

# Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification

## *Abstract*

In this paper I would like to show how belonging to different cultures does not impede intercultural philosophizing and instead favors it. To that end, I will first pinpoint what exactly intercultural philosophy stands for in Section II. In Section III I will sketch certain crucial features of what is in fact a hermeneutical situation. In Section IV I will develop my own theory of an interculturally-oriented »analogous hermeneutic« and then try to show in Section V that it can furnish what is necessary to do comparative philosophy. A short conclusion will follow in Section VI.

## *Keywords*

intercultural philosophy, interculturality, »analogous hermeneutics,« comparative philosophy, cultural encounters.

## I Introduction

Let me begin with some autobiographical remarks. As a person whose philosophical socialization began in India and continued in Germany, for the last forty years I have been an insider and an outsider at the same time. This particular situation provides me with the opportunity to do philosophy with an intercultural perspective and to examine one tradition from the point of view of another. Admittedly, thinking from within more than a single tradition is disturbing, but it can be an enriching experience too. Interculturality, thus, is not simply an intellectual and aesthetic category; for me it is of existential importance.

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phy stands for in Section II. In Section III I will sketch certain crucial features of what is in fact a hermeneutical situation. In Section IV I will develop my own theory of an interculturally-oriented »analogous hermeneutic« and then try to show in Section V that it can furnish what is necessary to do comparative philosophy. A short conclusion will follow in Section VI.

## II What Is Intercultural Philosophy?

Let me proceed by ruling out certain senses of the term interculturality. In this paper interculturality is neither used as a trendy expression nor as a romantic idea emerging in an age of global technological formation and world tourism. Furthermore, it is not understood as a compensatory move on the part of non-European cultures born of some inferiority complex. Moreover, it is also not just an *ad hoc* response in the face of the encounters occurring between world cultures today. Neither is it simply a construct, nor an abstraction; nor is it a syncretic idea.

Intercultural philosophy, rightly understood, *firstly*, is not a particular, concrete system of philosophy. Rather it refers to a philosophical orientation or a proto-philosophical stance, which allows and encourages the spirit of philosophy to be realized in different cultural contexts. No single philosophy can be the philosophy for all of humankind. Intercultural philosophy is, in other words, the name of a new orientation in and of philosophy. It accompanies all the different, concrete philosophical traditions and prevents them from taking on an absolute or monolithic position.

Doing philosophy means reflecting not only on our experience in relation to ourselves but also on how we relate to others and to the world at large. Reflection involves description, explanation, and interpretation. There is always a point of view (in terms of *naya* from Jaina philosophy) at work and whoever puts one's own point of view in an absolute position is guilty of not taking alternative ways of doing philosophy seriously. Some philosophers claim a privileged position for a comprehensive master principle called the »transcendental subject« which they universalize and singularize. But there can be no further subject existing alongside the empirical one.

One could argue that it is one and the same *philosophia perennis* which all philosophical traditions deal with, and which provides us with

different answers. This thesis should be rejected from the perspective of an intercultural philosophical orientation because it is heavily overloaded with ontological, speculative metaphysical, and ideological commitments. This one perennial philosophy must resist the temptation of being made ontological. All ways of doing philosophy are committed only to the singular universal regulative idea of *philosophia perennis*. Karl Jaspers is one of the very few modern philosophers who seems to interpret *philosophia perennis* in the spirit of an intercultural philosophical orientation. »It is *philosophia perennis*,« he writes, »which provides the common ground where most distant persons are related with each other, the Chinese with the Westerners, thinkers 2,500 years past with those of the present« (Jaspers 1982: 56).<sup>1</sup> An intercultural philosophical orientation pleads for unity without uniformity. It is not a matter of unity in diversity but »unity in face of diversity.«

*Secondly*, intercultural philosophy delineates its field of enquiry by concentrating on the questions that have been asked in different traditions. Philosophical questions not only outnumber philosophical answers, but they are also more persisting. There is, in other words, a primacy of questions over answers in human life, and the discipline called philosophy is no exception to this rule. In Wittgensteinian parlance, philosophical questions are marked by a kind of »family resemblance.« Answers to philosophical questions from different traditions, on the other hand, are few in number and often do not survive the ravages of time. This asymmetry between questions and answers makes us wary and warns us not universalize one particular way of doing philosophy.

