

Does Comparative Philosophy Have a Fusion Future?*

Abstract

This essay challenges the claim that fusion philosophy is the successor to comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy should find itself deeply at odds with the approach to various philosophical problems and traditions that fusion philosophy is taking, and comparative philosophers will surely deny Mark Siderits'¹ (2003: xi) claim that they have been superseded. The manner then in which fusion philosophy dismisses comparativist concerns and objections is to admit that such objections are valid in some case but to deny that they are intrinsic to good fusion philosophy. Comparativists however generally do not claim that fusion philosophy is necessarily or inherently bound to make the mistakes and contribute to misunderstandings that they claim it often does. Their claim is that from the start such philosophy often does make just these kinds of problematic errors and assumptions, and that this is what comparativist philosophy must seek to avoid. By the time fusionists are done defending – actually sanitizing – fusion philosophy from comparativist objections, one is left not with fusion philosophy but with what is – from the comparativist perspective – comparative philosophy. There is no succession from comparative philosophy to fusion philosophy and no segue from one to the other.

Keywords

Fusion philosophy, Comparative philosophy, Confluence, Mark Siderits, Methodology, constructive-engagement.

* At regular intervals, *Confluence* will feature articles which engage with methodological aspects crucial to the development of world philosophies. We invite our readers to participate in these debates by submitting short statements on the subject. These responses will be printed in our forthcoming issues. *The Editors*.

¹ M. Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, London: Ashgate, 2003.

Fission involves large radioactive nuclei which break down in to two smaller ones [...] giving off energy in the process. Fusion involves two smaller nuclei which under extreme temperature and pressures bond together to form a larger atom and also give off energy in the process [...] One of the most appealing characteristics of fusion as opposed to fission is that it is much cleaner.²

1 Introduction

Although the two have met, ›fusion philosophy‹ has yet to be properly introduced to comparative philosophy. There are those on both sides of the divide, and some are on either side of the divide, that will deny that fusion philosophy and comparative philosophy are engaged in the same sort of enterprise, or are in competition. They have not thought the matter through. While it is largely true that they are not doing the same sorts of things (e.g. analyzing the same issues), it is not the case that their different approaches, self-conceptions, and understandings of some of the same subject matter and source material, means that they are not competing with one another. There are weaker and stronger versions of fusion philosophy. Among the more radical fusionists are Mark Siderits (2003: xi) who claims that comparative philosophy has been superseded by what he terms fusion philosophy, Graham Priest, Owen Flanagan³ and perhaps Bo Mou. However, as we will see, even among those who see themselves as fusionists (e.g. Siderits), some at least are at times better understood as doing comparative rather than fusion philosophy.

Comparative philosophy should find itself deeply at odds with the approach to various philosophical problems and traditions that fusion philosophy is taking, and comparative philosophers will surely deny Siderits'⁴ claim that they have been superseded. The fusion challenge may help comparativists to clarify further the methodolo-

² http://www.upei.ca/~phys221/rlh/fision_vs_fussion/fision_vs_fussion.htm (last accessed on 10 September 2011).

³ O. Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2011.

⁴ Siderits (*ibid.*). Also see M. Siderits »Comparison or Confluence Philosophy?« *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, J. Ganeri (ed.), 2015, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199314621.013.5 (last accessed on 22 January 2016).

gical and theoretical doubts that have informed comparative philosophy from the start.

What Siderits calls fusion philosophy arguably has a number of aliases. Thus, although Bo Mou would emphatically deny this, what Bo Mou calls the »constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy« or CECP for short, is *at times* sufficiently similar to fusion philosophy to warrant the same appellation.⁵ Indeed, several of the editorial advisers to the journal *Comparative Philosophy*⁶, edited by Bo Mou, are prime examples of those doing just what it is that Siderits calls fusion philosophy. The question then is whether fusion philosophy has superseded comparative philosophy in the way Siderits claims it has; or is it, instead, a newer and more sophisticated or useful version of comparative philosophy; perhaps a version that CECP at times incorporates (or vice versa)?

Bo Mou never uses the term or refers to »fusion philosophy« in the introductory essay that lays out the »theme« of *Comparative Philosophy*. In principle at least, I think Bo Mou would see CECP as distinct from fusion philosophy, and claim that CECP rather than fusion philosophy is the genuine and latest incarnation of comparative philosophy. In any case, Siderits sees an established trend towards fusion philosophy, while Bo Mou sees a trend amongst philosophers with

⁵ Bo Mou, »On Constructive-Engagement Strategy of Comparative Philosophy: A Journal Theme Introduction,« *Comparative Philosophy* 1, No. 1, 2010, pp. 1–32 (<http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/comparativephilosophy/vol1/iss1/4/>; last accessed on 22 February 2016). Also see J. Fleming, »Comparative Philosophy: Its Aims and Methods,« *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2003, pp. 259–270. Fleming appears to reiterate the case for comparative philosophy (not fusion philosophy) as traditionally understood. He would therefore reject Siderits' claim that comparative philosophy has been superseded. While endorsing the virtues of comparative philosophy and gains to be had from it, Fleming says some things that few comparativists and virtually no contemporary analytic philosophers would endorse. On page 263, he says, for example, that »Such comparisons [...] may in the end reveal a common pattern running throughout all philosophies and cultures that constitutes their inner contradiction/rupture [...] comparison [...] may expose a similarity in how each is essentially different from itself: the nature of inner contradiction (which is defining) may turn out to be the same (and of course somewhat different) in the various philosophies (or cultures) compared – more specifically, we may discover that all philosophies (and cultures) are dialectical.« It is these sorts of generalizations and search for commonalities that methodologically informed (or concerned) comparativists tend to warn us about.

⁶ The journal's full title is »*Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*.«

comparativist concerns towards CECF. Who is right? Siderits is right with regard to Western analytic philosophers. CECF may however better characterize what many other comparativists are doing.

The alleged differences between fusion philosophy and CECF may be summarized as follows. (1) Fusion philosophy is largely unconcerned with methodological issues (detailed below) while CECF attends to such issues – even more than traditional comparative philosophy; (2) Fusion philosophy generally denies the historical approach while CECF does not. CECF considers the philosophical-issue-concerned approach and the historical approach as complementary and as sensitive to distinct purposes and focuses. It emphasizes philosophical interpretation of the classical texts; (3) Fusion philosophy focuses largely on analytic treatment; in contrast, the CECF emphasizes the constructive engagement between distinct approaches from different traditions; (4) Fusion philosophy has been largely focused on Buddhism. In contrast, the CECF's coverage is far more comprehensive.⁷ It is a way of doing philosophy.

In short, Bo Mou does not recognize the challenge that fusion philosophy (though he doesn't use the term) poses to comparative philosophy because, unlike Siderits, he would consider fusion philosophy – at least in some of its guises, as rather antithetical to CECF. And it is the latter (CECF) that he sees as the new comparative philosophy. Bo Mou (2010: 1–2) explains CECF as follows:

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

If this account is seen as a desideratum for comparative philosophy, then it has something for everyone and there is little, even for fusion philosophers, to disagree with. As this account moves to a level of

⁷ This may just be an historical accident rather than a principled difference between the two. But it remains a difference nonetheless.

generalization and vagueness that glosses over significant differences, disputes between fusion philosophy and the more methodologically concerned comparativists appear to vanish. The illusion of conciliation is achieved through smoke and mirrors.

