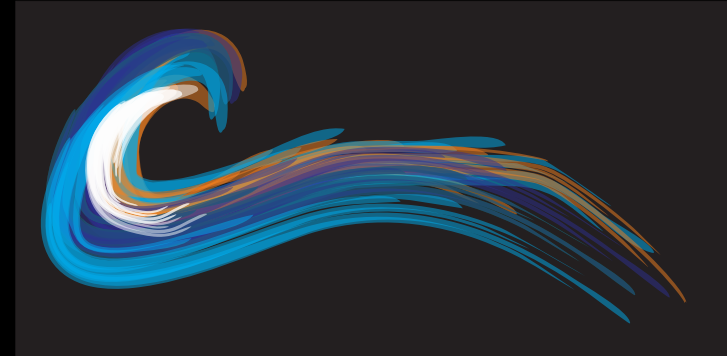


Confluence



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Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies

Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, international journal dedicated to comparative thought. It seeks to explore common spaces and differences between philosophical traditions in a global context. Without postulating cultures as monolithic, homogenous, or segregated wholes, it aspires to address key philosophical issues which bear on specific methodological, epistemological, hermeneutic, ethical, social, and political questions in comparative thought. *Confluence* aims to develop the contours of a philosophical understanding not subservient to dominant paradigms and provide a platform for diverse philosophical voices, including those long silenced by dominant academic discourses and institutions. *Confluence* also endeavors to serve as a juncture where specific philosophical issues of global interest may be explored in an imaginative, thought-provoking, and pioneering way.

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Contents

Articles	7
J. O. Chimakonam, Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of ›Philosophical Space‹	9
R. Bhattacharya, From Proto-materialism to Materialism: The Indian Scenario	41
A. Smirnov, Towards an Understanding of Islamic Ornament: Approaching Islamic Ornament through Ibn ‘Arabī’s <i>Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam</i> ’s Notions of the <i>Zāhir-Bāṭin</i> Interplay and the <i>Ṣūfī Ḥayra</i>	60
S. Brentjes, Relationships Between Early Modern Christian and Islamicate Societies in Eurasia and North Africa as Reflected in the History of Science and Medicine	85
Symposium: How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?	
F.-M. Wimmer, How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?	125
R. Bernasconi, The Kantian Canon: Response to Wimmer	133
P. Hountondji, Franz Wimmer’s Statement: A Comment	139
T. Norton-Smith, A Shawnee Reflection on Franz Wimmer’s »How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?«	145
F.-M. Wimmer, Reply	151

Contents

Philosophical Journeys

H. Verran, Comparative Philosophy and I 171

R. Ohashi, Philosophy as Auto-Bio-Graphy:
The Example of the Kyoto School 189

Survey Articles

L. Kalmanson, Have We Got a Method for You!:
Recent Developments in Comparative and Cross-Cultural
Methodologies 205

H. Shadi, An Epistemological Turn in Contemporary Islamic
Reform Discourse: On Abdolkarim Soroush's Epistemology . . . 215

Conference Report

Asixoxe-Let's Talk!, 1st and 2nd May 2015, SOAS, University of
London, UK 243

Institutional Programs on Comparative Philosophy

The Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy
(CEACOP), City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong,
China (SAR) 249

Non-Western Philosophy, University of Reading, Reading, UK . . 250

The Center for Comparative Philosophy (CCP),
Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA 251

Department of Philosophy, San Jose State University,
California, USA 252

Articles

Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of ›Philosophical Space‹¹

Abstract

In the aftermath of the great debate in African philosophy, questions have been asked which triggered what we would call post-debate disillusionments. One such question posed to the advocates of Philosophical Universalism who ridiculed ethnophilosophy is: having disestablished the episteme of what they ridiculed as ethnophilosophy, what do they offer in its place? The second question posed to both the advocates of Philosophical Universalism and Philosophical Particularism² is: in the absence of any other point to debate about and in the absence of any commonly accepted episteme, what constitutes the concern and the future direction of African philosophy now? The fact that none of the two schools had any definite answers to these questions created unexpected disillusionments which saw many who had expended great intellectual energy during the debate silently exit the stage of African philosophy. One of our goals in this essay shall be sketching a brief outline of systematic African philosophy. In doing this, we shall show how the conversational school has evolved as a new school of thought that takes phenomenological³ issues as its con-

¹ I wish to heartily thank Prof. Olatunji A. Oyeshile of the University of Ibadan and V. C. A. Nweke of the University of Calabar for reading through the initial draft of this essay. Their critical commentaries have been very helpful in producing the current version of this essay. I thank them immensely.

² I have employed the categories ›Philosophical Universalism‹ and ›Philosophical Particularism‹ in the same senses Edwin Etieyibo first employed them. Whatever does not completely fall into one can be regarded as a member of both. See E. Etieyibo, ›Post-Modern Thinking and African Philosophy,‹ *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2014, pp. 67–82.

³ Throughout this essay I have employed the derivative ›phenomenological‹ thirteen times and in two related senses: 1. To refer to issues that are present in the lifeworld or in the day-to-day experiences of a people e.g. ›phenomenological issues/concerns‹ and, 2. To refer to a method that seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of experience, e.g. ›phenomenological engage-

cern in the contemporary period. Understandably, the promise of this new school shall be the centerpiece of this essay as we engage Bruce Janz in a conversation on the concept of »philosophical space.« Our methods shall be evaluative, critical and prescriptive.

Keywords

Conversational philosophy, conversational, conversationalism, African philosophy, space, place, Bruce Janz.

1 Introduction

I have argued elsewhere that the history of African philosophy began with frustration⁴ that inexorably generated angry questions and then responses and reactions that then initially manifested in nationalist and ideological thoughts and excavations. Here, I wish to strengthen that claim and advance the notion that not only the history of African philosophy, but what I label systematic African philosophy, itself started from the springboard of frustration. Evidently as I argued elsewhere, the frustration was borne out of a colonial caricature of Africa as culturally naïve, intellectually docile, and rationally inept (2015: 9).⁵ These developments are not without some consequences. Beginning with the identity crisis of the African, the African's place in history as well as the African's contributions to civilization, later developments were to question the rationality of the African. All of these speculations coupled with the humiliating effect of slavery, colonialism, and racialism instigated an angry frustration against the treacherous colonial system in the returnee African scholars. As a result, animosity and frustration with the colonial episteme naturally

ment.« My main motive for employing this concept to describe the nature of conversational philosophy is to contrast my proposal for contemporary African philosophy with ethnographic and, most importantly, with the dry analysis and meta-philosophy of the Universalist school. It is to my graduate student, V. C. A. Nweke who drew my attention to the importance of this clarification that I owe my gratitude.

⁴ J. O. Chimakonam, »History of African Philosophy,« *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Nov. 22, 2014, J. Fieser, and B. Dowden (eds) (retrieved, March 1, 2015). Paragraph 1.

⁵ J. O. Chimakonam, »Dating and Periodization Questions in African Philosophy,« *Atuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy*, J. Chimakonam (ed.), Lanham: University Press of America, 2015.

took shape. Thus began the history of systematic African philosophy with nationalist and ideological constructions. I have clarified that it was the frustration of the returnee African scholars that first led them into systematic philosophizing and that still leads some African philosophers to this day – Africa, being a continent in turmoil (2014: 325).⁶ But I have stated this without also gainsaying the place and presence of »wonder« in the philosophical activities of African philosophers of today (*ibid.*).

In an earlier writing, I have delineated the history of African philosophy into two broad categorizations – to wit, the Pre-systematic and the Systematic. The former refers to Africa's philosophical culture, thoughts of anonymous African thinkers, and may include the problematic⁷ of Egyptian legacy. The latter refers to the period marking the return of Africa's first eleven or Western-tutored philosophers⁸ spanning from the 1920s to the modern day (Chimakonam 2015: 12). This latter category could further be delineated into four periods, namely:

1. Early period: 1920s-1960s
2. Middle period: 1960s-1980s
3. Later period: 1980s-1990s
4. New (contemporary) Era: 1990s- till today.

⁶ J. O. Chimakonam, »A Brief History of African Philosophy: From Frustration to Reflection,« *The Mirror of Philosophy*, G. O. Ozumba, and K. A. Ojong (eds.), Uyo: El-Johns Publishers, 2014.

⁷ The Egyptian legacy which refers to the ancient Egyptian thought is regarded as problematic in the history of African philosophy because there is widespread disagreement with regards to the veracity of the claim that Egyptian philosophy was African philosophy and that ancient Egyptians were black Africans. Cf. C. S. Momoh (ed.), »Issues in African Philosophy,« *The Substance of African Philosophy*, Auch: African Philosophy Projects' Publications, 2000, pp. 74–102; G. James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1954; I. Onyewuenyi, *African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentrism*, Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1993; C. B. Okolo, *Problems of African Philosophy*, Enugu: Cecta Nigeria Press, 1990; C. M. Okoro, *African Philosophy: Question and Debate, A Historical Study*, Enugu: Paqon Press, 2004, etc.

⁸ The Western-tutored African philosophers or those whom I call the first eleven African philosophers are those initial Africans who traveled outside of the colonies to Britain, France, and America to obtain Western education. This was during colonialism and prior to political independence. Some notable examples include, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Amílcar Carbral, to name a few. Akin Makinde refers to them as philosophers of first orientation (2000: 105), cf. his »Philosophy in Africa,« in (2000: 103–129).

It would however be mistaken to attempt to distribute individual African philosophers among these periods strictly and without yielding ground for overlaps. The reason for this is the dire circumstances of the time, hence:

This history [of African philosophy], it is important to remark, is a very short one! It is also to the chagrin of a dedicated reader, a very dense one, since actors sought to do in a few decades what would have been better done in many centuries, and as a result, they also did in later years what ought to have been done earlier and vice versa, thus making the early and the middle epochs overlap considerably (*ibid.*: 9).

But the obvious overlapping of periods, or the actors in periods, as explained in the preceding quote, should pose no structural defect in our delineation above, provided that the focus of each epoch is clearly marked out and that the actors are properly linked up, as we have done.

