the goalposts. So, I am told, even though the argument may work as far as it goes, before we bother with the business of Latin American philosophy what we really need is proof that there is some worthwhile idea in it *now*, some idea that does not already have currency in Anglophone philosophy. This, I am told, is the kind of evidence we need before we invest resources into the study of Latin American philosophy.

I am convinced this demand can be met, but I remain skeptical that were I to meet it, the goalposts wouldn't move once again. If showing that 20th century Anglophone philosophy would have benefited from attention to the history of Latin American philosophy up through the 1940s is not sufficient to make the case for its worth, then I doubt that making the case of 21st century Latin American philosophy will suddenly unleash a torrent of support among my Anglophone philosophical brethren. And why should it? Anything I would cite as a novel case of innovation that doesn't have a track record in the Anglophone philosophical community could be dismissed *precisely because it lacks that track record*.

On the one hand, unless the critic already shares a conviction expressed in the purported innovation or idea, the purported innovation can be readily dismissed as insufficiently innovative, mistaken, or otherwise unpromising precisely because its features are not accepted by the critic, because the intellectual context that make it plausible is unfamiliar, or because there is no track record of esteem in which the idea is held by those the critic holds in high regard. On the other hand, if the critic already shares a conviction expressed in the purported innovation, then here too the example will fail to persuade. After all, it is no innovation to highlight an idea already had by the critic. So, the situation is dire.

Of course, a critic *could* be satisfied *if* I produced evidence of the philosophical worth of contemporary Latin American philosophy. And, for the record, I provided such evidence, elsewhere (Vargas 2007, 77 n.14). Still, my sense is that philosophers of good will will not need a further argument from the fecundity of contemporary Latin American philosophy, and any critic insufficiently moved by what I have already offered *might*, without much effort, manufacture some further reason for ongoing dissatisfaction with the new examples I would adduce.[16]

A different objection challenges the very idea of there being a significant problem with the ongoing failure of philosophers in the Anglophone world to study and teach philosophy produced in Latin America. There are different strands of this argument. One strand focuses on the very idea of Latin American philosophy, and argues that it is a red herring, as there is properly only philosophy. Regional or cultural locations are irrelevant to considerations of philosophical worth and whether the work merits attention. A second strand is content to accept that it may make sense to speak of regional, national, or linguistic groupings of philosophy, but goes on to deny that there is any real barrier to the study of these things because we never criticize philosophical

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[16] For a lengthier discussion of the barriers facing the acceptance of Latin American philosophy, see Vargas 2007, and for potential cultural barriers, see also Gracia 2000.

work for being Latin American or otherwise. We criticize philosophical work for being bad, unrigorous, ill-conceived, or wrong.

Regarding the first strand, the denial of the relevance of regional philosophy, the matter is surprisingly complicated. First of all, it is not clear that we never think about philosophy in terms of regional, national, or linguistic clusterings. When we speak of American philosophy, it is generally understood that this refers to philosophers working in the U.S. in various frameworks of conviction (e.g., pragmatism, transcendentalism) prior to the arrival of logical positivists fleeing wartime Europe. Similarly, I trust that it is recognizable what one has in mind, more or less, when we speak of French philosophy, African philosophy, and Chinese philosophy. Second, it is worth noting that there has been a lively debate (especially within Latin American philosophy) about whether it makes sense to think of regional or local philosophy. Third, and most importantly, even if we put aside current practice and accept the view that philosophy is either just philosophy or it is not philosophy, the basic argument goes through. We can say that there is a body of "just" philosophy (i.e., philosophy without reference to some regional moniker) that happens to be almost entirely produced in Latin America and that through sheer happenstance tends to be principally written in a language that is neither written in English nor one of the Big Four "philosophical" languages (i.e., French, German, Greek, or Latin), and that as a matter of unremarkable historical contingency is virtually never studied or taught in the core of the discipline in the United States. Fine. At that point, the present argument is simply this: given that this body of philosophical work (label it however you like) has some valuable cultural resources in it, resources that are worth studying, then we should study it. Since we largely do not, we should do things differently than we are doing them.[17]

The second thread of the "there is no problem here" objection, (i.e., that there is no barrier to the study because Latin American-ness is never grounds for criticism of philosophical work) is unduly optimistic. Suppose it is true that Latin American-ness is never grounds for criticizing philosophical work, even indirectly. Even so, there would remain significant institutional and practical barriers to the study of Latin American philosophy. For graduate programs with foreign language requirements, students virtually never need to offer justification or demonstration of the utility of the Big Four languages for the study of philosophy. Anecdotally, the situation is not the same for Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, for students interested in writing a dissertation in Latin American philosophy, there is virtually no top-30 graduate program in

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[17] There is sometimes a different aspect to the first strand (or depending on how one individuates these things, perhaps a further strand) that may bear some mention. The complaint I have in mind goes something like this: for all I have said, I haven't shown what is special about Latin American philosophy. In reply: it is special in the only way that matters to this argument: it is valuable and ignored. Nothing turns on it being special in the sense of being radically different, laden with privileged insights, different from all other philosophical work, or the like. Rather, the point is that it is philosophy—in an uncontroversially Western, full-blooded sense of the term—and for whatever reason(s) it is not studied in any of the most influential parts of the field. The present article is one argument among many possible arguments for why we should try to change that fact.

philosophy where one can go and expect to have an advisor competent enough to direct such a dissertation.[18] This generates a double burden on students interested in Latin American philosophy: if they wish to have access to the best education and the best subsequent opportunities in the profession, they will have to work in at least two fields —something that already has currency and representation among influential Anglophone Ph.D.-granting departments— while effectively committing themselves to the life of an autodidact in Latin American philosophy. Perhaps that is just the kind of cost that will need to be paid in the growth and study of the field. I mention these things, though, because the mere fact (if that is what it is) that Latin American-ness is never a barrier to the study of Latin American philosophy, does nothing to mitigate the very limited and impoverished paths of access to what valuable complex cultural resources there are to be found in Latin American philosophy. So, again, I think the basic structure of the argument remains: there is something valuable here, we would do well to study it, but doing that would be something different than what we are in fact doing.

Let us therefore return to the main line of argument. As to the question of whether or not there is reason to believe that there is value to be had in studying Latin American philosophy the answer is clearly yes. Given that we are (or ought to be) committed to the value of complex cultural resources, Latin American philosophy clearly satisfies the test of meriting sustained scholarly attention in the United States. Indeed, if we had always had a tradition of scholarship on Latin American thought, already internal to the discipline of philosophy within the United States, these ideas (expectations constructing abilities, theory underdetermination, and the importance of empirical psychology) — which are widely regarded as important developments[19] in the United States — would have been ideas to which we already had access. These cultural achievements would have become resources that were available to us to deploy decades and even centuries earlier than they were developed in the Anglo-American context. Failing this, even concurrent or after-the-fact awareness of similar ideas in a different context might prove to be interestingly valuable: the fact of a different deployment or circumstance of development of some idea might itself be illuminating

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[18] In speaking "top-30" departments, I am thinking of the Philosophical Gourmet Report. Rankings of philosophy Ph.D. programs is a notoriously controversial matter, and I do not mean to here take a stand on the whether and how of ranking graduate programs. A different measure of the strength of graduate programs in philosophy might generate a different story— perhaps as many as two graduate programs in a different top-30 would have a scholar who works on Latin American philosophy. The basic point, though, would remain the same: even if there is no criticism of Latin American philosophy and philosophers on grounds of being Latin American, this does not mean that students of philosophy can undertake the study of works in Latin American philosophy with the same ease, seriousness, and professional promise with which they might study the work or ideas of Descartes, Nietzsche, or David Lewis.

[19] Of course, that something is an important development does not mean that one thinks that the development gets the facts of the matter right. You needn't think they get things right to believe that they are valuable, important, or worth studying. But, in virtue of being complex and worth engagement, they might, after all, spark more accurate proposals by way of refutation of these ideas. Either way, we are likely better off with these ideas.

about the considered idea or phenomenon. This is not to say that these benefits will always obtain, or that a given idea would have had the same effect in one time as at an earlier time (perhaps they would have had different, and perhaps differently valuable effects, or none whatsoever). However, inasmuch as it is prima facie valuable to have a wide storehouse of complex cultural resources at our disposal, it behooves us to be interested in acquiring those resources that have been developed in the Latin American tradition.

Of course, similar arguments might well be made about Indian, Chinese, and perhaps African philosophy. There are various analogies and disanalogies that hold between these cases. For example, among these, only Latin American philosophy is clearly a part of the Western philosophical tradition and clearly concerned with similar issues, figures, and methods. But if similar arguments can be given to favor these other families of philosophy, and these traditions show a promise of similar fecundity, then there should be space at the academic table for research in these fields, too.

Even so, we should not downplay real-world constraints on expanding the contents of a discipline without expanding the numbers of philosophers. Moreover, there is also an issue of diminishing utility to one's own work that comes from being in a context in which everyone is working on significantly different research programs. These things will constrain the resources we pour in to the study of any field, and there are surely no hard and fast principles governing how these resources should be allocated. Nevertheless, Latin American philosophy merits more attention than it has thus far received.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# LOGICAL ANALYSIS AND LATER MOHIST LOGIC:
# SOME COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

## MARSHALL D. WILLMAN

**ABSTRACT**: *Any philosophical method that treats the analysis of the meaning of a sentence or expression in terms of a decomposition into a set of conceptually basic constituent parts must do some theoretical work to explain the puzzles of intensionality. This is because intensional phenomena appear to violate the principle of compositionality, and the assumption of compositionality is the principal justification for thinking that an analysis will reveal the real semantical import of a sentence or expression through a method of decomposition. Accordingly, a natural strategy for dealing with intensionality is to argue that it is really just an isolable, aberrant class of linguistic phenomena that poses no general threat to the thesis that meaning is basically compositional. On the other hand, the later Mohists give us good reason to reject this view. What we learn from them is that there may be basic limitations in any analytical technique that presupposes that meaning is perspicuously represented only when it has been fully decomposed into its constituent parts. The purpose of this paper is to (a) explain why the Mohists found the issue of intensionality to be so important in their investigations of language, and (b) defend the view that Mohist insights reveal basic limitations in any technique of analysis that is uncritically applied with a decompositional approach in mind, as are those that are often pursued in the West in the context of more general epistemological and metaphysical programs.*

**Keywords**: *Mohist Logic, compositionality, intensionality, idiomaticity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any philosophical method that treats the analysis of the meaning of a sentence or expression in terms of a *decomposition* into a set of conceptually basic constituent parts must do some theoretical work to explain the puzzles of intensionality. This is because intensional phenomena appear to violate the principle of compositionality, and the assumption of compositionality is the principal justification for thinking that an analysis will reveal the real semantical import of a sentence or expression through a

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method of decomposition. In this regard, a natural strategy for dealing with intensional phenomena is to argue that there is a principled distinction to be drawn between extensionality and intensionality in natural language, and that the latter is really just a small, aberrant class of linguistic phenomena that poses no general threat to the thesis that meaning is basically compositional. Philosophical analysis, if properly construed as a decompositional enterprise, may then carry on unimpeded, provided that the entities or contexts being analyzed are not intensional (i.e., they are extensional), and are clearly distinguished from their more recalcitrant, but less common, intensional counterparts. In that way, compositionality can be said to hold its place as a plausible descriptive thesis about the semantics of natural language.[1]

Yet there is good reason to believe that this way of presenting the problem of intensionality is mistaken. The later Mohists, who may well have been the first in the world to attempt to furnish a systematic philosophical treatment of intensional phenomena, were aware of this, at least implicitly. The Mohists were keen observers of language, and their semantical investigations made them suspicious about the role of compositionality in the determination of the meanings of compound expressions. What they realized, and what we can subsequently learn from them, is that compositionality is not a principle to be taken for granted; it cannot be assumed *a priori* to hold of a definitive range of complex expressions that are distinguishable on the basis of their syntactical properties alone. While it may be fitting to characterize much of natural language meaning as compositional, it is incorrect to suppose that there can be any principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality in natural language.

The later Mohists' interest in intensional phenomena is thus more than a matter of historical curiosity. Fully explained, it draws our attention to fundamental limitations in Western techniques of philosophical analysis. Part of the picture that emerges of Western philosophy is one of a myopic vision of the nature of language that has misled philosophers into assuming that a sentence, expression, proposition, concept, or idea is perspicuously represented or understood only when it has been fully decomposed or resolved into its constituent parts. Part of my purpose in this paper is to explain why the Mohists found the issue of intensionality to be so important in their logical and

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[1] I assume in this essay that any explanation of analysis firmly rooted in the decompositional conception invariably presupposes at least some version of the principle of compositionality. To analyze a complex idea or expression, in this view, it is both necessary and sufficient to identify the meanings of its constituent parts and the way in which they hang together. Compositionality maintains, in other words, that the meanings of wholes are determined by the meanings of parts in connection with any logical structures that are formed through their combination. For a stronger version of this basic idea, it is often argued that the structures or logical forms of the meanings of natural language expressions are tracked, systematically, by the compositionality of their syntax. Note that this is best considered "stronger" than the basic idea because one might acknowledge the plausibility or veracity of the compositionality of meaning while insisting that the combinatorial rules that govern the syntax of natural language expressions do not always mirror the logical forms of their meanings. Still, a logical analysis typically begins with a sentence, and this sentence will usually serve as a guide to the analysis itself. To the extent that it does, it should be possible to show that the rules governing the syntax of natural language sentences can be associated with determinate semantic operations that act on the meanings of grammatical constituents in precisely the ways in which these constituents are combined in the syntax.

semantical investigations. But more importantly, I will defend the view that Mohist insights, in connection with a number of issues emerging out of the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese language, reveal obvious and important limitations in any technique of analysis that is uncritically applied with a decompositional approach in mind, as are those that are often pursued in the West in the context of more general epistemological and metaphysical programs.

## 2. WESTERN CONCEPTION OF ANALYSIS

Analysis in Western philosophy has, of course, been conceived and practiced in many different ways, and the decompositional conception is but one among many accounts that have been proposed or suggested over the ages. But it is not an exaggeration to say that the decompositional conception, more than any other, has exercised a profound influence on the minds of philosophers in the West. The British empiricists followed it in their analyses of complex ideas.[2] It played a key role in the writings of Leibniz and Kant,[3] and G.E. Moore adhered to it in the conception of analysis he developed in his major work *Principia Ethica* (1903).[4] In point of fact, the decompositional conception

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[2] See, for instance, Locke 1690, 291-3.

[3] Leibniz's well-known "containment principle" asserts that all judgments contain as parts a subject and a predicate, and an analysis of the logical relation that obtains between these two parts in a given judgment is a necessary step in the evaluation of its truth. For Leibniz, what makes a judgment true is that its predicate is logically contained within its subject, and the way in which we determine this is by a process of decomposing its parts into a sequence of identities (Leibniz, Gottfried 1690, 62). In an essay entitled "Primary Truths", Leibniz writes: "The predicate or consequent… is always in the subject or antecedent, and this constitutes the nature of truth in general, or, the connexion between the terms of a proposition, as Aristotle also has observed. In identities this connexion and inclusion of the predicate in the subject is expressed, whereas in all other truths it is implicit and must be shown through the analysis of notions, in which *a priori* demonstration consists" (Leibniz 1686, 30-4). The analysis of notions consists of reducing complex truths into primary truths by the aid of definitions. Kant's account of how we comprehend the meanings of judgments departs from Leibniz's in critical respects, chiefly in its claim that synthetic judgments may also be true, but the underlying conception of how we determine truth also requires that we resolve a judgment into the basic parts of subject and predicate (Kant 1787, 48-51 (A6-7/B10-1)).

[4] The decompositional conception is implicit in Moore's conception of analysis, which Moore conceives as a process of providing a definition for a complex object (such as a proposition) by decomposing it, as it were, into its ultimate, constituent parts: "Definitions… which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by a word, and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex. You can give a definition of a horse, because a horse has many different properties and qualities, all of which you can enumerate. But when you have enumerated them all, when you have reduced a horse to his simplest terms, then you no longer define those terms. They are simply something which you think of or perceive, and to any one who cannot think of or perceive them, you can never, by any definition, make their nature known (Moore 1903, 7). The "simplest terms" of which Moore speaks were themselves regarded as indefinable, the notions "good" and "yellow" being primary examples: "'[G]ood' is a simple notion, just as 'yellow' is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to any one who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is" (1903, 7). In Moore's view, the

has had a profound influence even on those thinkers who have struggled adamantly to articulate methodologies of a very different kind. A rather different conception of analysis, often called *logical analysis* in connection with the development of modern symbolic logic in the work of Frege and Russell, involves techniques of formal transcription or translation that have little to do with the decompositional conception *per se*. Generally speaking, an analysis may be considered "logical" when its concern is with the translation of statements of ordinary language into the theoretical framework of a formal or semi-formal language whose logical notions are perspicuously represented and set apart from its non-logical ones. On the other hand, this practice of interpreting or translating is very often undertaken with the tacit belief that a decomposition of one form or another is the goal of any formal representation of meaning.

As an example this, we can note that in Western analytic philosophy, it is not at all atypical to treat the concatenation of elements in complex expressions in terms of *predicate conjunction*, which is really a form of decomposition. This is especially the case with respect to complex nominal expressions. Thus, the sentence 'Jill met a large, angry dog' would be represented in first-order predicate logic as follows:

(1) $(\exists x)$ (*Met*(*Jill*, $x$) :&: *Large*($x$) .&. *Angry*($x$) & *Dog*($x$))

Each of the words in 'large, angry dog' is glossed as a simple predicate and joined with the others by the logical operator for conjunction, represented by the ampersand symbol, '&'.

Complex verb phrases are more difficult to handle, but predicate conjunction still seems presupposed as a basic principle in most cases. For instance, to represent the sentence 'Jill runs hastily', Pietroski considers an event-analysis in connection with predicate conjunction:

(2) $(\exists e)$ (*Agent*($e$, *Jill*) .&. *Run*($e$) & *Hasty*($e$))

The variable '*e*' is for events, and events are assumed to be capable of instantiating a variety of properties: they have agents, objects, manners, etc., and occur at specific times and places. In this case we have an event whose agent is *Jill*, since Jill is the one who runs hastily. The event is also a *running* event and a *hasty* one (Pietroski 2000, 161-76).