What Bo Mou does not point out but is nevertheless certain, is that comparative philosophers since the 1950's, *as well as fusionists*, have always implicitly or explicitly claimed to employ constructive-engagement strategies and their purpose has always been to ›constructively engage‹. No one in comparative philosophy (›fusionists‹ or comparative philosophers) would deny that they are trying to ›critically engage‹ with philosophical systems that are embedded deep within other cultures. The question is how to go about such constructive engagement. What are the proper methods, adequate constructive-engagement strategies, and necessary skills? What does one mean by ›constructive engagement‹? For example, is exploring another philosophical tradition's insights or arguments with the aim of bringing them back home count as constructive engagement? Many Native American philosophers would see it as expropriation and piracy.⁸

Fusion philosophy, *as well as* much of what Bo Mou terms CECP, at times eschews the methodological concerns of more traditional comparative philosophy and by and large seeks to ›get on with it‹ (that too is a strategy).⁹ It seeks to bypass method and get on to the ›critical engagement‹ part. And it does so for the simple reason that it sees such concerns as largely irrelevant to their purpose. Fusion philosophers may be right about this, but questions remain. Can fusion philosophy (or CECP) be philosophically productive and useful, without relying on methodological constraints that early comparativists often thought essential (e.g. contextualizing; considering a position or problem *in situ*; and at times, primary language capability)? There

⁸ Cf. T. Norton-Smith, ›A Shawnee Reflection on Franz Wimmer's ›How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?‹‹ *Confluence*, Vol. 3, 2015, pp. 145–150.

⁹ Bo Mou's (2010: 19–22) methodological guiding principles are well worth examining. It is clear that fusion philosophy adheres to them randomly at best. But more to the point perhaps is that arguably CECP does little better. Moreover, there is little in the principles that traditional comparativists would disagree with. Bo Mou (2010: 22n. 28; 21, 24–29) reads his principles back into ›the reflective practice of comparative philosophy‹ – which is easy enough to do. But to read guiding principles into a particular comparative essay is quite different than actually being guided by them.

are the issues of (1) whether different traditions even try to solve the same problems, and (2) whether or not they understand these apparently identical problems in the same way.

This paper assesses fusion philosophy's self image and claim to be the successor to comparative philosophy. By seeking to distance itself from comparative philosophy, which it sees as steeped in religion, fusion philosophy plays up its Western contemporary philosophical credentials. Comparative philosophy (including CECP) on the other hand claims fusion philosophy, or what is useful about it, as its own. It sees, or should see, virtually nothing new in fusion philosophy, except a methodological naïveté – albeit one very much at odds with comparative philosophy's traditional concerns with the difficulties of cross-cultural comparisons.

Virtually all humanities and social science disciplines self-consciously reflect on the methods they employ. Such methodological preoccupation (not all of it navel-gazing) occurs far more here than in the hard sciences where whatever particular experiments are construed and methods employed, standards for objectivity are far more likely to be agreed upon – at least by practitioners if not theorists. Even so, comparative philosophy has been far more concerned in an ongoing manner with its methods and approaches to the study of mostly religiously grounded philosophies than other disciplines have been. Leaving aside often heard contentions that Confucianism and even Buddhism are not ›religions,‹ in a non-western context, like it or not, ›philosophy‹ largely refers to philosophy as grounded in and expounded through some world-view. It is only from a rather rarified theoretical or ideological point of view, that from a Western, customary, traditional, scholarly perspective, one could claim these not to be religions. (Talal Asad and others have called into question the use of religion as a trans-cultural category.¹⁰)

At least sixty years on and comparativists are still trying to explain what comparative philosophy is, what it should be doing, and how it should be going about it. It is an exaggeration, but one with a point, to say that there are nearly as many accounts of what comparative philosophy is as there are comparative philosophers. Nevertheless, there are some broad commonalities. Its upfront and continuous

¹⁰ Cf. T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

methodological ruminations are probably linked to its need to justify its standing as a discipline. In one way or another, comparative philosophy draws on most other disciplines, some even more than philosophy, in the humanities and social sciences. But from its very conception, much like religious studies, where quite naturally much of comparative philosophy found its home, it has suffered from something of an identity and inferiority complex: treated like less than equal by other disciplines that see it as located at the interstices and as less formidable than their own. Comparative philosophy is a relatively recent addition to philosophy programs, as opposed to religion and religious studies departments in the West.

2 What is Fusion Philosophy?

It is somewhat ironic then that ›fusion philosophy‹ described by Mark Siderits as a successor to comparative philosophy, seems virtually unconcerned with method.¹¹ Fusion philosophy has its roots largely in contemporary analytic philosophy, though it draws on continental and phenomenological traditions as well. The extent to which it can properly be seen as emerging from comparative philosophy rather than from a cultural broadening of analytic philosophy itself is questionable.

Siderits says (2003: xi):

The enterprise of fusion philosophy is meant to be a successor to the practice of what has been called comparative philosophy [...] Comparative philosophy has always involved the comparison of elements drawn from two distinct philosophical traditions [...] the point of the comparison has often seemed to be limited to bringing out similarities and differences that might be of interest to scholars of one or the other tradition. To those who see problem-solving as central to philosophy, and who also believe that the counterpoising of distinct traditions can yield useful results in this endeavor, the name ›fusion philosophy‹ seems appropriate.

Not only is what Siderits terms ›fusion philosophy‹ unconcerned with the kinds of methodological issues that are, to this day, constitutive of comparative philosophy, this self-proclaimed successor seems to brand itself by means of not so much deftly avoiding, as simply sloughing off the concerns about method and theory – objectivity,

¹¹ Siderits (2003).

distortion, decontextualization etc – that previously defined comparative philosophy.

Furthermore, the view that sees »problem-solving as central to philosophy« and believes »that the counterpoising of distinct traditions can yield useful results in this endeavour« is, by itself, likely to be seen as a regressive step by comparative philosophy. Deutsch (2002: 23) describes »a rich diversity of aims, methods and styles« that has been exhibited by comparative or »cross-cultural« or trans-cultural or »global« philosophy.¹² Problem-solving is among them. Deutsch (*ibid.*) says: »In its earliest phases, a deeper agenda was also at play, which many comparativists today regard as a rather naïve one, which was to bring about a general synthesis of what was thought to be best in different traditions and attain a certain universal accord among philosophers wherever to be found.« This move towards what may be termed philosophical ecumenicalism is not the same thing as either Siderits or Deutsch has in mind by »problem-solving.« Deutsch (*ibid.*) goes on to say that this approach »occupied the attention of many of the philosophical pioneers in the field in the early-mid decades of the last century and is still carried out in a number of different ways.« Perhaps one of the different ways Deutsch has in mind could be seen as corresponding to fusion philosophy; in which case, from Deutsch's comparative perspective, fusion philosophy is best seen as one aspect of comparative or »cross-cultural« etc. philosophy.