*Thirdly*, intercultural philosophical thinking rejects the idea of a total purity of a culture. This belief is at best a myth or a fiction. The same applies to philosophy, which is one of the finest products of the human mind and of human culture. In this context, it is necessary to ask: What, on one hand, makes European, Chinese, Indian, African and Latin-American philosophies particularly European, Chinese, Indian, African and Latin-American and what, on the other, makes them philosophies? Philosophy is a term, which, by itself, presumes a universal applicability. Any viable answer to this question must take into account

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<sup>1</sup> K. Jaspers, »Einleitung,« in H. Saner (ed.), *Weltgeschichte der Philosophie. Aus dem Nachlaß*, München/Zürich: Piper Verlag, 1982, Author's translation.

those cross-cultural elements that shape all philosophical traditions to varying degrees.

Intercultural philosophical thinking thus rejects any absolutist or exclusive view from any one philosophical tradition – be it European or non-European – claiming to be in sole possession of the one, singular philosophical Truth. In the past, the Greco-Eurocentric concept of philosophy could succeed in casting itself as exclusively absolute due to external factors like imperialism, colonialism, and contingent political power arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Such absolutist claims lead to a narrow culturalism, which is against the open and tolerant spirit of intercultural philosophical orientation. The general term »philosophy« possesses both cultural and cross-cultural aspects. The very notion of European philosophy, for example, testifies to this fact, for it underlies the universal applicability of the general term philosophy along with the legitimate use of the adjective European. The same analysis applies to Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, and so forth. Different cultures and philosophies influence each other and still retain their idiosyncratic features, all of which enables us to apply different adjectives to the nouns »philosophy« and »culture.« Nonetheless, in philosophizing, we engage in a cross-cultural universal, which is only secondarily Greek, Indian, Chinese, etc., and not the other way round.

*Fourthly*, this approach calls for attention to be given to a »minimal universality« of philosophical rationality across culturally sedimented differences. The universality of philosophical rationality shows its presence in the different philosophical traditions of the world. At the same time, it transcends the specific limits of the traditions and binds them together in the sense of the prefix »inter-.« Its presence is that of an »in-between,« as will be discussed below. The fear that philosophy could lose its identity, could become deconstructed and relativistic due to intercultural philosophizing, is unfounded. The deconstructivist aspect of intercultural philosophy does not relativize universal applicability as such. It merely seeks to relativize this applicability when the term »philosophy« is defined by the exclusive use of certain traditions. The exclusive relation between truth and tradition needs to be deconstructed. Truth *of* the tradition and truth *in* the tradition are two dif-

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<sup>2</sup> F. C. Copleston, *Philosophies and Cultures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; R. A. Mall, and H. Hülsmann, *Die drei Geburtsorte der Philosophie. China, Indien, Europa*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1989.

ferent things and must not be confused with one another. Such differences, however, cannot deny, or even undermine, the universal unity of philosophical thinking. In this regard, intercultural philosophy cannot be simply dismissed as an offshoot of postmodern thinking, although it is indeed supported by the spirit of postmodernity. It exists in its own right beyond mere temporality, historicity, and conceptuality.

*Fifthly*, intercultural philosophy stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrisms, whether European or non-European. It *does* in fact allow for a preferential and differentiating treatment of philosophical traditions and yet it is neither discriminatory nor monolithic. It pleads for a »situated unsituatedness« or an »unsituated situatedness.« It enables us to critically and sympathetically examine one philosophical tradition from the point of view of the other and vice versa. In a certain sense, the phrase intercultural philosophy is tautological, for philosophy is by its very nature intercultural.

*Sixthly*, intercultural philosophy ushers in the idea of a new historiography of philosophy, which bids farewell to the Eurocentric, Hegelian way of writing books on the history of philosophy. The history of philosophy is not only the history of Western philosophy but also of all traditions of philosophy.

*Finally*, the spirit of interculturality endorses pluralism, diversity, and difference as values, and it does not take them as deviations from unity and uniformity. It is wrong to view diversity as Aristotelian accidents in the sense of a privation of unity. An intercultural horizon can very well envisage the »compossibility« (to use a Leibnizian term) of diverse cultural patterns striking a new note between total alterity and universality. The concept of order that intercultural thinking implies is an order in, through, and with differences, which allows for a chorus of different voices.