It is important to clarify also that the delineation of systematic African philosophy does not commit us to saying that before the early period people in Africa never philosophized – they did. But one fact that must not be denied is that they did not document their thoughts, and as such, we cannot attest to their systematicity.⁹ Although my idea of systematicity appears to make explicit allusion to written culture, I shall nonetheless include all forms of modern documentation systems, electronic or otherwise that are open to retrieval by any individual among valid forms of systematic philosophy. I shall however exclude any form of oral literature that is not documented in written or electronic systems from this category. To me, this latter category, including some written literary works that are mere narratives of traditional culture, are not different from folklore generally tied to

⁹ I am not unaware of the *ifa* literary corpus of the Yoruba people which, apparently dates back into time and which Sophie Oluwole, in a recent work (*Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*, Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2014), has attempted to elevate to a rigorous philosophical status. I simply doubt their philosophical rigor. They read like poetry and are at best comparable to the works of Homer and Hesiod, two important ancient Greek poets. Also, my brilliant graduate student V. C. A. Nweke has drawn my attention to the fact that ancient inscriptions on bones and all sorts of stone and wooden engravings could pass for documentations which might vitiate my claim that documentation was necessary for systematicity. I find it more convenient however to regard such carvings of symbols as art rather than writing, considering the fact that proper writing (apart from sign carvings) had not developed in the sub-Saharan Africa during antiquity.

the uncanny mind of the community or what Kwasi Wiredu would call »community thought« (Wiredu 1980: 14).¹⁰ I do not say that an oral literature cannot be philosophical, but rather that a proper construction of philosophical systems requires, as a minimum, that expressed thoughts refer to definite individuals who enjoy credit and bear responsibility. When philosophers agree or disagree; when they argue for or against, it is usually in reaction to an identifiable ›other.‹ In the absence of written or any alternate form of documentation, oral literature is lost as an unknown voice in the shadow of darkness. Even if what is anonymously expressed appears intelligible, it is too dangerous to place such a thought as another brick in the rising architectionic structure of African philosophy, because when such a thought is breached as is usually the case in philosophy, there would be no one to take responsibility. It is in this connection that Alena Rettova writes that emphasis is placed on written literature over oral because it has several qualities central to the project of philosophy which oral literature lacks, for one; writing establishes a connection to the individual authors, which is central to the practice of philosophy (Rettova 2007: 41, footnote 9).¹¹ Therefore, what the above periodization shows is that African philosophy, as a written and or documented system, first began in the late 1920s.

Furthermore, I denied the Egyptian legacy any important place in my periodization, because even if the philosophers of stolen legacy were able to prove a connection between Greece and Egypt, they could not prove in concrete terms that Egyptians were black Africans or that black Africans were Egyptians.¹² The frustration and desperation represented above that motivated such ambitious efforts in the ugly colonial era are understandable. But any reasonable person, judging by the responses of time and events in the last few decades, knows that it is high time that Africans abandoned that unproven legacy and let go of that now useless propaganda.

In light of these historical insights, I shall discuss in the next section, the mainstay of African philosophy as a systematic study. I shall trace its origin, progress and future concerns, one of which is

¹⁰ K. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

¹¹ A. Rettova, *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*, Stredokluky: Zdenek Susa, 2007.

¹² Cf. James (1954); I. Onyewuenyi (1993).

conversational philosophy. Thereafter, I shall discuss the inauguration of conversational philosophy which had taken place in a previous essay. The discussion here shall focus more on the conceptualization of conversation in philosophy, its promise as a philosophical movement/school, and the power of its approach. After this, I shall discuss the canons of conversational philosophy. These canons shall be presented in form of quality assurance in order to guard against certain problems of philosophizing in Africa today such as lack of rigor, apathy to criticism, the predominance of description over prescription, transliteration, over-modernization, apathy to modernization, etc. Finally, in the conclusion, I shall engage Janz more deeply in an attempt to discern the importance of the concept of philosophical space in the project of African philosophy more clearly.

2 African Philosophy as a Systematic Study

As a systematic study, African philosophy began in the 1920s. This implies that what lay behind, besides being ethnophilosophical, could be regarded as pre-systematic. In the systematic era, we have had the first three periods laying the important foundation that provides the direction for new developments in African philosophy. However, the early, middle, and later periods also suffer from three prominent distractions in the systematic era (1920s-1980s) before the emergence of the contemporary period in the 1990s. These are: 1) the burden of justification, which led to 2) the proliferation of perverse dialogue, and 3) culminated in the production of philosophical nationalism¹³ rather than platial thought, which according to Janz refers to a properly constituted philosophical tradition that attends to the conditions in which its questions arise (2009: 2, 12).¹⁴ This is not to suggest that African philosophy from those periods, despite being greatly short-changed in its focus, has no significance in the history of African philosophy. It is evidently systematic, critical, and rigorous in orien-

¹³ Cf. Chimakonam (2015: xii). Here I conceive of philosophical nationalism as the pattern of thought which demonstrates sympathy toward reclaiming in geography, theme, and personality that which is believed to be truly African. Janz describes it as spatial philosophy, a description I am not comfortable with because it tends to invite confusion with a positively interesting concept of »philosophical space.« See his essay »African Philosophy: Some Basic Questions« in the same volume (2015: 133).

¹⁴ B. Janz, *Philosophy in an African Place*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009.

tation. Above all else, actors were able to clear the air during the debate and their contributions will remain central to the future development of the discipline. But it has its low points too. African philosophy in the first three periods – namely early, middle, and later – was not phenomenological as such; rather it was more meta-philosophical.¹⁵ The bulk of this meta-philosophical activity was about finding a place and from there a space for African philosophy. But Janz cautions by saying that although there are still some doubters out there, there must come a time when one realizes that everyone that is going to be persuaded has already been, and that it is time to move past the attempts at self-justification (Janz 2009: 146). This strengthens the claim that in the first three periods, actors did not address substantive philosophical issues and that they did not engage to a very large extent in fruitful conversations on issues that would seek to unveil the African lifeworld in the light of philosophy. What stood out was the burden of justification as to whether African philosophy existed or not, a proliferation of a perverse dialogue concerning who was petty, biased, racist, or myopic, and a blind effort to recover and reclaim certain historical artifacts – what Janz calls »spatial philosophy« and what he encourages us to deride (Janz 2015: 133). He clearly captures the tension thus:

There is another significant tension. One might distinguish between African philosophy as a spatial or a platial activity. African philosophy is spatial when it thinks of itself as analogous to a country on a map, and sets out to reclaim intellectual territory that was appropriated in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by European thinkers. It defines its borders, establishes citizenry, and defends the »country« against invaders. African philosophy is »platial« when it focuses on phenomenological analysis, that is, when it explicates the meaning of an African life – world for Africans. A platial understanding works out what it means to live in a country (that is, what it means to connect practice and thought in an African context). To the extent that one fights the defensive battle imposed or implied by European thought as it dismisses African philosophy as legitimate, one is engaging in spatial thought. While these battles may be necessary, what makes African philosophy a vital and urgent pursuit for many people is not the spatial response to an external challenge, but rather the explication of meaningful lived experience (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ Meta-philosophy generally refers to the inquiry into the nature of philosophy itself, a kind of philosophy of philosophy and which includes the aims, scope, and methods of philosophy.

Evidently, the burden of the schools that thrived in the early, middle, and the later periods – namely ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, professional school, hermeneutic school and the literary school – was highly spatial according to Janz's preferred terminology but was more nationalist according to my own view. In a later section, I shall engage Janz more deeply in a conversational encounter (Section 5).

What I wish to put forward in this section is a thesis corroborating Janz's discourse on the proper concern of African philosophy in this age. The campaign is seamlessly the same. We must move beyond apologies and initiate a series of conversations that are phenomenological. African philosophy must aim at reaching an Archimedean point – the establishment of a veritable philosophical place from which it can engage contextual, phenomenological issues, as well as other philosophical places. This is what shall characterize African philosophy as a systematic study. In broaching this elevated use of the term ›systematic‹, there is no intention of discrediting the activities of the early, middle, and later periods. They are by no means less systematic. The difference however is, as the tools of philosophy are employed to address the burden of philosophy justifying itself in the three prior periods, little room was created to allow the tools to be applied to other more substantive concerns. Thus, there was a constricted use of philosophical tools in the three prior periods. A question that must be asked is: what is the best form of ›philosophical unveiling‹? Is it when the tools of philosophy are used to assess philosophy itself (meta-philosophical concerns) or when they are employed in assessing other phenomenological concerns of philosophy? The latter is evidently more plausible without diminishing the importance of the former. This is because philosophers may continually discuss their discipline in different modes but they do not earn special accolades by asking metaphilosophical questions such as: what constitutes philosophy? That may be an important question in a first-year philosophy class and indeed in any gathering of philosophers, but by no means in any system-building philosophical enterprise. The burden of justification, which constituted the philosophical center of the three prior periods, can be reduced to that sort of philosophy-questioning-philosophy mode of thought. On the other hand, philosophers are expected to ask questions about other definitive concerns of society, hence they are rightly regarded as society's gadflies.

One problem that could be associated with this philosophy-questioning-philosophy mode of thought is that the tools of philosophy

remain frozen within the circumference of thought itself, whereas ideally, these tools of thought ought to be freed up in phenomenological engagements. It is the liberal manifestation of thought in the activity of critical discourses on issues that touch human society that we call philosophizing. The philosopher analogously becomes the one who has taken his critical mindset far afield. The philosopher sticks their nose into the businesses of other disciplines; raising questions about what many take for granted and unveiling the underlying meanings of reality, some of which go on to have immense implications for life in the society. This philosophical energy is very vital to a society's development that it would be considered wasted for such energy to be dissipated entirely on discussions pertaining to philosophy's status rather than on the intricate nature of reality. This was what the era of debate pursued almost fruitlessly even though it did so in a systematic manner.

Thus, it is not a given that any philosophical activity that is systematic is progressive, or even desirable by virtue of being systematic. By systematic I mean something simple, namely any philosophical activity (properly documented in a human language) that diligently employs the tools of philosophy in drawing its conclusions. The schools in the early, middle, and later periods (ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, hermeneutic and the universalist schools with the exception of the nationalist/ideological school) were variously systematic in their processes, but in my opinion they failed to some extent in completely decentralizing the philosophical tools through critical engagements with the substantive issues that trouble Africa. In other words, being or reality remained partly frozen in these periods. In the absence of any critical fire directed to Being, it stayed at peace within the African context. Clearly unperturbed, Being in African philosophy could not unfold itself during these periods. In no way does this bear good testament to a culture of philosophy. The activity of philosophizing must primarily disquiet Being. It is in the struggle between word and Being that different phenomenological visions of ontology are unveiled. It is in this that philosophy fulfills its obligations to society and pays its debt in the manner that Janz often cites of Jacques Derrida (*ibid.*: 145).¹⁶ To actualize this, philosophy must con-

¹⁶ Janz strongly believes that for African philosophy to grow it must divert attention from fruitless debates and focus on substantive issues that touch on society's problems.

front the norms, the laws, the beliefs, and the various pillars of society. This critical dis-centering of Being often creates a room for new synthesis to emerge which continues to reshape and reorganize society from time to time. This was clearly lacking in the philosophical activities of the schools that thrived in the first three periods of African philosophy. Much of what they did could be summed up as merely talking *about* African philosophy.