Even Russell's theory of descriptions, which is said to facilitate the *elimination* of problematic terms or expressions, is still reasonably construed as a kind of decompositional analysis. Consider a natural language application of this theory to descriptive phrases involving relative clauses, such as 'The *F* that is *G*'. On this point, a Russellian analysis of the sentence:

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process of providing a definition must eventually arrive these simple, indefinable parts, for otherwise the analysis would go on *ad infinitum* and the definition would be impossible.

(3) The *F* that is *G* is *H*

has the following logical form:

(4) (∃*x*) ((*Fx* & *Gx*) & (∀*y*)(((*Fy* & *Gy*) → *y* = *x*) & *Hx*))

This analysis is Russellian in that it replaces the *analysandum* with a quantified formula in which the descriptive phrase has been eliminated. But it is also a decomposition because the predicates embodied in the descriptive phrase 'The *F* that is *G*' have been resolved into a formula that represents them as a conjunction of predicates.

These analyses, it should be noted, are not at all implausible, for they furnish a straightforward method for dealing with entailment relations—something arguably involved in the comprehension of any natural language sentence. If one knows, for example, that the sentence 'Jill ran angrily and hastily' is true, then one also knows that the sentences 'Jill ran', 'Jill ran angrily', 'Someone ran angrily', 'Someone did something', etc., are true. We also seem capable of recognizing second-order entailments: 'Running was instantiated by Jill', 'Running was instantiated by someone', and so on. Competency with respect to logical entailments is, arguably, a precondition for the comprehension of sentence meaning. Moreover, Russell's theory has benefits of its own: it can be utilized as an analytic tool to eliminate expressions referring to metaphysically dubious entities, and it can help us deal with problems of scope and ambiguity. On the other hand, as a general analytical methodology, the business of explaining entailment relations, ambiguity, and scope in terms of predicate conjunction will clearly *not* work for many of the arguments adduced in the Mohist *Canons*. This is because these arguments are intensional in content and resist any easy compositional representation. Moreover, a significant number of these arguments involve intensional contexts whose contents are arguably non-epistemic, and are therefore not capable being dismissed for reasons pertaining to the complications imposed by the involvement of mental states.

## 3. MOHIST LOGIC AND INTENSIONALITY

The Mohist writings that I am concerned with in this essay are those in which the study of logic and language play a central role. They are the entire four chapters of Book 10 and the first two chapters of Book 11 of the *Mo-Zi* (chapters 40-5, collectively referred to as the Mohist *Canons*). The chapters of Book 10 are known by the titles *Jing-Shang* (经上, *Canons I*), *Jing-Xia* (经下, *Canons II*), *Jing-Shuo-Shang* (经说上, *Expositions of the Canons I*), and *Jing-Shuo-Xia* (经说下, *Expositions of the Canons II*). In Book 11, we have the *Da-Qu* (大取, *Major Illustrations*) and the *Xiao-Qu* (小取, *Minor Illustrations*). The text of the *Canons* leaves a great deal unsaid; there are missing segments and obvious textual errors, and interpretations of a number of critical

passages have exhibited widespread disagreement. In this essay I will follow the numbering system presented in Graham, A.C., 2003 [1978], which pairs each *Canon* with its corresponding *Exposition* and identifies the passages from each pair by numbers prefixed with the letters A and B. (For instance, passage B40 of the *Canons* is from *Canons II*.) Graham's work also reconstructs the *Da-Qu* (大取) and the *Xiao-Qu* (小取) into a single corpus entitled *Names and Objects* (*NO*). (Graham 2003)

The Mohists seem to have been wrestling with intensional phenomena from a variety of different points of view. In so doing they appear to have examined a number of basic logical operations that are utilized today as tests of intensionality. This might seem anachronistic; after all, I am imposing certain ideas on the Mohists that many would think could not have been realized without the jargon of 20th century analytic philosophy. Yet there is a lot of textual evidence to support it, and a lot that can be reconstructed in the background. To begin with, the Mohists seem to have had at least an implicit awareness of the basic thesis (commonly attributed to Bertrand Russell) that the grammatical form of a sentence or an expression cannot be assumed to be a reliable indicator of its underlying logical form. To be sure, the Mohists quite likely had no rigorous sense of what it means for a sentence or expression to have a logical form, to say nothing of the formal symbolic apparatus that is generally necessary to perspicuously represent it. But they did have a strong sense of the relevancy of treating linguistic names and expressions as distinct objects of study, and they had clear ambitions to introduce greater rigor into the standards of grammaticality.[5]

Moreover, they were aware of the possibility that certain strings of characters whose constituents play analogous grammatical roles can nonetheless have very different conditions of satisfaction. That is the lesson we learn from an important later passage from the reconstructed text entitled *Names and Objects* (*NO*) by A.C. Graham, which essentially compares the satisfaction conditions of two analogous assertions involving expressions that have the same grammatical form. The expressions are 'loving people' and 'riding horses':

> Loving people requires loving all people without exception, only then is this called loving people. Not loving people does not require loving no people at all; it is (rather) not loving all people without exception, and by this it is called not loving people. Riding horses does not require riding all horses without exception; it is (rather) riding some horses, and by this it is called riding horses. But not riding horses does require riding no horses at all; only by this is it called not riding horses. These are cases in which something applies without exception in one case but not in the other. (*NO*17)

Evidently, the Mohists are pointing out here that the predicate 'loves people' is satisfied only by those who happen to love all people, whereas the predicate 'rides horses' is satisfied by anyone who happens to ride at least one horse. By the same token, the predicate 'does not love people' is satisfied by anyone who fails to love at

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[5] According to A.C. Graham, the Mohists' use of the expression '*ye che*' (也者) is used throughout the *Canons* as a form of quotation to talk about the meanings of key words and expressions (Graham 2003, 140-1).

least one person, whereas the predicate 'does not ride horses' requires that one ride no horses at all. Even ignoring the added complications of the intensionality of the verb 'loves', we have here very different conditions:

'Jill loves people' is true iff Jill $\in \{x \mid (\forall y)(Person(y) \rightarrow Loves(x,y))\}$

'Jill rides horses' is true iff Jill $\in \{x \mid (\exists y)(Horse(y) \,\&\, Rides(x, y))\}$

'Jill does not love people' is true iff Jill $\in \{x \mid (\exists y)(Person(y) \,\&\, {\sim}Loves(x, y))\}$

'Jill does not ride horses' is true iff Jill $\in \{x \mid {\sim}(\exists y)(Horse(y) \,\&\, Rides(x, y))\}$

Notice, in spite of this, that the sentences 'Jill loves people' and 'Jill rides horses' have the same grammatical form; their constituents are playing the same basic grammatical roles. In classical Chinese, these sentences would be written simply as '臧爱人' and '臧乘马', respectively. Even if the Mohists did not possess a rigorous notation for dealing with these differences of logical form, they were certainly knowledgeable enough of the pitfalls of assuming that sentences with the same grammatical form should be given analogous semantic representations.

Now, if the Mohists knew that two sentences of identical form could have very different truth conditions, then they almost certainly sought out explanations for why, in particular, sentences containing intensional verbs appear to behave so differently from those without them. This would have been an integral part of their general methodological program. Indeed, there is some evidence that they were aware of the basic distinction between intensions and extensions; see Zong 2000, 221.[6] If so, then they would have had some feeling for the idea that the truth of a sentence containing an intensional expression requires a consideration of the intension of this expression as well. In any case, it is hard to make sense of the Mohists' logical writings without assuming that they had at least an implicit understanding of intensional phenomena, if not an explicit one.

For instance, in passage B40 of the *Expositions* they seem to employ or presuppose a logical operation that many today would characterize as an intersubstitution of coextensive predicates:

(5)  智狗重智犬，则过。不重，则不过。

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[6] Zong claims that this distinction was grasped by the Mohists in their discussion of time and sameness. This is certainly debatable, but the text seems consistent with it. Note that the Mohists' awareness of an intension / extension distinction does not imply that they could not have rejected the possibility of a principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality in natural language. True, the possibility of understanding the basic nature of intensional phenomena seems to require that one first grasp the distinction between intensions and extensions. On the other hand, an acknowledgement of the presence of intensional phenomena in language need not be taken to imply the possibility of a principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality. There may be no such distinction; it may just be that the facts that distinguish the two are in some cases arbitrary or imprecise. Compare the notion of "child" with that of "adult." Except arbitrarily, one cannot identify an exact age at which one becomes an adult, and yet no one believes that a four year old should have voting privileges or a driver's license.

> To assert the identity of knowing dogs and knowing canines is a mistake; to not do so is not a mistake.[7]

This passage employs the terms '*gou*' (狗, dog) and '*quan*' (犬, canine), which the Mohists used as standard examples of *ming* (名, name), names that refer to the same thing, or predicates whose extensions are identical. That the Mohists were concerned with two names referring to the same thing is obvious from their discussion of sameness in A86 and elsewhere. They also clearly used the term '*ming*' (名) for what we would today regard as predicates—no doubt in part because they did not distinguish predicates from singular terms. If we characterize this epistemically, then the Mohists seem to be asserting that the mental act of knowing *what a dog is* is not the same as the mental act of knowing *what a canine is*, for one's comprehension of the concept in each case is different. If this is correct, then in the Mohists' view, (7) does not follow from (6), in spite of the fact that all dogs are canines:

(6) Jill knows what a dog is.
(7) Jill knows what a canine is.

The intersubstitution of the predicate 'canine' for the predicate 'dog' is an invalid logical operation in the context of the intensional verb 'knows'. Indeed, if the Mohists did distinguish intensions from extensions, then their reason for why it does not follow from the fact that Jill knows dogs that she knows canines would have been that the intensions expressed by the predicates 'dogs' and 'canines' are not identical. They would have recognized that terms denoting these intensions are not logically interchangeable, and their proposition at B40 would have followed as a trivial consequence.[8]

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[7] Unless otherwise specified, the translations in this section and the next are my own. Though I have been greatly influenced by A.C. Graham, I have departed from his translations in many cases in favor of interpretations that I feel more closely track the original grammar of classical Chinese.

[8] It is not an incidental point, in this regard, that many commentators have misinterpreted this passage, assuming that it is inconsistent with the line in the *Canons* with which it is paired, and in need of emendation; Li 1969, 179, 194-5, He 1971, 151, 179, and Chen 1983, 21-22 are examples. (I have borrowed these sources from Zong 2000.) By contrast, Zong claims that B40 of the *Canons* contains a textual error, in that it omits a critical character for negation whose addition is necessary to square it with the putative explanation we find for it in the *Expositions* (Zong 2000, 215-7). In my opinion there is no inconsistency here; the explanation for the apparent discrepancy consists in the fact that the Mohists are simply talking about two different senses of 'knowing,' which they distinguish by the use of two different ideographs, '*zhi*' (知) and '*zhi*' (智). This is the passage at B40 of the *Canons*: "知狗而自谓不知犬过也。说在重。" ("Knowing dogs while saying of yourself that you do not know canines is a mistake. This is explained by (the notion of) identity.") It cannot be a coincidence that the Mohists fail to repeat the use of '知' (*zhi*) in the line of the *Expositions* that corresponds to this passage (see (5) above), preferring instead the character '智' (*zhi*), for they do the same thing in B39 and elsewhere, and they explicitly distinguish their meanings in A3-6. In A5 they define '智' (*zhi*) as a form of knowing that involves being able to identify something through its *mao* (貌), its describable characteristics. This could very well have been conceived as a form of object identification through the connotations of a name,

There are other tests for intensionality, of course, but the method of interchanging equivalent expressions seems to be the most widely mentioned. If co-referential terms, co-extensive predicates, or logically equivalent sentences are intersubstitutable without a change of truth value, then the linguistic context in which they occur is extensional; if not, then it is intensional. More often than not, however, we find the Mohists weighing the consequences of interchanging predicates that are not coextensive, but which bear some other obvious logical relation. For instance, if Jack is riding a horse, then Jack is riding an equine animal. In this case we substitute the predicate 'equine animal', whose extension is the set of all equine animals, for the predicate 'horse', whose extension is the set of all horses. No fallacy is committed here, in part because the context created by the verb 'rides' is extensional. However, if Jack is thinking of a horse, then it may or may not follow that he is thinking of an equine animal. Perhaps he does not know what an equine animal is.

The inference that the Mohists seem to be presupposing here is the substitution of a predicate *G* for a predicate *F* whenever the extension of *F* is a subset of the extension of *G*. Evidence for the Mohists' interest in logical operations of this kind is apparent from a number of different examples found in the *Canons*. For example, there is an important earlier passage from the reconstructed text entitled *Names and Objects* (*NO*) by A.C. Graham. In spite of apparently missing fragments and probably a number of textual errors, the principal message of this text appears clear. I reconstruct it as follows, filling in only those missing remarks that seem clearly intended:

> Knowing is different from thinking… [Thinking of a *huang* is not thinking of a jade thing]; it is [thinking of] a *huang* that happens to be a jade thing. Thinking of a pillar is not thinking of a wooden thing; it is thinking of a pillar that happens to be a wooden thing. Thinking of a man's finger is not thinking of a man; [it is thinking of a finger that happens to be part of a man]. [Thinking of a bird is not thinking of a game animal]; it is thinking of a bird that happens to be a game animal.[9]

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such as '*gou*' (狗, dog) or '*quan*' (犬, canine), which were thought to be different. They distinguish this notion from a more basic form of intelligence that is the means by which one knows (*cai* 材), which the Mohists seem to think involved a variety of things associated with the apparatus of sense, such as being able to individuate an object in one's visual field by means of perceptual acquaintance with it. If this is correct, then the assertion at B40 of the *Canons* is reasonable. Jill could assert truthfully of Jack that Jack knows what a dog is, even if Jack fails to know the name 'dog' or the meaning of 'dog', as acknowledged by convention. It may be unclear to what extent object individuation in perception requires the mastery of a language, but a basic ability to do this is certainly possible for anyone who does know a language, even when certain words are absent from one's vocabulary. If, therefore, one knows dogs in the sense of '*zhi gou*' (知狗), by means of perceptual acquaintance with dogs, then one also knows canines (*zhi quan* 知犬) by the same act of perception. This interpretation of B40, which resolves the apparent inconsistency, is certainly preferable to Zong's and others', since it is corroborated by other textual evidence and does not require any textual emendation.

[9] This passage has been reconstructed from *NO*3, which I present here in full: "智與意異。… 是璜也是玉也。意楹非意木也，意是楹之木也。意指之人也非意人也。意獲也乃意禽也。" As given, the text is badly corrupted and no interpretation of it can stand beyond controversy. I have used brackets in the English translation to indicate places where the text seems to be missing. The account I have given here seems consistent with both the extant fragments of the passage and a number of logical insights

The relevant logical notions here are those either involving or presupposing intersubstitution. The Mohists appear to be asserting, for instance, that in spite of the fact that all *huang* are made of jade, it does not follow from one's thinking of *huang* that one is thinking of a thing that is made of jade, for one might have no knowledge of jade *as such*, a distinct mineral.[10] Here we seem to have evidence for an instance of intensionality in the verb phrase 'thinking of', but it is evident not from the intersubstitution of co-extensive predicates, but from the intersubstitution of the predicate 'thing made of jade', whose extension is the set of all things that are made of jade, for the predicate '*huang*', whose extension is the set of all *huang*.

Now, it must be noted that as a test of intensionality this inference form is problematic. It successfully draws our attention to some contexts that are referentially opaque but misleads us on others. For instance, suppose that Jack eats meat from every kind of cow, but not from every kind of mammal. We substitute the term 'mammal' for the term 'cow' to obtain a false statement from a true one. Yet no expression in the sentence 'Jack eats meat from every type of cow' appears intensional.[11] Moreover, restrictions on this rule to simple verb phrases without the universal quantifier do not solve the problem; any simple predicate with a transitive verb has a predicate nominal that admits of a quantificational interpretation, and this interpretation can be exploited to achieve the appearance of referential opacity by interchanging the right non-co-extensive terms. Suppose that Jack rides horses, but not elephants. Then the sentence 'Jack rides elephants' is false, but we can produce a true statement from this by substituting the expression 'mammals' for the expression 'elephants', since all horses are mammals. It makes no difference whether the predicate nominal is interpreted as a universal quantifier or an existential one. Either way, the Mohists face difficulties in the application of their rule, if their purpose is indeed to ferret out cases of intensionality and distinguish them from those that are non-intensional.

Yet, for all that, the Mohists may not have been misguided here. More common tests of intensionality are problematic as well, and for similar reasons. The method of intersubstituting co-extensive predicates may fail to reveal forms of intensionality that are obvious by other methods. Consider the word 'needs'. If a baker needs some baking soda, then he also needs some sodium bicarbonate. The substitution of 'sodium bicarbonate' for 'baking soda' does not alter truth value. In spite of this, 'needs' is intensional at least in this context, since existential generalization, another common

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apparent in other writings in the *Canons* that are better preserved. Of critical interest here are the self-contained remarks on the method of disputation that we find in *NO*12-18. I address these passages in detail in section 4.

[10] The Mohists may also have been right about this from another point of view. It may have been a mere contingent fact that all *huang* are made of jade. If so, then no conclusions about the substance of *huang* would be warranted from the mere facts that one is thinking about *huang* and that all *huang* are (contingently) made of jade, since one could be thinking about a *huang* that happens to be made of some other mineral, or something else.