### III Philosophical Encounters Past and Present

The following section critically examines three paradigmatic cultural encounters with the aim of finding out viable means for a peaceful and fruitful encounter between philosophies, cultures, and religions. The Arabic-Islamic encounter with the Zoroastrian cult in ancient Iran is an example of political and religious intolerance in spite of the fact that the Islamization of Iran was not always violent. The meeting of

Indian Buddhism with the cultural traditions of China, Korea, and Japan exemplifies religious and political tolerance occurring together in spite of the tensions – big and small – accompanying this encounter. The encounter of Judaic, Christian, and Islamic philosophies, religions, and cultures in twelfth and thirteenth-century Spain is another example, although one where religious tolerance arises with political intolerance.

We realize that we are badly in need of an intercultural global liberalism, which, in opposition to the brand of classical European liberalism that paradoxically has gone hand in hand with colonialism, imperialism, and missionaryism, instead argues for the value of unity without uniformity and takes pluralism seriously without falling into non-committal racial relativism. To be worth its name, liberalism must not be biased against certain ways of life in spite of its situatedness within a particular tradition.

The kind of intercultural global liberalism that we need today must be open and tolerant enough in order to be self-critical. Put negatively, the binding character of such a liberalism consists in its abstaining from exclusively universalizing a particular way of thought and life (as has happened with classical liberalism) and, put positively, it consists in fostering a private and public recognition of a plurality of values which might coexist alongside each other and lead to fruitful encounters with reciprocal enrichment between the cultures concerned. As Professor Kim (2000: 69–70) rightly stresses in his »Prospects for a Universal Ethics,« a search for common universal values must be guided by our conviction and vision that any search for unity has to take place in the face of diversity, which, rightly understood, is enriching, creative, and tolerant.<sup>3</sup> This diversity is not only a mere empirical fact, but it is also to be found in our cultural, philosophical, religious, and political frameworks.

The discovery of non-European cultures is mainly a European achievement leading to the unintended irony of relativizing European culture itself. For example, some missionaries went out to convert others, but some of them were themselves converted. At present, non-Europeans also think and write about Europe, explain it, and make jud-

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<sup>3</sup> Y. Kim, »Philosophy and the Prospects for a Universal Ethics,« in M. Stackhouse, and P. Paris (eds.), *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000.

gements about it. Europe today continues to be a center, but it is not the only one. The *de facto* intercultural hermeneutic situation has outgrown the Greco-European and Abrahamic interpretation of culture, philosophy, and religion. Post-colonial Europe is encountering a non-European discovery of Europe. This change differs in kind from the invasions and discoveries of foreign lands in the past.

Furthermore, it is characterized by a fourfold hermeneutic dialectic: 1) European self-understanding, 2) European understanding of non-Europeans, 3) Non-European self-understanding and 4) Non-European understanding of Europe. In addition, philosophers, theologians, and ethnologists can avail of a double perspective today: they can turn to themselves and make their own culture an object of study.

Our intercultural orientation welcomes this change. The desire to understand and the desire to be understood go hand-in-hand. The mere desire to understand may turn out to be empty and the total desire only to be understood may become blind. In the long history of colonization, whether in culture, religion, or politics, the desire to be understood was quite powerful on the part of the colonizers. And it is not always wrong to maintain that orientalist, missionaries, and ethnologists did in fact play a conspiratorial role for quite a long time. They took great pains to learn foreign languages like Sanskrit, Chinese, etc. in order not so much to understand others, but to be understood by them.

Today, given the plurality of cultural encounters, it is better to be hesitant in advancing one's own claim to truth. Very much in the spirit of an intercultural philosophical orientation, Jonardon Ganeri (2012: 12) speaks of two types of orientation: »orientation by means of the polestar« and »orientation by means of a compass.« The polestar is a fixed, distant point upon which the traveller – or here, the inquirer – sets their sights. Orientation by means of a compass is quite different.<sup>4</sup> Different thought patterns are like compasses guiding us with the help of different maxims and principles on our way to a single regulative idea, the polestar. Radical othering involves claiming truth for oneself and at the same time underrating the importance and virtue of relativism and pluralism.<sup>5</sup> The foreignness of the other confronts us within

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<sup>4</sup> J. Ganeri, *Identity As Reasoned Choice: A South Asian Perspective on the Reach and Resources of Public and Practical Reason in Shaping Individual Identities*, London: Continuum, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

our own cultures. A general similarity between intra- and intercultural understandings and misunderstandings exists.