It is probably much easier to talk about African philosophy than it is to *do* African philosophy. This is why Godwin Sogolo chides members of the Universalist school who criticize traditional philosophy saying, »it is one thing to point out errors and omissions in what they condemn as African philosophy and it is quite another thing to produce a credible alternative. They may have done the former but surely not the latter« (1988: 111).¹⁷ Thus if African philosophy in this contemporary era is to develop and find ways of unfolding reality, actors must switch gears and begin doing African philosophy, since according to Wiredu, more than enough time has already been devoted to talking about African philosophy, it is high time to get on with the task itself (1980: xi). In different milieus of African philosophy during recent times, phenomenological visions of reality are being unveiled to signal a new direction in African philosophy. For me therefore, Pantaleon Iroegbu's »Uwa Ontology,« Mogobe Ramose's systematized »Ubuntu Ontology,« Innocent Asouzu's »Complementary Ontology,« Ozumba-Chimakonam's »Integrativist Ontology« and Ada Agada's »Consolationist Ontology« are all examples of attempts to disquiet Being in the new era of African philosophy. One common trait linking these sources is that they follow, at least to some degree, the pattern of conversational philosophy. Some scholars have muted the idea of conversations in African philosophy. For example Jennifer Lisa Vest suggests a switch from a perverse dialogue to a necessary one, where her use of dialogue captures our meaning of conversation (Vest 2009:23).¹⁸ Janz, to my knowledge, was the first to employ the term in the technical sense as I use it in this essay. He highlights the importance of conversational engagements in the fu-

¹⁷ G. Sogolo, »African Philosophers and African Philosophy,« *Second Order* (New Series), Vol. 1, No. 1, 1988, pp. 109–113.

¹⁸ J. L. Vest, »Perverse and Necessary Dialogues in African Philosophy,« *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)*, New Series, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 2009, pp. 1–23.

ture development of African philosophy (2009: 148). A few other scholars here and there have been known to employ the term in talking about potential future inquiries in African philosophy.¹⁹ In this essay, we explore conversational philosophy as a new wave of thought in African philosophy and as the very crest upon which the contemporary period rides.

3 Inaugurating the Conversational School²⁰

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information (*cf.* Smith 2004: 285).²¹ Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. By conversational philosophy we mean that type of philosophical engagement between individual thinkers with

¹⁹ F. Ochieng'-Odiambo, R. Burton, and E. Brandon (eds.), *Conversations in Philosophy: Crossing the Boundaries*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008. This book appears to have been appropriately titled, even though there is no chapter that addresses conversations concerning a possible future direction of African philosophy. What the editors pointed out however was the need for conversations to ensue among world philosophies in the understanding that reason is a common human heritage. Muiyiwa Falaiye is another scholar who has employed the term conversations in African philosophy in a rather technical sense (*cf.* F. Muiyiwa, »Transmitting Philosophic Knowledge without Writing: The Ekiti-Yoruba Philosophic Sagacity Experience,« *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2005, pp. 55–74). However, he represents a neo-Orukan dynasty. His own understanding and use of the term advances Oruka's approach to philosophic sagacity where a professional philosopher holds a conversation with a village sage. Perhaps, it was Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) that first employed the term »conversation« in the sense I already attributed to Oruka. That is not the sense in which we employ it in this essay. For an example of our sense of the term, see Chimakonam (2015: xiv–xv, 28–34).

²⁰ A little conceptual clarification is called for here. Conversational philosophy is what I call the school; conversational refers to the movement aimed at advancing the idea of conversational philosophizing, while conversationalism refers to the method. I wish for readers and commentators to maintain consistency in the usage of these three concepts.

²¹ S. Smith (ed.), *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language: Encyclopedic Edition*, Florida: Trident Press, 2004.

one another, on phenomenological issues of concern, or on one another's thoughts where thoughts are unfolded from concepts or from concepts of concepts.²² Conversational philosophy is therefore more than a dialogue; it is an encounter between proponents and opponents, or a proponent and an opponent engaged in contestations and protestations of ideas and thoughts. A conversational school therefore would be any circle of like-minded philosophers who adopt this approach in their practice of philosophy. For me, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but also the practice of philosophy in our age generally.

The New Era or Contemporary Period of African philosophy necessarily emerged out of the disillusionment of the post-debate era. The post-debate disillusionment occurred at a time when philosophical particularism²³ (traditional philosophy) had been completely discouraged and philosophical universalism (professional philosophy) had grown out of fashion as a result of its failure to sustain hope and provide a new direction for African philosophy. It was a time when there was nothing more worth debating, and where there was no one worth debating with on the subject of the existence of African philosophy. Vest captures this disillusionment where she admonishes:

While engagement in perverse dialogues may have been necessary in the early formulations of African philosophy, there is no reason at this point for African philosophy to continue to allow their ubiquitous influence on it. By becoming aware of the tendency to engage in such dialogues by African philosophers in various schools of thought, we can approach our work more critically and refuse to engage in these preoccupations, thus freeing ourselves to pursue other more important subjects. Checking for perverse preoccupations should be one of the tests each new work in African philosophy is subjected to (Vest 2009: 21).

Attending to Vest's caution above is unarguably part of the focus of this essay. To actualize the vision of a new direction, we propose a

²² By concepts of concepts, I mean further interesting ideas or notions inspired by the discussion of particular concepts.

²³ Note however, that in the recent African philosophy literature the 'particular' has come to acquire two meanings, old and new. While the old can be fairly referred to as 'traditional philosophy,' the new refers to 'philosophy tradition.' The latter makes it possible for one to be an advocate of relative but universalizable systems of philosophy without being an advocate of traditional philosophy or, which is worse, 'ethno-philosophy.' My usage of the term 'particular' in this work shall dart between the two senses depending on the context.

conversational order in African philosophy. This entails promoting conversational philosophy as a new school of thought that characterizes the contemporary period of the discipline. In the early 1990s, some emerging scholars regarded conversational thinking on substantive issues as a new attraction in opposition to the outmoded 'orientation of perverse dialogue.' By the time of the new millennium this new orientation had begun to take shape. Among its pioneers are Pantaleon Iroegbu and much later, Innocent Asouzu. The conversational school has become the new school of thought to which all who esteem the interplay of rigorous engagements between African philosophers on relevant phenomenological issues belong. Conversational philosophy does not aim at interpreting traditional culture, even though it adopts an African mode of thought in its analyses as the usable past²⁴ or valuable past²⁵ or what I shall prefer to call 'relevant tradition,' which is relevant to the modern synthesis. I prefer the term 'relevant tradition' to the expressions preferred by Bogumil Jewsiewicki (usable past) and Janheinz Jahn (valuable past) because anybody can find any part of African culture usable or valuable irrespective of what he/she finds of interest. Again, the term 'past' does not properly refer to African culture of the pre-colonial era. 'Past' could mean a thousand years ago; it could also mean a day ago, which is quite confusing and unclear. The expression 'relevant tradition' on the other hand highlights the importance of taking only what is relevant in constructing modern philosophical syntheses and the term 'tradition,'²⁶ as we have employed it, appropriately designates pre-colonial African thought as it existed then and as it may still exist in the present through generational transfer.

Conversational philosophy does not blindly apply Western modes of thought in analyzing African issues. Actors must therefore note that by conversational philosophy, we do not mean critical engagements between African philosophers in a simplistic sense; we mean to say also that these tools of textual criticism, rigor, analysis, and the sundry modern philosophical tools we employ have been Africanized such that in applying them, we designate an African

²⁴ B. Jewsiewicki, 'African Historical Studies: Academic Knowledge as 'Usable Past' and Radical Scholarship,' *The African Studies Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1989, pp. 1–76.

²⁵ J. Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 16.

²⁶ For a multi-perspective interpretation of the term tradition, see the second chapter of Janz (2009: 37–62).

mode of thought. For example, critical analysis in African philosophy does not only imply fault-finding in order to deepen understanding, but in addition, it implies the idea of reconstruction. In other words, when we employ critical analysis in African philosophy, we aim in the final lap of the exercise to reconstruct faulty areas, not just to identify them. This is because the edifice of African episteme has yet to form a mountain, hence any part that is destroyed must be rebuilt. Thus, conversational is what I call the movement that thrives in this contemporary era. Presently, genuine conversations in African philosophy are taking place between some actors such as Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu, Kwame Gyekye, Bruce Janz, Kwame Appiah, Jennifer Lisa Vest, Jonathan Chimakonam, Ada Agada, to name a few. By conversational philosophy I mean the rigorous engagement of individual African philosophers with one another, or their works, in the creation of critical narratives using an African mode of thought. Even though some works in this area, like those of Kwame Appiah, still fall short²⁷ of employing the African mode of thought, we can admit them once we view conversational philosophy as an evolving pattern of thought. On the whole, the conversational orientation clearly defines African philosophy as a platial enterprise commanding phenomenological preoccupations that do not lead to ethnophilosophy. As Janz points out:

The geography of philosophy does not lead to ethnophilosophy. Placing philosophy in a geography suggests that it has contingent but not arbitrary interest, that it responds to and shapes a particular set of conditions of reflection. It is the contention of this book that philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish philosophy's traditional (although never completely fulfilled) striving for universals (Janz 2009: 2).