[11] This problem was first made known to me in an excellent review of an earlier draft of this paper by an anonymous reviewer for this journal. I have used the same example provided by the reviewer.

test of intensionality, may fail to apply: the baker may need some baking soda even when none is available. Existential generalization, furthermore, has its own problems. Consider 'Jack feeds pigeons whenever he sees them.' We generalize on the term 'pigeons' to obtain the existentially-quantified assertion 'There are some pigeons that Jack feeds whenever he sees them', but this would be false if there were no pigeons. This seems to be a false positive result, since no term in this sentence appears intensional.[12]

More importantly, the method of interchanging co-extensive terms also gives misleading results if we admit expressions that are interpreted non-compositionally, and natural language is full of them. If referential opacity really is the true mark of intensionality, then any expression consisting of two or more words that is interpreted non-compositionally will be intensional. This includes compound expressions of various kinds, such as 'white collar' and 'four wheel drive' in English, and '*zui-ying*' (argumentative) in Chinese, and any expressions that are irreducibly idiomatic, such as 'cut to the chase'. Jill may take the advice of her friend with a grain of salt, but she would not be doing the same with a grain of sodium chloride. Or Jack may be considered over the hill because he just turned 50, but he would not be considered over a natural elevation of the Earth's surface because he just turned 50. Truth value changes in these cases, not due to the meanings of terms like 'take' and 'considered', but because of the idiomaticity of the expressions 'with a grain of salt' and 'over the hill'. Moreover, the intensionality of such phrases may not be apparent if we are considering only co-extensive expressions. Many terms that are constituents of idiomatic phrases in natural language may be ignored because terms that are strictly co-extensive with them are not forthcoming (they may have different shades of meaning), and many idiomatic phrases in natural language are not *obviously* idiomatic.[13]

Awareness of these other forms of intensionality opens up new avenues for the interpretation of Mohist texts. If the Mohists *had* been aware that referential opacity could be caused by any expression that can be interpreted non-compositionally, and that any word or phrase could serve as a constituent of an idiom regardless of its meaning, then they would not have had any reason to believe that a sharp distinction could be drawn between intensional and extensional phenomena in natural language. Intensionality could not have been explained simply as a byproduct of assertions about the mind, and they would not have felt any need to talk about "intensional objects" and

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[12] A conditionalized interpretation of this statement in first-order logic, with the antecedent representing 'whenever he sees them', would not have the same problem, but this would presuppose certain rules of translation, which are not given. I am simply pointing out here that we cannot assume an unproblematic intersubstitution of terms in *natural language* without further rules to handle contingent expressions such as these.

[13] Consider the interrogative 'Could you pass me the salt?' which is used to make a request. Most people would not respond to an utterance of this in the same way as they would to the sentence 'Do you at present have the physical ability to pass me the salt?' For a notable paper on the idiomatic features of indirect speech acts, see Searle 1979, 59-82.

such. On the whole their attitudes toward language would have been far more inquisitive and adaptable.

If this is correct, then it casts new light on the aims that motivated the assertions at *NO*3. It is not that the Mohists regarded 'thinking of' as a fundamentally intensional verb—somehow intensional in isolation; it is rather that they felt that its contribution in connection with other phrases gave rise to various kinds of idiom in assertions, and this forced them to re-evaluate their admissibility. They were not thinking simply analytically; they were assimilating and evaluating linguistic complexes in wholes. Of course, my interpretation of this passage is debatable, but there is ample textual evidence in support of the view that the Mohists were concerned with idiomaticity as a basic explanation for at least some forms of intensionality. In the next section I will discuss some of the more striking cases in support of this.

## 4. INTENSIONALITY RECONSIDERED

Thus far our considerations have dealt mostly with rather standard forms of intensionality, those engendered by the complications of linguistic expressions involving mental states—'knows', 'thinks of', 'believes', 'loves' and the like. But intensionality can be caused by other things as well, linguistic phenomena having nothing to do with the mind. If the Mohists were not fully aware of this, then they were at least disinclined to believe that the properties of intensionality must somehow track the ontology of the mind. Consequently, with the absence of this constraint in their logico-semantical methodology, they had a greater inclination to weigh the consequences of combining and intersubstituting expressions in a variety of different linguistic contexts. This led them to a number of insights into the logic of natural language that went entirely unnoticed, as far as I can tell, in the early traditions of the West.

Surprisingly, in his otherwise careful examination of Mohist logic, Zong entirely misses this general point. Zong discusses a variety of intensional verbs used in the *Canons* that make plain the Mohists' concern with intensionality, but he interprets every one of these verbs epistemically. As a consequence, he neglects the Mohists' distinct contributions to the study of language:

> [A] modern logician … is unlikely to be impressed by what I have presented [in these examples]. After all, these are some particular forms of fairly simple modal inferences the nature of which modern logicians know only too well. But my concern here is the history of philosophy, not logic per se. … The examples show that Mohist scholars clearly distinguished two kinds of contexts, one that involves intensional terms such as 'knowing', 'thinking of', and 'believing', and one that does not. (Zong 2000, 213)

Zong's oversight here consists in a failure to recognize the possibility that intensional contexts may be created by non-epistemic or non-mental terms or expressions. Whether or not modern logicians are likely to be impressed by the examples he gives, Zong is incorrect, I believe, in thinking that the Mohists were

preoccupied only with forms of intensionality that are engendered by the conceptual problems associated with mental states. They were concerned with more general problems of meaning that arise out of the concatenation of a variety of terms in classical Chinese, and this made them more receptive to other forms of intensionality.

Chief among these forms are those involving idiomaticity, as noted in the previous section. The most striking examples are found in the *Xiao-Qu*, the largely self-contained treatise of the *Canons* that makes up the latter portion of *Names and Objects*. In *NO*15, for instance, the Mohists are particularly interested in patterns of reasoning they refer to as *mou* (侔, parallelizing). The Mohists' idea is to evaluate and categorize expressions by investigating how meanings change when strings of characters consisting of ordinary statements of identity or predication are supplemented with other characters or strings. To do this, one reasons by *bi ci er ju xing* (比辞而俱行, comparing expressions and letting them proceed). It is unclear what much of this entails, but at least some of these patterns of reasoning involve proceeding from statements of the form 'An *A* is a *B*' to those of the form '*VA* is *VB*', where *V* is a verb combined with the noun phrases *A* and *B* to yield, in effect, two distinct nominalized infinitives. When these patterns of reasoning successfully advance from one proposition or expression to another without contravening its admissibility, the Mohists say that they *xing* 行 (proceed) and refer to them as *shi er ran* (是而然). In such cases we may correctly assert '*VA* is *VB*' on the supposition that an *A* is a *B*. When they do not successfully advance in this way, they are referred to as *shi er bu ran* (是而不然), and the Mohists assert '*VA* is not *VB*' as a consequence.

Each of the assertions considered in *NO*15 involves an intensional transitive verb exemplifying the basic principle *shi er bu ran* (是而不然) in which reasoning from a statement of the form 'An *A* is a *B*' does not successfully advance (or *xing* 行) to a statement of the form '*VA* is *VB*'. The passage offers eleven uses of transitive intensional verbs. Of these eleven, five are straightforwardly or arguably non-epistemic, or more generally, non-intentional (-with-a-'t'): '*cheng*' (乘, riding), '*ru*' (入, entering), '*duo*' (多, abounding in), '*wu*' (无, being without), and '*sha*' (杀, killing). The most striking of these is the last, since 'killing' would ordinarily be thought of as an extensional verb. Regarding this verb, the Mohists assert the following:

(8) 盗人人也... 杀盗人非杀人也。
Robbers are people… but killing robbers is not killing people.

This is striking, of course, because almost anyone trained in Western symbolic logic will consider it obvious that the contrary statement 'Killing robbers is killing people', or at least something equivalent to it, is provable in first-order predicate logic, if we allow the assumption that all robbers are people, that is,

(9) $(\forall x)\,(Robber(x) \to Person(x))$

The statement 'Killing robbers is killing people' need only be transcribed as follows:

(10) ($\forall e$) (*Killing*($e$) & ($\exists x$)(*Robber*($x$) & *Object*($x,e$)) .→. ($\exists x$) (*Person*($x$) & *Object*($x,e$))

I am assuming here, as above, that we are quantifying over events, and that the expression '*Object*($x,e$)' is to be understood as: "$x$ is the object of event $e$."

Apparently, what the Mohists would object to here is our decomposition of the expression 'killing robbers' into a conjunction of individualized predicates. They seem to have felt that the combination of the ideographs '*sha*' (杀, killing) and '*dao ren*' (盗人, robbers) formed an idiom that was recognized as a distinct, unanalyzable unit of common speech. This unit of speech carried with it connotations of justified execution, so that, at least for some people in the linguistic community in which the Mohists lived, the expression '*sha dao ren*' (杀盗人, killing robbers) *was simply intended to mean* "justified execution of criminals". By contrast, connotations of justified execution were not considered present in the meaning of the expression 'killing people', which seemed to connote more simply an act of murder. Indeed, the Mohists explicitly prohibited the latter in connection with their espoused doctrine of universal love (cf. *NO*17).[14]

My interpretation of these expressions is controversial. In the next section I respond to an important objection to it, but we can provide further evidence for it

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[14] This idea is suggested by A.C. Graham (2003, 488). Graham, however, seems to view it as a sort of novelty, conceived by the Mohists more or less in isolation from their other semantical insights. Part of my purpose in this paper is situate Graham's basic idea in the framework of a more comprehensive theory that explains the Mohists' general semantical program, their interest in intensionality, and their skepticism about the compositionality of language. For a proposal alternative to Graham's, see Mou 2009. As I understand it, Mou's account is only partly in disagreement with mine. It appeals largely to phenomenological facts about the way in which our attention shifts among different aspects of things in different contexts of communicative discourse. For example, Mou argues that "we often shift our attention from what is shared between involved parties … to what is distinction between [them]… depending on the nature of the context and concrete situation." To explain the killing robbers case, Mou proposes the following: "[W]hen saying 'robbers are people', one focuses on the aspect of robbers, A, that makes them being people; nevertheless, when saying 'killing robbers is not killing people', one's focus shifts to some other aspect of robbers, A*, which is possessed by robbers rather than by the other people and which makes robbers deserve being killed (from the Mohist point of view, and cited for the sake of argument): killing robbers for the sake of A*; that does not amount to killing people for the sake of A* because people generally speaking do not possess A*." Unfortunately, Mou does not further explain what he means by A*, but this may be irrelevant. What matters here is whether Mou's phenomenological explanation of the process by which we grasp the various aspects of things in verbal discourse is compatible with my suggestion that the meaning of '*sha dao ren*' (杀盗人, killing robbers) in classical Chinese was treated as idiomatic. As far as this is concerned, I don't see any disagreement. However, Mou does make some rather substantive metaphysical claims in connection with his account that I remain noncommittal about. He claims, for instance, that "such a shift in focus is not supposed to be made at random but has its due metaphysical foundation: an object of study really possesses its multiple aspects / layers / dimensions". My own account is essentially semantical, not metaphysical, and I regard it as compatible with a variety of different metaphysical views.

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simply by comparing it with other remarks in *NO*15 which more obviously indicate a preoccupation with idiomaticity. For instance, there is the curious use of the expression '*ru mu*'入木 (entering wood) in the following line from *NO*15:

(11)船木也，入船非入木也。
A boat is wood, but entering a boat is not entering wood.

Importantly, there is nothing in the meaning of '*ru*' (入, entering) indicating, by itself, an intensional context; non-mental objects or entities surely have the capacity to enter things. As Zhang and Liu (2007) observe, the complex expression '*ru mu*' (入木) is idiomatic. It means "going to die", something entirely absent in the connotation of '*ru chuan*' (入船, entering a boat), which is used to signify just the generic action of going into a boat.[15] Note that the grammatical form of the expression '*ru chuan*' (入船, entering a boat), which consists of a simple combination of two ideographs, is precisely the same as '*ru mu*' (入木, entering wood). But grammatical form is deceptive, as the Mohists knew, for it masks the contrast between analyzable compounds and expressions involving idiomaticity. Similar points may be made with regard to the remaining non-epistemic intensional transitive verbs.

In the remaining six cases we have assertions involving transitive verbs that are often regarded as intensional for epistemic reasons. But *epistemic*-based intensionality is not likely the problem the Mohists had in mind even with these. Consider the first item from *NO*15:

(12)获之（视）＊亲人也，获事其亲非事人也。[16]
The father of *huo* is a human; and yet it does not follow from this that when *huo* serves his father, he is serving a human (or acting as a servant).

This example involves the transitive intensional verb '*shi*' (事, serve). Now, contexts created by epistemic terms are generally considered opaque on the supposition that they may fail to support otherwise valid inferences owing to failures of knowledge. Jack may believe *de dicto* that the Evening Star is bright, but not believe the same thing about the Morning Star, if he fails to recognize that the two terms 'Evening Star' and 'Morning Star' designate the same astronomical body. Similarly, Jack may desire *de dicto* to learn about the Evening Star without desiring the same thing about the Morning Star, if (again) he fails to realize that the Evening Star is identical to the Morning Star. On the other hand, unless Jack is simply mistaken about basic facts, it is highly unlikely that he will fail to believe that he is serving a human if he knows that he is serving his father, for it is common knowledge that all fathers are human. It is for this reason that we should consider it implausible that the Mohists were worried about the possibility of *huo*'s not realizing that his father was a human. The Mohists were not

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[15] Zhang and Liu 2007, 85-102.
[16] The text here has been emended by A.C. Graham (2003, 487). The notation '(Y)*X' is: "Read X for Y."

assuming that the context created by the transitive verb '*shi*' (事, serve) is intensional for reasons involving possible failures of knowledge. It is much more likely that they were concerned that the phrase '*shi ren*' (事人, serve a human) was commonly interpreted as an idiom signifying the poor labor involved in being a servant, something they didn't feel was apparent in the connotation of the phrase '*shi qi qin*' (事其亲, serve one's father).[17]

Arguably, the same point is true of the example in *NO*15 that immediately follows (12):

(13)其弟美人也，愛弟非愛美人也。
One's brother is a handsome man; and yet it does not follow from this that when one loves one's brother, one loves a handsome man.

It is implausible, in my opinion, that the Mohists were worried here about the epistemic-based intensionality of the term '*ai*' (爱, love). It is conceivable, of course, for one to fail to recognize the handsomeness of one's brother, as perceived or acknowledged by others. A better account, however, is that the Mohists were concerned with the idiomatic force of the complex expression '*ai mei ren*' (愛美人, love a handsome man), which, in the great economy of classical written Chinese, may well have involved connotations of sexual attraction. One's brother may be a handsome man, but loving one's brother does not imply that one is sexually attracted to him. The intensionality here that undermines the suggested inference is not engendered by the single term '*ai*' (爱, love), but by the unique way in which the meaning of the string '*ai mei ren*' (愛美人, love a handsome man) is determined idiomatically.

Indeed, if the Mohists really *were* concerned with possible failures of knowledge in the passage at *NO*15, then surely they would have used more obvious and convincing examples—assertions not hinging on an ignorance of basic facts like "fathers are people". They would have used examples where it is clearly more likely that one could fail to recognize certain identities, analogous to those inspired by Frege's Morning Star-Evening Star scenario. Moreover, they would likely have felt the need to distinguish epistemic forms of intensionality from idiomatic ones, something we do not seem to find any indication of in *NO*15 or anywhere elsewhere in *Names and Objects*. Whatever the case, any sharp contrast between intensional and non-intensional terms seems to me entirely antithetical to what appears to be a far more fluid and adaptable conception of natural language emerging out of *Names and Objects* that is perceptive of the many different ways in which meanings are grasped in ordinary communicative discourse. This very fluid and adaptable conception of language is precisely what makes later Mohist logic philosophically significant, and—dare I say—*original* in the investigation of intensionality. The Mohists give us good reasons to avoid any blanket assumption about the compositionality of natural language, and I am

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[17] As with the expression 'killing robbers', I am following the suggestion of A.C. Graham on this point (2003, 486).

inclined to say that many contemporary Western philosophers, logicians notwithstanding, have important things to learn from them.[18]

## 5. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

A common view of the Mohists' logico-semantical program is that it was motivated by little desire to demarcate the kinds of formally valid inference patterns that are characteristic of Aristotelian categorical logic. The reason often given is that the Mohists had a more basic interest in the semantics of compound expressions that distracted them away from the issue of logical form. This interest in semantics was pursued in the context of a largely unsystematic program of analogical disputation that involved categorizing linguistic forms into different classes on the basis of their underlying semantical properties. The categorization of these forms proceeded by examining parallels in phrasing and making judgments about their kind on a case-by-case assessment of their admissibility. Distracted by their own idiosyncratic methodology, the Mohists failed to classify linguistic forms in the way that Aristotle did, independently of their semantical content, and this undermined any desire they might have had to develop a syllogistic-style logic of categories.

A view of this kind is proposed by Chris Fraser. Fraser suggests that the Mohists were skeptical of the utility of studying purely formal methods because their own technique of drawing inferences based on mere formal linguistic parallels was "invariably unreliable". As a consequence, they had little desire to develop a working theory of logical form:

> Over-reliance on formal parallels tends to yield assertions that violate what the Mohists take to be the norms for distinguishing various kinds … and predicating the corresponding terms. When this happens, they reject these assertions on the basis of their knowledge of the semantics of terms, which they take to be more fundamental than linguistic structure or logical form. Their discovery of the misleading nature of linguistic parallels probably contributed to their skepticism about the extent to which formal methods could be applied in dialectics or disputation… This skepticism may in turn have helped point them away from any significant study of formal logic, but in fact their inquiries were oriented in a different direction from the start. (Fraser 2009)

Fraser is certainly right, I think, in making the general claim that the Mohists' skepticism about the utility of formal methods was a consequence of their recognition

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[18] It is not clear to me whether the Mohists thought that *most* linguistic contexts are intensional, or whether they felt that intensional phenomena simply make up an important minority that ought to be of concern to anyone engaged in the art of disputation. The treatise *Names and Objects* (reconstructed by Graham) simply surveys a number of different possibilities, some extensional and some intensional, and admonishes the reader to be "cautious" when making inferences based on grammatical parallelisms in language. Whatever the case, the Mohists' preoccupation with intensionality was enough, I believe, to make them skeptical about role compositionality in language, and we do not see this perspective being entertained with the same degree of interest anywhere in the early philosophy of the West.

of the misleading nature of linguistic parallels. On the other hand, he seems to lose sight of this as a real contemplative *discovery*—in spite of his use of the word. In explaining why the Mohists draw the conclusion that killing robbers is not killing people, Fraser proposes that the Mohists had in mind little more than an expedient semantical invention: they simply stipulated that killing robbers is not killing people out of an *ad hoc* attempt to reconcile their approval of the execution of criminals with their doctrine of inclusive concern. This allowed them to go on advocating the absolutist view that killing people is always wrong, even when offering their nod of approval in sight of a criminal's execution. Indeed, the Mohists do seem to have believed that they could justify their ethical views merely by drawing their opponents' attention to certain facts (or claims) about the semantics of compound expressions.[19] But as a tactic of moral justification, this seems dubious. In Fraser's view, even granting that executing criminals is not the same thing as murder, it is "still an event in which people are killed". In other words, the Mohists were abandoning commonsense, illicitly attempting to support their position on inclusive concern by denying what others would take to be obvious, that the killing of a robber is indeed the killing of a person. Granting the oddity of this, the Mohists could have simply distinguished different kinds of events, some specific, and some general. In Fraser's words:

> They could have pointed out that 'killing people' refers generally to all kinds of actions in which one person causes another to die. These include a range of more specific kinds of actions, among them intentional, morally wrong killing of the innocent (murder) and community-sanctioned, morally justified killing of criminals (execution). Thus killing robbers could be an action of the kind *killing people* without being one of the kind *morally wrong killing*. (Fraser 2009)

Why didn't they do this? Fraser's answer is that "this route didn't occur to them"—they were simply unable to move beyond the assumption that every name in language corresponds to exactly one distinct thing, as later classical thinkers did. That is, the Mohists simply assumed that "each unit of language should denote some discrete kind (*lei*), or part of reality…", and this led them into the awkward situation of being unable to distinguish terms of different scope, some of whose extensions fall within others.