The coincidental meeting of different cultures, philosophies, and religions in the wake of modernity (with all its global technological formations) calls for an intensive and reciprocal dialogue on the part of all concerned. In the light of this situation, it would be short-sighted to solve problems of mutual understanding by regarding the truth and falsity of a definite culture, religion, or philosophy in metaphysical terms. Any *a priori*, metaphysical, or ideological decision precludes the possibility of genuine understanding.

The famous Latin-American philosopher Leopoldo Zea (1989: 32) rightly criticizes the self-centredness of Europe and tries to develop a genuine alternative to it through his pioneering interpretation of the Greek word *logos*. The concept of *logos* stands for two things: a) the human capacity of reason and understanding and b) for the ability to make use of words and language in order to communicate with others. *Logos* may be of Greek origin, but it is not true to say that the idea of *logos* is exclusively Greek and European.<sup>6</sup> In order to make sense of the term »art,« we do not need to understand its etymology. Rather, we ask, what do we do when we engage ourselves in artistic activities? Similarly, in order to know what philosophy is, we should not so much ask where the word comes from, but what do we do when we philosophize. Philosophers like Georg W. F. Hegel, Martin Heidegger, and Edmund Husserl succumbed to the view that doing philosophy is an exclusive property of the Greek and European mind. Such an attitude has led to a very restrictive definition of philosophy.

The problem of tolerance and intolerance has always played a vital role in cultural encounters. There are positions which are intolerant in theory, but which, for different reasons, are tolerant in practice. Their being tolerant in practice must then be accounted for in terms of the boundary conditions that force an intolerant theory to be tolerant in practice. But there are also positions that are tolerant in theory but may turn out to be quite intolerant in practice. This again may be due to boundary conditions that might politicize the otherwise tolerant theory and thereby undermine its moral claim. There is also the third possibility that no boundary conditions are able to overcome the negative and fundamentalist thrust of an intolerant theory. This is the worst

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<sup>6</sup> L. Zea, *Señales aus dem Abseits*, Munich: Eberhard, 1989.

type of intolerance and deserves no tolerant treatment in return. The spirit of an intercultural orientation requires a deep commitment to tolerance in intercultural understanding and communication.

For a peaceful and fruitful cultural encounter, there are two strategies to be put into practice. First, we should be prepared to fight back theoretical forms of absolutism by offering arguments against exclusive ideologies and by arguing for pluralistic approaches in epistemology, methodology, ethics, and morals. Secondly, we must find out practical ways and means of confronting the violent practice of absolutism. We normally, but not always, underrate the dangerous consequences of theoretical fanaticism and wait, sometimes too long, before it becomes practically far too powerful. In the name and for the sake of a peaceful cultural encounter there is no other way than protesting, in differing ways, against any exclusive ideology, as is seen in many reactions to human rights violations. Our age is sometimes called the age of human rights. Rights without duties and responsibilities may lead to an attitude defined by little more than demands. There are human rights that we deserve only when we are ready to do our duties and carry out our responsibilities. Rights and duties are two sides of the same coin. According to the great Buddhist king Ashoka, everyone has the right to choose the religion he or she wants but he or she has at the same time the duty and the responsibility to respect the religion of others.

A peaceful encounter among religions, for example, demands that there must be room for a theory and practice of pluralism, even in the case of so-called revealed religions. Polytheism and pluralistic theology, rightly understood, are more tolerant and conducive to peace among religions than monotheism. This is because a pluralistic approach to truth – secular or sacral – is by nature open and tolerant. A common conviction that cultures possess basic similarities and illuminating differences that enable them that they meet to differ and defer to meet is a need of our age.

Judging from the daunting weight of empirical evidence, properly peaceful cultural encounters may not be very likely, but they are also not impossible either. We may follow the advice of the social philosopher Max Horkheimer and be a theoretical pessimist and a practical optimist (Horkheimer 1981: 175).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> M. Horkheimer, *Gesellschaft im Übergang: Aufsätze, Reden und Vorträge 1942–1970*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1981.

