

## EDITOR'S WORDS

The current issue of the journal focuses on one special topic, “Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy”, and consists of three peer-reviewed research articles that, in my opinion, have well illustrated the philosophical point and significance of the topic. Let me briefly explain why the journal focuses on the topic and how it would contribute to the concern and emphasis of the journal.

Especially since the first decade of the 21st century, comparative philosophy, as understood and practiced in a philosophically interesting way, has undergone significant development in its identity, coverage and mission. Comparative philosophy is no longer limited exclusively to the East-West comparative dialogue; it is neither restricted to the cases of apparent culture/region-associated traditions nor stops at a mere historical description of apparent similarities and difference of views under examination, but penetrates deeper and wider philosophically. Comparative philosophy, instead of being a local subfield of philosophy, has become one exciting general front of philosophical exploration that is primarily concerned with how distinct approaches from different philosophical traditions (generally covering both culture/region-associated and style/orientation-associated philosophical traditions<sup>1</sup>) can learn from, and constructively engage, each other to jointly contribute to the contemporary development of philosophy on 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.

It is known that contemporary philosophical studies have been divided into two blocs or traditions concerning methodological styles or orientations of doing philosophy,<sup>2</sup> which are often conveniently labeled ‘analytic’ and ‘Continental’

---

<sup>1</sup> Understanding the identity of philosophical traditions in this reflectively broader way is not a mere verbal difference but is in serious reflective need for the sake of sophisticated appreciation of the internal structure of each of the closely related multiple identities of philosophical traditions and of the cross-tradition character in some important and relevant dimension and layer of each of these related identities.

<sup>2</sup> It is controversial how to define or exactly characterize the identities of the analytic and “Continental” approaches in philosophy, and the division is not clear cut. However, the features of the two generic methodological styles and orientations by virtue of which their relevant figures, works or basic orientations can be identified are relatively clear and unambiguous, although some of these characteristic features per se also deserve explanation and clarification. Roughly speaking, as far as methodological style and orientation (at the surface level) are concerned, the analytic approach emphasizes conceptual analysis, logical analysis or linguistic analysis of philosophical argumentation and key terms; it stresses logical argument, coherent explanation, clear and precise presentation and

approaches or traditions in philosophy, although both labels tend to be misleading and inaccurate (especially the latter label). What is the relation between the two? Could they learn from each other and make joint contributions to the common philosophical enterprise? How could we carry out critical reflection on both instead of indiscriminately taking one of them for granted in treating philosophical issues and concerns? These related questions address the central concern and objective of the special topic of the current issue, that is, how the constructive engagement between the two is possible. As the constructive-engagement goal and concern is one central strategy of comparative philosophy, it constitutes the vision-crux dimension of the vantage point of comparative philosophy. Tieszen's article explicitly gives a systematic exploration of how the interaction between the two traditions on the relation of natural science to philosophy can help foster further constructive engagement between the traditions. In contrast, O'Brien's and Wenning's articles implicitly address the issue of the relation between the two traditions by examining how some valuable resources from both traditions can jointly contribute to our understandings and treatments of some fundamental issues of philosophical significance that are jointly concerned. All three articles look at the issue from the constructive-engagement-vision crux of the vantage point of comparative philosophy in their distinct ways.

There is another significant feature of the vantage point of comparative philosophy in understanding and treating the relation between the two philosophical traditions. Indeed, historically speaking, the two labels have been used by many to refer to the two styles and orientations of doing philosophy *within* the Western philosophical tradition, especially contemporary (post-Kantian) Western philosophy, as suggested by the label '(European) Continent(al)'. The exploration of the relation between the two is not new. Within the Western philosophical tradition (or the contemporary Western philosophical circle) there are conferences or workshops in Europe and in the US that focus on the relation between analytic philosophy and 'Continental' philosophy understood as two contemporary movements of thought in the Western tradition. However, as the primary interest and purpose of this special issue of the journal on the topic does not consist in doing history but *philosophical* inquiry, and as some characteristic features of the two distinct types of methodological styles and orientations of doing philosophy can be traced back to ancient sources in the Western and *other* philosophical traditions and have also

---

rigorous assessment; it tends to focus more on the stable, definite, constant, consistent or universal aspect/dimension of (the conceptual characterization of) an object of study instead of identifying its historical situation or cultural setting as a prominent focus. In contrast, 'Continental' approaches tend to rely more on literary (sometimes poetic) expressions and imagination of their ideas while having less reliance on formal logic; they are more interested in actual political and cultural settings and implications of an object of study. It is noted that the division does not lie in their having totally different concerns or topics. Both share many jointly-concerned issues or topics. Many of their originally identified 'unique' concerns turn out to be distinct aspects or layers of jointly concerned issues or topics under appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. As a systematic explanation of the identities of the two is not the purpose here, I will not explore this further but give this brief note for the sake of minimal clarification and understanding.

manifested themselves in (some) other philosophical traditions in distinct philosophically-interesting ways, the current issue as a whole thus examines the issue of how their constructive engagement is possible in a double cross-tradition (cross-Western-tradition as well as cross-both-target-traditions) way, as addressed by Tieszen's article and as well illustrated by Wenning's article, though one can still focus on their manifestations within the Western tradition (but retaining the vision of the constructive engagement of comparative philosophy), as treated in O'Brien's article.

The constructive-engagement goal and cross-tradition character (in the foregoing double sense of 'cross-tradition') of the exploration presented in the current issue as a whole is thus highlighted in the sub-title of the special topic, i.e., "from the vantage point of comparative philosophy".

Bo Mou  
July 2011