Yet the charge that the Mohists failed to differentiate terms of different scope is simply incommensurate with the existing textual evidence. How else are we to make sense of their more basic claim that all robbers are people—if not on the assumption of

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[19] True, the Mohists may have been simply naïve in attempting to justify moral judgments by an appeal to an inventory of basic semantical categories. Yet this has no direct bearing on the issue of whether the Mohists were right in asserting in their native tongue that killing robbers is not killing people. Our concern here is with their assertion's *logical form*, as it was grasped by listeners of the era in which the Mohists were advancing their philosophy. To the extent that the Mohists were grappling with a great variety of compound expressions of varying degrees of idiomaticity, they were never inclined to take the principle of compositionality for granted. This forced them to cast about for other methods of argument, and this we see reflected in their very attempt to produce a taxonomy of semantic relations among basic expressions.

some analogy to the set-theoretical fact that the set of all robbers is a subset of the set of all people? If the Mohists failed to differentiate terms of scope, then they would have to have believed it necessary, too, to treat the terms '*dao ren*' (盗人, robber) and '*ren*' (人, people) as denoting two disconnected kinds or parts of reality. That would have forced them to deny the admissibility of the claim that all robbers are people and many others besides ('Jill's parents are people', 'Her brother is a handsome man', 'Carriages are wood', and so on). But they did not do this. It cannot be a coincidence that the majority of parallelisms investigated in the *Xiaoqu* involving the intersubstitution of terms in intensional contexts appeal to logical relations whose explanation naturally invokes the notion of extensions overlapping or falling within one another.

Indeed, in the alternative proposal quoted above, Fraser is ignoring precisely what he is willing to attribute to the Mohists elsewhere, that "killing people" was conceived in ordinary discourse in connection with acts of murder, the unjustified killing of innocents. This is understandable; in English the expression lacks the idiomatic force that we can say was likely ascertained by members of the Mohist community, who were living in ancient China and dealing with an ideographic language of extreme economy. In any case, the Mohists were not simply stipulating this; they were noting an obvious empirical fact about linguistic usage in ancient China and attempting to exploit it in their justification of the doctrine of universal love. If they had simply stipulated this, then they would have been accused of violating or otherwise abandoning the norms of speech. Admittedly, the difference between stipulation and genuine analysis may be vague. Many words have a variety of meanings, and many are polysemous. A proposed analysis of these words may provoke agreement in some circles and disagreement in others, and in fact the Mohists' own analysis of the Chinese expression for "killing robbers" seems to have aroused a certain amount of disagreement from members of the common community (cf. *NO*15). However, it would be entirely uncharitable to conclude from this that the Mohists didn't care about the norms of speech and were willing to stipulate meanings as they pleased, whether common or not. For their arguments to have appeal, they surely would have felt the need to identify some common ground with those they sought to convince; they would have observed the common idioms of important terms carefully for the purpose of winning over otherwise indecisive minds in argument.

Thus, the meaning of the whole was not resolvable into the meanings of the parts, so the extension of the expression '*sha ren*' 杀人 (killing people), conceived as an unanalyzable linguistic unit, would have been none other than:

(14) $\{x \mid x$ is an unjustified killing of innocents$\}$

When we assume that this is the ground of the common idiom, and the extension of '*sha dao ren*' (杀盗人) is $\{x \mid x$ is a justified killing of robbers$\}$, then it follows, trivially, that killing robbers is not killing people. The conditions that satisfy these two predicates are not the same. The Mohists could easily have held this view while

allowing that terms may be distinguished by their scope, with some being more general than others. They may have held that the extensions of these phrases are subsets of some more general set identified by any kind of action in which, say, a living being caused to die.[20] But these possibilities are only appreciated when it is remembered that the compositionality of classical Chinese cannot be taken for granted, since the concatenation of ideographs in this language can produce expressions whose meanings are not the mere sums of the meanings of their constituent parts.

If the Mohists did not develop an Aristotelian-style logic of formal inference patterns, it is because the semantics of classical Chinese is in many ways resistant to analyses that presuppose compositionality. But this is not a failing on their part. Rather, what we find in the *Canons* are insightful responses to dilemmas that are faced when reasoning in the context of a language whose basic elements exhibit, in combination, varying and unpredictable degrees of idiomaticity. In this regard, the explanation I am proposing here has the benefit of better explaining the peculiar nature of the Mohists' investigations of language and their unique concern with the development of techniques of analogical argumentation. Specifically, the Mohists' insistence on classifying various expressions on the basis of their consideration of the properties of nominalized infinitives would have been entirely unpersuasive as the basis of philosophical argument if it were not for the fact that there were genuine similarities and differences in the meanings of these infinitives that members of the broader population outside the Mohists' philosophical community would have been willing to recognize. No charitable interpretation of Mohist literature would assume that the Mohists lacked the insight to realize that a mere stipulation that "killing robbers" is different in kind from "killing people" would fail to convince any reasonable interlocutor to change his or her views about the ethics of justified execution.[21]

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[20] This is, to be sure, a matter of speculation, and I have not identified any textual evidence in support of it. However, if the Mohists really were making observations on common idioms, then they probably would not have felt it necessary to point this out, for their argument could have easily been made without doing so. In effect, I am offering what I take to be an inference to the best explanation: the best (and most charitable) explanation of the Mohists' arguments in *NO*15 and elsewhere is that they had something like this in mind. It is the best explanation because it represents the Mohists' method of argument as an inherently reasonable one, unlike any account that assumes that they were in the business of making arbitrary stipulations of meaning.

[21] It might be claimed that since, in my view, the Mohists rejected the possibility of articulating a principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality, I should agree with Fraser that they must have felt a need to make stipulations about critical expressions to advance their views. I disagree. I take the Mohists' rejection of this to imply that they rejected the possibility of identifying any general features in the grammar of classical Chinese that would have enabled them to distinguish one from the other on the basis of mere grammatical form. Note that grammatical form can reveal itself in many ways. In English it is identified partly through properties of inflection, which are absent in classical Chinese. In the latter, it is primarily the *ordering* of ideographs in a grammatical sequence that bears the burden of revealing differences in grammatical form. Now, the language of English, it should be noted, is no different from classical Chinese in this regard. Here, too, we seem to encounter serious difficulties in drawing a principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality merely on the basis of grammatical form. If Jack is riding a horse, then there is some horse that Jack is riding. However, if Jack is imagining a horse, then we cannot conclude that there is some horse that Jack is imagining. We seem

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that the insights of the Mohists reveal obvious and important limitations in any technique of analysis that is uncritically applied with a decompositional approach in mind. It is now time to clarify these limitations. We have seen that an analysis of natural language concatenation in terms of predicate conjunction is questionable for a very large variety of expressions in both classical and modern Chinese. That the Mohists were especially concerned with this is obvious from their discussion of *mou* (侔, parallelizing), where concerns about compositionality come to the fore. With an admirable degree of lucidity, they realized that arbitrary combinations of ideographs in Chinese, such as the joining of verbs with nouns to yield nominalized infinitives, cannot be uncritically assumed to produce complex expressions whose meanings are determined merely by the meanings of their parts and their modes of combination. This awareness of the problems of

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to have a discrepancy in logical form, but this discrepancy is not exposed in the grammar, for the sentences 'Jack is riding a horse' and 'Jack is imagining a horse' appear to have the same grammatical form. This puzzle is simple to apprehend, but early philosophers of language in the West do not seem to have been aware of it. Instead, we find them assuming that we can identify the logical form of a sentence primarily through its grammar, as in the case of the syllogistic logic of Aristotle. The idea there was to identify the form of an argument (and therewith its sentences) by examining its logical content and by ignoring its non-logical content. The former was thought to be identified through certain elementary logical notions ('all', 'some') in connection with basic properties of grammatical form, those associated with relations between subjects, copulas, and objects. Hence, from the sentence 'All humans are mortal' we obtain the sentence schema 'All *A*s are *B*s'. This operation, which exploits basic features of grammatical form, was thought to draw out the logical form that is otherwise implicit in a sentence's meaning. In later Mohist literature we do not observe a similar preoccupation with identifying general principles of logical form because the Mohists were skeptical about it from the start: they were aware of too many counterexamples that frustrated the very idea of identifying a logical form from a grammatical one. So they admonished caution on the matter of making inferences on the basis of parallelisms in grammar and rejected any general distinction between intensionality and extensionality. This does not mean, on the other hand, that they had no reason to look for common idioms and other conventions recognized in ordinary discourse. One may consistently reject a principled distinction between intensionality and extensionality while observing that our ordinary speech is abounding in common conventions that determine on a case by case basis how expressions are to be understood. There is no difference in grammatical form between the expressions 'he kicked the container' and 'he kicked the bucket', yet the latter in today's English, unlike the former, will often be taken as an idiom meaning "he died". We cannot determine this idiomatic meaning simply by examining its grammatical form, or by identifying the meanings of the words and the way in which they are combined compositionally. Consequently, we cannot rely on the properties of grammatical form to tell us that this expression is to be interpreted non-extensionally. Yet its idiomatic meaning is there nonetheless; it is recognized and supported by the conventions of use. In my view, the Mohists were simply trying to exploit conventions of this sort to support their arguments. The Mohists' assumption was that those who felt some of the force of the common idiom of 'killing robbers' would have been more likely to concede to the Mohists' views on the ethics of justified execution if they realized (as the Mohists wanted) that they themselves had a disposition to reason similarly with other patterns of expressions of similar form, such as those found in *NO*15.

compositionality led them to an understanding of the phenomena of intensionality and idiomaticity that went largely unappreciated (so far as I know) in the early traditions of the West.

It is noteworthy that classical Chinese's modern counterpart, which has inherited a great deal from its predecessor, is highly idiomatic and retains many of the features that resist compositional analyses that can be found in its earlier forms. This of course is evident from the sheer numerousness of Chinese *cheng-yu* (成语, set phrases). However, beyond these we observe a wide spectrum of semantical possibilities among compound expressions that resist any simple scheme of classification, not simply among nominal compounds but among most other types as well. Verb-object compounds, for example, exhibit varying degrees of idiomaticity in agreement with the extent to which their constituents are grammatically separable in context. [22] The meaning of the verb '*zou xue*' (走穴, to earn extra money as a part time entertainer by performing in many venues) is highly idiomatic and irreducible to the meanings of its constituent parts, '*zou*' (走, to walk) and '*xue*' (穴, cave, hole). For this reason it does not support a grammatical separation of its constituents, as do the readily separable verb-object compounds '*shui jiao*' (睡觉, to sleep) and '*shuo huang*' (说谎, to lie), which are essentially non-idiomatic. Thus, the following are grammatical:

(15)  这一觉，睡得真好。
      I had a really good sleep.

(16)  这个谎我们不能说。
      This lie we cannot tell.

However, no such parallel construction is possible for the expression '*zou xue*' (走穴), in which the second constituent of the compound is detached from its partner and placed in the sentence-initial position. What makes this contrast problematic for the thesis of compositionality is the fact that there are rather nebulous cases in between: phrases which allow for limited degrees of grammatical separability and which exhibit lesser degrees of idiomaticity. An example is '*ge ming*' (革命, revolution), the meanings of whose constituents '*ge*' (革, remove the mandate) and '*ming*' (命, life) do seem to be faintly involved in the connotations of the whole; but the whole, which is still largely idiomatic, supports only highly limited forms of grammatical separation.[23] Another example is '*shang feng*' (伤风, catch a cold), which does not support sentences in which the second constituent occurs in the sentence-initial position, but which does

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[22] For further discussion of this, see Li and Thompson 1989, 73-81. Most of these examples are from Li and Thompson; the exceptions are '*zou xue*' and '*ge ming*'. Li and Thompson do discuss '*ge ming*', but they treat it as irreducibly idiomatic, whereas I think that the meanings of the parts do play some role in the determination of the meaning of the whole. I thank Bo Mou for his comments on this point.

[23] An example of this separation, suggested to me by Bo Mou, is '*wo men jiu shi yao ge ni men de ming*' (我们就是要革你们的命, We insist that we reform your practices).

support constructions involving more limited forms of separation. Thus, whereas (18) is ungrammatical, (18) and (19) are acceptable forms of speech:

(17) *风，伤了。
     *A cold, he caught.

(18) 他伤了风。
     He caught a cold.

(19) 他伤大风了。
     He caught a terrible cold.

What we learn from these points is not just that there are *some* Chinese linguistic phenomena that are impervious to the application of the analytical techniques we described above. As the Mohists knew, it is that *no definite criteria are possible* for determining which of these phenomena are amenable to a decompositional analysis, and which are not. We cannot, in other words, outline categorical differences here. We have, on the whole, broad spectrums of compound phenomena that admit of no precise points at which expressions whose meanings are determined entirely through their constituent parts and their combination can be distinguished from those whose meanings are essentially idiomatic and recognized independently of the semantics of their parts.

This point is critical, because arguments for compositionality typically rely on the assumption that intensionality in natural language, in whatever form it occurs, is clearly identifiable and isolable, so that the meaning of any complex grammatical string that is not intensional is determined exhaustively by the meanings of its constituent parts and the structural mode of their combination. Abandoning this assumption, we are led to a more fluid conception of language. Apprehension of meanings in discourse may customarily proceed not merely combinatorially, through a tacit apprehension of the contributions of semantical building blocks and their overall form, but also holistically, by means of an appreciation of the idiosyncrasies of linguistic complexes, conceived more or less independently of their parts. And in the attempt to fully ascertain others' communicative intentions in ordinary discourse this conceptual shift between combinatorial and holistic modes of thought might very well occur episodically. This underscores the general belief that success in communication invariably depends on a heavy dose of inductive inference and inference to the best explanation, in addition to one's *deducing*, in accordance with the constraints of compositionality and the conventions of meaning, the literal meanings of sentences.

Though in their own way brilliant thinkers, the Mohists were not entirely unprompted in their desire to articulate a logic of intensionality. For there are, as I have argued, certain palpable features of classical Chinese, of both a semantical and syntactical sort, that led them into their investigations of intensional contexts and that served as a primary catalyst that inspired their own ambitious program of "rectifying

names". As far as I know, the philosophical implications of these obvious features have not been sufficiently addressed in the literature in comparative philosophy, in spite of the fact that the lexical semantics of Chinese compound expressions has received substantial attention over the years in journals on Chinese linguistics. In any case, as a principle central to much of our efforts at analyzing the expressions of natural language, compositionality will have to be relegated in status to a rule of thumb. It can no longer be assumed *a priori* to hold of a definitive range of complex expressions that are classifiable on the basis of syntactical properties alone, and this implies that the syntax of compound expressions cannot be assumed to be an infallible guide to the meanings that correspond to them. This is not to say, on the other hand, that Western techniques of logical analysis are to be cast aside as irrelevant to the problems of Chinese philosophy, or to the issues that preoccupied the Mohists in particular. It is just that any application of them will have to accommodate greater flexibility than the principle of compositionality seems to allow. As the Mohists say, it will be necessary, in hazarding analyses of critical philosophical statements or positions, for us to "proceed with caution".

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# TYPOLOGY OF NOTHING:
# HEIDEGGER, DAOISM AND BUDDHISM

## ZHIHUA YAO

**ABSTRACT**: *Parmenides expelled nonbeing from the realm of knowledge and forbade us to think or talk about it. But still there has been a long tradition of nay-sayings throughout the history of Western and Eastern philosophy. Are those philosophers talking about the same nonbeing or nothing? If not, how do their concepts of nothing differ from each other? Could there be different types of nothing? Surveying the traditional classifications of nothing or nonbeing in the East and West have led me to develop a typology of nothing that consists of three main types: 1) privative nothing, commonly known as absence; 2) negative nothing, the altogether not or absolute nothing; and finally 3) original nothing, the nothing that is equivalent to being. I will test my threefold typology of nothing by comparing the similarities and differences between the conceptions of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism. These are three of the very few philosophical strains that have launched themselves into the wonderland of negativity by developing respectively the concepts of nothing (*Nichts*), nothing (*wu* 無*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). With this analysis, I hope that I will clarify some confusion in the understanding of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism, and shed light on the central philosophical issue of "what there is not".*

**Keywords**: *nothing, absence, Heidegger, Daoism, Buddhism*

## 1.    INTRODUCTION

Parmenides expelled nonbeing from the realm of knowledge and forbade us to think or talk about it. But still there has been a long tradition of nay-sayings throughout the history of Western and Eastern philosophy. Are those philosophers talking about the same nonbeing or nothing? If not, how do their concepts of nothing differ from each other? Could there be different types of nothing?

Leibniz once famously argued against the possibility of there being more than one void. He maintains that if there could be more than one void, then there could be two voids of exactly the same shape and size. These two voids would be perfect twins (Sorensen 2009, sec. 9). Leibniz's argument suggests that if we are dealing with empty space, then a type of nothing potentially has "shape" or "size". But the variety of traditional conceptions of nothing is much more complicated than this.

