

SPECIAL THEME (2):
CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT ON PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE
AND WORLDVIEW: PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICAN, ASIAN, ISLAMIC,
LATIN-AMERICAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

COMPARATIVE WHAT?
LATIN AMERICAN CHALLENGES TO
PHILOSOPHY-AS-WORLDVIEW

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ABSTRACT: *Attention to the details of putatively obvious examples of philosophy-as-worldview within Latin America give us reasons to be skeptical about the taxonomy that gives us the category of philosophy-as-worldview. Among the examples that suggest difficulties for this way of thinking about the philosophical enterprise are 19th century Mexican ethnolinguistics, contemporary efforts to reconstruct historical and contemporary Indigenous thought, and 20th century efforts to articulate regional ontologies within Latin America. However, reflection on these cases also point to a different project worth considering, namely, a taxonomy of wisdom- and knowledge-focused practices that might allow a different way of drawing distinctions between kinds of “philosophies”.*

Keywords: *ethnography, Hegel, Leibniz, Mexican existentialism, Mexican philosophy, Nahua philosophy, Totsil, Uranga, worldview*

1. PHILOSOPHIES

Within comparative philosophy circles there is a widely acknowledged distinction between having a worldview—that is, having an oftentimes tacit collection of shared categories, presumptions, and inferences that one uses to make sense of things—and the doing of self-conscious, explicit theorizing that is exemplified by academic philosophy in the mode initiated by the ancient Greeks. Although both things—worldviews and self-conscious reflection about how to represent the world—have a distinguished history of being characterized as philosophy (Smith 2018), the former is

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most readily spoken of as *having* a philosophy, whereas the latter involves *doing* philosophy (Maffie 2014, 4-6). This essay concerns the former, that is, philosophy as a worldview, within the specific context of Latin America.

The central claim of what follows is that consideration of Latin American examples of philosophy give us some reason to doubt the conceptual stability and cross-cultural appeal of a distinction between philosophy-as-worldview and self-conscious philosophy. The argument I make draws from a range of historical cases, including 19th century ethnolinguistics, contemporary efforts to reconstruct historical and contemporary Indigenous thought, and 20th century efforts to articulate regional ontologies within Latin America. The upshot is that the distinction between the having and doing of philosophy is plausibly an artifact of a taxonomy that many people have reason to reject. I conclude by considering how distinctions between kinds of philosophy might portray wisdom and knowledge norms and practices in ways that diverse groups would not have reason to reject.

Several caveats are in order. First, although I will focus on some apparent cases of philosophy-as-worldview, nothing in what follows should be taken to presume or imply that there is anything like a unified Latin American worldview, or that there is a some robustly unified subset of philosophical commitments across the region. Perhaps there are such things, but nothing here presumes it. The present essay starts from a less contentious place. It focuses on putative instances of philosophy-as-worldviews *within* the region that we now think of as Latin America. More specifically, my interest is in notable efforts to articulate those worldviews by scholars with some training or interest in academic philosophy as it is practiced in institutionalized venues in the Americas.

Second, I acknowledge that efforts of this sort can involve complicated issues of positionality, which raise issues about the ethics of “speaking for” a community (Alcoff 1991; Táíwò 2020; Rivera Cusicanqui 2020). It also involves the inevitable complexities of translation and interpretation of community-bounded meanings that are at some remove from the audience for those accounts (Geertz 1973; Bolom Pale 2017). These concerns arise for those directly aiming to represent the worldview of a community, and for those of us attempting to discuss and characterize those discussions. Caution is in order for all of us.

Third, one might reasonably reject the propriety of this regional category as a meaningful unit of analysis, and thus the utility of talking about *Latin American* philosophy or philosophies. Latin America, as a region, was dubbed as such in part because of the imperial interests of Napoleon III; that we think of it as a region is partly an artifact of the history of European colonialism. Thus, it is unclear whether or to what degree it is useful or meaningful to identify the epistemic practices of human communities defined by the region thus designated. Relatedly, even if one accepts that there is a meaningful sense in which we can speak of Latin American philosophy, one might insist that it is an act of colonial erasure of the status and projects of Indigenous groups that have resisted and sought to avoid being folded into the political, economic, and national projects of Latin American states. (For present purposes, let ‘colonial erasure’ refer to negligent insensitivity to morally relevant distinctions produced by colonialism and its effects.)