Thus, drawing from the above, we emphasize that conversational philosophy, though riding on the crest of an African mode of thought, is universalizable. Additionally, this emerging school thrives on fulfilling the yearning of the professional/modernist school to have a robust individual discourse while also thriving on fulfilling one of the convictions of the traditionalists that a thoroughgoing African philosophy has to be established upon the foundation of the African sys-

²⁷ It is probably because some of these actors have been immersed in Western thought through a stringent process of education that they could not or would not interpret reality otherwise.

tem of thought.²⁸ Conversationalists make the most of the criterion which presents African philosophy as a critical tradition projecting individual discourses from the system of thought of Africa. It is not plagued by the distractions of burden of justification, perverse dialogue, or philosophical nationalism. It neither aims to prove a point, nor does it seek to attack a group, nor does it strive to reclaim some territories or personalities; in conversing, it simply looks forward to the future unhindered by tradition and does not look backwards tied to the past. It is at the conversational level that substantive issues can be tackled in African philosophy. For example, Vest suggests:

Determining whether or not existing debates are perverse in origin can aid African thinkers in identifying debates that are necessary to the development of the discipline and not merely prompted by external representations and the need to reply to them. If there is a widespread belief in witches in many parts of Africa, perhaps a debate on the ontology of witchcraft is necessary, regardless of how it fits into existing discourses of primitive religions authored by Western writers. If there is a widespread belief in intimate ontological relationships between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects, then perhaps an African metaphysician should explore this idea, regardless of how it might be disparaged by European thinkers who might classify such beliefs as animistic and therefore not worthy of investigation. Perhaps the ideas of important men and women ought to be studied by Sage philosophers whether or not they can be compared to the ideas of Socrates. Perhaps African languages ought to be studied for their epistemological insights regardless of whether similar insights can be found in Anglo-American Analytic investigations of language. Perhaps African philosophers ought to engage in intercultural dialogues with Asian, Native

²⁸ Perhaps the definite article »the« would be more appropriate in describing African system of thought because it eliminates pluralities that the indefinite article »an« would suggest. The African system of thought, as used in this work, thus refers to a common index that characterizes ontology in many African cultures – being as communitarian or complementary. That this common index exists has been supported in writing by the likes of Tempels Placid, John Mbiti, William Abraham, T. Uzodinma Nwala, C. B. Nze, Olusegun Oladipo, and Innocent Onyewuenyi to name but a few. Cf. W. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; P. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri: International Universities Press, 1995; L. Keita, »The African Philosophical Tradition,« R. A. Wright, (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, ³1984; J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969; U. Nwala Igbo *Philosophy*, London: Lantern Books, 1985; C. B. Nze, *Aspects of African Communalism*, Nigeria: Veritas Publication, 1989; I. Onyewuenyi, »Is There an African Philosophy,« *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, T. Serequeberhan (ed.), New York: Paragon House, 1991. pp. 29–46.

American and African American philosophers, and no longer focus all of their attention on Western interlocutors. Perhaps efforts such as these will lead to a definition by African philosophers of the Necessary Debates in their field (Vest 2009: 20).

Although above categorizations made by Vest are not as definite as one would wish, they nonetheless point clearly to their phenomenological status. It should be noted that by exploring the belief in witches, for example, Vest does not mean a description of a people's belief system concerning witches, which is exactly the same thing ethnophilesophers and some members of the literary and the hermeneutical schools would do. Vest refers to a rigorous and critical engagement of the ontology of witches, leading to both epistemological and metaphysical results.

Janz also explores what the focus of the conversational school in African philosophy should be as the discipline develops greater sophistication. Dwelling, as the ethnophilesophers and indeed other schools of thoughts have, on one form of distraction or another has become not only unfashionable but untenable. For him therefore:

I have argued that a great deal of effort has been expended in solidifying African philosophy's place in the philosophical world, and that this impulse, while important, does not exhaust the creative possibilities for African philosophy. In the coming decades, we can expect African philosophy to mature, by which I mean that it will find new conversations (other than primarily with Western philosophy); it will find ways of including groups that are currently under-represented (particularly women); it will further develop conversations among scholars themselves, rather than focusing on interpreting traditional culture or applying Western modes of thought to African issues; and it will include ›platial‹ rather than only ›spatial‹ philosophy in the sense I have described. African philosophy stands as both an important critical and reflective movement in world philosophy, and a contribution to the world of philosophy by working out how, in the words of Derrida, philosophy can honour its ›debts and duties‹ (Janz 2015: 144–145).

At a conversational level, the debt and duties of African philosophy would lie in addressing issues that touch upon Africa, whether in the present or potentially in the future. The method called conversationalism aims at employing reason in identifying problems in the study of substantive issues and proffering solutions in the form of new syntheses. Critical rigor and analytic engagements are also part of this discourse in which the African mode of thought is projected. The African mode of thought is a rational framework in which:

1. The opposite ends are not strictly regarded as contradictories, but as sub-contraries, 2. There is a possibility of a complementary synthesis of seemingly opposed variables, 3. That 1 and 2 above make the intermediate value possible through what is called ›truth-value glut.‹ Put simplistically, working by way of analogy, the African mode of thought considers life to be larger than logic with regards to the strict application of the law of contradiction and the principle of bivalence. A considerable dilution of the strict application of the classical laws of thought is manifest in the African mode of thought.²⁹ This dilution does not suggest the outright violation of the principle of contradiction, but rather a clever application of same in which there is room to say that between two seemingly opposed variables, a middle point can be found.

As might be expected, the idea is that by employing the African mode of thought issues in African philosophy can be analyzed in a more meaningful and platial way that would also resonate well with the idea of universal applicability. Examples of such issues include: the impact of democracy in Africa, what constitutes relevant knowledge for Africa, the notion of human rights in the undeveloped and developing parts of Africa, the significance of modernization in Africa, fundamentalism, the impact and relevance of religion in Africa, the role of education in Africa, the question of civilizing attitudes, individual liberty, ›bush mentality,‹ the problem of poverty, the challenge of ignorance, the dearth of enlightened leaders, the problem of followership, the question of progress – economic, political, technological, intellectual as the case may be, gay rights, the question of freedom, the question of reason, environmental challenges, corruption, animal rights, the question of creativity and originality, the question of innovation, and finally the questions concerning the sage – Who is a sage, who should he or she be? Is there still a need for sages in modern Africa? Is he/she the elder/oldest in the family, work place, community? Or is he/she the most enlightened? Continuing with other issues that touch on youth and liberty, we may ask; what are the roles of the youth in building a thriving Africa, what should they

²⁹ Cf. J. Chimakonam, ›Ezumezu: A Variant of Three-Valued Logic – Insights and Controversies,‹ Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, Free State University, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Jan. 20–22, 2014; See also A. Agada, *Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy*, J. O. Chimakonam (ed.) (Minnesota: Paragon House, 2015), p. 322.

be? What is the extent of their rights and liberties? What does equality mean for us, what should it mean? How should we define this concept within the relational matrix of men and women, and of adults and children? Where ought individuality find its place? What of freedom of speech? What of the courage to speak out? What of the journey of reason in Africa? What is the place of reason? What are the reasons why one should speak out? To what extent should numbers matter in policy issues in Africa? And the list goes on. In any event, these are some of the issues that should occupy contemporary African philosophers working for the good of what Innocent Asouzu calls the Africa we know (Asouzu 2004: 216).³⁰ To further make clear the focus of conversational philosophy, I shall outline its canons in the following section.

4 Canons of Conversational Philosophy

Canons generally refer to the standard rules or norms of a given system. The canons of conversational philosophy thus aim to streamline the minimum requirement, mode, focus, and direction of thinking in contemporary African philosophy. In essence, they are to serve as a check against illicit philosophical posturing³¹ which has been on the rise in African philosophy in the wake of post-debate disillusionment. Some self-styled African philosophers have taken advantage of the absence of standards to introduce confusion in a *systemless* African philosophy. They publish descriptive cultural inquiries lacking in systematicity and christen such work African philosophy. In the absence of properly formulated criteria and goals, African philosophy has remained in a vicious circle of burden of justification, perverse orientation, and philosophical nationalism.

Vest (2009: 21) was one of those who had called for some measures or tests to determine what falls under the category of properly produced African philosophy and to check the proliferation of illicit

³⁰ I. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection In and Beyond African Philosophy*, Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2004.

³¹ By illicit philosophical posturing I mean attempts that disregard the common indices of philosophical constructions. For example, it is accepted that proper philosophical systems are critical, argumentative, rigorous, categorical, prescriptive, questioning, evaluative, etc. An illicit philosophizing would include attempts that are merely descriptive, hypothetical, and narrative.

philosophizing. Thus to break through this logjam, it has become imperative to formulate these canons in order both to guide and to check standards in African philosophy; to wit:

1. Critical conversation: This canon stipulates that a standard work in African philosophy is one in which the author engages other authors/positions/philosophical traditions in a critical conversation.
2. Transformative indigenization: This canon stipulates that when authors write on non-African issues or employ foreign methods,³² they should endeavor to indigenize them through contextual transformation that would give them relevance in (contingent) African thought. The idea of indigenization is simply about finding contextual relevance and in no way does it suggest any kind of cultural bracketing of which ethnophilosophy is so often accused.
3. Noetic re-Africanization: This canon stipulates that an African philosopher is one who is versed in African intellectual life. But when such a person derails as a result of contact or undue influence by, Western mode of thought, such a person must deliberately undergo a measure of re-Africanization (a retuning or re-conscientization) in which he/she delicately balances Western and African modes of thought, recognizing the relevance of both modes in the construction of epistemes such as what Janheinz Jahn would refer to as the »neo-African culture« (Jahn 1961: 16–18). Again, the idea of an African mode of thought as used here does not suggest a culturally exclusive logic with separate set of rules of thought; rather it makes allusion to nuances in the application of those same rules. Odera Oruka in particular has made a strong reference to the importance of the writer of African philosophy being versed in the culture and intellectual life of Africa (Oruka 1975: 50).
4. Moderate decolonization: This canon stipulates that the African philosopher's posture toward African philosophy should not be

³² My reference to foreign methods should not be understood as creating a dichotomy between local and foreign methods unique unto themselves and with varying ontological commitments. In other words, I do not mean to say that they are methods that are tailor-made for African and Western philosophies respectively. I mean to say rather, that these are methods adequate for philosophizing in any tradition but which happen to be developed in Africa by African philosophers and in the West by Western philosophers.

that of radical decolonization as advocated by Kwasi Wiredu³³ but rather of moderate decolonization that would suggest the relevance of some parts of colonial mode of thought. This canon also stipulates that there shall not be any racial bar as to who is or can be an African philosopher. To me, anyone, regardless of racial background, can be an African philosopher. This subverts Paulin Hountondji's prescription that an African philosopher must be in fact an African (Hountondji 1996: xii).³⁴

5. Constructive modernization: This canon stipulates that a standard work in African philosophy is one that marks a fusion of relevant modernity (Western thought) and relevant tradition (African thought).
6. Non-veneration of authorities: This canon stipulates that any work in African philosophy, irrespective of the author, deserves a full measure of peer criticism. This canon can be credited to Peter Bodunrin (1985: xii, xiv).³⁵
7. Theoretic interrogation: This canon stipulates that the best route to the progressive development of African philosophy is through continuous interrogation. This interrogation involves peer-criticism, critical, but creative (re)construction of thoughts of fellow actors aimed at increasing the sophistication of the episteme. It recognizes Karl Popper's thesis that knowledge grows when we learn and correct our mistakes (2002: xii).³⁶
8. Checking perverse dialogues: This canon can be attributed to Jennifer Lisa Vest³⁷ and it stipulates that before any work is acknowledged as properly produced contemporary African philosophy, it must pass the test for perverse orientation (*ibid.*: 21).