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Surveying the traditional classifications of nothing or nonbeing in the East and West have led me to develop a typology of nothing that consists of three main types: 1) privative nothing, commonly known as absence; 2) negative nothing, the altogether not or absolute nothing; and finally 3) original nothing, the nothing that is equivalent to being. I do not claim that these exhaust the types of nothing in which many other philosophers had more finely grained classification schemes. For instance, the Neo-Platonist Ammonios Hermeiu and the Indian Yogācārins distinguished five different types of nothing, whereas Marius Victorinus (another Neo-Platonist), Immanuel Kant, and mainstream Indian philosophy had developed various fourfold schemes. However, I think my typology will suffice for the purpose of my paper which is to examine the similarities and differences between the conceptions of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism. The reason why I choose these three philosophical strains to test my typology of nothing is not only because I am familiar with them, but also because they each respectively represent the developing concepts of nothing in the West, China and India.

The logical positivist Rudolf Carnap once criticized the Western tradition of metaphysics by taking Heidegger's theory of nothing as an extreme case of meaningless discourse (Carnap 1931, 233). Similarly, in the eyes of orthodox Confucian and Hindu scholars, both Daoism and Buddhism were seen as passive, negative, and even destructive to intellectual and social norms. In fact, these scholars condemned them as heresies and were determined to eliminate their influence on Chinese and Indian minds. It is no accident that their opponents developed a "negative" impression of these traditions. These are three of the very few philosophical strains that have launched themselves into the wonderland of negativity by developing respectively the concepts of nothing (*Nichts*), nothing (*wu* 無) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

## 2.   ORIGINAL NOTHING

In his major work *Being and Time*, Heidegger apparently did not treat nothing as a central issue. Only in his analysis of *Angst*, one of the fundamental attunements (*Befindlichkeit*) of *Dasein*, does he touch upon this concept. The idea of *Angst* is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In a long footnote in section 40 on "The fundamental attunement of *Angst* as an eminent disclosedness of *Da-sein*", Heidegger refers to Augustine, Luther and Kierkegaard to support his distinction between *Angst* and fear (*Furcht*). With regard to *Angst*, Heidegger says:

> The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what *Angst* is about. *Angst* "does not know" what it is about which it is anxious. But "nowhere" does not mean nothing; rather, region in general lies therein, and disclosedness of the world in general for essentially spatial being-in. Therefore, what is threatening cannot approach from a definite direction within nearness, it is already "there" - and yet nowhere. It is so near that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath - and yet it is nowhere. In what *Angst* is about, the "it is nothing and nowhere" becomes manifest (Heidegger 1963, 186; Stambaugh 1996, 174-5).

It is nothing (*Nichts*) and nowhere (*nirgends*), and yet the disclosedness of the world lies within it. This reminds us of God being depicted in negative terms within

the mystical Christian tradition. In contrast to the philosophical discussions of nothing, as found in early western philosophers, such as Parmenides and Plato, the Christian mystics who developed the negative theology regard nothing as an experience. Their view has influenced many classical German philosophers including Schelling and Hegel. In this sense, nothing is not an abstract concept, but rather a reality that can be experienced. This is similar to the Eastern mystical tradition of Daoism that emphasizes the sagely practice of experiencing nothing (*shengren ti wu* 聖人體無).

Of course, it is not so easy to experience nothing. In fact, Heidegger admits that such an experience is rare. In Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics*, he states: "Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human *Dasein*? It can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of *Angst*." (Heidegger 1978, 111; 1998, 88, with my modification) In this work of 1929, we find the most extensive discussion of nothing by Heidegger. Most of the work illustrates how nothing is revealed and experienced in *Angst*. Moreover, he develops another theme that is not seen in *Being and Time* which is the relationship between being and nothing. He says, "nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself as belonging to the being of beings". (Heidegger 1978, 120; 1998, 94) Furthermore, he states that "[i]n the being of beings the nihilation (*Nichten*) of nothing occurs". (Heidegger 1978, 115; 1998, 91) We can infer from these statements that Heidegger takes nothing to be equivalent to being.

The idea that nothing and being is equivalent can be found in many of Heidegger's works. For instance, "Being: Nothing: Same…Nothing is the characteristic (*Kennzeichnung*) of Being".[1] Reinhard May, who studied these expressions, tries to prove their connection with relevant statements that are found in Daoism and Chan Buddhism. These statements include: "Being and nothing giving rise to each other" (*Dao-De-Jing* Ch. 2); "The things of the world arise from being. And being arises from nothing" (*Dao-De-Jing* Ch. 40); "Being is none other than nothing, nothing is none other than being" (*Xin-Xin-Ming* 信心銘, T2023, 1056a). May maintains that all of these Daoist and Chan Buddhist writings were already translated into German in or before the 1920s, and so Heidegger may have read these sources and become influenced by them (May 1996, 26-8).

Heidegger, however, only admits Hegel's contribution on this point. He cites a statement from Hegel's *Science of Logic*: "Pure being and pure nothing are the same." Pure being and pure nothing are two concepts in the beginning of Hegel's logical system. They are the same because they are indeterminate, immediate and pure. But Heidegger disagrees with Hegel on how and why they are the same. He says: "Being and nothing do belong together, not because both – from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought – agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of a *Dasein* that is held out into nothing." (Heidegger 1978, 120; 1998, 94-5) Here "the transcendence of *Dasein*" is discussed earlier in the same work: "Being held out into nothing – as *Dasein* is – on the ground of concealed *Angst* is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence."

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[1] For more examples, see May 1996, 21-6.

(Heidegger 1978, 118; 1998, 93) *Dasein* transcends the totality of beings and therefore reaches the being itself. Meanwhile, *Dasein* is also "held out" into nothing, therefore being and nothing become identical in the experiential dimension of *Dasein*.

Another theme that Heidegger devoted himself to is the relationship between nothing and negativity, a concept again bearing a Hegelian mark. In Hegel's system, negativity is apparently more active and important than pure nothing. It is the engine of the Hegelian dialectics and makes becoming, movement and development possible through its force of *Aufhebung*. Although Heidegger insists that "nothing is the origin of negation, not vice versa" (Heidegger 1978, 117; 1998, 86), he closely follows Hegel when he describes how nothing functions through negation and refusal. We can see this in two of Heidegger's works that were written in the 1930s but only recently published.

> Fullness is pregnant with the originary "not"; making full is not *yet* and *no longer* gifting, both in *counter-resonance*, refused in the very hesitating, and thus the *charming-moving-unto* in the removal-unto in the removal-unto. Here [is] above all the swaying not-character of be-ing as enowning (Heidegger 1999, 189).

> The questioning of the history of being not only experiences nothing not as void (*Nichtiges*), when this questioning requests the being itself in the fullness of its essential swaying, nothing is experienced as enownment (*Er-eignung*) (Heidegger 1997 , 313. My translation).

Here enowning (*Ereignis*) or enownment (*Ereignung*) functions as the provider or giver of being and time, and it is the 'it' in the phrase "it gives/there is" (*es gibt*). Meanwhile, Heidegger stresses that the withdrawal or refusal that is not providing or giving also belongs essentially to the enowning itself. It is this withdrawal or refusal that makes providing or giving possible. Therefore, in the withdrawal or refusal that is located in the heart of enowning, we see an original nothing which is the ultimate ground for negation and negativity.

The term "original nothing" (*nihil originarium*) appears in Heidegger's writings only a few times. For instance, when discussing the world as nothing, he says: "The world is the nothing that originally temporalizes itself and simply arises in and with the temporalizing (*Zeitigung*). We, therefore, call the world the original nothing (*nihil originarium*)."[2] Nevertheless, this term captures very well the basic meaning of nothing in Heidegger's usage, namely, as something experienced by *Dasein*'s *Angst*, equivalent to being, and functioning through negation and withdrawal.

By using "original nothing" Heidegger also distances himself from other types of nothing that were discussed by previous philosophers. It is generally agreed that what Parmenides forbade us to talk about is "the altogether not" (τὸ μηδαμῇ μηδαμῶς ὄν). Since Plato philosophers have tried to break this curse, but they were only approaching an "absence". In Kant's fourfold classification of nothing, these two senses of nothing are respectively called negative nothing (*nihil negativum*) and privative nothing (*nihil privativum*). He characterizes the former as "the empty

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[2]  Heidegger 1990, 271. Cited from Wirtz 2006, 333. My translation. For more discussions on this concept, see Kwan 1982, 76, 83-84, and 142.

object without concept" that is the impossible, e.g., a two-sided rectilinear figure, and the latter as "the empty object of a concept", e.g., a shadow or cold.[3] For many philosophers, these are the two basic types of nothing. I therefore take them to be the first two types in my classification scheme. But Heidegger's sense of original nothing seems to have nothing to do with them. Instead, this nothing signifies alternatively to his key concept of being. Nothing as being is also one of the four types of nothing for the Neo-Platonist, Marius Victorinus.[4] Its traces can be found in many classical German thinkers such as F.H. Jacobi, J.G. Hamann, Schelling, Hegel, and F. von Baader. So, I include original nothing as the third type of nothing in my classification scheme. With these three types of nothing in mind, we can now discuss the Daoist concept of nothing.

## 3. NOTHING

In early Daoism, nothing may not have been a central concept as "*Dao*" but even at this stage it is an essential aspect of *Dao*. Its position was further elevated with the development of the Xuan School. The Neo-Confucian scholars, also known as "*Dao*-scholars", were not necessarily upset by the idea of *Dao*, but often reacted strongly against nothing. Nothing may not be the central concept of Daoist philosophy, but it is surely the most characteristic Daoist concept.

According to Pang (1999, 348-63), the concept of nothing as discussed in the rich canons of Chinese philosophy can be classified as having three different types. These include "nothing as absence", "absolute nothing", and "nothing as being" which are signified respectively by the characters '*wang*' (亡), '*wu*' (无) and '*wu*' (無). Interestingly, these three types correspond to the three major types of nothing that I identified among Western philosophers, namely, privative nothing (*nihil privativum*), negative nothing (*nihil negativum*) and original nothing (*nihil originarium*). It is now pertinent to consider what type of nothing the Daoists were talking about.

Many contemporary scholars distinguish two senses of nothing in Lao Zi's *Dao-De-Jing*.[5] One is the empirical or commonsense usage referring to empty space. This usage is found especially in Chapter 11 of the *Dao-De-Jing*, where nothing functions inside the hub, a pot, and the dwelling. The other is nothing in its metaphysical sense, referring to the source or origin of all existents, and found in key passages of the *Dao-De-Jing*, e.g., Chapters 2 and 40.[6] This distinction, however, becomes irrelevant if we attempt to match Daoist nothing to my typology of nothing. Both space and the origin of all existents are actual existence with real

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[3] See Kant 1956, 332-3. The other two types are rational entity (*ens rationis*) and imaginary entity (*ens imaginarium*).

[4] See Kobusch 1984, 809. The other three types are negation, mutual relation, and the not-yet existent (*Noch-nichtsein*). Another Neo-Platonist Ammonios Hermeiu added the fifth ineffable unrepresentable nothing to the list.

[5] For instance, Liu 1997, 159; Wang 2001, 155; Lin 2007, 151.

[6] I exclude chapter 1, because I read the relevant sentence there as "the nameless (*wuming* 無名) is the origin of heaven and earth" rather than "nothing (*wu* 無) is called (*ming* 名) the origin of heaven and earth".

function. They are called nothing only because they are formless and imageless. So nothing for Lao Zi, either in its empirical or metaphysical sense, is the "nothing as being" or the original nothing.

In the *Dao-De-Jing*, there are also a large number of compounds in the form of "non-*x*" or "no-*x*", e.g., non-action (*wu-wei* 無爲) and no-name (*wu-ming* 無名), where the word '*wu*' ('non-', 'no-') functions as a prefix in the compound and cannot act independently as a noun or a philosophical concept. Its meaning is close to the privative nothing or nothing as absence. The Daoist classics never seem to mention the absolute or negative nothing, which usually indicates logical impossibility as in the case of late Moist classics.[7]

In any case, the concept of nothing as discussed in the Daoist philosophical context falls under the category of original nothing or nothing as being. It is elaborated in two aspects. The first is the cosmogonical or vertical dimension, with the emphasis of nothing being the source or origin of existents: "The things of the world arise from being. And being arises from nothing."[8] It is this ability of giving rise to all existents that makes nothing the true original nothing. The same idea is elaborated in the *Zhuang-Zi*: "The myriad things come forth from nonbeing. Being cannot bring being into being; it must come forth from nonbeing, and nonbeing is singularly nonbeing."[9] The Xuan School, represented by Wang Bi, further develops this line of thinking and interprets nothing as the "origin" (*ben* 本) of all things. In comparison to its Western counterparts, the Daoist nothing is more "original" by emphasizing its cosmogonical dimension.

The second is the ontological or horizontal dimension that emphasizes "being and nothing giving rise to each other".[10] The mutual arising of being and nothing horizontally illuminates the identity and transformation between pure being and pure nothing. The formless imageless original nothing, through its identity with and transformation into being, establishes its ontological position in the sense of nothing as being. This runs parallel to the ontologies of Hegel and Heidegger.

Certain tension exists between the two dimensions, however, and many commentators have attempted to explain the apparent contradiction. In my view, the failure of classical Chinese philosophers, such as Lao Zi, to distinguish ontology from cosmology or cosmogony contributes to this tension. The admixture of cosmogonical and ontological approaches that dominates classical Chinese philosophy probably owes its existence to the centrality of *sheng* (生) (begetting, generating, giving rise to) in Daoist and Confucian metaphysics. Exactly for the same reason, original nothing in Lao Zi and Daoist philosophy is realized in its more complete "original" form than in the works of Western philosophers such as Heidegger, who only stress its ontological dimension.

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[7] See the *Mojing* and its commentary: 無不必待有，……無天陷，則無之而無 (Nonbeing does not necessarily presuppose being. … In the case the nonbeing of the sky's falling down, it is nonbeing without ever having been).

[8] *Dao-De-Jing*, Chapter 40: 天下萬物生於有，有生於無.

[9] *Zhuang-Zi*, Chapter of "Geng-Sang-Chu": 萬物出乎無有，有不能以有爲有，必出乎無有，而無有一無有.

[10] *Dao-De-Jing*, Chapter 2: 有無相生.

## 4.  EMPTINESS

Let us turn to emptiness in Buddhist philosophy and its relationship to nothing. In early and sectarian Buddhism, the concept of emptiness was employed to interpret the foundational Buddhist doctrine of no-self. It became one of the key Buddhist concepts with the rise of Perfection of Wisdom literature and its interpretation by the Madhyamaka scholars. The orthodox Hindu scholars, who often classified Buddhist philosophy into four major schools, namely, Sarvāstivāda realism, Sautrāntika indirect realism, Yogācāra idealism, and Madhyamaka nihilism, were especially critical of the latter. In their view, emptiness may not have been the central concept of Buddhism, but it was no doubt the most characteristic of Buddhist philosophy.

In the history of Indian philosophy, different schemes were developed for classifying nothing or nonbeing (*abhāva*). The mainstream Vaiśeṣikas, Naiyāyikas, and Mīmāṃsakas classified nonbeing into four types, namely, prior nonbeing (*prāgabhāva*), posterior nonbeing (*dhvaṃsābhāva*), mutual nonbeing (*anyon-yābhāva*), and absolute nonbeing (*atyantābhāva*). These four types can be subsumed into two more basic types: absolute nonbeing and mutual nonbeing. The latter covers the first three of four types, which are its manifestations in temporal and spatial dimensions. Mutual nonbeing corresponds to privative nothing or absence in my typology, while absolute nonbeing is the negative nothing with respect to "the altogether not". This popular scheme, however, does not include emptiness. Among the Indic sources that I have encountered, only a Yogācāra Buddhist text adds emptiness to the scheme as the fifth type of nonbeing. It is called the "ultimate nonbeing" (*paramārthāsat*) and interpreted as "devoid of intrinsic nature" (*niḥsvabhāva*), which is exactly the definition of emptiness.[11]

In the history of Buddhism the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions have developed an interpretation of emptiness. It is generally agreed that the Perfection of Wisdom literature and its Madhyamaka interpretation, while aiming at criticizing and denying intrinsic nature, made emptiness a central Buddhist concept. Intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) was a key concept in Abhidharma scholasticism that characterized the unanalysable elements (*dharma*) of all existents. In this understanding, the intrinsic nature of each and every element should be distinctive and consistent, otherwise their distinction will collapse. Meanwhile, their consistent, even permanent, nature does not imply that existents made of elements do not go through change or transformation. All the elements and existents, as long as they are conditioned, must dependently arise and cease.

In the Madhyamaka view, however, the concept of intrinsic nature is incompatible with the foundational Buddhist doctrine of dependent arising. Nāgārjuna argues, "[t]he origination of intrinsic nature from causes and conditions is illogical, since intrinsic nature originated from causes and conditions would become contingent. How could there be contingent intrinsic nature? Intrinsic nature is not contingent, nor is it dependent on others."[12] By upholding the doctrine of

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[11]  It is found in the encyclopedic *Yogācārabhūmi* (T1579, 362c) and its commentaries (T1828, 416a and T1829, 97a).

[12]  *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 16.1-2: *na saṃbhavaḥ svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ /*

dependent origination, one must give up and deny intrinsic nature, as Nāgārjuna declares: "Whatever is dependently originated, I claim it is emptiness."[13] He holds that all those in the net of causal arising—either conventional existence or its elements—are devoid of intrinsic nature and empty. For the Ābhidharmikas, such conventional existence—for instance, a desk or person—is conceptually constructed, and hence lack intrinsic nature, but their building blocks are those elements embedded with intrinsic nature. Nāgārjuna insists that even those building blocks, as long as they arise and cease in the causal network, are also "conceptually constructed".[14]

There are at least two ways of understanding this claim of emptiness. If all existents are conceptually constructed, as with illusions and hallucinatory objects, then emptiness in this sense is absolute or negative nothing as in the case of the son of a barren woman or square-circle, both indicating logical impossibility. This will inevitably lead to a nihilist end that negates all existents, which, as a matter of fact, dominates classical and contemporary interpretations of the Madhyamaka tradition.[15] The other way, however, emphasizes that absolute reality such as dharma-realm (*dharmadhātu*) or thusness (*tathatā*) is revealed through the idea of emptiness that denies intrinsic nature.[16] In this view, emptiness comes close to original nothing or nothing as being. Nāgārjuna himself seems unwilling to fall into either extreme when he claims that emptiness is "the middle way"[17] which is beyond nonbeing and being. From the viewpoint of my typology of nothing, if emptiness is beyond negative nothing (the extreme of nonbeing) and original nothing (the extreme of being), then it would fall under privative nothing. This observation is supported by the very definition of emptiness as "devoid of intrinsic nature" which is a constant negation and antidote of any reification, even emptiness itself, and therefore "emptiness is empty".[18]

In the Yogācāra School, even though emptiness is not as central as it is in the Madhyamaka School, the Yogācārins understood it very differently. They refer to a passage from an early Buddhist text, *Cūḷasuññata-sutta*, which is never cited by the Mādhyamikas in their extensive discussion on emptiness. The text says: "It is seen that when something does not exist somewhere, that place is empty with regard to the former. And yet it is to be understood that when something remains somewhere it does exist as reality."[19] In this case, emptiness is understood in terms of privation or absence, or, in an Indian term, mutual nonbeing. But this type of nonbeing is always relative to something existent. It is in this sense that emptiness serves as an antidote to intrinsic nature in Madhyamaka. But when emptiness is expanded to negate all existents at the ultimate level, it will cease to be a mutual nonbeing in the

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hetupratyayasaṃbhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhavet // svabhāvaḥ kṛtako nāma bhaviṣyati punaḥ kathaṃ / akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca //.