Fourth, and last, my focus will be mostly on cases within what we now think of as Mexico. This is an artifact of my expertise, rather than anything principled. Even so, there is some reason for thinking that many of the claims I make about these cases generalize to other parts of Latin American philosophy and its history. Some evidence for supporting such a generalization will emerge over the course of the argument given here.

The order of presentation is as follows: first, I argue that a set of cases that might initially appear to be paradigmatic instances of philosophy-as-worldview provide grounds for contesting the very idea of philosophy-as-worldview. Second, I argue that there is a body of work in Latin American philosophy that is plausibly and centrally concerned with the idea of philosophy-as-worldview, but that, ironically enough, also exemplifies self-conscious philosophical theory-building. Finally, I conclude with some meta-philosophical reflections on reasons to take seriously the possibility of lingering Eurocentrism in the idea of philosophy-as-worldview. Because some communities might not welcome the appellation or the characterization of ‘philosophy’ for their practical and theoretical normative enterprises, we have some reason to consider what a taxonomy of philosophy-like epistemic practices might look like if one sought to represent the range of knowledge and wisdom practices in a way that would be acceptable to those whose practices are described by the taxonomy. I sketch what such a picture might look like.

2. SOME PARADIGMATIC CASES

One might expect that some straightforward examples of philosophy-as-worldview can be found in contemporary scholarship that aims to articulate the contours of Indigenous thought in the Americas. I highlight three candidate cases, the general upshot of which is that while one can find some things in this vein, the overall picture suggests that it may be much harder to sustain the generalization that Indigenous philosophy, as such, is rightly conceived of through the lens of philosophy-as-worldview. This is, of course, compatible with thinking that *some* Indigenous philosophy neatly fits the picture of philosophy-as-worldview. The claim here, though, is that notable historical and contemporary examples confound these generalizations.

Perhaps the closest thing to a tidy narrative about Indigenous philosophy-as-worldview is Agustín de la Rosa’s *Estudio de la filosofía y riqueza de la lengua mexicana* [*Study of the Philosophy and Riches of the Mexican Language*] (1889). De la Rosa’s ambition in that work is to describe the structure of Nahuatl (commonly referred to as *mexicano* in that era), the language spoken by the Nahua cultural group, of whom the Mexica (“The Aztecs”) are the most well-known. For our purpose, the most interesting aspect of the work is something intimated in the title, namely, a link between philosophy and language.

According to de la Rosa, since language is the external manifestation of thought, the more accurately a language conveys that thought (5) and the more expansive the range of concepts that can be conveyed in that language (95-6), the more *philosophical* the language is. Crucially, though, the issue is not just about accuracy, but the richness

and philosophical power of a language partly turns on its ability to convey sentiment pleasingly, and to excite similar feelings in its hearers (6). Building on the work of an 18th century Jesuit, Francisco Clavijero, de la Rosa concludes that Nahuatl is among the most metaphysically sophisticated languages one can find (95). Moreover, its emotionally expressive powers outstrip Spanish, especially in communicating the nuances of reverential forms of address (103). In short, Nahuatl—and thus, Nahuatl speakers—are *very* philosophical.

De la Rosa argues that Nahuatl is exceptionally metaphysically powerful because of its abundance of abstract terms (95). For example, the grammar expresses a strong metaphysical distinction between persons and things and the properties that attach to each. Indeed, it even encodes a notion of evil as the privation of good, independently converging with the Thomistic account of evil (96), all of which readily invites comfortable supplementation by traditional Catholic metaphysics.