Deutsch does in fact go on to describe another form of comparative philosophy that comes closest to fusion philosophy. Indeed it appears to describe exactly what the fusionists are after. It is the account of comparative philosophy closest to his own and captures the »creativity« he thinks can be achieved and that should be aimed for through at least some comparative philosophy. Deutsch says (*ibid.*: 23–24):

[A]gainst the background of twentieth century Western analytic philosophy [...] attention gets focused on issues in epistemology, philosophy of language and logic where, it is thought, a careful and sophisticated reading of non-Western texts can enrich Western treatments of these issues [...]. This approach may be seen to be part of a larger comparative enterprise

¹² E. Deutsch, »Comparative Philosophy as Creative Philosophy,« *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, pp. 23–26.

which we might call the ›problem approach‹ [...] [W]e can identify philosophical problems that cut across various traditions and employ the resources of those traditions to [...] broaden one's own philosophical understanding [...] [O]ver thirty years ago, I stated what I still believe to be the most exacting and exciting approach to comparative philosophy. ›We are aware now,‹ I wrote then, ›that there is much of intrinsic philosophical value and interest in Asian thought and that consequently this thought need not be cast merely in the mould of an historical (or exotic) curiosity. Students ought to be able to study Asian philosophy for the purpose of enriching their philosophical background and enabling them to deal better with the philosophical problems that interest them.‹ I went on to say, and would now soften considerably the somewhat universalistic language employed, that ›Without losing sight of the distinctive and sometimes unique characteristics of a tradition, one ought to be able to concentrate attention on the tradition as it is a response to a series of universal questions and problems, and with the express intention that these responses will influence one spontaneously in one's own thinking.‹¹³ Today [...] we have become more circumspect in our understanding that philosophical problems, as well as the answers given to them, are highly contextualized and that one of the significant creative functions of comparative philosophy is to examine how one's initial formulation of a specific problem can itself be reformulated in the light of alternative possibilities proffered in other traditions. We have also come to realize that the very idea of *philosophy* may mean rather different things in different cultures and that we have much to learn from these other conceptions.

Deutsch sees fusion philosophy as reliant on, and embedded in, comparative philosophy rather than a successor to it.

Apart from comparative philosophy, fusion philosophy is apt to run afoul of the problems that earlier comparative philosophy concerned itself with and sought to overcome. Fusion philosophy draws on distinct philosophical traditions when they can be seen as offering support, conceptualizations or ways of thinking that address a rather narrow range of philosophical problems as conceived largely in Western analytic, and occasionally continental, philosophy. But it cannot do this without the methodological, theoretical, linguistic and other resources constitutive of comparative philosophy. As Deutsch (*ibid.*: 24) says: »The creative comparativist faces a number of formidable tasks, the first of which is that of understanding and interpreting the philosophical achievements of other traditions. This calls for a

¹³ See E. Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969, preface.

complex and subtle hermeneutic.« Fusion philosophy, conceived of as something independent of, or as a successor to, comparative philosophy sees little if any need for such a hermeneutic.

Few comparative philosophers would agree with Siderits that »the point of the comparison has often seemed to be limited to bringing out similarities and differences that might be of interest to scholars of one or the other tradition.« (They can agree that at times it may »seem to be,« but they would deny that it is). Nor do I know of any comparative philosopher, and few philosophers in general, who would deny (certainly not openly) »that we can sometimes make progress toward solving philosophical problems by looking at what traditions distinct from our own have had to say about the issues with which we are concerned« Siderits (2003: xi). In what sense then is fusion philosophy a successor to comparative philosophy? Even if he is successful in showing how classical Indian philosophy can show us a way to »adjudicate the dispute between Parfit and his many critics« (*ibid.*) Siderits has some way to go to establish fusion philosophy as comparative philosophy's successor – by which he means its intellectual heir. Although Siderits bases his analysis of the Hindu/Buddhist traditions, it is said to be applicable to comparative philosophy as a whole. But given the embeddedness of these traditions in a particular context, why should one presume that this analysis would hold, and is applicable, in different contexts in which comparative philosophy is carried out? Would it apply to African philosophy, for example?

3 Rites of Succession

The recently established (2010) online journal, *Comparative Philosophy: An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy* makes no specific mention of fusion philosophy on their website description. Nevertheless, it appears to describe what Siderits and other fusionists have in mind. How is this journal supposed to differ, if it is, from *Philosophy East West*, *Asian Philosophy*, *Religious Studies* and, to a lesser degree, other journals with a significant comparative component (e.g. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*)? We find:

Comparative Philosophy [emphasizes] [...] 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 [...]. The coverage of *Comparative Philosophy* is not restricted to, but can include, any particular comparative-engagement pairs of distinct approaches from different traditions or styles/orientations of doing philosophy [...] The contents of *Comparative Philosophy* 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 her 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 also as her (current) working approach, which may be related to her training/specialty background, personal research interest or the need of the current study.¹⁴

Method and theory are both mentioned here (›and/or on general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy‹), but as something in addition to or separate from the principal fusionist focus. Methodological and theoretical essays will be considered, but the principal idea is to draw from various philosophical traditions and approaches cross-culturally ›for the sake of their joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise‹ and ›constructive engagement.‹

However, it is most certainly fusionist philosophy that is being referred to in the claim: ›For a philosopher would be intrinsically interested in distinct approaches to the issues and topics under her philosophical (instead of merely historical) examination and in their reflective relation to her current working approach [...].‹ This sentence dismisses the comparativist's methodological, theoretical and philosophical concerns by simply assuming these ›distinct approaches‹ and views are there for the picking independent of a ›working approach,‹ ›training/specialty background,‹ or ›personal research interest‹ (?). It further assumes that philosophical content can somehow be siphoned off, or distilled from, historical and other unnamed approaches. The fact that fundamental philosophical ideas

¹⁴ <http://www.comparativephilosophy.org/index.php/ComparativePhilosophy/> (last accessed on 22 February 2016).

like the Buddhist notion of *nirvāṇa* (is it utter annihilation?), or the neo-Confucian idea of *li*, are contested within their various traditions and sub-traditions, makes little difference to the fusionist. They choose an interpretation off the rack, one that appears to fit, and thus advance, a view of their own.

Whereas comparative philosophy concerns itself with what constitutes ›constructive engagement,‹ fusion philosophy assumes (like the Supreme Court justice who couldn't define obscenity) that we will recognize it when we see it.¹⁵ Fusionists may be right – at least part of the time. Contemporary analytic philosophy that draws on what are seen to be significant commonalities with Buddhist philosophy, and is supported by that philosophy, is paradigmatic of what they have in mind. Siderits' work on identity, and Owen Flanagan's on consciousness are two prominent fusionist examples. Neville (2002: 22)¹⁶ writes:

[T]he point of comparison for the sake of integrative philosophy is not just intellectual history but the creation of a conversation within which all parties share in the struggle to develop old ideas into new ones, each appreciative of the heritage of the others [...] comparative hypotheses [...] are both backward looking as in comparative intellectual history, and forward looking as in the work of creative reconstruction for contemporary purposes.