Understandably, so important is this quest for progress in a conversational school structured to open new vistas in African philosophy that

³³ K. Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy: Four Essays*, O. Oladipo (ed.), Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995, pp. 22–23. For a critique of Wiredu's conceptual decolonization see M. Edet, 'The Question of »Conceptual Decolonization« in African Philosophy and the Problem of the Language of »African« Philosophy: A Critique of Kwasi Wiredu and a Proposal for Conceptual Mandelanization in the Africa We Know» (Chimakonam 2015: 197–218).

³⁴ P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

³⁵ P. Bodunrin, *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*, Ile-Ife: University of Ile-Ife Press, 1985.

³⁶ K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, London: Routledge, 2002.

³⁷ Vest (2009: 21).

we devote this essay to it. One might ask: why should we bother with establishing canons? Does that not suggest a hegemonic sort of gate-keeping? And why should we indulge a new school of thought anyway? There is what I have labeled seven bulwarks that vitiate the growth and progress of African philosophy. These bulwarks are products of false attitudes, misinformation, and innocent misconceptions afflicting many African philosophers, which in turn vitiate the quality of the philosophy they produce. My list includes: historicist bandwagon, philosophical nationalism, cultural nostalgia, perverse orientation, Hountondji's dilemma, methodic apathy, and logical schizophrenia (see Chimakonam 2015: xii–xiv). It is important to explain however that the declaration of these canons is not intended to discriminate against some African philosophers, but rather that it aims at saving African philosophy from impending stagnation. Thus instead of looking at it as a means of excluding some works in African philosophy; it can be viewed in its positive light, which is as a means of including more works within African philosophy. Evidently, in the absence of a minimum standard, some African philosophers may be encouraged to put forward structures that would prove detrimental to the system.

The problem of a »copycat philosophy,« which Asouzu (2007: 30)³⁸ identified some time ago, has taken a firm grip such that non-Africans are beginning to level it as something of an accusation against African philosophers.³⁹ One of the most popular forms of copycat philosophy can be found in the type of books published by many philosophers in African universities. They buy one or two Western-authored books and then carefully re-copy the works, changing grammar from time to time, eventually binding it into classroom textbooks on ethics, epistemology, or metaphysics, as the case may be.

Added to the above is the problem I shall like to call »patronizing philosophy.« This is an intellectually retrogressive practice where some African philosophers expect their peers and students to praise (patronize) their works while they seldom condone any criticism.

³⁸ I. Asouzu, *Ibaru: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy Beyond African Philosophy*, Münster: Litverlag, 2007.

³⁹ J. Hengelbrock, »You Cannot Free Yourself from Hegel: An Encounter with Heinz Kimmerle,« see H. Kimmerle's response in the same volume: »The Stranger between Oppression and Superiority, Close encounter with Heinz Kimmerle,« *Intercultural Communication*, Introduction by J. Hoogland (www.galerie-inter.de/kimmerle; last retrieved 12 December 2014).

This in particular, now, threatens to destroy the post-graduate programs of philosophy in many African universities, Nigeria in particular. Academic journals are no longer peer-reviewed. My experience as a journal editor has been dismaying. For each volume that we publish, nearly fifty percent of reviewed articles are never resubmitted for publication. Authors simply frown at the critical commentaries and back off. I believe it was experiences like this that forced some philosophy journals to set aside processes of peer-review entirely and publish whatever colleagues submit after mild proofreading or grammar checks. Yet again though, we must not sweep under the rug the increasing trend among African philosophers where reviewers have tended to be more destructive rather than constructive. They emotionally attack an essay that they have been asked to review. As an editor, I have been disheartened to see language that betrays the passionate intent of some reviewers to destroy. Let there be no mistake; this »green« attitude has also discouraged many writers of African philosophy and kept many journals out of circulation.

The above problem connects well with another problem that Peter Bodunrin calls the »veneration of authorities« (1985: xii, xiv). Senior colleagues, particularly those who have been made professors, expect younger colleagues to deify them and venerate whatever they have written, even if such is lacking in depth. A certain professor colleague of mine once attempted bullying me into publishing a sub-standard article that he had helped a friend to put together. My insistence on the valid and recommended corrections needed to be made ended our friendship. This was what the distinguished Peter Bodunrin tried to warn against in 1985 when he urged African philosophers to develop scientific attitudes; to wit:

Essential features of the scientific attitude is freedom of enquiry, openness to criticism, a general type of skepticism and fallibilism and non-veneration of authorities [...] philosophy thrives on mutual criticism, and criticism is best when it is directed at those who are in a position to reply (Bodunrin 1985: xii, xiv).

The brilliant Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji corroborates this view when he points to the gains he had made as a result of the ideas of his critics, writing: »Yet I am grateful to most of my critics for prompting me to clarify certain ambiguities, refine some notions, and occasionally, deepen the analysis« (Hountondji 1996: viii). The growing culture in Nigerian academia, in which peer criticism is deni-

grated, calls for a collective fight. I must admit that some of these attitudes highlighted above are not peculiar to African academia, by no means. But it does seem that they are more serious and deeply entrenched (to a level of utter devastation of scholarship) in Africa, and this is what I decry.

Another problem is that of anachronism. Many essays and (annoyingly, too) a good number of full-length books published by some African colleagues and purporting to defend some thesis or another are anachronistic. That is to say, authors of such works fail to cite colleagues who have already written on the ideas in question, leading these authors to present such ideas as though they were the first to dwell on them – call it »the first-to-do-it syndrome.« Another form of anachronism inspired by petty attitudes is what occurs when authors intentionally avoid citing a colleague who is working in the same area or one who has criticized their works. They go ahead to appropriate the gains of the criticism in another work without citing the colleague from whose critique or work they have benefitted. All of this and more make it imperative for us to introduce certain canons of practice in African philosophy in order to enable us check against plummeting standards in the construction of contemporary African philosophy. Another accompanying reason comes with the observation that in general practice in most places, every progressive system is backed up by a minimum standard of practice.

5 Conclusion: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of »Philosophical Space«

Having come thus far in our explication of conversational philosophy, I shall conclude this paper by reflecting on the thoughts of Janz, specifically on his conception of philosophical space. I want to hold this conversation with the brilliant African philosopher Janz here for two reasons: Janz is one of the few African philosophers today who promote conversational philosophy in exciting ways and in the spirit of conversational philosophy, as sketched above. I have found reason to converse with him in order to deepen the definition and conception of what I shall call »philosophical space,« a notion which he first suggests in *Philosophy in an African Place*. However, his treatment of this important concept was indirect, which necessitates this conversation. In treating the question of the topeme, he juxtaposes space with

place and sees space as allied with, or as a function of, modernity, whereas place is seen as traditional (Janz 2009: 13–14). He attributes the character of the globalization or the spatialization of thought to space and suggests that places point to cultural units (what he terms »platial philosophy«), just as space could be conceived as their common ground. I agree with his conception of »platial philosophy,« which I alternatively dub »philosophical place,« and I reckon with his idea of »space,« which I dub »philosophical space.« My aim in this conversation is to move from Janz's articulation and deepen the concept of »philosophical space,« to draw attention to it, and to make it more regular in the African philosophical place. The ideas of these two concepts (philosophical space and philosophical place) bring to life the discourses in African philosophy on universalism and particularism respectively.

A number of African philosophers, and Wiredu, in particular, have dedicated space in writings to the dicey issues of universalism and particularism⁴⁰ as they affect the African philosophical tradition. The lead questions generally are: Is African philosophy African and universal? Or is it African and border-sensitive? If it is border-sensitive, what makes it philosophy and if it is universal, what makes it African? Wiredu was able to show that it is perfectly possible for a discourse to be African (particular, in which an attempt is made to answer the philosophical questions that are raised within a given culture) and also universal, provided certain conditions like critical rigor and rational individual engagements are met in its construction, with these marking some of our shared traits as human species (*ibid.*: 1–9). Employing a different terminology, to wit »place,« Janz drove home this point in his book appropriately titled *Philosophy in an African Place*, arguing that different philosophy traditions in the world represent different philosophical places. Put in his terms, Janz observes that the geography of philosophy (particularism) does not lead to ethno-philosophy. Placing philosophy in a geography simply suggests that it has contingent but not arbitrary interest, that it responds to and shapes a particular set of conditions of reflection. It is therefore the contention of Janz that philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish

⁴⁰ K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

philosophy's traditional (although never completely fulfilled) striving for universals (2009: 2).

Thus with the idea above Janz suggests that philosophical places (platial philosophies) are particulars which do not short-change their universal inclination and whose particular resurgence is not silenced by their universal resonance. A lot has been said about the criteria of universal philosophy or of the identity of any philosophy that is at once particular and universal, so I shall not dwell broadly on such a metaphilosophical exercise here. Members of the professional school in African philosophy made it their goal to establish these criteria and they did so in no confusing terms. Such a philosophy, they say, must be rigorous, critical, as well as individualistic and it must thrive on Western methods such as analysis.⁴¹

My conversation with Janz here would not be defined by the question of whether African philosophy credibly constitutes a »philosophical place,« for that is now a foregone conclusion. It would however be defined by his conception of »space,« which I find among other things, full of insights, although these are largely undeveloped. Before I begin, it is important that I distinguish between his conception of »space« and his conception of »spatial philosophy« – two seemingly related concepts but with different meanings.⁴² »Space« for him stands at the opposite end of »place« as a form of common ground where different philosophical places can relate to each other (Janz 2009: 14), perhaps in a form of intercultural conversation. On the other hand, Janz explains in another work that:

African philosophy is spatial when it thinks of itself as analogous to a country on a map, and sets out to reclaim intellectual territory that was appropriated in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by European thinkers. It defines its borders, establishes citizenry, and defends the »country« against invaders (Janz 2015: 133).