In its general outlines, de la Rosa is committed to a view according to which the structure of a language reflects a fungible but readily available set of ontological and expressive possibilities. De la Rosa holds that there was supplementation to be done to the pre-Conquest language's metaphysical framework, just as there was to pre-Christian Greek and Latin (98). For example, the effort to avoid terms associated with Indigenous religious thought (e.g., *teotl*¹) by some conversion-minded priests required some violence to the manner of speaking of some pre-Conquest Nahuatl. Even so, according to de la Rosa, it was evident that the language was markedly philosophical by virtue of having a high degree of expressive power, a profligate disposition for abstraction, and nuanced and expansive capacities for the pleasing evocation of sentiment.

So, a linguistic analysis of Nahuatl is, in the end, an analysis of the philosophy of a people. It is an account of the basic constituents of their worldview, and a distillation of an ontology accumulated over generations of living out the forms of life proper to them. On this approach, we can account for the philosophical worldview of a people by doing ethnolinguistics. At the same time, the possession of a robustly philosophical language seems to imply that some amount of self-conscious, abstract, metaphysical talk is readily found among Nahuatl-speakers.

Despite the availability of accounts that hold that the Nahuas had philosophy-as-a-worldview, at least since the middle part of the 20th century it is notable that many of the most important scholars of this thought have endeavored to show that the Nahuas *did* rather than merely *had* philosophy. Most visibly, León-Portilla (1963) emphasized a variety of considerations in favor of the claim that the Mexica had a distinctive group of people—*tlamatinimeh*—who engaged in philosophical theorizing in forms continuous with contemporary understandings of philosophy. More recent scholarship,

¹ In early translation efforts, *teotl* was commonly translated as “God”, but Maffie, for example, has argued that it is better to understand *teotl* as, “continually dynamic, vivifying, self-generating and self-regenerating sacred power, force, or energy” (2014, 22); on his account, it is the basic process (as opposed to substance) on which Nahua metaphysics rests.

though, has argued that the idea of an independent class of thinkers or sages, people who were not themselves priests, was an artifact of post-Conquest interests in misrepresenting the religious nature of those figures (Lee 2017).

Although León-Portilla tended to regard it as important that there was a discrete class of non-priest philosophers, it is not obvious that he needed to do so. Even within the European canon, there have been plenty of philosophers—from Socrates forward—who readily invoked gods and supernatural spirits in their doing of philosophy. Further, among contemporary scholars there is little consensus about how to understand what religion is, nor is there much consensus about how to accommodate the various ways in which global (putatively) religious practices differ significantly from central aspects of Abrahamic religions.²

Over the past decade or so, several notable scholars have refined and extended the core of León-Portilla's position on the Nahuas. James Maffie has explicitly characterized his position as broadly in agreement with León-Portilla's insistence that the Nahuas both "had and *did* philosophy" (Maffie 2014, 7). Maffie has also noted that, on his account of Nahua metaphysics and ethics, those convictions would count as philosophical even if they were not self-consciously developed as such by the Nahuas. On broadly Wittgensteinian grounds, Alejandro Santana (2008) has also made a case for the conclusion that the Mexica did philosophy. The upshot here is that even in perhaps the best-known case of pre-Conquest indigenous thought, there is a lively tradition of scholars insisting that it is a misrepresentation of this body of thought to characterize it exclusively in terms of philosophy-as-worldview.

A particularly interesting element of Maffie's treatment is his claim that Nahua philosophy constitutes an *alternative* to Western philosophy, albeit within the broader scope of philosophy as a self-conscious enterprise. The "wisdom tellings" of the Mexica provide a comprehensive account of how to live and order human life, encompassing not just moral questions (understood in the narrow modern sense), but also etiquette, farming, life rituals, and language (Maffie 2019; Maffie 2020b). Maffie maintains that what is distinctive of these "tellings" is their focus not on the pursuit of truth, but on "way-seeking"—a vision of the how-to in acting (Maffie 2020a, 14). Put this way, the Nahua philosophy constitutes a substantive alternative *within* self-conscious philosophy. It is not itself rightly understood (only) as philosophy-as-worldview—although such way-seeking is oftentimes expressive of a distinctive metaphysics that itself constitutes a worldview. At the same time, though, Maffie suggests that these are ultimately metaphilosophical problems that may resist resolution in non-ethnocentric and non-circular ways (Maffie 2014, 6).