Fusionists will either accept this view or reject it. If they accept it, then on what grounds is fusion philosophy to be distinguished from comparative philosophy? If they reject it, then how can they claim to be a successor of comparative philosophy, rather than say simply rejecting it?

Without denying (perhaps) that ideas are often contextualized and historically localized, the supposition by fusionists generally seems to be that any idea or argument can be taken from its natural (as it were) setting and held up for comparison, critically examined and, most importantly, transposed in meaningful and useful ways to a contemporary philosophical context. In other words, what Siderits calls fusion philosophy defines itself by denying a significant, even

¹⁵ When asked how the law could determine if something was obscene, the United States' Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously remarked in 1964 that ›I know it when I see it.‹

¹⁶ R. Neville, ›Beyond Comparative to Integrative Philosophy,‹ *APA Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, pp. 20–23. Also see J. Kupperman, ›The Purposes and Functions of Comparative Philosophy,‹ *APA Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, pp. 26–29.

essential, part of what comparative philosophy hitherto has defined itself in terms of. If so, it is difficult then to know what to make of the claim that fusion philosophy is the successor to comparative philosophy. They seem to share no DNA. It is unlikely that Siderits means fusion philosophy is the successor only in the sense that it temporally follows it. He must see it as an intellectual successor as well; as building upon what comparative philosophy started. Given that fusion philosophy defines itself by negating comparative philosophy's central concerns, how can this be?

For nuclear physics, achieving fission (as in the atom bomb) is not a problem. It is fusion that is something of a holy grail. Suppose that these terms (fission and fusion) could be used to describe two general (albeit vague) approaches to comparative philosophy – where ›fission‹ not fusion, is conceived as the mode that meets traditional comparativist concerns. Further suppose that instead of producing energy, the goals the two approaches both sought could be broadly (albeit vaguely) described as knowledge that advanced an understanding of the comparative philosophical strands, whether singularly or together, in some useful ways – such as in advancing contemporary philosophical theory. Would anything useful or normative about the nature(s), methods or goals of comparative philosophy be revealed if it were then asked whether, in comparative philosophy, fission or fusion (as in fusionist philosophy) best produced the desired results?

Or to carry the comparison a step further (perhaps a step too far), does it make sense to say that in comparative philosophy, as in nuclear physics, ›one of the most appealing characteristics of fusion as opposed to fission is that it is much cleaner‹? It may seem cleaner (less messy), unconcerned as it is with history, method and the like. But comparativists like Neville seem to be committed to the view that so-called fusion philosophy is not genuinely comparative philosophy. Fusionists seem to want to look forward without looking back. They want to take a shortcut, to bypass, the issues that comparativists have been concerned with for decades.

Neville (*ibid.*: 20) talks about moving »beyond comparative philosophy to integrative philosophy« – the title of his article. However, the methodologically astute integrative philosophy he has in mind bears little resemblance to that of fusion philosophy. An explicit concern or even preoccupation with method does not mean that comparative philosophy does not see itself as methodologically pluralistic – not only in terms of fusion and fission, but in terms of being »crea-

tive« (Deutsch) and »integrative« (Neville). Both of these terms are used to describe what comparative philosophy – explicit in its comparative work and methods (i. e. employing »disciplined comparison«) – could be doing in drawing on whichever strands of Western philosophy (analytic or continental) and Eastern thought that might be useful in making a philosophical point. Neither term however seems to apply to fusion philosophy seen as the successor to comparative philosophy.

4 Who are the Real Fusionists?

Comparativists like Neville and Deutsch would see themselves as the real »fusionists« as Siderits describes it, though they of course do not use the term. This is because as Siderits describes it, where fusion philosophy meets all comparativist objections and warnings, fusion philosophy just is comparative philosophy. Despite Siderits' claims on behalf of what he terms »fusion philosophy,« Neville's »integrative« and Deutsch's »creative« approach to comparative philosophy might both claim Siderits for their own. This would depend both on whether or not they see him as having done interpretive justice to the Buddhist formulation of personal identity and reductionism, and second on the appropriateness and adequacy of its application to Parfit.

In any case, claims concerning fusion philosophy as it relates to comparative philosophy had better be considered independently of just how successful Siderits is in providing Parfit with forceful, useful and *correct* ways of responding to his critics. Siderits (2003: xiii) argues that,

ontological reductionism about any sort of entity is best understood as a kind of »middle path« between the two extremes of non-reductionism (the view that entities of that sort are ultimately real) and eliminativism (the view that such entities are utter fabrications). Thus Reductionism, or ontological reductionism about persons, is best understood as situated between Non-Reductionism and Eliminativism. I claim that by replacing Parfit's dichotomous taxonomy (Parfit speaks only of Non-Reductionism and Reductionism) with the Buddhist trichotomy, we can become much clearer about what Reductionists are and are not committed to.

Why this strategy is not simply seen as a different way – perhaps a different useful way – of expressing the same point – a point made elsewhere, is not clear.

Does it lend clarity to reductionism or avoid a commitment to eliminativism properly and contextually understood in this specific case? It does neither. One must simply be clear on what is being eliminated. When Hume claimed that he could never discover a ›self‹ but only a series of impressions, he was making a similar point – occupying a middle way if you like, though his conclusion was still eliminativist – as long as we understand what it is that was being eliminated (i. e. an enduring underlying self that is the locus of experience through time – or something like that). And the Buddhist claim that the five *skandhas* are aggregates of mental and physical characteristics that come together to create an individual, can likewise be called eliminativist. To see it »as situated between Non-Reductionism and Eliminativism« is at least equally misleading.¹⁷ In any case, whether Siderits' claim on this matter is illuminating is independent of both his grand claims for fusion philosophy and misconceptions about comparative philosophy. He has piggy-backed a series of views of comparative philosophy and fusion philosophy on the back of a straightforward interpretive claim about how best to understand the Buddhist account of no-self.

It may be that neither fission nor fusion sufficiently captures or adequately describes any approach to, or way of doing, comparative philosophy – let alone two general methodological approaches that are recognizable and normative. It may also be that insofar as the terms do apply to what is actually being done in comparative philosophy, they apply willy-nilly. That is, comparative philosophical studies may make use of both. Terms, concepts and arguments, may be split off from larger ones and historically, culturally and even philosophically, decontextualized if it is thought that in doing so something significant or interesting will be learned. Alternatively, and within the same study, a version of fusion may occur. Terms, concepts, arguments, ways of seeing are brought together in ways that may be illuminating for each doctrine, term, concept, dogma, point of view, etc. individually; or there may be a further point to the comparison. Something new might be postulated or learned that wouldn't be from even the most careful and astute consideration of any doctrine, term or argument in isolation.

¹⁷ For an account of eliminativism versus reductionism see P. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge MA; MIT, 1988.