Today, every philosophy ought to cooperate with others and form part of a larger whole, thus making every philosophy a cross-cultural phenomenon. We should accept and recognize more than one genuine *Gestalt* of philosophy. We should not err in thinking that our own way of doing philosophy might be the only possible way of doing philosophy at all. In this regard, a conceptual clarification, which is to say a philosophical grounding of interculturality becomes very pertinent.<sup>8</sup> Let us now turn to this task.

#### IV Towards a Theory of an Interculturally Oriented »Analogous Hermeneutics«

As stated above, the alien, the other, is given to us before we attempt to understand the other. In order to understand it, we stand in need of an adequate hermeneutic method that will allow us to work out analogous structural patterns, despite the inaccessibility of the other's contents.

In cultural encounters, we may distinguish between three models of hermeneutics:

(a) There is a hermeneutics of identity that identifies understanding with self-understanding. Such a hermeneutical approach is tautological and boils down to the empty thesis that, in order to be able to understand a particular cultural context, one has to be a member of that culture. There are several reasons for the prevalence of this assumption in many encounters, the consequences of which have been disastrous. Hegel is a case in point. For him, philosophy, culture and religion are Western and solely Western achievements. Non-Western philosophies, cultures, and religions cannot either be classified as philosophies or are mere preliminary stages of a process culminating in Western philosophy, culture, and religion. This view is untenable, but nonetheless continues to have its dogmatic defenders (*cf.* Hegel 2001: 128–268).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> F. M. Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Geschichte und Theorie*, Vol. 1, Vienna: Passagen-Verlag, 1990; Mall, and Hülsmann (1989); H. Kimmle, *Die Dimension des Interkulturellen. Philosophie in Afrika – afrikanische Philosophie; Supplemente und Verallgemeinerungsschritte*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994; Copleston (1990); Jaspers (1982).

<sup>9</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History, With Prefaces by Charles Hegel and the Translator John Sibree*, Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001 (URL: <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/hegel/history.pdf>, last accessed on 18 March 2014).

(b) Contrary to the above position there is the hermeneutics of total difference which completely ignores the other. Here it must be noted that total difference, if there is such a thing at all, cannot find any further articulation through which its fictitious character might be displayed. If the hermeneutics of identity aims at understanding in accordance with a complete change of what is to be understood, a hermeneutics of total difference, on the other hand, makes understanding at the very outset impossible. In both cases what is foreign is lost. Such approaches have indeed operated in some cultural encounters. In the days of colonialism, imperialism and missionarism, hardly any attempt was made to understand the other although there was a concerted attempt to make the West understood by the other. The other was considered to be so radically different that no understanding was said to be possible. One can call the hermeneutics of total difference a radical pluralism that disregards the necessity and feasibility of commonly shared values.

(c) It follows from what has been said above that both total identity and total difference (total commensurability and radical incommensurability) are fictions. An »analogous hermeneutics« rejects the hermeneutics of total identity because it reduces the other to an echo of oneself and repeats its own self-understanding in the name of understanding the other. On the other hand, total difference makes the understanding of the other rather impossible. There is no one trans-cultural universal hermeneutic subject over and above the overlapping dynamic structures among cultures. One can belong to one's own culture *and* be a critic of it. The concept of analogous hermeneutics is led by the conviction that truth and values are present in all cultures that invite us to cooperate in finding out a general framework of and for intercultural understanding and communication.

The word »hermeneutics« is, no doubt, Greek and Western, but its idea and practice is an anthropological constant. Indian thought, for example, possesses a very rich hermeneutic tradition. The long lineage of *bhasya*, *upbhasya*, *tika* and *tipanni* verifies this. The science of hermeneutics as an art of interpretation and understanding is undergoing a fundamental change in the global context of interculturality today and an unprecedented widening of horizons. This change means that every hermeneutics has its own culturally sedimented roots and cannot unconditionally claim universal legitimacy. Any dialogue, above all intercultural dialogues, must take this insight as a point of departure.