A third case of reflection on Indigenous thought is instructive. In recent years, Manuel Bolom Pale has attempted to articulate the worldview of the contemporary Totsil community in the southernmost part of Mexico (Bolom Pale No date; Bolom Pale 2017). In Bolom's words, his aspiration is to articulate the "broad set of words, linguistic, cosmogonic concepts and ethical and philosophical categories of Tsotsil

² For reasons to be skeptical of the possibility of a conceptually tidy account of religion, see Cavanaugh 2009, 57-122).

thought built through daily experience and practice” as these are “interwoven with community values, as well as the rituality and knowledge of elders” (Bolom Pale No date, 19). Of special interest to him is something like education and moral formation. This involves the characterization of central symbols—for example, the snail, as a representation of a simultaneous beginning and ending of a cycle—and an articulation of various pedagogical practices common to Tsotsil life that are taken to be normative and centrally formative of Tsotsil personhood and communal life (a formative practice called *chanubtasel-p’ijubtasel*). It is a project that seeks to articulate a way of seeing and perceiving, and a sense of Tsotsil cultural memory, which thus looks to daily practice to identify the “cultural and ideological fabric” within it (25).

Put this way, Bolom Pale’s account reads as a relatively straightforward picture of a worldview, or more generally, a way of living, as philosophy. Yet, Bolom suggests something more radical than this. He understands his effort as a piece of a larger collective project that seeks to reconsider Indigenous thought *in its own terms*. The ambition is animated by the possibility of epistemologies among Indigenous peoples in the Americas that are very different from those familiar to European scientific and academic inquiry. The goal is collective in this sense: it is taken up in a spirit of dialogue involving the live possibility of mutual gain for all philosophers, whatever the accidents of their cultural position (Bolom Pale No date, 22). Bolom, then, invites his readers to reconsider whether the right way to portray or characterize the knowledge and normative practices of the Tsotsil peoples is in terms of conventional academic practices and distinctions.

As I understand it, part of what he is suggesting is that characteristically Tsotsil practices shape a person’s sensibilities so that they see the world in a distinctive way, i.e., in the characteristically Tsotsil way. Specific agency-shaping practices and cultural dispositions can be articulated and negotiated. In so doing, one may be doing self-conscious philosophy. However, to operate from *within* traditional Tsotsil practices is to see knowledge and wisdom in distinctive ways that resist the demarcations familiar to European philosophical thought.

This is a thought I will return to below, but for now let us note that in all three of these cases—de la Rosa’s ethno-linguistics, pre-Conquest Nahua philosophy, and contemporary Tsotsil thought—scholars have offered accounts that do not neatly limit themselves to an account of a collective worldview. For de la Rosa, language is itself a philosophical library, the books of which may be opened and arranged by its speakers in different ways. For Maffie and Bolom Pale, there are grounds for a degree of skepticism about the idea that philosophy-as-worldview represents an egalitarian picture of epistemic practices across human communities.

3. WORLDVIEW REDUX

A different kind of challenge to the idea of philosophy-as-worldview is raised by considering a family of projects that emerged in the 1930s in Mexico. These projects consumed a great deal of academic and popular oxygen through the 1950s. Their aspiration was to identify *lo mexicano* [“that which is Mexican”]. What putatively

started with Samuel Ramos' (1934) effort to provide an "x-ray" of Mexican psychology eventually became a collective project of providing an ontology of *lo mexicano* in the work of Emilio Uranga (1952), Leopoldo Zea (1952), and various other Mexican existentialists.³

These figures were all centrally concerned with self-conscious philosophical theorizing in a way that drew from and was in conversation with the European tradition. But, they also contested important aspects of that tradition. Their ambition was to deploy philosophical tools in the interest of accurately characterizing the way of life, the ontology, and the psychology of a particular historical situation.⁴ So, here we have philosophy-as-theorizing that is concerned with articulating a worldview and a form of life, but which is itself self-conscious theorizing.