One comes up against pitfalls, incongruities and dead-ends whether methodologically guided by a fusion approach (there is rather little method to such a ›see what one needs‹ approach) or by the various comparative approaches employed by comparative philosophy. Nevertheless, there is reason, based on accomplishment, to suppose that comparative philosophy's most significant and at times unexpected achievements result from the juxtapositions, dialectics, interpretations and arguments that are not ingredients in approaches dominated by fusion philosophy on its own.

For at least some fusionists (e.g. Siderits, Flanagan, Miri Albihari)¹⁸ the fact that Buddhist philosophy may be embedded in doctrine and intertwined with religious views appears to be of little concern – at least as far as their philosophical exposition and intent are concerned. The operative fusionist principle here is that if it is philosophically useful to do so, then (for example) Buddhist philosophical arguments, terms (e.g. self) and beliefs can – without serious loss of meaning or distortion – be pried out of and disentangled from religious, cultural and historical settings. Thus, the truth about the nature of the ›self‹ or consciousness transcends any and every particular context in which it arises. Here, the religious roots of Buddhist views on these issues seem of little consequence. In another way however it is of great concern, and fusionists often seek to distance themselves from the religious as much as possible.

It is not uncommon among fusionists (e.g. Flanagan, Siderits, (?) Albihari) who draw on Buddhism (a prime example) to either deny that Buddhism is a religion at all or see it as inconsequential. They see it primarily as a philosophical tradition. Whether or not one can successfully extract a philosophical view, the doctrine of no-self (or not-self) for example, from its Buddhist religious roots may be questionable for some. It is, after all, at the core of a Buddhist world-view and ethos.¹⁹ But the fusionists see no particular difficulty in separating

¹⁸ Flanagan (2011); M. Albihari, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-tiered Illusion of Self*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

¹⁹ C. Geertz, ›Religion as a Cultural System,‹ in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 87–125. Geertz says (*ibid.*: 89), [...] sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive idea of order. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the

philosophical wheat from religious chaff. Comparativists may understand and appreciate the fusionist analysis of ›self‹ but are apt to situate the philosophical significance of the no-self theory in the context of a Buddhist world view. Fusionists, however, locate that significance in terms of a philosophical account of the self or identity. They see no need to embed the view in a tradition. This difference is not insignificant and helps to fill in a picture of how to distinguish comparative philosophy from fusion philosophy.

Nevertheless, hard and fast distinctions between the two are impossible to draw. Thus, at the conclusion of chapter two of *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, Siderits discusses the connection that Buddhists allege exists between ›suffering‹ and the belief in a self. Is the discussion of Buddhist reductionism and ethics in chapter 5 more comparative philosophy than fusion? Or is it an exposition of Buddhist doctrine and psychology? Where does such exposition fit in? Even if these discussions are contextualized and an account of the role that it plays in his book is given, the answer may not be readily apparent. Fusion philosophy seems held in abeyance with regard to the discussions in terms of Buddhist thought in chapters 2, 5 and 9 about suffering in relation to false beliefs in a ›self‹; the implications of reductionism for concern with the welfare of others; and the ethical consequences of a Buddhist conception of ›self‹ or ›empty person.‹

Remember that Siderits characterizes fusion philosophy as concerned with »problem-solving.« Fusionists (Siderits 2003: xi) »believe that the counterpoising of distinct traditions can yield useful results in this endeavor.« Here then is a pointed question addressed to fusionists. No doubt fusing various traditions might yield useful results. But fusion philosophy appears to require no essential reference to any tradition whatsoever. It seems possible to eliminate references to distinct traditions altogether and simply assess the arguments involved. Siderits' book should be able to be rewritten in principle with no reference to Buddhism. If so, then why not proceed in this manner where the kinds of methodological and interpretive difficulties raised by comparative philosophy are of no consequence and can be simply eliminated by fiat?

actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.

5 Mark Siderits on Fusion or Confluence Philosophy

Mark Siderits is the one who coined the term fusion philosophy and who has been its foremost methodological proponent. A further and closer look at his position will help clarify the issues in the fusionist/comparativist debate.

In ›Comparison or Confluence Philosophy?‹ Siderits (2015: 1) defines the

project of fusion or confluence philosophy: [as] philosophizing that draws on resources from both Indian and Western philosophical traditions in seeking solutions to philosophical problems [...] [It] proceeds from the assumption that a given Indian text or author [for example] is sufficiently well understood that we can bring it into dialogue with something from Western philosophy. In the past much of this was done under the banner of something called ›comparative philosophy.‹ And implicit in that label is the suggestion that the Asian and Western traditions have their respective places in two distinct cultures, and that comparison and contrast are consequently the best we can hope for.

I doubt that the view that »comparison and contrast are [...] the best we can hope for« was ever implicit in the label »comparative philosophy« or that such a view fairly sums up what comparative philosophy was and still is about. Some of the reasons why this is not a fair assessment should become clear.

Siderits continues (*ibid.*: 2): »The idea behind the model is that just as the views of Aristotle might be relevant to defending a particular solution to the problem of incontinence, so we should see that the arguments of Kumāṛila may be a source of important ideas concerning the problem of how one can be conscious of their own consciousness, or that Nyāya metaphysics might contain some key suggestions about how to frame an endurantist account of persistence.« Few comparatists would deny such a claim and Siderits cites none. In attributing such a view (such a denial) to comparative philosophy Siderits further misconstrues and misrepresents comparative philosophy's methodological concerns as well as their core objections to fusion philosophy.

Siderits (*ibid.*: 1) says that there are »[v]arious challenges to the project [fusion philosophy],« and that among these are the »criticism[s] that the two traditions are incommensurable, and the charge that such a project is politically problematic.« However, while these are undoubtedly among the criticisms made of fusion philosophy,

neither of these are its principal difficulties, nor indeed the principal criticisms.

Siderits (*ibid.*) states »When we see the practice of philosophy as chiefly concerned with trying to solve unresolved philosophical problems, we can see why it might prove useful to know the genealogy of the problem and how related issues were addressed in the past.« He equates this practice of philosophy with fusion philosophy and suggests comparative philosophy raises the same issues. Comparative philosophy just is, or has come to be, fusion philosophy on his account.

Doing comparative philosophy and drawing on Indian and other non-western sources is no different for Siderits than drawing on historical Western philosophical sources to address contemporary philosophical issues. This view is also held by Graham Priest who, if I understand him, claims that there is no such thing as comparative philosophy – only philosophy.²⁰ However, to note – correctly – that drawing on historical Western sources may introduce many of the same problems associated with comparative philosophy, does nothing to show that the methodological concerns traditionally raised by comparatives are unwarranted. On the contrary, it assumes they are genuine. The conclusion to be drawn here is that if one is methodologically naïve in one's approach to comparative philosophy and non-western sources, then for the same and similar reasons, one may be naïve in drawing on certain western historical sources. Instead, Siderits and Priest beg the question and conclude that there is no problem (really). This is because they assume, at least here, that there are no serious difficulties in drawing on western historical sources.