He suggests this also in another earlier work (Janz 2009: 28–29). It must be stated here that Janz's conceptions of »spatial philosophy«

⁴¹ For material concerning this argument, see the following works: O. Oruka, »The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy,« *Second Order*, Vol. 4, No. 1 1975; K. Wiredu, »On Defining African Philosophy,« in Momoh 2000; Wright (1984); H. Maurier, »Do We have an African Philosophy?« Wright (1984); Hountondji (1996); P. Bodunrin, »The Question of African Philosophy,« in Wright (1984).

⁴² I wish to acknowledge one of the anonymous reviewers of the draft manuscript of this paper for drawing my attention to this distinction.

and »space« could very easily lead to a misreading of him. Evidently, he derived the qualifying terms »patial« and »spatial« from the concepts of »place« and »space« respectively. But, while he went on to developpatial philosophy as an offshoot of his concept of »place,« he did not do the same with »spatial philosophy« and his concept of »space.« Granting his poetic license to do as he did, it must not be ignored that the style was cumbersome in a way that could deceive his readers upon first sight. Keeping this distinction constantly in mind could save us from the problems arising from amphibious shifts in the meanings derivable from his concepts and his conceptions of them. Janz evidently did not consider this very seriously. His conception of »space,« or what I call »philosophical space,« therefore would not provide the abstract framework for his conception of »spatial philosophy,« conceived of as something resembling a geographical map, one which some African philosophers might strive to appropriate and defend. Instead he conceives of it as a framework where the various philosophical places could converge to relate to each other. Agreements with this conception notwithstanding, I choose to think more of the importance and significance of »philosophical space« especially in connection to my idea of the contemporary development of African philosophy as being conversational. In philosophical space, I find an abstract *agora* for intercultural and cross-cultural conversations where various philosophical places might be able to transcend mere relation and become able to look at their shared values and points of divergence. It is where each party could contest what is claimed to be exclusively owned and protest what appears to be commonly shared. In one word, »philosophical space,« for me, is the hub of comparative and intercultural thought into which various philosophical places strive to enter.

The position of Janz on »space« is not so far away from mine, as he clearly recognizes the importance of a common *agora*. According to him:

Place is not space, after all, and if we start with the idea that philosophy comes from place, are we also faced with the impossibility of finding common ground for those places? In short, if we start from place, and ask about the place(s) of African philosophy, our problem becomes how (or whether) those places can relate to each other [...] The question of the *topeme* also raises the issue of the distinction between space and place. Space is sometimes seen to be allied with, or a function of, modernity, while place is seen as more traditional. This might suggest that a place is an irreducible unit of

cultural meaning, which is being destroyed by spatial thinking in the form of globalization (Janz 2009: 13–14).

In the above passage Janz recognizes that the idea of philosophical places suggests strongly the idea of a common ground. He did not however identify this common ground as »philosophical space,« as I now do. He identifies it simply as »space,« which in my view is too simplistic and which either belittles the significance of the concept in the new era of African philosophy or fails to transform it into a viable concept for the future development of African philosophy.

Therefore, in this new age of African philosophy the concept of philosophical space is pregnant. It is more so in that it holds the key to better understanding of the (1) significance of intercultural/comparative thought in our age, and (2) the importance of the reducibility of positions to different philosophical places. While the significance of the former cannot be compromised, the importance of the latter can no longer be questioned, let alone ignored. For me, the important idea that arises in the constitution of philosophical space is a new one and can be formulated simply as that of contestation and protestation, i. e. some philosophical places contesting whether »one« deserves a space and »one« protesting that it does deserve a space. Janz even makes allusion to this idea of contestation and protestation when he states that »African philosophy has a space in the world of philosophy, it has just not yet been recognized« (Janz 2009: 29). Thus, the philosophical space serves for me as a harbinger of what I shall call the »Global Expansion of Thought« (GET). For me, GET entails the exportation of the fruits of the philosophical places to the market of philosophical space. Janz also makes allusion to this notion when he employs the terms spatialization and globalization (*ibid.*: 14). However, he appears to express concern that the spatial tendency in African philosophy can result in a lack of attention to place (*ibid.*: 14). Janz's worry is that the drive toward globalized thought could have an uncharitable effect on philosophical places such as that of African philosophy by reducing its assumptions to mere cases in point. I shall hesitate to agree with Janz on this position. I think that this matter is more about an individual's state of mind. It is hardly definite. I can choose to see the GET as having a clearly positive effect on philosophical places by constituting them as genuine contexts in which the universal mind unfolds – a form of contextual manifestation of philosophical reason. In conversational philosophy, the actors mentioned in this essay are philoso-

phers who have sought to establish African philosophy as a place from where they attempted to find a space for it within philosophical space. In no way have their thoughts or approaches translated into a petty geographical reduction.

From the foregoing therefore, one may find that it is not the authenticity of Janz's conception of ›space‹ that compels this conversation; it is rather its conceptualization and its depth. For one, the word ›space‹ is too simplistic. It is a common concept that dots the horizon of many disciplines such as geometry, physics, geography, astronomy, and architecture, to name just a few. To conceptualize it simplistically in philosophy would do no more than evoke a familiar impression. To avoid this possible objection, I have conceptualized it as »philosophical space.« One might be tempted to ask: so what is the difference? Disappointingly, there is none essentially besides a stronger image or impression. Yet it is this that makes all the difference when philosophers choose one theory to analyze from a pack of a thousand others. Employing the adjective ›philosophical‹ to qualify space concretely locates the concept within philosophy and readily whips up the interest of philosophers. Without the adjective however, the conceptualization ›space‹ and the passing conceptualization Janz gives it make it sound more like an orphan. I do not see how that conception and conceptualization could open further vistas. It is as if one is told an important story in an uninspiring way. There is a sneering road-end to this conception and conceptualization. ›Space‹ as a common ground where philosophical places could relate is not only lacking in depth but is also too simplistic. Janz's presentation of this concept is like a flash in a pan, hardly vigorous enough to command enduring attention.

Indeed, in the later chapters of his book (Chapters 5 and 8) he hits upon the concept of space as a common ground every now and then. In one passage, he discusses the attempts by Wiredu and Oruka to establish a common ground for communication between cultures, but that is still insufficient. Janz was for the most part directly dealing with the more familiar idea of cultural universals, touching on the argument that universals should not pose a barrier to the manifestation of particulars. My conversation with Janz here aims at deepening that conception of ›space‹ beginning with its re-conceptualization as »philosophical space.« Interestingly, concepts are not only important in philosophy; they are the engine that spins out new thoughts. Janz states pointedly that concepts are used creatively to produce new con-

cepts through asking new questions (*ibid.*: 213). As cardinal as the role of concepts in thought might be, it should not be ignored that they are just about the most unfaithful, if not outright flirtatious entities in philosophy. This is because, by the power of stipulation, philosophers are always able to define concepts to suit their projects. And taking up that same simplistic method, many a philosopher's definitions of a certain concepts differ in degree from those of others. Beyond this though, concepts become messengers of the philosophical enterprise carrying meanings that dart from context to context. This has not and will never deduct from the value of concepts in philosophy whether it is in terms of place or in space.

I think that to develop African philosophy in a conversational mode, we must concentrate on generating new concepts. Janz (*ibid.*) does not think otherwise, but his inattention to the genetic coloration of new concepts where he conceptualizes ›space‹ is costly. We must find ways to compel the existing concepts to bear witness against themselves rather than attempting to silence them – a form of an inbuilt termination mechanism; and we must aim at making the concepts come alive, not at deactivating them. As unimportant as this proposal might sound, philosophers are unlikely to be attracted to a dull conceptualization. And until philosophers employ concepts creatively by asking questions, new concepts cannot be produced. Concepts, on their own, do not cross-pollinate. To this end, my rejection of Janz's conceptualization of space is a protestation aimed at reactivating the concept. Janz, in his interpretation, has literally silenced the pregnant concept of space in philosophy. It does appear, therefore, that to rescue the concept from Janz's dull conceptualization is one of the focal points of this conversation. Thus rather than ›space‹, I say »philosophical space.«

By philosophical space, I mean that abstract meeting point of world philosophies. The encounter that occurs in this space has variously been described as one of intercultural or comparative philosophy. In this way, the philosophical space would stand at the opposite end of philosophical place or platial philosophy. The idea is that with their various relative geographies, different philosophical traditions represent, as we have said, the philosophical places (cultures) that inspire their emergence. Yet, each, in a sustained movement towards the universal, converges with other philosophical traditions at a comparative level. This is what I have chosen to interpret as philosophical space. In a way, this conceptualization also makes clear a sense of the

frequently asked question: can a philosophy be particular (African, Oriental, Caribbean, Western, etc., in a relative sense) and still be universal? The answer is plain; every philosophical tradition is first relative in the sense that each arises as a result of questions asked in a particular culture and becomes universal or universalizable when the attempts to answer those culture-inspired questions are made following procedures which may not be identical with those of other traditions, but which represent the same universal standard. Hence, it is my argument that every philosophical place should strive to enter a philosophical space where it initiates further conversations with other traditions. Let me attempt a diagrammatic representation of this movement below.

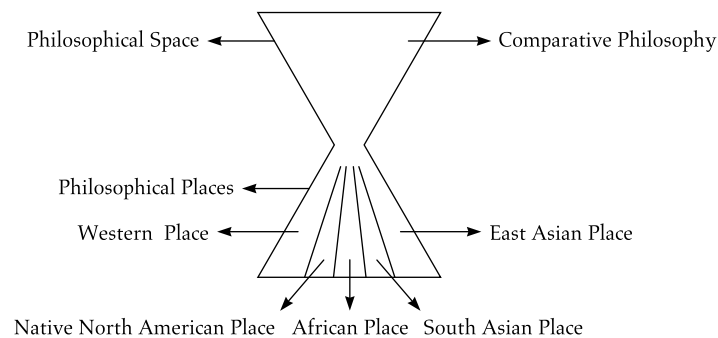


Figure 1. Place-space diagram in African Philosophy

The point of this diagram is to demonstrate the necessary interconnections that must exist among different philosophical traditions. It means that the activity of philosophizing or conversation is not exhausted in philosophical places. As autonomous as these places may seem, the sublime philosophical goal must be to reach philosophical space and converse with other world philosophies. This spatial conversation, it must be remarked, is not a replacement for platial conversations. This still leaves philosophical place at a point of great importance because it is where the philosopher actually emerges from, whereas philosophical space is what he/she strives for.