In the history of Greco-Christian-European philosophy many have appealed to the term »analogy« in order to solve a very perplexing problem arising from the Holy Scriptures and Hellenistic philosophy, having to do with the two paradoxical messages of the incommensurability of God with his creation on the one hand and of the possibility of a comparison between the Creator and the created on the other. Since God and His creation do not belong to the same species, analogy in theology and speculative metaphysics has always suffered from a tension between univocity and equivocation. Our use of the term »analogy« here relates to things and beings belonging to the same species, and we can very well use the means of analogy as a legitimate source of knowledge. In the field of intercultural understanding, analogy stands for, firstly, a consciousness of non-identity, secondly, for a consciousness of difference, thirdly, for a consciousness of less than total difference and, fourthly, for a consciousness of less than total identity. Analogy is defined here as a likeness of relation between unlike things.

Hermeneutics in the intercultural context presumes an understanding of philosophy in which traditions are not radically different. Were such a difference to be the case, we would not be entitled to use the same general concept for those traditions. In that case, we would not even be able to articulate this radical difference, for the very general concept would lose its applicability. Thus, we are obliged to operate with an analogical understanding of philosophy and culture. Philosophies differ as instances of the same general concept.

My conviction is that the two fictions of total translatability and commensurability on one side and of radical untranslatability and incommensurability among cultures on the other must be given up in favour of a metonymic thesis of dynamically overlapping structures. Since no culture is a windowless monad, all cultures possess points of intercultural overlap occurring in varying degrees. Total identity is the dead end of philosophy and total difference lacks even the very minimum of agreement among ways of doing philosophy. This bare common minimum allows us to accept and respect that counter-arguments are arguments after all in spite of the fact that they are sometimes contrary and even contradictory.

Since no philosophical reflection can fully surpass the object of those reflections, there is always an open possibility of multiple expressions. This is the bedrock for our practice of translating one culture into another. A closer look at the history of ideas from an intercultural

perspective clearly shows that the practice of translation does not succeed; it rather *precedes* the question regarding the possibility of the same. It is a wrong move to start with the possibility or impossibility of translation before taking actual steps at translation. The case is similar with regard to understanding the other. Our not being able to understand the other can be traced to not taking the necessary steps to do so. Regarding the problem of translating cultures, Paul Ricoeur (1974: 290–291) says that there is no absolute alienation and that there is always a genuine possibility of translation. One can understand without repeating, can imagine without experiencing, and can transform oneself into the other while still remaining the self that one is.<sup>10</sup>

Philosophy working in the field of cultural comparison subscribes to a hermeneutic model of reciprocity. A desire to understand the other should be accompanied by a desire to be understood by the other. An intercultural orientation offers us a medium, a common space of discourse, where philosophers of all traditions come together and converse with each other with full dedication to truth. This form of philosophical practice is a crucial feature of intercultural philosophy. Comparative philosophy today cannot use traditions as mere objects of comparison. It must ask the question of what those traditions can learn from each other. It is, no doubt, true that in our attempt at understanding others, we cannot fully avoid the hermeneutic circle. We must, however, take care not to dogmatize it either. Those who take the hermeneutic circle to be our philosophic fate fail to avoid repeating the error of pursuing self-understanding in the name of understanding the other. For this reason, intercultural philosophy rejects the idea of a hermeneutics of identity, which is intolerant of differences. In our attempt to understand others, we meet to differ and defer to meet. We also experience the other through its resistance to our attempt to assimilate it fully.

In my attempt at developing interculturally-oriented »analogical hermeneutics« I have greatly benefitted from the Jaina ideas of *anekantavada*, *syadvada* and *nayavada*. This methodology does not necessarily »ontologize« and it can be well applied to our present need for intercultural encounters of philosophical traditions in a global context. Added to this, this Jaina methodology is deconstructive of absolutist truth-claims of particular standpoints (*naya*).

*Anekantavada* (many-sidedness or non-onesidedness), stands for

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<sup>10</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Geschichte und Wahrheit*, München: List, 1974.

the thesis that the nature of reality is such that it can be and should be approached from many perspectives. In other words, conflicting theories are different standpoints for viewing the same reality. No standpoint is *the* standpoint.

*Syadvada*, the doctrine of conditional predication, is a powerful methodology in the spirit of a multi-valued logic. The underlying notion is that the nature of reality is so complex that no one simple predication can do justice to it. Thus the prefix *syad* (maybe) leads to more than one predication. There are seven predications (*saptabhangi*).