In considering objections to the very possibility of fusion philosophy, Siderits (*ibid.*: 2) says:

A given philosophical argument or concept, it will be said, has its meaning only through its having a particular location in the tradition in which it arose. Where that tradition is not one's own, one can grasp its meaning only by fully entering into that tradition – by coming to think like a native of that culture.« He cites no one who holds the view and that is because it will be difficult to find anyone who does – though I am sure some do. The issue

²⁰ A version of this paper was presented at the 2015 conference on comparative philosophy in Melbourne, Australia. During question time Graham Priest, the conference's keynote speaker, asked me »What is Comparative Philosophy? I don't know what it is.« He drew the same parallel Siderits does between comparative philosophy and contemporary philosophy that draws on Western historical sources.

is not that »one can grasp its meaning only by fully entering into that tradition« but rather what it takes to adequately understand »a given philosophical argument or concept.

Siderits (*ibid.*: 3) writes »The objection [to fusion philosophy] was that individual elements of a philosophical tradition – specific theories, concepts, or arguments – cannot be lifted out of their cultural context. But why not?« But this is not a fair or adequate statement of the objection. The objection is that it is not easy to do so (to lift a concept etc. out of its connect) – that one must attend to certain meanings, understanding, usage and contexts in order to do so – if one is to come away with the meaning that can justifiably be ascribed to the concept. The objection, correctly understood, is defensible on various accounts of ›meaning‹ including *both* Wittgenstein's ›meaning as use‹ and at least some essentialist (necessary and sufficient condition) accounts. It seems to be a common sense objection. Siderits (*ibid.*) says that this objection »must rather have something to do with a kind of meaning holism that would make the basic semantic unit not the word or the sentence but the totality of what is said in the culture« and that »this seems *prima facie* implausible.«²¹ But this too is misleading since the objection rests not on ›meaning holism‹ but on theories of meaning that are, or can be independent of meaning holism.

Siderits's strategy, and that of other fusionists, is to defend fusion philosophy by pointing out instances where comparativist's concerns to fusion philosophy are being met. But comparativists do not generally deny that their concerns may be met (and at times are met) – which is what comparative philosophy is meant to do and which is what they claim fusion philosophy often does not do. What they claim, and what Siderits, Priest, Bo Mo and others downplay or turn a blind eye to, is that sometimes those concerns are not met; that there really is misapplication and misunderstanding of terms and

²¹ Siderits (*ibid.*) claims the objection relies on something like »the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, some way of supporting the claim that certain concepts cannot be expressed or fully grasped outside the cultural context in which they are at home. And while the notion that distinct conceptual schemes might somehow be incommensurable continues to have popular appeal, there are good Davidsonian reasons to question its coherence.« This just isn't the case. The Whorf-Sapir hypothesis is not needed to support the objection properly understood and ›Davidsonian reasons‹ are not relevant since the issue of simple interpretation and translation is no part of the objection properly understood.

concepts; a de-contextualization coupled with imaginative transformation of meaning that amounts to equivocation, misappropriation and the like. Incidentally, none of this is meant to deny that at times the work of fusionists may be insightful. After all, the work of Siderits and other sophisticated fusionists may at times adhere to methods and standards that are consistent with comparativist concerns.

Siderits (*ibid.*) writes »A very different sort of objection to the confluence project comes not from a comparativist but from the intended audience of the project, philosophers firmly rooted in their own tradition [...] The objection might be put tersely as, Why bother? That is, why suppose that the effort involved in coming to understand another tradition will yield adequate payoffs in the problem-solving department?« But this too misses comparativist objections to fusion philosophy. Comparativists do not generally deny that »the effort involved in coming to understand another tradition will [*may*] yield adequate payoffs in the problem-solving department.« What does Siderits think comparativists are doing? What does he think, what do fusionists think, that comparativists think the purpose of doing comparative philosophy is? Comparative philosophy is all about gaining such insight. However, it is coupled with methodological concerns and constraints on the adequacy, justification, and rationality of some ways of going about it.

Siderits (*ibid.*: 4) writes »When one broadens one's vision to take in other traditions, what was invisible from within one's own tradition may come into view. To do philosophy in the [fusionist] confluence way is to learn to see a set of issues from two rather different perspectives. And binocular vision can add depth to what one sees. Therein lies whatever promise there may be in a fusion project.« And what comparativist would deny that this aim of fusion philosophy is at the core of comparative philosophy? What comparativists claim is that fusion philosophy often fails to broaden one's vision and fails to genuinely see »a set of issues from two rather different perspectives.« And indeed I think this is true. The fusionist approach is often procrustean.

Elsewhere, Siderits (*ibid.*: 5) does correctly identify criticisms that comparatists have made and approaches and pitfalls they have warned against. And these are, as Siderits acknowledges, applicable to at least some fusion philosophy. He says for example:

Perhaps the obstacle that is most difficult to overcome in doing fusion philosophy is the tendency to see elements from one tradition in the other when they are not there. Examples are not hard to come by. So one finds claims concerning verificationism in Nāgārjuna, transcendental arguments refuting naturalism in Madhyamaka and Mīmāṃsā, failed solutions to the problem of induction in Indian epistemology and the like. Each of these cases is, arguably, one of superimposition; superficial resemblances have led to a failure to see deeper differences and thus obscured important lessons (*ibid.*).

Since it is always possible that the presuppositions that structure another tradition's approach are quite different, one must refrain from an overly hasty dismissal of views that may at first blush look like failed attempts from one's own tradition's past [...] One must develop some degree of mastery of the techniques of the two different ways of doing philosophy before one can put tools from one tradition to new work in the other. We need to put on the 3-D glasses to gain the added depth of field that comes from doing philosophy across distinct cultures. The politics of the situation can interfere with this in several ways. Cultural chauvinism is one common route to an over-hasty dismissal. But there is also the opposite danger of an over-hasty embrace, one that fails to enter fully into the problematic of the alien tradition before attempting to appropriate some theory or argument (*ibid.*: 6).

Siderits however invariably dismisses these objections and in doing so Siderits examples are carefully chosen so as to bypass or undermine the plausibility of the comparativist's objections to fusion philosophy. He says, for example: »Viewing him [Nāgārjuna] as an anti-realist need not count as yet another case of neo-colonialists imposing a hegemonic discourse on the subaltern Other« (*ibid.*). Fine. But why doesn't Siderits choose an example where it may be plausible to suppose that such an imposition has taken place?

The manner then in which Siderits chooses to defend fusion philosophy and dismiss comparativist concerns and objections is to admit that such objections are sometimes valid but to deny that they are intrinsic to good fusion philosophy. But comparativists generally do not hold that fusion philosophy is necessarily or inherently bound to make the mistakes and contribute to misunderstandings that they claim it often does. Their claim is that from the start such philosophy often does make just these kinds of problematic errors and assumptions, and that this is what comparativist philosophy must seek to avoid. By the time Siderits gets done defending – actually sanitizing – fusion philosophy from comparativist objections, one is left not

with fusion philosophy as Siderits would have it, but with what is – from the comparativist perspective, comparative philosophy. There is no succession from comparative philosophy to fusion philosophy and no segue from one to the other.