But philosophical places, however and wherever they are constituted, must be wary of the danger of what I would like to call »conceptual envelopment« – an unintended ethnocentric bracketing of concepts in a philosophical tradition such that they are not considered

open to use by other traditions. Any philosophical place is guilty of »conceptual envelopment« when its accumulated concepts are treated as if they are privileged philosophical paraphernalia of its designated place and would not be relevant in other philosophical places. In this way, actors of a designated philosophical tradition could unconsciously believe that whatever appropriation of these concepts and tools of reasoning done by the »other« would have to be fakes, copycats, or mere transliterations of the originals developed in their own respective places. This could propel actors to maintain a position of »conceptual envelopment« in error. This is perhaps, another way of making the point Janz himself attempts to make, this time by warning that the attempt at what he calls spatial philosophy in African philosophy could lead to the creation of borders of isolation (*ibid.*: 30). More than any other variety in our age, Western philosophy is now faced with this danger.

I think that the concept of philosophical space is sure to become central in comparative thought and to the program of Global Expansion of Thought (GET), where it promises to open further vistas. GET is, in my view, the omega point or the highest level of philosophical conversation originating from any designated philosophical place. Actors in various philosophical places must therefore overcome the lure of conceptual envelopment and realize the major significance of intercultural conversations in our ever-globalizing world. According to Chamsy El-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden, Bauman conceives of my idea of GET as »time-space compression« and John Lechte defines it in terms of the point of connectedness, which according to El-Ojeili and Hayden is suggested in Marshall McLuhan's 1962 phrase »the global village,« which literally regards globalization as an emerging global consciousness.⁴³ Understanding that our world is evolving into a compressed space is key to understanding the importance of comparative thinking. On the strength of the foregoing, any existing mind-view in the different philosophical traditions which still emphasizes the dichotomy between superior and inferior, real and unreal philosophies, true and false philosophies, original or imitation, philosophers that are worth talking to and others that are not, must now be discarded as they lead to various forms of conceptual envelopment in which one philosophical place considers its set of concepts not only

⁴³ C. El-Ojeili, and P. Hayden, *Critical Theories of Globalization*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

pristine but exclusive to discourses within it. All this clearly amounts to intellectual cowardice.

We must therefore shun intellectual cowardice and engage the other, rather than staying in our enclosed world and dangerously assuming that others are not worth talking to, that we are self-sufficient, that reason has its abode in our place, that the sanctity of our place must not be polluted or violated, etc. This is the summation of the idea behind conversational philosophy, whether it is thought of in terms of place or space, whether as a method or as a school, whether in African philosophy or in Western philosophy or in Oriental philosophy or in Martian philosophy. Philosophy in this age must therefore achieve consummation at a comparative level. That, now more than ever before, seems clear as philosophy's ultimate destination in our time. The ultimate goal of philosophy has been and will always remain ensuring the continuous unfolding of reason from the particular places to the universal space.

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From Proto-materialism to Materialism: The Indian Scenario

Abstract

Pāyāsi and Ajita Kesakambala in the Buddhist canonical literature and Uddālaka Āruṇi in the Upanisadic literature maybe taken as proto-materialists in the Indian context. The development from the primitive stage to a full-fledged doctrine saw the birth of two distinct materialist systems in the early centuries of the Common Era. They are called *bhūtavāda* (elementalism) and Lokāyata in the Tamil epic, *Maṇimēkalai*. These two systems are the representatives of old or Pre-Cārvāka materialism in India. By the eighth century CE we come to hear of the Cārvākas, the last of the materialists, who differed radically from the old schools by admitting the role of inference in however restricted a manner, without dispensing with its materialist fundamentals. The paper traces the growth, course of the development of materialism and enumerates the sources from which much information can be gathered.

Keywords

bhūtavāda, Cārvāka, inference, Lokāyata, perception, proto-materialism.

1 Introduction

The course of philosophy all over the world did not follow a single pattern. Yet it is interesting to note how the sixth/fifth century BCE threw up several socio-political ideas and philosophical doctrines, both materialist and idealist, in faraway places, unrelated and almost unbeknown to one another. D. D. Kosambi (1907–1966), the mathematician-turned-Indologist, once observed:

The sixth century B.C. produced the philosophy of Confucius in China and the sweeping reform of Zoroaster in Iran. In the middle of the Gangetic basin there were many entirely new teachers of whom the Buddha was only one, not the most popular in his own day. The rival doctrines are known mostly through biased reports in hostile religious documents. However, Jainism still survives in India, and traces its origins to founders before the Buddha. The Ajivikas are known from Mysore inscriptions who have survived as late as the fourteenth century A.D. [...] Obviously, the simultaneous rise of so many sects of considerable appeal and prominence in one narrow region implies some social need that older doctrines could not satisfy (1972: 97–98).¹

What Kosambi did not mention is a similar phenomenon in the west: the rise of a considerable number of thinkers in and around Athens, mostly in the surrounding islands of Hellas (Greece). They are collectively known as the Presocratics. Barring a few like Pythagoras and the like, most of these thinkers were materialists, or rather proto-materialists of some sort or the other.²

The term, proto-materialism, is employed to suggest the first inklings of an incipient philosophical doctrine when the link with mythology is already snapped but any systematization with a distinct ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, etc. is yet to be achieved. In the Indian context Ajita Kesakambala (Ajita of the hair blanket) has been called a proto-materialist (Kosambi 1975: 164).³ He was out to deny whatever was there to be denied. The exposition of his own

philosophical views, as found in the ›Discourse on the Fruits of Being a Monk‹ (Long Discourses) ›Sāmañña-phala-sutta‹ (*Dīgha Nikāya*) consists of a series of negations:

O King, there is no (consequence to) alms-giving, sacrifice or oblation. A good or bad action produces no result. This world does not exist, nor does the other world. There is no mother, no father. There is no rebirth of beings after death [...] (1987: 83, translation slightly modified).⁴

Besides this discourse which speaks of Ajita and five more itinerant preachers, there is the ›The Duologue between King/Governor Pāyāsi and Kassapa‹ (Long Discourses) ›Pāyāsirājāñña Sutta‹ (*Dīgha Nikāya*) in the Pali Buddhist tradition which reveals the first appearance of the denier or negativist (*nāstika*).⁵ This word came to signify, whether in the Brahmanical or the Buddhist or the Jain circles, heretics of all sorts (in religious terms) and heterodox thinkers or disbelievers (in philosophical contexts). Pāyāsi, however, here echoes Ajita in only one respect, namely, the denial of the post-mortem existence of a human's spirit or soul, and consequently of rebirth: ›Neither is there any other-world, nor are there beings reborn otherwise than from parents, nor is there fruit of deeds, well done or ill done‹ (Rhys Davids in Chattopadhyaya, and Gangopadhyaya 1990: 10).⁶

He is not content with making a simple declaration of denial ex cathedra as did Ajita Kesakambala; he is made to claim the validity of his statement by conscious observation and experimentation (following the joint method of agreement and difference). Ajita and Pāyāsi are the two proto-materialists⁷ found in the Buddhist canonical texts. Their words are quoted and re-quoted throughout the corpus of the Buddha's discourses (for instance, in the Middle-length Sayings

¹ D. D. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, 1965, New Delhi: Vikas, 1972.

² While studying Gottfried Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Lectures on the *History of Philosophy* (Vol. 2) and other philosophical works in a library in Bern, Switzerland, Vladimir Ilych Lenin was thrilled to learn of the Presocratics, particularly Democritus and Heraclitus. See V. I. Lenin, »Philosophical Notebooks,« in *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House), 1961 passim. He copied down in his notebook a fragment from Heraclitus (30 Diels) which runs as follows: »The world, an entity out of everything, was created by none of the gods or men, but was, is and will be eternally living fire, regularly becoming ignited and regularly becoming extinguished [...].« Lenin added his comment in appreciation: »A very good exposition of the principles of dialectical materialism« (1961: 349). For another translation of the fragment see K. Freeman, *Ancilla to The Pre-Socratic Philosophers. A Complete Translation of the Fragment in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1952, p. 26.

³ D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1975 [1956].

⁴ *Ten Suttas from Dīgha Nikāya*, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1987 (reprint of Burma Pitaka Association Publication, [1994]).

⁵ »Pāyāsirājāññasuttanta,« *Dīghanikāya*, Parts 1–3, J. Kashyap (ed.), Patna: Pali Publication Board (Bihar Government), 1958.

⁶ D. Chattopadhyaya, and M. K. Gangopadhyaya (eds.), *Cārvāka/Lokāyata*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990.

⁷ Frauwallner has mentioned two more names, Purāṇa Kāśyapa and Kakuda Kātyāyana, in the list of early materialists (1956: 300–302; 1973: 219–221) but his view has not met with general approval (E. Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973 [original: *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, Band II, Salzburg: Otto Muller Verlag, 1956]).

Part 2, = *Majjhimanikāya*, see ›Apaṇṇakasuttaṃ‹ 10.1.3,4, 1958: 78–79; ›Sandakasuttaṃ‹ 26.1.3.12–23, *ibid.*: 213).⁸

As to the Brahmanical tradition, Uddālaka Āruṇi of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* represents another aspect of proto-materialism, namely, the primacy of the body over consciousness. His name has been suggested as the first scientist in the world (Chattopadhyaya 1991: 89–148), who, before Thales of Miletus, had affirmed the basic materialist idea by proving experimentally (again following the joint method of agreement and difference) that consciousness cannot operate in a starving body (this view later came to be known as »the doctrine of matter and consciousness« (*bhūta-caitanya-vāda*) and »the doctrine of the body and the spirit (as one)« (*dehātma-vāda*).⁹

This is how Uddālaka Āruṇi teaches his son, Śvetaketu how mind depends upon the body:

»A man, my son, consists of sixteen parts. Do not eat for fifteen days, but drink water at will. Breath is made of water; so it will not be cut off if one drinks.« Śvetaketu did not eat for fifteen days. Then he came back to his father and said: »What shall I recite, sir?« »The Ṛg verses, the Yajus formulas, and the Sāman chants.« »Sir, I just can't remember them,« he replied. And his father said to him: »It is like this, son. Out of a huge fire that one has built, if there is left only a single ember the size of a firefly – by means of that the fire thereafter would not burn all that much. Likewise, son, you are left with only one of your sixteen parts; by means of that at present you don't remember the Vedas. »Eat, and then you will learn from me.« He ate and then came back to his father. And he answered everything that his father asked. And the father said to him: »It is like this, son. Out of a huge fire that one has built, if there is left only a single ember the size of a firefly and if one were to cover it with straw and set it ablaze – by means of that, the fire thereafter would burn very much. Likewise, son, you were left with only one of your sixteen parts, and when you covered it with food, it was set ablaze – by means of that you now remember the Vedas, for the mind, son, is made up of food; breath, of water; and speech, of heat.« And he did, indeed, learn it from him (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.7.1–6 in Olivelle 1998: 251).¹⁰

⁸ *The Majjhimanikāya*, Parts 1–3, Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayana (ed.), Patna: Pali Publication Board (Bihar Government), 1958.