*Nayavada* (doctrine of points of view) stands for a systematic theory of standpoints (*naya*). One particular *naya* cannot grasp the whole truth. The seven-fold predication is termed *saptabhanginaya*.<sup>11</sup>

The Jaina argument for a reciprocal recognition of different standpoints (*naya*) that are not exclusive, but rather complementary to each other, is one of the best methodological moves in the service of intercultural understanding. Two standpoints may be contrary or even contradictory, but they continue to remain standpoints. This insight leads us to the recognition of overlapping contents and it is the source of the logic of the conversation that far outstrips the two fictions of total commensurability and radical difference. The moment that we universalize one particular standpoint (*naya*), we are led to a wrong standpoint (*durnaya*), which is not only violent on a practical level, but implies some manner of theoretical violence. It is this theoretical violence which we get rid of with the help of the theory of *anekantavada*. Bimal Krishna Matilal (1981: 6) observes that »Mahavira carried this concept of non-violence from the domain of practical behaviour to the domain of intellectual and philosophic discussion.«

Applying this methodology, I have tried to work out an intercultural hermeneutic approach which is non-reductive, open, creative, and tolerant. It approves of overlapping centers, searches for them, finds, and cultivates them. These overlapping structures are the common factors which make communication possible, and they also allow philosophies and cultures to retain their individual characters.

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<sup>11</sup> B. K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekantavada)*, Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1981.

## V Comparative Philosophy: Then and Now

Until recently, the ill-conceived and privileged paradigm of comparison was a movement from the West to the East. This mode of comparison implicitly or explicitly started with a pre-fixed definition of philosophy, which led to different forms of centrism. Not only did this comparative philosophy have a strong hegemonic bias, it also proved to be unproductive and sterile because it mechanically placed philosophies of different traditions side-by-side to highlight rigid contrasts between Western and non-Western philosophies. For example, Indian philosophy was said to be practical, intuitive, and spiritual in a way that could hardly be differentiated from religion. Western philosophy on the other hand was said to be rational, analytic, logical, theoretical, and systematic. In all fairness, this attitude was found among Indian philosophers too. In my graduate days at the University of Calcutta even some of the academic philosophers maintained that *darshana* (view, vision, system, and philosophy) is more than philosophy in its Western self-understanding; it is superior to philosophy because it is a spiritual activity leading to liberation. It looks like an irony of fate that the same adjective »spiritual« has a negative connotation when used by Western thinkers and a positive connotation when used by Indian thinkers. It really hardly matters whether it is a *pundit* sitting in Benaras (Varanasi) declaring Indian philosophy to be *the* philosophy, or it is academics sitting in, say Freiburg, Germany or in Oxford claiming something similar for their respective enterprises. In any case we are guilty of self-absolutization. These comparativists seem to be blind towards the fact that these attributions can as well be applied when we compare philosophies *intraculturally*, to say nothing of working *interculturally*.

Comparative philosophy can be meaningfully carried out today only if it is guided by an interculturally-oriented conviction that philosophy as such is not the sole possession of any one tradition, whether Western or non-Western. It was a wrong move in the early phase of comparative philosophy to set up rigid contrasts between Western and Eastern philosophies. Phrases like Indian, Chinese, Western, and German philosophy are intellectual constructs. In global discourse, all traditions – intra- and intercultural – converse with each other. It is not persons, countries, or even systems of thought that should matter to comparative philosophizing, but the problems, the questions, and their treatment in philosophical traditions all over the world. Added to this,

the idea of a linear development of philosophy culminating in some single philosophical system or truth needs to be rejected. It does not matter whether such a culminating point is the philosophy of René Descartes, Hegel, Husserl, Nagarjuna or Shankara. An intercultural-ly-oriented comparative philosophy should be understood as a two-way path between Western and non-Western philosophical traditions. All such traditions can learn from sympathetic criticism, mutual appreciation through the recognition of fundamental affinities, and illuminating differences. As Gupta and Mohanty (1996: xv) write: »Philosophy, then, can become a conversation of humankind, and not merely a conversation of the West.«<sup>12</sup>

Philosophy qua philosophy then has no one mother tongue, be it Greek, German, Sanskrit, or Chinese. Even though language structures do influence our way of doing philosophy, they do not fix it completely. Heraclites and Parmenides philosophized differently in one and the same Greek language. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the variety one sees in Buddhist and Hindu philosophies (in Sanskrit), in the works of Lao Tzu and Confucius (in Chinese), and in those of Arthur Schopenhauer and Hegel (in German).