6 Fusion Philosophy, Religion, Truth

The difference as to where the significance of a doctrine lies for comparative philosophy versus fusion philosophy is related to another significant self-characterization of fusion philosophy. What is behind the insistence of Buddhism as a philosophy as opposed to a religion for fusionists? Let's stick with Buddhism, although Confucianism, Judaism and just about any other tradition can be substituted. The problem facing the fusionists is this. They believe in core doctrines of Buddhism, but as philosophers, as an aspect of the fusionist self-image, they believe they have to distance themselves from religion. How does one do that? They do it by denying that Buddhism is fundamentally a religion, or if that is impossible, by insisting that philosophical doctrine may be neatly and with no loss, separated from religious views. There is a third option here as well: denying that the philosophy vs. religion distinction applies to Buddhism, or Shinto, or Native American »thought.«

Philosophy of religion, as now practiced, is regarded by mainstream Western philosophy as somewhere between a poor relation on the one hand, and an irrelevant anachronism on the other. It is no wonder then that those who identify themselves as philosophers first and foremost want to distant themselves from religion. It is not so much ironic as it is odd that contemporary analytic philosophers of religion (a field dominated by conservative Christians) misperceive themselves as mainstream – as both a vital part of contemporary philosophy, and knowledgeable about ›religion‹ probably because they are religious. They are almost wholly engaged with apologetics.

It might be tempting to regard the emergence of fusion philosophy as a triumph of comparative philosophy – it's greatest to date. After all, aren't the fusionists doing just what comparativists have always regarded as a prime objective of comparative philosophy – to learn from other philosophies and cultures and to take them on board, scrutinize and respectfully critique them, synthesize them and even make them part of one's own? Probably not. Comparativists are likely

to regard fusionists of this ilk as naïve, at least on methodological grounds, and frequently on philosophical grounds as well. Philosophers in the fusionist camp (some are relative newcomers to the study of the traditions they draw from) are likely to regard comparative philosophy as largely rooted in religion (a term that is itself controversial in the cross-cultural context), and as another aspect of religious studies or a feeble attempt at interdisciplinarity. Like Siderits, they think that whatever the concerns of comparative philosophy may be, »problem solving« is not principal among them. In short, they do not regard it as philosophy at all – at least not rigorous analytic philosophy.

Let's return to Neville's account of comparative philosophy to highlight some further possible distinctions between fusion and comparative philosophy. Neville (2002: 20) describes comparative philosophy as »not new.« Aristotle's typological method was a kind of comparative philosophy on Neville's account, and the »six schools of Vedic-Hindu tradition in the face of Buddhist challenges, and in explicit dialogue with Buddhisms of several sorts« (*ibid.*), was also comparative philosophy. On his account, »comparative philosophy is always at work where dialogue takes place between philosophical positions that do not share cultural assumptions, styles of rationality, and interpretations of the meaning of philosophy.« He further characterizes comparative philosophy in the twentieth century as being generally »objectivist« or »normative« with each of these themselves made up of various different kinds of comparative philosophy. Among the objectivist approaches he cites are the typological, social science, philosophy of culture, and »historical analysis of core texts and motifs« kinds (2002: 21). He says (*ibid.*) »normative approaches to comparison are far rarer. They involve the deliberate use of disciplined comparison to make a philosophical point [...]. The normative approach to comparison is in fact a kind of integrative philosophy that is explicit in its comparative work, in contrast to the integrative philosophy that simply builds an argument on the resources brought together by comparison.«

On Neville's account then, fusion philosophy would be a type of integrative philosophy (the latter kind of integrative philosophy he mentions) but one that simply »builds an argument on the resources brought together by comparison.« There is no explicit suggestion that this latter type of integrative philosophy is inferior to the former even though it is not »explicit in its comparative work.« Fusion phi-

losophy of this type would not be a normative approach to comparative philosophy even though it is *in a sense* explicit in its comparative work. It is explicit insofar as its comparative method is just to use available »resources« (ideas and arguments). Fusion philosophy might also fail as comparative philosophy on Neville's account because it is questionable whether a »dialogue takes place between philosophical positions,« rather than a one way importation.

Neville remarks on how normative approaches that involve »the deliberate use of disciplined comparison« run the risk of distorting the elements compared. He notes (*ibid.*) that objectivist comparison also runs the risk of distortion since they too have »normative elements [...] [such as] the selection of the categories according to which ideas are compared.« Many of the same kinds of points are made in claims that history (the discipline) is irreducibly subjective. Distortion as well as bias are always a danger. But what of the »integrative philosophy [Fusion Philosophy] that simply builds an argument on the resources brought together by comparison?« The possibility of misrepresentation and distortion seems to be even greater here. While the first kind of methodologically deliberative integrative philosophy might distort the philosophies being compared »because of the normative case being made« (*ibid.*), the categories and terms chosen etc., isn't the second kind of integrative philosophy, the kind »that simply builds an argument on the resources brought together by comparison,« bound to distort both traditions or philosophies in question?²² Hasn't this been a core methodological concern of comparative theorists from the start?

Fusionists are likely to dispute this and claim that far from distorting the views in question they may (do) have a better understanding of the particular philosophical points being made in whatever tradition they are drawing from. Thus, it is Owen Flanagan who can teach the Buddhists about a Buddhist theory of consciousness philosophically speaking and Siderits who can teach them about a Buddhist conception of identity, anti-realism and so forth. If there are good reasons for supposing they are not right about this, wouldn't they

²² Neville's example of a normative approach using »disciplined comparison« is R. Ames' and D. Hall's *Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China*, LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1999. They ask (Neville 2002: 21) »what kind of Western philosophy would be helpful for China today in light of its Confucian heritage, and answer [...] *pragmatism*.«

have to be cast in terms of the kinds of methodological and theoretical concerns that have always occupied comparative philosophers?

Fusionists, some at any rate, are far less concerned with the accuracy of various accounts of Buddhist views on mind, identity or annihilation, than they are with whether the view in question (accurate or not) can provide support for a particular line of argument or advance some research question or program. This seems integral to fusion philosophy. Given their own account of what fusion philosophy is trying to achieve, the question for fusionists is, or should be, not particularly whether some view is correctly attributable to say the Buddha. Instead the question is whether such a view, correctly attributable or not, might be right or help lend insight and support to some contemporary philosophical view. This approach and perspective is more or less foreign to comparative philosophy as traditionally conceived – where what the Buddha really said rather than what he should have said, or Confucius meant rather than what he should have meant is paramount. Why should either of these matter to fusion philosophy, unless of course one assumes their actual views and arguments are more likely to be linked to truth and knowledge?

There might be a presumption that served a methodological purpose in supposing that the actual views, for example of the Buddha, were those most likely to be true rather than other views merely attributed to the Buddha. But for the fusionist this could be nothing more than a useful initial supposition if that. It might well be that one of the incorrect interpretations of what the Buddha said, or a view incorrectly attributed to the Buddha, was more philosophically plausible or useful from a fusionist perspective. From the comparativist's perspective the issue is treated differently. Their focus on correct and accurate translation, duly contextualized and historicized, is partly an end in itself. They too may presuppose that the actual views of the Buddha (etc) are most likely to be if not true or quite true, then at least the most useful. But their reasons for doing so are different.