[13] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.18ab: *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe /.*

[14] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24. 18c: *sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat.*

[15] Contemporary scholars with this approach are represented by Eugene Burnouf, H. Jacobi, M. Walleser, I. Wach, A.B. Keith, and La Vallee Poussin. See Lin 1999, 183-6.

[16] Contemporary representatives of this approach are St. Schayer, Stcherbatsky, and Murti. See Lin 1999, 186-91.

[17] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24. 18d: *saiva madhyamā //.*

[18] See Piṅgala's commentary on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, T1564, 33b17.

[19] Cited from Nagao 1991, 210.

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sense of absence and become an absolute negative nonbeing. The Mādhyamikas themselves may not admit this, but their theory inevitably leads to this end.

The Yogācārins understood emptiness in terms of its root meaning of absence and defined "the characteristic of emptiness as nonbeing of subject and object and the being of that nonbeing".[20] The subject and object, in their epistemologically oriented project, is regarded as conceptual constructions on the basis of existent conscious processes. The concept of emptiness denies the existence of these conceptual constructions, yet asserts the existence of consciousness (*vijñāna*), thusness (*tathatā*), or dharma-realm (*dharmadhātu*). In this respect, emptiness is equivalent to the so-called "wondrous being" (*miao-you* 妙有) and therefore comes close to the original nothing or nothing as being in my typology of nothing.

Later Tibetan Buddhists characterized the Yogācāra way of understanding emptiness as "other-emptiness" (*gzhan stong*), in contrast to the "self-emptiness" (*rang stong*) held by the Mādhyamikas, and condemned the former way of understanding as heresy. This understanding of emptiness as wondrous being, however, became dominant in East Asian Buddhism, a development based on the influence of the Yogācāra as well as the Daoist sense of original nothing. As a result, Buddhist emptiness and Daoist nothing were easily confused.[21] Masao Abe (1985, 128-30), for instance, while discussing the superiority of negativity in Eastern philosophy, treated Daoist nothing and Buddhist emptiness as equivalent to wondrous being. In his discussion, both are understood to be original nothing or nothing as being.

## 5.   CONCLUSION

By comparing the similarities and differences between the concept of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism, I have tested my threefold typology of nothing. If we distinguish the conceptions of nothing into three basic types, namely, privative, negative, and original nothing, then Heidegger's and Daoism's conception of nothing can be characterized as "original nothing". The unique Daoist cosmogonical-ontological approach renders nothing more "original" than its parallels in Western philosophy. In contrast, the emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism is basically a type of privative nothing, but its tendency to negate all existents at the ultimate level leads to negative nothing. And finally, the emptiness in Yogācāra Buddhism is basically nothing as absence or privation, but its affirmation of ultimate reality leads to original nothing. The latter sense of emptiness was more influential among East Asian Buddhists, and more easily confused with the Daoists' original nothing.

With this analysis, I hope that I have clarified some confusion in the understanding of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism. This typology of nothing also sheds light on the central philosophical issue of "what there is not". The perplexity of this issue is attributed to the fact that nonbeing or nothing, by its very nature, escapes from falling into a being or something and thus resists any

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[20]  *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.13ab: *dvayābhāvo hy abhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyasya lakṣaṇaṃ /.*
[21]  See the relevant studies in Luo 2003 and Zhao 2007.

attempt of definition or characterization. In the history of Western philosophy, the mystery of nothing is usually associated with two equally mysterious questions. One is why, according to Parmenides, can we not think or talk about nonbeing? This question becomes even more intriguing in contrast to the fact that we can talk about nonbeing or nothing with ease in our ordinary language. The other is the famous Leibnizian–Heideggerian question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" which has been taken to be the fundamental question of metaphysics.

According to my typology of nothing, when Parmenides forbade us from thinking or talking about nonbeing, he was warning us against the altogether not or absolute nothing, e.g., square-circle and the son of a barren woman. It is evident that this type of nothing was mainly a logician's concern, including Moists, Hindu and Buddhist logicians, and contemporary analytical philosophers since Russell. Given its nature of being logically contradictory and impossible, this type of nothing, as predicted by Parmenides, does not really enter into the realm of knowledge, but rather functions as an indicator of the limit of human knowledge. What does enter the realm of our knowledge and ordinary language is a different type of nothing. To break the curse of Parmenides, Plato and his followers were approaching "what there is not" in the sense of "difference" or, in Indian terminology, mutual nonbeing. As the absence or privation of being, this type of nothing is always an essential part of our knowledge. So the reason that we can think or talk about nonbeing or nothing with ease is not because Parmenides was wrong, but because we are approaching a different interpretation of nothing.

Leibniz was the first philosopher to put forward the perplexing metaphysical question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Various attempts to answer this question have understood nothing as an absolute nothing that is logically impossible. As a result, the existence of something is believed to have a higher probability or necessity. The question then becomes purely speculative, as if it is possible for a state of absolute nothing to exist prior to something. However, if we understand nothing in the Heideggerian or Daoist sense of original nothing, then the question is a matter of cosmogony, i.e., how a concrete something with form and image comes about from a formless imageless state. To answer this, Christian theologians would resort to God's will, whereas Daoists would rely on the creativity of Dao. In either case, nothing should not be understood as absolute nothing or absence; such an interpretation will lead to vain speculations. Instead, nothing is a formless imageless state of existence, which is described as earth and water covered with darkness in the *Book of Genesis*, or simply as chaos in Daoist writings. It is only with this conception of nothing that we can make sense of this fundamental question of metaphysics.

I have expounded my typology of nothing by comparing the conceptions of nothing in Heidegger, Daoism and Buddhism (three representative philosophical trends in the West, China and India). Each has explored negativity to a great depth and preliminarily answers two perplexing questions in the philosophical discourse of nothing, i.e., "why we cannot think or talk about nothing" and "why there is something rather than nothing". The depth of these discussions shows that it is wrong to indiscriminately exclude all kinds of nothing from the proper realm of philosophy. Instead we should treat the subject more seriously by engaging with traditional sources in the East and West with the hope that we may eventually know

better "what there is not".


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# COMPARISON PARADOX, COMPARATIVE SITUATION AND INTER-PARADIGMATICY: A METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CROSS-CULTURAL PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARISON

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**ABSTRACT**: *It is commonly believed that philosophical comparison depends on having some common measure or standard between and above the compared parts. The paper is to show that the foregoing common belief is incorrect and therewith to inquire into the possibility of cross-cultural philosophical comparison. First, the 'comparison paradox' will be expounded. It is a theoretical difficulty for the philosophical tendency represented by Plato's theory of Ideas to justify comparative activities. Further, the connection of the comparative paradox with the obstacles met by cross-cultural philosophical comparisons will be demonstrated. It will be shown that to attribute the difficulty of cross-cultural comparisons to incommensurability of traditions is irrelevant and misleading. It is to be argued that the original possibility of comparison depends on the 'comparative situation', i.e., the mechanism of meaning-production that functions in a non-universalistic and anonymous way. A philosophical paradigm does facilitate the attendance of such a situation, but it is also possible for the situation to emerge between paradigms in a gamesome way. Accordingly, the genuine comparison at issue will not originate primarily and merely on the level of concepts and propositions, but can only be achieved through inter-paradigmatic conditions, where we have the sharp awareness of a paradigm's boundary from which we can attempt to achieve situational communication with another paradigm. In light of this, the perspective of a philosophical comparison differs not only from the traditional or universalistic one, but also from Gadamer's hermeneutics, such as the doctrine of 'fusion of horizons'. The new perspective finds an illustration in Heidegger's relations with Daoism.*

**Keywords:** *comparative paradox, incommensurability, comparative situation, inter-paradigmaticy, Heidegger's attitude towards Dao.*

With respect to cross-cultural philosophical comparisons, two attitudes can be identified: one is optimistic, the other pessimistic. The former overlooks the special obstacles in such comparisons, taking them as feasible as the comparison within one tradition. The latter, because of being aware of the difficulty of the so-called 'incommensurability' between philosophical traditions, denies the possibility of the comparison. However, we do recognize that there have been some successful cross-

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cultural philosophical comparisons such as that between Indian Buddhism and the Chinese *Dao*-oriented tradition, which differs profoundly from the efforts guided by the aforementioned attitudes. What is taken for granted by the two attitudes is that significant philosophical comparison must be done between concepts and propositions in accordance with a universalizable 'common measure' or standard. If no common measure exists, then the attempt for comparison amounts to building architecture on sand. This idea hinders methodological cross-cultural comparison, since there is no universally valid standard between alienated traditions. To show that this shared presupposition is untenable, I will start from a reflection on Plato's doctrine of comparative possibility which entails a 'comparison paradox'. We will then try to find what is required for a genuine comparison as well as a philosophical comparison. A 'paradigm' does facilitate philosophical comparison in itself, not mainly because it provides some common standard, but rather its encouraging of an emergence of a comparative situation. As far as the situation appears and functions, comparison is evoked. In this new perspective, therefore, inter-paradigmatic comparison may not be impossible if the situation is not totally rejected at the interval.

## 1.  COMPARISON PARADOX

Plato, the most influential philosopher in the history of western philosophy, establishes a universal and substantial reason for the possibility of comparison. In one of his works, *Phaedo*, he writes:

> Then you too wouldn't accept anyone's saying that one person was larger than another by a head, and the smaller was smaller by the same thing; but you'd protest that you for your part will say only that everything larger than something else is larger by nothing but largeness, and largeness is the reason for its being larger; and that the smaller is smaller by nothing but smallness, and smallness is the reason for its being smaller. (Plato, *Phaedo,* 100e－101a)

Plato is talking about a comparison, namely, between one person being larger or smaller *than* another person. It seems that all of us are able to make such comparisons, but how shall we provide a 'reason' for this comparative 'ability'? Plato's answer is that a comparative act depends on the Ideas (*eidos, idea*) as 'largeness' and 'smallness'. In other words, the comparative act will not consist of the experience of the two compared things (e.g., seeing or touching A and B). There must be a third item of a higher order (e.g., 'largeness') to make the recognition of 'A is larger than B' possible. It is 'largeness' or 'smallness', being self-dependent and universally valid, that allows for a common measure or pivot for comparison which makes the experience of 'A is larger than B' possible. Otherwise, how would you know that A is *larger* －instead of whiter, darker, prettier, etc.－than B? If you have A and B, among many other items, but not the Idea of 'largeness' itself, then how can you possess the experience of 'A is larger than B'?

The problem with Plato's account is that it fails to explain the ability of making a *comparison* in a final sense. Even if we accept his theory of Ideas, we would only

know that 'A is large', where A participates in 'largeness', but not that 'A is larg*er than* B', since the phrase 'larger…than' implies that 'A is large' and 'B is small'.

We also know that Plato views 'largeness' and 'smallness' as radically distinct from each other and cannot coexist in one situation at the same time. If we admit that 'largeness' and 'smallness' attend the same comparison, then the 'common measure' that Plato believes constitute the experience of comparison will disappear. So, we cannot make a genuine comparison in the Platonic framework. Furthermore, the expression 'A is as large as B', taken as a comparison, implies the possibility that 'A is larger (smaller) than B'.

The difficulty of 'comparison' made through definite Ideas can be expressed more concisely as follows:

1. Any comparison must be accomplished by finding the sameness or difference between two items (A/B).
2. On the one hand, finding 'sameness', or what can be viewed as 'the same' according to a common measure, has nothing to do with comparison because any comparison can never arise in the pure sameness.
3. On the other hand, it is also impossible to find any difference between two items, for according to Plato, the difference can only be found through a common measure. Consequently, the so-called 'difference' that is found in the Platonic framework, such as the 'large' or the 'small', is no longer a difference but a common point (largeness or smallness of things).[1]
4. In conclusion, a genuine comparison is impossible.

Indeed, this 'comparison paradox'[2] can be expressed even more concisely:

Any comparison will demand the *simultaneous presence* of 'sameness' *and* 'difference'. This will negate the common measure or the pivot of comparison in Platonic perspective, and thus make comparison impossible.

The same paradox is recognized by Zhuang Zi (莊子) who writes in the second chapter of his book:

Whom shall we ask to produce the right decision? We may ask someone who agrees with you; but since he agrees with you, how can he make the decision? We may ask someone who agrees with me; but since he agrees with me, how can he make the decision? We may ask someone who agrees with both you and me, but since he agrees with both you and me, how can he make the decision?

[1] Plato views 'difference as such' as an 'Idea' (*Sophist*, 255e), which comes into being by participating or sharing the Idea of 'being' (259e). Therefore, difference has its own being. But it does not explain the difference *in comparison*. As for the Idea of 'difference', we can ask: *is it different from itself*? Answering this question will result in a 'paradox of difference', i.e., whether the answer is yes or no, it will lead to its opposition. But as regards to the difference *in comparison*, the same question cannot be asked, for it has no 'self' [of its Idea].
[2] The term 'paradox' or 'antinomy' is used in a less strict way to refer to a radical dilemma that cannot be overcome by taking any direction, be it forward or backward.

> We may ask someone who differs from both you and me, but since he differs from both you and me, how can he make the decision? (Zhuang Zi Chap. 2, 1989, 53)

The 'decision' that Zhuang Zi mentions means that the arbitration of the controversy between you and me naturally needs the comparison between the opinions of both sides as a prerequisite. Zhuang Zi shows that it is impossible to accomplish a comparison and hence an arbitration if we deal with the sameness and difference separately.

## 2. THE PARADOX OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

The 'comparison paradox' is deeply implanted between different philosophies. In the tradition of Western philosophy and the enterprise of philosophical comparison, which on a large scale pursues explicitly or implicitly the Platonic 'commensurability', 'philosophy' is mainly viewed as an effort of thinking that inquires fundamental problems by reflecting on and constructing individual concepts or propositions (or a system of concepts or propositions). Consequently, this tradition has been seeking to establish certain universal standards, foundations or premises from which all beings must obey. In such a framework of thinking, cross-cultural philosophical comparison cannot avoid the comparison paradox since the possibility of comparison will depend on the universality that provides common measure for the compared sides. For instance, the comparison between Western and Chinese philosophy, which is advocated by Zong-san Mou（牟宗三）is constrained by this kind of framework. Mou holds that:

> Ideas…will become universal when they become concepts. But this kind of universality, from a Chinese viewpoint, bears its own peculiarities from the beginning of its civilization … Consequently, there are Chinese as well as Western philosophy…which can be communicated, however, through their universality. Communication means universality, and from here a common understanding is possible. There will be no common understanding if there is no universality. (Mou 1997, 3-5)

It is clear that Mou, among many other philosophers who share this view, believes that universal concepts guarantee sufficient comparison (i.e., 'communication')

When we compare two philosophical doctrines, e.g., C and D, what we are trying to do, in the most basic sense, is find their sameness and difference. Even an implicit comparison, i.e., interpreting D from the viewpoint and method of C without mentioning C itself, cannot be reasonably justified without the recognition of their sameness and difference. When we are talking about the sameness and difference of C and D, it is important to consider what common measure or standard of comparison we are appealing to. But can we truly appeal to a common measure in order to obtain a meaningful comparison? These problems are not often directly addressed, but how we solve them, whether explicitly or implicitly, will influence the quality of comparison. Most of the time, we speak of sameness and difference in light of the measure we are accustomed to, such as, with an early introduction of Buddhism to the Chinese world. Scholars or monks apply the method of *ge-yi* (格義, obtaining the meaning of alien

terms by analogy with what we know) in order to translate and comprehend Buddhist terms in virtue of the compared Daoist terms. On the contrary, in the period of a 'paradigm shift', it is also possible to speak of sameness and difference in light of the measure provided by the other side, such as what took place in the process of 'reversed *ge-yi*（*fan-xiang-ge-yi* 反向格義)' in China since the twentieth century (Liu 2007). However, as the comparative paradox shows, not all of these comparisons are genuine. As a result, many cases of comparison between Chinese and Western philosophy are not entirely satisfying, and this problem cannot be solved by simply mastering the literature of both sides or by being more tolerant of the foreign view. Surely we can learn to be erudite and tolerant, and discover some apparent similarities or differences, but this does not mean that we will find pivots of comparison that can help resolve genuine philosophical problems with full constructive engagement. Once we try to compare philosophical thoughts according to a certain imagined universal standard, we will therefore either exceed or fail to achieve the *middle* pivotal junction by which they are connected. Accordingly, 'incommensurability' is not the proper expression of difficulty that lies with philosophical comparison. If 'commensurability' is taken as the common measure or universal standard in comparison, then it is not only irrelevant but misleading when dealing with the issue of possibility of philosophical comparison.

## 3. COMPARATIVE SITUATION

Although it is difficult in theory to make a comparison, in everyday-life we experience, and often do make, successful comparisons. Comparison is the prerequisite of recognition, and consequently of any meaning, consciousness, or perception. As structuralism maintains, differentiations constitute the meanings of a language (F.D. Saussure 1985, 164-165, 167-168). This differentiation, however, cannot be ideally assimilated, i.e., differences made according to a common standard or Idea. Meanwhile, it is not totally separable from similarity either.[3] Rather, it is the differentiation *in* comparison.