Today, comparative philosophy should be carried out in the intercultural mode argued for in this article. An intercultural attitude accompanies all cultures like a shadow and does not allow them to absolutize themselves; and this is the very condition for the possibility of genuine comparative philosophy. This attitude also leads to cooperation and communication between different cultures. To use a common metaphor, comparison is blind without intercultural philosophy and intercultural philosophy is lame without comparison. The spirit of interculturalism endorses pluralism as a value without undermining any commitment to one's own position.

Furthermore, an intercultural philosophical orientation does not fix the standard of comparison, the *tertium comparationis*, solely within one particular philosophical tradition. As noted in Husserlian phenomenology of shared overlapping contents, if extremes ever happen to meet in a common overlapping space, then this space is the habitat of a *tertium comparationis* available to the phenomenological method of description apart from any speculation. Similarly, our search for an

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<sup>12</sup> B. Gupta, and J. Mohanty (ed.), *Philosophical Questions: East and West*, Maryland/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996.

overlapping *tertium comparationis* as the real seat of an analogical conceptual framework can end in the »in-between« realm of cultures, philosophies, and religions. This common intercultural space is phenomenologically and experientially given and it is empirically evidenced. It lives in and through the cultures, philosophies, and traditions. Its only habitat is the »in-between« avoiding any universalization of a local tradition. With the help of such a standard of comparison, we can be sensitive to both similarities and differences.

## VI Conclusion

The understandable fear that interculturality might bring about deconstruction of terms like philosophy, truth, culture, religion, etc. is unfounded. It is the singular, monolithic, absolutist, and exclusivist use of these terms that calls for deconstruction, and not anything having to do with the ongoing search for truth that philosophers of all traditions might use as a regulative idea. The search for truth requires a way of seeing things that is acutely aware of its own place amongst many similar or dissimilar views and that declines to put one's own perspective in an absolute position. From this position, there is a need to develop some sort of a philosophical, cultural, religious, and political modesty in order to be able to communicate even in the absence of consensus. There is a primacy of communication over consensus, and acquiescence is more helpful than consensus, guided by the insight that one's own point of view may not be the last word of wisdom.

Although having a point of view means thinking, feeling, and acting from within a core tradition with a concentric horizon which may cover the whole of humanity, it does not prevent one from thinking globally but acting locally, thus steering clear of both extreme individualism and narrow communitarianism. One can cultivate an »intercultural liberalism« which does not reduce, does not wait for total consensus to take place and calls for intercultural understanding and communication in the face of diversity. The presence of overlaps and of convergences enables us to compromise in spite of divergences.

To compromise means understanding and not just transposing oneself into the mind and framework of the other, but rather sharing common concerns and seeking answers accompanied by a readiness to be changed in the process of the encounter. This is a readiness born out

of an intercultural orientation whose *sine qua non* is the philosophical conviction that standpoints are standpoints after all. There is always interplay between worldviews, and understanding in an intercultural context is always sensitive and respectful to the diversity and complexity of human existence. Understanding means recognizing cultural identities as a good, which is the source of legitimate claims. Understanding means seeing in an analogous spirit, the legitimacy of other claims. The phenomenon of understanding is a two-way street, because our desire to understand the other and our desire to be understood by the other go hand in hand and are two sides of the same coin.

The idea of intercultural philosophy envisaged here aims at a philosophy that makes us sensitive to a general concept of philosophical truth omnipresent in differing philosophical traditions. Understood as an orientation, intercultural philosophy has several dimensions. Philosophically speaking, the singular *philosophia perennis* is no one person's possession alone. Considered theologically, interculturality is the name of inter-religiosity bearing the firm conviction that the singular *religio perennis* (*sanatana dharma*) is also no one's possession all alone. Politically, interculturality is another name for a pluralistic democratic attitude with the conviction that political wisdom does not belong to only one group, party, or ideology. All philosophies of history that, with absolutist flair, claim to possess the only true real message are politically fundamentalist and practically dangerous. The pedagogical perspective is the most important one, for it prepares the way for the practical implementation of an intercultural orientation. Preparing for this culture is the central task of all philosophers involved in comparative thinking.

—Ram Adhar Mall, Jena, Germany