There is frequently an underlying supposition that fusionists may not share which is that aspects of the actual theories or views are either true or contain insight. Fusionists, even when they believe, for example, in the Buddha's account of personal identity or what they take it to be, are not tied to Buddhism in the same way. For the fusionist such views are generally not constitutive of what Geertz called a world view and ethos. There are, however, exceptions like those fusionists who believe in many of the basic tenets of Buddhism

(e.g. no-self; past lives – including his claim that these can be empirically verified) but deny that Buddhism is a religion rather than a philosophy.

7 Advantages of Fusion Philosophy

From what has been said thus far one might get the impression that I see no value in fusion philosophy and nothing but value in comparative philosophy. But of course, some fusion philosophy is insightful and may even advance or ›solve‹ problems it sets its sights on. Comparative philosophy on the other hand does sometimes seem to draw vapid conclusions and pointless comparisons.

One advantage of fusion philosophy is that it is more inclusive. There are fewer, if any, gatekeepers. For example, there is no insistence on language capability for primary source material. The simple recognition is that those engaged in fusion philosophy will never develop language skills that would enable them to comprehend source material with greater understanding or nuance than reading such material, including relevant substantive disputes about translation, as translated by ›experts.‹ The comparativists who have insisted on language capability have often done so on questionable grounds. If no one can do ›serious‹ comparative work unless one has the language ability, then it is at times implicitly supposed that those who do have the requisite language skills also have the requisite philosophical and methodological skills to do comparative philosophy.

I remember (well) a well-known academic/Confucianist arguing that since there is no word for ›ethics‹ or ›morality‹ in Chinese, those who spoke about Confucian, Daoist or Chinese ethics were generally misguided and somehow fundamentally confused. Why one cannot profitably speak of such ethics even given the absence of such a word in Chinese was not addressed, nor was the fact that one hardly has to be able to read Chinese in order to ›know‹ that there is no word for ethics in Chinese – or to claim that this presented no serious obstacle to analyzing what we may call Chinese ›ethics.‹ Similarly, it has been argued by biblical scholars that given the absence of any specific word for ›miracle‹ in the Bible (putative ›miracles‹ being called ›wondrous‹ events instead), the entire debate about the plausibility of such events, their relation to laws of nature, or the possibility of justified belief in such events was somehow seriously off track. With argu-

ments as transparent as these, it is no wonder that fusionists deny the necessity, albeit perhaps not the desirability, of primary source language ability for comparative philosophy.

Fusionists have turned these sorts of arguments by comparativists on their head. Complementary to this fusionist dismissal of some long standing ground rules of comparative philosophy's territorialism, fusionists may hold the view (many do) that those with comparativist skills (e.g. language skills) often lack the (analytic) philosophical expertise required to do what comparative philosophy is really meant to do: advance genuine philosophical insight and argument into matters like the nature of mind, consciousness and identity. While comparative philosophers of the more classical sort may be capable of expositing the views in primary source material, they may lack the philosophical expertise necessary critically to examine such ideas in ways that could integrate such views into mainstream analytic philosophy. There is after all, just so much one can study in depth. If one devotes oneself to primary source material it may come at the expense of in-depth philosophical training – and vice versa.

8 Conclusion: Fusion's Future

What is the future of comparative philosophy/religion versus that of fusion philosophy? Fusion philosophy's view is that it has superseded comparative philosophy, though just what is meant by the claim of succession is never made clear. The new journal *Comparative Philosophy* emphasizes »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.« This statement basically defines fusion philosophy. The view of comparative philosophy on the other hand, on some accounts, is that it already contains fusion philosophy and in nascent form always has to a degree; but that in any case it alone has the resources that fusionists must continue to draw on.

Discipline groupings and divisions are driven by so many factors, largely factors outside of academic considerations that it is difficult to tell what will happen. I am inclined to think however that fusion philosophy does not have as bright a future as the more traditional comparative philosophy – though the latter is likely to embrace more

fusion philosophy than before. Fusion philosophy talks about »constructive engagement of distinct approaches« and »themes from various traditions,« but measured against what fusionists have done, this is largely rhetoric. The themes that they have mined other traditions for are largely the ones that fit their own agendas and method of doing philosophy and they are relatively few.

Thus, we have seen fusionists focus on Buddhist conceptions of no-self and the nature of mind, personal identity and the like – views they regard as consonant in important respects, or that tend to support, their own contemporary views. Confucianists stress the social dimension of identity and ethics. The use that contemporary analytic philosophers make of the views they take up is largely illustrative and supportive – though they are apt to claim that the views are mutually supportive. In so doing they make no apologies for decontextualizing those views. Other traditions are also drawn upon, but the bulk of Buddhist, Vedānta, Daoist, Confucianist etc. metaphysics, ethics, philosophical psychology, aesthetics, let alone mythology, demonology etc. holds little interest for the fusionists since they are not seen as adding to the »joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise.« Fusionists might claim that a consideration of Buddhist ethics and metaphysics can be part of a »constructive engagement of distinct approaches« when considering, for example, a »pro-choice« position on abortion. But unless one held the relevant Buddhist positions it is difficult see how such positions could support or undermine the ethical justification for pro-choice. Buddhism does little to advance the abortion debate – unless of course one happens to be a Buddhist.

In considering the future of fusion philosophy, one question is whether there is enough in the distinct approaches and content of other traditions to sustain the fusionist's (i. e. western analytic philosophy's), as opposed to comparative philosophy's, interest. This is doubtful. Furthermore, if comparativists have been right from the start about the importance of context, the difficulties and rewards, confronting cross-cultural philosophical study and the like, then in looking only for that which in the fusionist view will enhance »their joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise,« fusionists are likely to be methodologically, theoretically and substantively procrustean. They are likely to exclude much that is philosophically interesting – the most philosophically interesting on the comparativist's account – though little of philosophical value on the fusionist's narrow conception. By »the common philosophical enterprise« they

mean that enterprise as they conceive of it – not as it was conceived by those who they wish to enlist in their allegedly »joint contribution.« Fusionists conceive of themselves as they would like to be conceived – as doing philosophy *simpliciter* – timelessly and without location.

Returning to the original metaphor: fusionists are really »fission-ists.« Fission involves a breaking down of the larger into the smaller to give off energy (or in this case philosophical insight), while fusion involves bonding the smaller into something larger for the same end. Fusionists are not bonding various views and positions together, but are instead mining those traditions on behalf of positions they already hold or are developing. We began by noting that fusion philosophy sees itself as the sequel to or successor of comparative philosophy. But if comparative philosophy's concerns with method and context have been right all along, then not only is this self-image mistaken, but to think that a more sophisticated comparative philosophy might result from fusion philosophy superseding comparative philosophy is also confusion.²³

–Michael Levine, *The University of Western Australia,*
Perth, Australia

²³ My thanks to anonymous referees and to the editors for their comments.