When I see some dates on a high tree and several bamboo rods lying at the foot of the tree, I take the longest rod to get the dates without any kind of idealized thinking. In such an act, I successfully accomplish a comparison. The so-called 'successful comparison' refers to those comparative acts that produce the meanings or have the effects that would not have appeared in unilateral or non-comparative acts. I call the structure which makes the comparison successful a '*comparative situation*'.

The following question now arises: how does a comparative situation appear, especially with respect to different philosophies? Let us first reflect on the mechanism of the comparison paradox. Plato claims that a successful comparison depends on the transcendent common measure, e.g., 'largeness', to which the compared items refer.

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[3] Saussure thinks that the basic differentiation is opposition. Opposition, such as 'père/mère' (father/mother), 'Nacht/Nächte' (night/nights) *implies* rather than presupposes certain similarity (Saussure 1995, 166-169).

However, as argued above, the experience of the comparison 'A is larger than B' cannot be formed simply by participating in 'largeness' because the experience of 'larger than' implies in itself 'smaller than'; and a simultaneous experience of 'larger' and 'smaller' is unimaginable according to the theory of Ideas and rules of formal logic, for there is no Idea that can be large and small *at the same time*.[4] Accordingly, if philosophy is nothing but the result of Idealization or conceptualization, and if the comparisons of philosophical doctrines can only be accomplished on a conceptual level, then there will not be any fruitful comparison. It still belongs to where the comparison paradox can be applied.

Is it necessarily contradictory and meaningless if 'the large and the small' appear in the same experience? Of course not. Otherwise no fruitful comparative experience will occur. We all know it is possible, and it even takes place from time to time. Furthermore, it will not work if we understand the co-existence of 'A and non-A' as a dialectic synthesis, i.e., as the development of 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis', for this already presupposes a comparison, but not the other way around. One fact is that the application of dialectic in the philosophical researches of mainland China, during the last sixty years, did not bring about any prosperity to cross-cultural philosophical comparison, but rather, popularity of philosophical West-centrism.

In the traditional philosophical mainstream, concepts (e.g., the concept of 'highness') come into being either by themselves or by abstraction, and thus contain a hard and essentially idealized core, demanding distribution (universal applicability) and identification. If concepts are not distributed or limited, this can only be caused by adding more concepts to previous ones, but not by an act of comparison. For example, if we add 'middle', 'extremely', or 'not' to the concept 'high', we respectively obtain the following concepts: 'middle high', 'extremely high', or 'not high'. For this reason, the theory of *genos* elucidated in Plato's *Sophist*, though it shows a profound motive to save the 'plurality' of phenomena, cannot enter into the dynamic phenomenal process of comparison due to its method of grasping dichotomies like 'similarity/difference' or 'being/non-being' by 'definition' and 'conceptual division'.

A 'comparative situation' can be understood as a meaningful comparison without appealing to a higher measure. We can say 'Ming Yao (姚明) (2.29m) is taller than Michael Jordan (1.98m)' as soon as we see them standing together. It has nothing to do with participating in the Idea of 'tallness', but simply with the experience of this concrete comparative situation. Someone may argue that this situation presupposes many accumulated experiences, e.g., childhood learning experiences, in which the capacity of recognition and using a language is acquired, which imply the meaning-acquisition of the concept 'tallness'. This explanation, though correct for the most part, is false in the last assumption. The more we trace our experiences back to our

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[4] Plato, in order to avoid the weak point that Idealism lacks genuine 'difference' and 'non-being', argues in the *Sophist* that "highness and non-highness have the same measure of existence" (258a). But as the first footnote points out, even if he can accomplish this argument, which is actually flawed and far-fetched, the possibility of the co-existence of "highness and non-highness" in the experience of comparison remains unjustified in his theory.

childhood, the less there could be any ideal model or measure, and the more important a comparative situation becomes. So how do we *begin* learning the use of the term 'tall'? Is it by referring to a tall thing or the Idea of 'tallness'? In either case, how do we learn this very notion of 'reference'? Is it possible to refer to 'reference' itself in order to learn 'to refer'?

In a comparative situation we can experience 'taller than…' and 'shorter than…' simultaneously because we do not just see A or B alone, even less see them by first looking at 'tallness' or 'shortness', but simultaneously see A, B, *and…* Here the ellipsis is indispensable and more important than what is explicitly said. It means that everything else is being experienced by us in an indistinct, marginal, and hidden mode. This plural-dimensional, clear-boundary-lacking field of experience, and occasional confrontation of items, render "A is taller than B" as a prominent phenomenon that is directly experienced. This is the way in which people learn and accomplish comparisons without presupposing an Idealized common measure or non-contextual definition based on conceptual content. Indeed, we can (and do) know that "A is taller than B" without knowing what 'tallness' in itself is, just as we can, and only can, learn to ride a bike without knowing what 'riding a bike' in itself consists of.

A situation is primarily a 'space-time horizon' or 'field', i.e., the potential and non-objectifiable stream of space-time experience flowing from the past to future, and the inner and exterior lived region accompanying every experience (there are other things beside, behind, and between A and B…). It can also be viewed as an indistinct, potential and all-related net that precedes all identifiable objects or subjects. The relational things that we experience are just the manifested or prominent parts of this anonymously functioning horizon. A comparative situation is no doubt just one of such a situation.

## 4. PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARATIVE SITUATION EMERGING IN THE INTER-PARADIGMATIC CONDITION

A philosophical comparative situation emerges when it earns its own comparison situation. Therefore, the key methodology of philosophical comparison is to enter into its comparative situation, rather than anything else. It first means that cross-cultural comparisons cannot be limited to concepts, propositions, or philosophical arguments since total dependence on them may cause a divorce from comparison situations, which in turn may lead to the comparison paradox. Secondly, the comparison should not be made *only* through a ready-made framework as the cross-cultural *ge-yi* (or its reversion) does. Certain kinds of *ge-yi* may be an inevitable stage in the history of trans-cultural intercourse, but there will not be any genuine and pregnant comparison if we constrict ourselves to them.

We may find that in *one* major philosophical tradition or paradigm, comparisons made between philosophical concepts and arguments are feasible and sometimes significant. For instance, Aristotle and Hegel made quite a few comparisons of the

philosophies before them. In Chinese Buddhism, *pan-jiao* (判教), or judging the superiority of various Buddhist schools by comparing them, was a powerful way to promote the philosophical sensitivity of the Buddhist monks. However, from these facts it cannot be asserted that successful comparisons should be attributed to the common standards or rules that the paradigm provides. A paradigm is not equal to a set of conceptual rules or common standards for its composition and function is richer and deeper than a system of rules.

Scientific paradigms, according to which Thomas S. Kuhn made the notion of a 'paradigm' significant, not only to the study of the history of science but also to humanities, are "the community's paradigms, revealed in its textbooks, lectures, and laboratory exercises". (Kuhn 1962, 43) They differ from a system of rules or standards since "paradigms may be prior to, more binding, and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them". (Kuhn 1962, 46) A scientist acquires a paradigm "through education and through subsequent exposure to the literature often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms". (Kuhn 1962, 46) So, a paradigm can guide scientists' researches or make them convergent on their identifying objects and relations, not primarily by establishing common rules or standards but by providing a 'network' of models of study which have a 'family resemblance'[5] among them. (Kuhn 1962, 43-46) Although a set of common rules may be abstracted from a paradigm, where they may function during a normal period of research, there is no guarantee that the unanimity among scientists about how to understand and apply these rules will be established. Considering that Wittgenstein's central ideas, e.g., his notion of language-games and forms of life, are imminently connected to the idea of 'family resemblance', which must have impacted Kuhn, we may reasonably assume that the paradigm takes the situational structure of human life as its precondition.

Following Kuhn, we may say that a philosophical paradigm stands between originally situated experience of human life and the total conceptualization of it. Without the experience, the paradigm shall lose its motive; without moderate or pragmatic conceptualization of the experience, philosophical approaches will fail to form a continued tradition. Because of the overwhelming influence of Plato, the paradigm of traditional Western philosophy has always been in danger of being over-conceptualized.

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[5] Kuhn illustrates his idea of a paradigm's function by incorporating one of Wittgenstein's key terms in his *Philosophical Investigations*, namely, 'family resemblance'. At the point where people fail to find a common essence for a term or action such as 'language' or 'game', Wittgenstein proposes 'family resemblances' (*Familienähnlichkeit*) to explain what it is that holds all of these various cases together. For instance, why do we call various activities a 'game'? He writes: "We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing [among the various activities we call 'game']… I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. ---- And I shall say: 'games' form a family. … And the strength of the thread [a term's identity] does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres." (Wittgenstein 1958, §66- §67)

A philosophical paradigm is revealed through learning a language, an education in humanities (including philosophy and history), general education, life-experiences, conceptual systems, and so on. One who conducts a philosophical comparison within a paradigm does not first need to know a set of rules or standard. So the paradigm may not merely allow but also in a sense encourage the function of a comparison situation, if people do not make it too abstract or common-rule-oriented. However, this facility for the presence of a comparison situation is missing in cross-cultural comparisons where they are performed beyond a paradigm. Therefore, the difficulty of cross-cultural comparison does not come from the absence of common rules between paradigms, since there is no final need for such rules or measures even in the comparisons within one paradigm. The obstacle should rather be due to the seldom attendance of a comparative situation caused by the heterogeneity of participants' experiences in different paradigms.

In order to solve this problem, some scholars have advanced a series of significant suggestions, such as, 'implicit comparison' (Carine Defoort), 'pluralized comparison' (Bo Mou 牟博), comparisons from linguistic comparisons—i.e., the awareness of translation effects, the comparisons of grammar, semantics and pragmatics between different languages—to philosophical comparisons (Roger Ames), and so on. The reason that these comparisons can improve the conceptual and propositional mode of traditional comparison is, to some extent, due to their ability to offset the separation from comparative situation. For example, linguistic and translation comparisons, which involve the analysis of certain key words and lead to philosophical comparison, have the effect of immersing one's self in foreign languages and contexts, whereby the sameness and difference between concepts and propositions exposed in the following comparison will emerge more naturally. As a result, there will be a greater chance to earn the comparative situation.

These improved strategies of comparison, however, still cannot significantly enhance the possibility of an emergence of a comparative situation. Linguistic and translation comparisons, for example, will still be constrained by the conceptual framework of the one who makes these comparisons, especially when the attempt to transform them into philosophical comparisons is being made. Consequently, if we are not aware of this constraint or danger and in no way respond to it, there may likely be a conceptual, situation-lacking comparison. Even a bilingual or multilingual philosophical scholar cannot ensure that he is making genuine philosophical comparisons because as soon as a reflective linguistic consideration is summoned, and philosophical contrasts made, the vigor of context will decline immediately. What remains is simply grammar, semantics and pragmatics that can be objectified. How to deal with them seems to be a problem of different conceptual positions. For instance, by observing the same Chinese language there will be opposite conclusions, such as, with Chinese philosophy as either having no awareness of truth (e.g., Chad Hansen) or having its own awareness of truth that is different from its Western counterpart (e.g., Chen-yang Li 李晨陽). Furthermore, this problem is not overcome in principle even if

we form a 'middle' language between two languages (e.g., 'creoles' or 'pidgins')[6] because it is then a new language and not a language *between* different languages that may have a significant effect on comparison. In the same way, 'implicit comparison' and comparisons between cultures and lifestyles, in most cases, are not 'situationalized' but constrained by one paradigm. For this reason, the globalization or the uniformity of languages and lifestyles will not necessarily give rise to the emergence of a comparative situation and hence have its philosophical effects. Rather, it is more likely to result in the dominance of certain systems of ideas, the damage of those non-dominant traditions and the consequent destruction of inter-culturality.

What gesture of thinking, then, is more helpful towards the emergence of a philosophical comparative situation? If we realize that a paradigm, including its moderate conceptualization, is inevitable to *philosophical* comparison, and that the conceptual dimension of the paradigm—especially the common-rule-oriented view of paradigm—somehow covers up the original comparative situation, then a methodological self-awareness, namely, 'towards *inter*-paradigmaticy' may be more desirable. As stated earlier, philosophical comparison, as the comparison of thoughts and doctrines, is derived from certain philosophical paradigm and the conceptual systems within it. In other words, it must be constrained by certain linguistic, cultural or philosophical structures of meaning-concept production and maintenance. On the other hand, cross-cultural comparison requires the appearance of a comparative situation beyond one paradigm, and therefore cannot be completely dominated by a single philosophical paradigm. Therefore, the philosophical comparison at issue must achieve the inter-paradigmatic condition in order to activate the cross-cultural comparative situation.

But does the inter-paradigmatic condition really exist? Is there comparative situation in the condition? The so-called 'inter-paradigmaticy' is a conscious state that, although abiding in one paradigm, is strongly aware of the heterogeneous and even threatening presence of other paradigms; an awareness prior to the so-called 'fusion of horizons',[7] and nevertheless manages to maintain a marginal albeit authentic existence

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[6] So-called 'creoles' or 'pidgins' are 'hybridized' languages created by people who, though speaking difference languages, live together in a long time, to solve the problem of basic communication, e.g., Neo-Melanesian created in New Guinea (Cf. Jared Diamond, 1993, chapter 8).

[7] The 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*) is the key term of Gadamer's hermeneutics. It indicates the successful understanding between two or more agents. "*[U]nderstanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*." (Gadamer 1989, 306) For Gadamer, "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point." (Gadamer 1989, 302) "The concept of 'horizon' suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand----not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion." (Gadamer 1989, 305)

The difference between the two theories, the fusion of horizons and the inter-paradigmaticity, lies primarily in recognizing the inter-paradigmatic reality. Gadamer is unaware of the profound limitation of paradigm to the inter-paradigmatic understanding, or the ontological meaning of the *otherness*. In this respect, Martin Heidegger, especially Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida are much more sensitive than him. Thus Gadamer is blind at what is really needed for a cross-cultural comparative understanding.

at the interval of paradigms by certain non-conceptual, non-universalistic means, such as, various forms of language-games (including translation) or spontaneous modes of conscious acts.

Why do we expect the existence of a certain philosophical consciousness rather than mere irrational arbitrariness at the interval of paradigms? The discussion above provides some clue. A paradigm does *not* exhaust human sense-making activities. Instead, the paradigm needs the potential field of experience or the stream of consciousness as a precondition.[8] As a result, it is possible for us to experience a marginal but deeper comparative situation than what is available in a paradigm by tracing back to its origins. For a similar reason, though trans-cultural languages (e.g., Chinese and Sanskrit, Chinese and Greek or German) are incommensurable, it is not impossible to translate texts, including philosophically profound ones, in one way or another between those languages and related paradigms. Speaking more illustratively, entering into inter-paradigmaticy means getting back to the native-land (*Heimat*) of a paradigm in order to experience the concealed nativeness (*Heimlichkeit*) or nativity *(Nativität)* of the interval where the cross-cultural, comparative philosophical situation might appear. Because of the *fundamental* potentiality of the inter-(ness) or between-(ness), the inter-paradigmaticy will not show itself as the higher voice or the universal mind immune to contamination caused by the paradigm, but rather enable the inter- or trans-condition with the paradigm. Therefore, any trans-cultural translation can never be guaranteed and there will always be possibilities to reconstruct them reasonably, just as how cross-cultural philosophical comparisons possess no doubtless certainty, but always *on the way* to establish itself and reach the fittest for the time being. In brief, at the interval, 'it' (from the worst to the best) is always being possible without a fixed controller. And that is exactly the meaning of a comparative situation.

In short, it is the dynamic structure of meaning-genesis or the potential, non-objectifiable stream of space-time experience plus paradigmatic footing that gives rise to the inter-paradigmaticy, but its own existence *cannot* be paradigmatized. If we ignore the first half of this expression, relativism or the strong claim of 'incomparability' will arise. If we ignore the second half, then rationalism or universalism will emerge; a blind belief that comparison is always possible by appealing to some super-paradigmatic universality.

From this viewpoint, a philosophical comparative situation may attend at the level of inter-paradigmaticy, and consequently making it possible for cross-cultural philosophical comparisons to bear paradigmatic effects. As previously argued, this

His views of 'horizon', 'prejudice', 'fusion', etc. are too explicit, conceptual and objectifiable. His interpretation overlooks the hidden, non-visible and non-objectifiable dimension of the horizon which is emphasized by the author of this paper. His focus is merely put on opening the horizon to the past or traditional text (Gadamer 1989: 304-7) and thence "rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (Gadamer 1989, 305), and so his discussion of understanding is fundamentally limited to one tradition with its language, history and past.

[8] Cf. the doctrine of 'field of perception' or 'field of phenomena' in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1996), and the doctrine of stream of consciousness in W. James' *Principles of Psychology* (James 1981).

emergence presupposes the recognition of the boundary of this very paradigm. The illusion that this situational comparison can be pursued solely on the level of conceptual expression, epistemological (subject-knowing-object) thinking, and one/none paradigm should be deleted. For this reason, the 'fusion of horizons' advocated by Gadamer's hermeneutics, compared with an 'inter-paradigmatic comparative situation', is still too optimistic and facile. We have to know that in many cases the encounters between philosophical paradigms of alienated cultures with 'prejudices'[9] will not result in the emergence of a comparative situation. The reason is not simply that one's own horizon is not fully opened, or lacks the intention to open the horizon (as what happened in the twentieth century with the 'reversed *ge-yi*' – see second section for the irrelevance of this intention), but the absence of recognizing the inter-paradigmatic characteristics of cross-cultural comparison. In this view, inter-paradigmatic comparisons have no tendency towards a historical relativism which Gadamer's hermeneutics imply because this kind of 'relativism' appears only on the level of propositional assertions or judgments.


## 5.  AN EXAMPLE OF INTER-PARADIGMATIC COMPARISON: HEIDEGGER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS *DAO*


Successful philosophical comparisons, e.g., the Sino-Indian philosophical comparison which gave birth to Zen Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, bears the disposition of noticing the radical difference between two paradigms, admitting each other implicitly or even critically, abandoning the illusion of *ge-yi*, standing in a paradigm yet not being totally limited by it, and constituting the comparison both creatively and conservatively (tracing back to its own tradition) in a dynamic situation. To illustrate this point, consider one case in the twentieth century, namely, the philosophical comparison made by Heidegger between his thinking and Chinese Daoism. It can hardly be said to be a perfectly successful example, but at least in some respects the demands of inter-paradigmatic comparisons are felt and responded.