By itself, this need not indicate a problem for the distinction between philosophy-as-worldview and philosophy-as-theory-construction, but it does set up a particularly interesting diagnosis of a problem for at least one way of thinking about accurate depiction of the lifeworld of a community. For the Mexican existentialists, successful guidance (e.g., overcoming inferiority complexes, or living in *zozobra*—roughly, normative uncertainty) depends on accurately articulating the contours of the Mexican condition and its precipitating elements in the lifeworld. It was not enough to offer an idealized or aspirational picture of that lifeworld. The normative diagnosis of how to proceed required accuracy in the characterization of the (situated, historically bound) Mexican worldview or way of life.

Enter Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy. Salazar famously insisted that Latin American philosophy had largely been a failure, that the region had served as place where Western philosophy passed "*through* our countries" (Salazar Bondy 1969, 9). By his lights, the central demand of philosophical work is that it be a "manifestation of the rational conscience of the community" (12), and that by that measure it had failed. Latin America's intellectual history was littered with inauthentic philosophy, on account of a history of domination and underdevelopment (18). The result was a region with its philosophical vision directed at recapitulating the thought of its oppressors, which left the Latin American community bereft of the articulation of an authentic, rational articulation of the community.

Here, I won't attempt to canvas the various critiques that have been made of Salazar's view (although see Zea 1969), nor will I attempt to canvas the various liberationist and decolonial projects that, in subsequent decades, endeavored to address the heart of his concern. For our purposes, the relevant feature of Salazar's account is the claim that self-conscious theoretical articulation in Latin America had failed to construct an authentic worldview. This is because the worldview it did construct was a product of oppression impairing or distorting the possibility of rational conscience in Latin American communities. On one reading, the worry is that oppression distorted

³ As is inevitably the case, there were important antecedents to Samuel Ramos' work (Schmidt 1976). Still, Ramos' work is rightly taken as the most influential trigger for widespread reflection on the nature of Mexicanness.

⁴ For recent discussions of some of this work, see Sánchez 2016, Hurtado 2007, Pereda 2013, Leyva 2018, and Cuéllar Moreno 2018. I've written about Uranga's project in Vargas 2020.

the project of academic elites. On another reading (to my mind, the more interesting one), the problem he identified was this: the very conditions of ongoing dependence and oppression in Latin America precluded the possibility of any rational articulation of an authentic worldview. On this latter reading, *any* account (elite or otherwise) of the worldview of Latin America was necessarily an already polluted one, depicting a people whose way of life was distorted by oppression's omnipresence.

What does any of this mean for our purposes here and now? If Salazar Bondy was right, we should be wary of thinking that an ethnographically accurate report of ways of life or worldviews is indeed an adequate representation of the philosophy of the people thus depicted. Where there is oppression or deprivation—and one might worry these things are everywhere and everywhen—attempts to articulate the worldview of a people will not be that at all. For Salazar Bondy, there is no authentic articulation of the rational conscience of people while they live in dependence and under oppression.⁵

These are, of course, complicated issues. Evaluation of the substance of the chief elements will have to wait for another day. My ambition in canvassing this history has not been to take sides in this dispute, but to illustrate some of the complexity of attempts to extract an account of philosophy-as-worldview, even by philosophers who take this as their central project.

The foregoing tour of some episodes in Latin American philosophy suggests three sets of reasons for worrying about the stability of the category PHILOSOPHY-AS-WORLDVIEW. The first is that the distinction is unstable: cases that might have seemed like paradigmatic instances of one kind blur into the other. Worldviews sometimes imply self-conscious thought characteristic of theorizing, and self-conscious theorizing is sometimes pursued with the ambition of describing a worldview. Second, the distinction itself is a historically contingent product of European philosophical history, one that invites us to overlook local pictures of practical and theoretical norms that carve up epistemic enterprises in different ways. A third family of concerns comes from within the mainline of the European tradition as it was transplanted into Latin America: the fact of oppression and dependence can distort or otherwise render inauthentic the worldview of a people, such that the lifeworld and the philosophy that emerges from it says more about the conditions of oppression than it does about the authentic interests, forms of life, and worldview of the people subjected to that oppression.