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[9] 'Prejudice' (*Vorurteil*) is another important term used by Gadamer. It is a non-closed forejudging that constitutes the foreground or background of the hermeneutic horizon. Everyone starts interpretative or comprehensive action with such a prejudice but it will encounter, say, "the actual meaning of the text" (Gadamer 1989: 269) and therefore fuse itself with the other side. In this way, the presence (the prejudice) and past (the text) merge in such a way that the tension between the two sides allows for a successful understanding.

The problem of his interpretation of the pre-judged horizon is that the non-propositional and anonymous features given to the horizon by Husserl and Heidegger (it is from them that Gadamer gets the term), is almost lost. "Actually 'prejudice' means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined." (Gadamer 1989, 270) The current paper on the contrary argues that the chance for the prejudice, having been a *judgment* already, to be appropriately rectified by the other side (e.g., text in other paradigm) and fused with it in a cross-cultural confrontation, is extremely slight. The 'method and truth' of Gadamer's hermeneutics is irrelevant to the possibility of comparison which we are looking for.

No later than the beginning of the 1930s, Heidegger shows a strong interest in the Daoism of Lao Zi (老子) and Zhuang Zi, which influenced his *Kehre* (i.e., his turning away from his early stage of philosophy to his later stage), and manifested itself many times afterwards (Zhang 2009, 71 and notes 1-2). The '*Kehre*' was first expressed in Heidegger's essay "On the Essence of Truth" (1930) and displayed a shift on his view on truth. The light (opening)-oriented view of truth (*a-lētheia*) in *Being and Time* (1927) was turned to a light (opening)-black (concealing)-complementing one. This change was affected or at least significantly accompanied by his encounter with a Daoist view of *yin* (black)-*yang* (light) relation, especially his reading and translation of a line in the 28th chapter of *Lao Zi* (Zhang 2009, 71; Zhang 2007, Ch.12). These facts support the belief that Heidegger's interest was genuine and even had a considerable impact on his thought (May 1996, Ch. 4). Meanwhile, in some other circumstances, he emphasized the profound difference between Western and Eastern cultures and philosophies, including Daoism, and even made westernizing claims like "Only a God can save us" that demands a return to the origins of the Western world. Accordingly, some literal-minded commentators judge that Heidegger's interest in Daoism is not serious and even superficial. In fact, both apparent contradictory attitudes are indispensable for the experience of a genuine philosophical comparison. Let's take a look at the following paragraph:

> Das Wort Ereignis soll jetzt, aus der gewiesenen Sache her gedacht, als Leitwort im Dienst des Denkens sprenchen. Als so gedachtes Leitwort läßt es sich sowenig übersetzen wie das griechische Leitwort λóγος und das chinesische *Dao*[10]. (Heidegger 1957a, 25)

> (The words event of appropriation, thought of in terms of the matter indicated, should now speak as a key term in the service of thinking. As such a key term, it can no more be translated than the Greek λóγος or the Chinese *Dao*. (Heidegger 1957b, 36))

We can see that Heidegger's emphasis on "the Chinese *Dao*" is so strong that he juxtaposes it with Greek *logos* and the key word '*Ereignis*' in his later works. At the same time, however, he asserts that this '*Dao*' is *almost untranslatable*, i.e., it cannot be translated into Western languages without distorting its original meaning. This observation shows his high sensitivity to the non-conceptual and non-propositional feature of inter-paradigmaticy. Nevertheless, his recognition of the constraint presented by the paradigm of language-philosophy goes *hand in hand* with his effort to communicate with the Chinese *Dao* inter-paradigmatically. For example, in the same year (1957) he wrote that:

> Das Leitwort im dichtenden Denken des Laotse lautet *Dao* und bedeutet 'eigentlich' Weg. Weil man jedoch den Weg leicht nur äußerlich vorstellt als die Verbindungsstrecke zwischen zwei Orten, hat man in der Übereilung unser Wort ' Weg' für ungeeignet befunden, das zu nennen, was *Dao* sagt. Man übersetzt *Dao* deshalb durch Vernunft, Geist, Raison, Sinn, Logos.

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[10] The German and English texts render "道" as "*Tao*". For the sake of unifying format in this journal, "道" is presented as "*Dao*" without exception.

Indes könnte der *Dao* der alles be-weegende Weg sein, dasjenige, woraus wir erst zu denken vermögen, was Vernunft, Geist, Sinn, Logos, eigentlich, d.h. aus ihrem eigenen Wesen her sagen möchten. Vielleicht vebirgt sich im Wort 'Weg', *Dao*, das Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse des denkenden Sagens. (Heidegger 1959, 198)[11]

(The key word in Laotse's poetic thinking is *Dao*, which 'properly speaking' means way. But because we are prone to think of 'way' superficially, as a stretch connecting two places, our word 'way' has all too rashly been considered unfit to name what *Dao* says. *Dao* is then translated as reason, mind, *raison*, meaning, *logos*.

Yet *Dao* could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos* properly mean to say----properly, by their proper nature. Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word 'way', *Dao*. (Heidegger 1971, 92))

Heidegger seems to give a translation of *Dao* or *Tao* (道),[12] i.e., 'Way (*Weg*)' and its variations. But if we observe carefully, we will find that his translation is not the conceptual, super-paradigmatic 'one-to-one' translation (that is why he refuses to provide previous *ge-yi* translations, such as, 'reason', 'spirit', 'understanding' etc.). Rather, his venture is to try to probe its multiple meanings, especially what can be intuited and compared in the context, and translate them on a situational basis after sensing the "*dichtend* (*poeticizing* and *creating*)" nature of *Dao* in *Dao-De-Jing* (《道德經》) or *Lao Zi* (《老子》). We know that the translation of poems (*Ge-dicht*) present the most obstinate linguistic paradigmatic obstacles, which can only be overcome by the tentative *dichtend* way of translation, i.e., by seeking certain inter-paradigmatic and gamesomely expressions that may (or may not) work.

In order to enter a cross-cultural comparative situation, Heidegger first tries to remove or omit those elements in the term 'way' that still can be objectified and transformed into a higher-rank principle, e.g., the element of "route" by which 'way' is often superficially said to mean the connection between two locations (*Verbindungsstrecke*), and by which 'way' is translated abstractly and "intellectually". Then he attributes the more dynamic and self-constituting meaning of "the way that gives or opens all ways (*der alles be-wëgende Weg*)" to the *Dao* of 'way'. Consequently, our understanding of this 'way' is inseparable from the constituting process and situation that makes it appear. The generative comparative situation therefore looms between Lao Zi's '*Dao*' in Chinese and Heidegger's "*der alles be-wëgende Weg* (the way that gives or opens all ways)" in German, and thus the linear translational strategy is abandoned.[13] '*Dao*' has no longer been viewed as one of the highest philosophical concepts, no matter logical, semantic, metaphysical,

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[11] This citation is from the lectures titled "Das Wesen der Sprache" (The Nature of Language) which Heidegger gave in Dec, 1957 and Feb, 1958 at the University of Freiburg.
[12] '*Dao*' (道) is a key term in ancient Chinese philosophy and basically means the ultimate truth and reality. Its etymology is 'way' (*Shuo-Wen-Jie-Zi*), and derives from it the meanings of dredging (a river), guiding, rule, principle and speaking.
[13] Roger Ames and David Hall in their translation of *Dao-De-Jing* also translate *Dao* as 'way-making'(Cf. Ames & Hall 2003).

cosmological or ethical, because it is inseparable from its concrete comparative situation or the meaning-becoming process. In this way, Heidegger continues:

> Vielleicht vebirgt sich im Wort 'Weg', *Dao*, das Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse des denkenden Sagens.

> Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying [thinking speaking] conceals itself in the word 'way', *Dao*.

It can be viewed either as another attempt of translation, i.e., to translate '*Dao*' as "the mystery … of Saying" "the origin of speaking", or as the expression of the inter-paradigmaticy of this '*Dao*' translation—"thinking speaking (*denkendes Sagen*)". The phrase 'thinking speaking' means that thinking never leaves speaking, and consequently the linguistic paradigmatic limits of this thinking can always be made aware; meanwhile, speaking never leaves thinking, and therefore speaking is a process of dis-covering something fundamentally meaningful, i.e., what is constituted and presented directly in the inter-paradigmatic condition. And the so-called "the mystery of mysteries (*das Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse*)" refers to the inter-paradigmaticy of the 'thinking speaking', which shows the nonlinearity, waiting-in-hiding and anonymous occurrence. Furthermore, the very way in which it appears in such a context or comparative situation, as 'the mystery of mysteries', gives rise to the impulse of comparing it with "the most mysterious mystery (*xuan-zhi-you-xuan* 玄之又玄)" in the first chapter of *Dao-De-Jing*.[14] This comparison is a thinking-speaking comparison that takes place in the philosophical comparative situation. Indeed, 'inter-paradigmaticy' can also be properly described as "the most mysterious mystery".

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[14] Richard Wilhelm's German translation renders '玄之又玄' in the first chapter as "*Des Geheimnisses noch tieferes Geheimnis*". Cf. Richard Wilhelm: *Laotse, T[D]ao Te King, Das Buch des Alten vom Sinn und Leben*, Duesseldorf: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1978, S.41. This translation was first published in 1911 (Jena edition).

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RECENT WORK

## THE MINIMAL DEFINITION AND METHODOLOGY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY: A REPORT FROM A CONFERENCE

STEPHEN C. ANGLE

*In June of 2008, the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP) convened its third Constructive Engagement conference, on the theme of "Comparative Philosophy Methodology." During the opening speeches, Prof. Dunhua ZHAO, Chair of the Philosophy Department at Peking University, challenged the conference's participants to put forward a minimal definition of "comparative philosophy" and a statement of its methods. Based on the papers from the conference and the extensive discussion that ensued, during my closing reflections at the end of the conference I offered a tentative synthesis of the conference's conclusions. That summary has already been published on-line as part of the bi-annual ISCWP newsletter (Angle 2008). In this brief essay, I recapitulate the themes of my earlier summary and expand, in my own voice, on some of the key points.*

An important goal of the conference was to bring together both practitioners and critics of comparative philosophy, in its various incarnations, to reflect on and debate the nature of our subject. There was thus no expectation that we would all agree perfectly on what "comparative philosophy" is, and on how it should be done. However, we did discover that there was considerable agreement. Most basically, it became clear that comparative philosophy has at least two potential *dimensions* that, while they may interact, are at least sometimes distinct from one another:

1. Use terms, ideas, or concepts from one philosophical tradition to help *understand* or *interpret* another philosophical tradition.
2. Through cross-tradition engagement, seek to *advance* or *develop* philosophy.

Depending on how one defines "philosophy," often the "traditions" in question will not be only philosophical. Both historically and at the present moment, "Confucianism" surely can refer to many discourses and practices that are not in any obvious way philosophical. Almost all the conference participants agreed, though, that historical and

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more recent Confucian practice has included an important philosophical dimension, and thus that one can treat the tradition as philosophy for the purposes of comparative philosophy.

Not all participants agreed that comparative philosophy could successfully accomplish these goals; I will discuss in a moment some of the challenges that were articulated. In general, though, we thought that the goals could be met, and articulated some *success conditions*:

1. Success comes in either of the above dimensions when the work is *constructive*.
2. Many of us agreed that success — and constructiveness — must be measured *in context*. That is, what counts as an "advance" will be determined from within a given philosophical tradition, rather than from a neutral standpoint above or between traditions.
3. Some of us believed that it was possible to judge which idea or tradition was better overall, at least in some circumstances. None of us believed that one could readily judge which tradition was the absolute best.

Alasdair MacIntyre is well-known for having argued that, notwithstanding the existence of a kind of incommensurability (on which see further below), it is sometimes possible to compare two traditions and see which one is superior (MacIntyre 1988). He argues that one might come to see that one's tradition has failed by its own lights, and furthermore that an alternative tradition can both explain this failure, and does not itself fail by its own lights. In such a case it can be rational, MacIntyre says, to adopt the alternative tradition. MacIntyre offers various possible examples, and it can also be interesting to think about Chinese advocates of "complete Westernization" in the early twentieth century in this vein. Still, even in such cases, the judgment of superiority is still made from a particular standpoint that is initially rooted in one of the two traditions.

If we set aside the type of case MacIntyre has in mind, then the only possible success criteria would seem to be internal notions of progress or fruitfulness, on the one hand, and a standpoint-independent idea of universal truth, on the other. In fact, if we grant that the only access one has to truth is via the best epistemological standards that one has so far come up with, then standpoint-independent truth will collapse into internal judgments. Therefore we seem to be on solid ground in emphasizing that success in comparative philosophy — the "constructive" kind of engagement that is referred to in the title of the conference series — is judged from within the distinct perspectives that the comparative philosopher is bringing into contact. One need not be limited to only one of the perspectives. In an essay a few years ago in comparative political philosophy, for example, I argued that if Chinese democratic centralism were to undergo certain sorts of reforms, it would then be legitimate both in its own terms, and from the standpoint of a Rawlsian "Law of Peoples" (Angle 2005). The exact significance of this result varies, depending on one's own position; I did not offer either perspective as uniquely privileged.

Depending on the nature of the philosophical work, the ways in which its "constructiveness" might be evaluated will also vary. Current debates about the applicability of the category "virtue ethics" to early Confucianism can illustrate some of the complexities. For some (e.g., Van Norden 2007), the framework of virtue ethics can help us better interpret and understand a work like the *Meng-Zi*. Others have argued that this category highlights relatively unimportant aspects of the text, and leads to a misunderstanding of its actual significance in its day. Whether a "virtue ethics" approach to the *Meng-Zi* is constructive as regards textual understanding — the first dimension of comparative philosophy mentioned above — will depend in part on the outcome of debates like these. (It will also depend on the details of what a given scholar takes "virtue ethics" to be, since this very category is by no means univocal in current philosophical use.) If we turn to the second ("advance or develop") dimension, we see that constructiveness will be judged by whether some version of Confucianism-as-virtue-ethics is judged to be a fruitful development of Confucianism, as seen either by someone committed to the contemporary development of Confucianism as a living philosophical tradition, or by someone interested in the development of virtue ethics in ever more robust, explanatory, or transformative ways.

Participants in the conference identified a series of *challenges* to comparative philosophy:

1. *Incommensurability*. If it is impossible to compare or translate, then comparative philosophy cannot succeed.
2. Some say that philosophy is simply *one thing*; there is no room for "comparison."
3. A complementary worry is that different philosophical traditions lack adequate *common concerns*.
4. Research and teaching of comparative philosophy lacks adequate *institutional support* and potential students find it difficult to acquire the needed training. On this we were all in agreement.

With respect to incommensurability, most of us at the conference believed that differences between concepts or languages or traditions did not make comparison impossible. Both theoretical reasons (e.g., Donald Davidson's argument in Davidson 1984) and practical examples (of seemingly successful comparative philosophy) were offered as evidence that this challenge could be overcome. My own view (as seen, for example, in Angle 2002) is that there is ample evidence of cross-tradition philosophical engagement despite the distinctiveness of each tradition, and that we can readily understand how such communication across differences can occur. Indeed, according to many plausible theories of linguistic meaning, communication across difference takes place even when two native speakers of the "same language" talk to one another.

Concerning the idea that "philosophy" is one specific thing, leaving no room for comparison, we should acknowledge that if philosophy is defined very narrowly, it may be that there is not enough room for the level of different development on which the possibility of comparative philosophy depends. Few of us were convinced that

philosophy is such a narrow enterprise, however. Efforts to produce a narrow definition based on early Greek "*philosophia*" are typically extremely ahistorical — ignoring, for example, the evidence that philosophy was understood as a "way of life" (Hadot 1995). Turning to the opposite worry, that different philosophical traditions may lack common concerns, the most basic response is simply that many scholars have in fact found areas of common concern in our work across traditions, and those of us at the conference were therefore skeptical of any *a priori* argument that denied we could have done this. "Common concern" does not, of course, necessitate finding identical formulations of concepts or problems; this thought returns us to the same considerations that were discussed in the previous paragraph.

The challenge of inadequate institutional support, we agreed, applies to each of our countries. Pioneering comparative philosophers in China, as in the U.S., have certainly had an impact, and there are now some institutional structures that welcome and nurture comparative research. But many barriers remain. In China, it is often difficult to be simultaneously taken seriously by specialists in different traditions, even when they share a single department. In the U.S., specialists in traditions other than the dominant Western ones are extremely rare within major graduate departments, as has recently been discussed in an issue of the APA's *Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* (Olberding 2008). We have a long way to go.

Finally, on the basis of this understanding of comparative philosophy, what could we say about its methodology? At the conference there was quite general agreement on the following characteristics of a *minimal methodology*:

1. Openness is fundamental, though so is the exercise of critical philosophical judgment.
2. Traditions are not monolithic, but internally diverse; our specific methods should take advantage of this.
3. The idea of family resemblance is very helpful.
4. A focus on concepts or problems is often more constructive than the comparison of individual thinkers, though there are many exceptions — particularly if the figure studied was him or herself engaged in comparative work.
5. Careful attention to issues of language and grammar is important.
6. Adequate training and adequate institutional support is critical.

There is of course a great deal that could be said about many of these characteristics, but the key is to stress that the "minimal" nature of the methodology does not mean that we each felt that a more "maximal" set of principles was needed, but could not agree on such principles. A few at the conference did indeed argue for a more demanding methodology which they felt entailed constructing a kind of neutrality among traditions or a perspectiveless perspective. In general the conference participants were not sympathetic to such an approach, and noted that some of those who advocated such an understanding of comparative philosophy did so in order to

argue that the enterprise was impossible. Most of us felt this was attacking a straw man.

The general preference for a "minimal" methodology, therefore, does not express a compromise or a lowest common denominator. Admittedly, because comparative philosophical practice is diverse, this limits the number of helpful generalizations about methodology that can be made. Nonetheless, I feel that the conference's agreed-upon methodological principles are far from empty. The idea of openness, in particular, puts the comparative enterprise into tension with many existing research programs in philosophy that are narrowly constrained by explicit or implicit assumptions about their subject matters. Still, some at the conference commented on the minimal methodology by suggesting that there was no real difference between doing what is here characterized as "comparative philosophy" and simply doing philosophy well. This may be true: perhaps all philosophy is comparative philosophy.

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