4. META-MEDITATIONS

I conclude with some reflections on how we got here, and on one alternative to it.

⁵ So, for example, a Mexican-American philosophy that construes its value in terms of articulation of an epistemic standpoint (as in Gallegos and Gallegos de Castillo 2018) will not, on Salazar's picture, succeed at producing authentic philosophy if Mexican-Americans have epistemic standpoints colored by oppression. A notable upshot of this picture is that only people who enjoy freedom can hope to produce authentic philosophy (Cf. Silva 2018). To be sure, some philosophers have thought that one can retain various forms of authoritative agency under oppression [for discussion, see Khader (2022) and the essays in Oshana et. al. (2018)].

The present account started with the idea that some pieces of philosophy are instances of a worldview or a way of life, and that other instances of philosophy are self-conscious efforts at theory-building. As we have seen, several philosophers have worried that this distinction is itself a product of a particular epistemic tradition. And so it is. The distinction arises from a common way of understanding Hegel's picture of philosophy. In Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, a distinction is introduced between having a view about the world and its structure—"the unity of spirit with nature"—and the self-conscious consideration of representations of that world (Hegel 1985, 25-45, 164-183). It is the latter, the self-conscious version, that is distinctive of philosophical thought in the mode that we associate with Greek philosophy. As Hegel puts it, philosophy properly speaking emerges with "pure thinking" and the transition from "thought" to "Concept" (46, 88, 165, 174).

Justin H.E. Smith (2018) argues that Hegel's formulation was a relatively late arrival in the history of European conceptions of philosophy, supplanting an earlier picture found in Leibniz and others, according to which the thinking of all peoples, at least when concerned with the natural world, was itself a codification of how reason manifested and organized the world. On the broadly Leibnizian view, one convergent with the picture in de la Rosa, the use of natural language to order the world just *was* philosophy. Smith notes that one consequence of the uptake of the Hegelian picture and its supplanting of the earlier Leibnizian picture was that it made it more difficult for Europeans (and their intellectual descendants, we might add) to recognize non-European intellectual traditions *as* philosophy (Smith 2018, 25)

This latter result converges with the concern articulated by Maffie, Bolom, and others: the very idea of philosophy as a way of life or worldview, set off and different than self-conscious theorizing, is a product of a specific moment of the European philosophical tradition. To be sure, there are undoubtedly cases where two instances of thinking might be usefully distinguished in this way. The issue pressed here is that there are too many cases that do not neatly fall into this distinction. The Hegelian distinction does not carve human thinking at its joints. In constructing the alternatives in this way, too much thought—mostly non-European thought—can be dismissed as mere having of a philosophy, ignoring the varied ways in which the active regimentation of thought and its effects on human lives do not fit the Hegelian template. Thus, the distinction between philosophy-as-worldview and philosophy as self-conscious theorizing is rightly resisted by communities that do not carve up theoretical and practical norms concerning wisdom and knowledge in the Hegelian fashion.

Once we see how recent and contingent this distinction is, the instability of it, and the resistance to it among those outside of its historical narrative, it is natural to wonder whether there might be alternative ways to characterize the options. What would a less Eurocentric, and more generally, a less ethnocentric conception of "philosophy" be like? By way of concluding, I sketch a very tentative and somewhat programmatic two-step procedure for answering this question.

As a first step, we might try to consider the broad outlines of the diversity of human social practices, abstracted away from the accidents of any specific community's cultural and epistemic history. At this immodestly high level of generality, it is difficult

to imagine groups of humans who live in anything like the broad forms of arrangements we recognize as human communities without *some* practical and theoretical norms. For any given community, though, their norms are likely a motley collection: some may be the aggregation of hard-won insights, others felicitously effective accidents, and still others may be products of self-conscious and explicit theorizing. The norms will likely have diverse relationships to our cognitive and affective natures: some may be rooted in affect, others in the rational dispositions of the human mind as such, still others in some mutual attunement of culture and dispositions of mind.

With enough time any given community seems likely to have an array of specific practices surrounding those norms, including practices concerning the accumulation, error-correction, and transmission of information relevant to them. For example, the advent of alphabetic writing might enable accumulation of information including information about alternative norms, but it also raises distinctive challenges for error-correction. In other communities, rigorous rules governing an oral tradition might do better at error-correction and transmission but be less efficient at the accumulation of novel information. Some communities and, perhaps, not others might find tremendous value in iterated and intentional interrogation of ideas. The underlying processes for accumulating, error-correcting, and transmitting information and norms might be diverse, supporting and supported by different kinds of human cognitive and social arrangements (Henrich 2016; Bicchieri 2017; Bratman 2022).

As a second step, let's focus on those human normative practices, whether theoretical or practical. We can ask what ways there are for understanding *wisdom and knowledge* (however loosely we might initially understand these things) as a subset of the entirety of their epistemic norms and human associated practices. Given the iteration of this procedure over the full range of human groups, and given the diversity of human normative self-organization, it seems plausible that we will end up with a different and more diverse set of categories for talking about what constitutes "philosophy-like" epistemic enterprises. One suspects that most groups will have their own distinctive taxonomies of practical and theoretical enterprises that carve the normative joints in different ways.

For some relatively local "us"—e.g., those of trained in philosophy of the sort that dominates the Anglophone world in the first quarter of the 21st century—we might accept distinctions between philosophy as worldview and philosophy as explicit theory construction; we might also distinguish between wisdom and knowledge, between know-how and know-that, between the practical and the theoretical. We also have our various ways of dividing up areas of inquiry into metaphysical and epistemic, and between the empirical and *a priori*. These are some of the taxonomies of knowledge-and-wisdom-centered practices that are familiar to our ways of organizing thought and talk about knowledge and wisdom. For the Tsotsil people, the historical Mexica, or contemporary Malagasy, their taxa might look different to greater and lesser degrees, perhaps significantly overlapping here but not at all there.

The thought I am gesturing at in the foregoing may be a complicated way of saying that it is not obvious what philosophy looks like if we don't start with the taxonomic framework we have inherited from the European tradition. Notice, though, that *if* we

had a diverse set of culturally or socially specific taxonomies about theoretical and practical norms and their associated practices—a library of taxonomies—we might then ask whether there is a meta-taxonomy that one could construct, one that would range over a maximally large set of those culturally contingent taxonomies (for a related picture of rationalities, see Taylor 2017). In creating that meta-taxonomy, we would seek to construct it in such a way that no taxonomically-minded adherent of any of those individual taxonomies would have strong reason to object that their own taxonomy was misrepresented. Such a meta-taxonomy would be better still if adherents could agree that nearby taxonomies or categories in the meta-taxonomy were indeed proximal.

If we could construct such a meta-taxonomy of practical and theoretical enterprises of wisdom and knowledge, it would be one way to frame the space of possibilities for thinking not just about how we happen to think about philosophy, but what the range of cognitive enterprises might be that are recognizably akin to what we think of as philosophy, and more ambitiously, a map of our epistemic enterprises. It might plausibly be a map of “philosophy” not beholden to the vagaries of any community’s intellectual history.

In sketching the outlines of this idea, I do not mean to suggest that we can succeed in constructing such a thing. There might be any number of challenges that would make success in this project impossible. For example, it is unclear the extent to which, and the basis on which, we might construct satisfactory translation schemes for different practical and theoretical taxonomies. However, the point of raising the possibility of such a meta-taxonomy of “philosophy” is not to insist that it is possible, but to remind us of the peculiarities of our dominant approach to thinking about the forms of philosophy. More ambitiously, it is an invitation to reflect on what it would take for us to have a neutral conception of the sorts of things we gesture at when we talk of philosophy, wisdom traditions, worldviews, and ways of life.

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