⁹ D. Chattopadhyaya, *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India*, Vol. 2, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1991.

¹⁰ P. Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads Annotated Text and Translation*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 (http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/The%20Early%20Upaniṣads%20Annotated%20Text%20and%20Translation_Olivelle.pdf; last accessed on 9 August 2015).

The parallel rise of proto-materialism in Greece and India are of course purely accidental. But the figures of Uddālaka Āruṇi on the one hand and Heraclitus on the other present us with certain insights into the growth and development of philosophical systems themselves. It will be rewarding to trace the course of materialism in ancient India from this point of view.

2 Intellectual Turmoil and the Rise of Proto-Materialism

It is evident from available sources, however fragmentary they may be, that materialism does not presuppose any special social basis congenial to or necessary for its birth. On the contrary, it was presumably an intellectual turmoil in the sixth century BCE which threw up both idealism and materialism, as in India so in Greece (See Chattopadhyaya 1991: 35–46, 71–88). It was the Second Urbanization and more importantly the use of iron that brought about a major change in the then Indian society particularly in the north. We read of no fewer than sixty-two heretical doctrines in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* (*Brahmajāla-sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*) as also in the *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* (7.8–10).¹¹

As Radhakrishnan succinctly pointed out:

It is to be noted that while the Upaniṣad thought developed in the western path of the Gangetic tract, the east was not so much assimilating it as acquiring it. The western speculations were not admitted in the eastern valley without debate or discussion.

There were also political crises which unsettled men's minds. Among the small states which were being then established there were pretty dissensions. Outside invaders disturbed the peace of the country. Loud complaints were heard about the degeneracy of the age, the lust of princess and the greed of men. [...]

The contradictions of the time appeared in conflicting systems, each of them representing one phase of the spirit of the age. It is necessary for us to distinguish in this period three different strata of thought, which are both chronologically and logically successive: (1) The systems of revolt, such as the Cārvāka theory, Jainism and Buddhism (600 B.C.); (2) The theistic reconstruction of the Bhagavatgītā and the later Upaniṣads (500 B.C.); and

¹¹ *Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads*, V. P. Limaye and R. D. Vadekar (eds.), Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana Mandala, 1958.

(3) The speculative development of the six systems (300 B.C.), which attained definiteness about the end of A.D. 200 or so (Radhakrishnan 1980: 276).¹²

In the Brahmanical tradition, following the sceptic tone concerning the origin of the world found in a late Ṛgvedic verse, the Nāsadiya Sūkta (10.129: »Then even nothingness was not, nor existence [...]«),¹³ the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* clearly voices the persistence of doubt (*vicikitsā*, 1.1.20) regarding the state of humans after their death: young Naciketas asks Yama: »This doubt that [there is] in regard to a man that is deported – »he is,« say some; and »this one is not,« say some [...]« (Whitney 1890: 96).¹⁴

A more detailed exposition of proto-materialism in this respect, namely, the non-existence of the other-world, is met with in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Book 2 (Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa) (Bhatt et al. 1960–1975, canto 100).¹⁵ Jābāli, a thoroughgoing negativist, tries to persuade Rāma (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2.100.1–17) that all post-mortem rites are futile, for nothing of one's ancestor remains after his death (for details see Bhattacharya 2015).¹⁶ The primacy of the body over consciousness is asserted in the other epic, *Māhābhārata* (Book 12, The Book of Peace (Śānti-Parvan) critical edition canto 211.22–28).

These were the two issues, the problems of death and rebirth, and the priority of matter or consciousness, that divided the proto-materialists and the proto-idealists in India long before the Common Era. All other questions relating to epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, etc. arose later, presumably in the early centuries of the Common Era. The development of philosophy on this line, centering not only round the other-world but about rebirth as well, is somewhat unique in the world.

Another question, namely, how the world came into being, too arose simultaneously in India and Greece. If God was not to be ad-

mitted as the creator of the universe, how did it come into being? If the Presocratic thinkers differed among themselves in determining which one of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) was to be called the first cause (Thales opted for water, Heraclitus for fire, Anaximenes for air, etc.), their counterparts in India thought of all the elements as one unit (with or without the fifth, space or void, *ākāśa* or *vyoma*, added to them) as a claimant to that title. There were other »competing causalities« (Halbfass 1992: 291) too.¹⁷ The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.2 records, besides the »elements« (*bhūtāni*), five more of such claimants for the title of the first cause: Time, Own-being (*svabhāva*), Destiny, Accident (*yadṛcchā*), the (Primeval) Person (*puruṣa*, meaning God or the Spirit). At least two of the doctrines, those of Time and Own-being, have been recognized as materialistic (Bedekar 1961 passim).¹⁸ In the course of time many more claimants to the title of the cause of the universe arose, of which *karman* was the most important one (For further details see Bhattacharya 2001: 19–23).¹⁹

However, the rise of such key concepts that comprise the materialist doctrine/doctrines – insofar as they can be identified and isolated – are significant pointers to the ongoing clash of ideas between several systems or quasi-systems of philosophy at a given period of history. The appearance of new ideas also reflects, as Kosambi noted (see above), the inevitable decay or hibernation of at least some of the old doctrines. The history of materialism too contains more than one period of such decay or hibernation and reappearance both in Greece and India. There was apparently no continuation of Ajita Kesakambala's brand of all-denying materialism.

Here I find myself in disagreement with Kosambi's opinion that »[t]he Lokāyata school [...] seems to have taken a great deal from this Ajita [...]« (1972: 104). There is not an iota of evidence to support the view that the Cārvāka, the best known system of materialism, owed anything to Ajita, whose name is never mentioned in the Brahmanical works, and the Cārvāka belongs very much to the Brahmanical tradition. In all probability the Cārvāka doctrine emerged in or

¹² S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980 [reprint].

¹³ For a translation of the whole hymn see Basham (1954: 247–248), reproduced in Eliade (1979: 110–111) (M. Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen*, London: Collins, 1979).

¹⁴ W. D. Whitney, »Translation of the Kaṭha-Upaniṣad,« *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 21, 1890, pp. 88–112.

¹⁵ The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, G. H. Bhatt, et al. (eds.), Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975 [critical edition].

¹⁶ R. Bhattacharya, »Reflections on the Jābāli Episode in the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa (Ayodhyākāṇḍa)«, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, forthcoming.

¹⁷ W. Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992.

¹⁸ V. M. Bedekar, »The Doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla in the Mahābhārata and Other Old Sanskrit Works,« *Journal of the University of Poona, Humanities Section*, No. 13, 1961.

¹⁹ R. Bhattacharya, »The First Cause: Rivals of God in Ancient Indian Thought,« *Indian Skeptic*, Vol. 14, No. 8, 2001, pp. 19–23.

around the eighth century CE de novo, borrowing nothing from Ajīta. Even the elementalism (*bhūtavāda*) and Lokāyata, two materialist systems mentioned in the Tamil epic, *Maṇimēkalai* (see below), each having its own distinct set of doctrines, were in some respects similar but not identical. The similarity between all these doctrines of both »old (pre-Cārvāka) materialism« and »new (Cārvāka) materialism« (before the eighth century CE and after) is only to be expected (see Bhattacharya 2013a: 1), for they all start from the same negative premises of denial of current religious and idealist views.²⁰ In other words, they emerged as representatives of anti-fideist, anti-spiritualist, and anti-idealist ways of thinking. However, the doctrinal aspects of these two communities were not simply revived as they had been before in the sixth century BCE, without any change. At every stage of reappearance, materialism adopted a new garb, retaining something of the past doctrines sublated (pace Hegel) in the new but having some novel elements added to the new incarnation. It will be rewarding to trace the growth and development of materialism in ancient India from this point of view.

3 Inventory of Sources for Studying Materialism in India

What are the sources for studying the course of development from proto-materialism to materialism proper? A philosophical system in India implies the existence of a base (*mūla*) text comprising a number of aphorisms (*sūtra*-s), and at least one commentary (also sub-commentaries, if any). Most of the systems, not just the orthodox six (*ṣaḍ-darśanāni*), conform to this. The sources for the study of materialism in India are as follows:

1. Proto-materialism in the Upaniṣads – Uddālaka Āruṇi in the *Chāndogya* (sixth century BCE)
2. Proto-materialism in *The Three Baskets* (Tipiṭaka) and other Buddhist semi-canonical works generally called »the doctrine of annihilation« (*ucchedavāda*), documented in the *Pāyāsi Sutta* and the *Sāmañña-phala Sutta*, both in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (fifth century BCE).
3. Proto-materialism in the Jain canonical works such as *The Sūtra-kṛtāṅga Sūtra* (fifth century BCE) and para-canonical texts

²⁰ R. Bhattacharya, »Development of Materialism in India: the Pre-Cārvākas and the Cārvākas,« *Esercizi Filosofici*, Vol. 8, 2013a, pp. 1–12.

such as *Nandī Sūtra* variously called *bhūtavāda*, *tajjīva-taccharīra-vāda*, etc.²¹

4. Proto-materialism in the two epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Book 2) and the *Mahābhārata* (Book 12 in particular), redacted between the fourth century BCE and the fourth century CE.

The second phase witnessed the birth of full-fledged materialist doctrines. The development is recorded in the following works:

5. Materialisms in the *Maṇimēkalai* (between the fourth century and the seventh century CE).²²

6. Materialisms in the non-philosophical texts: Vātsyāyana's work on erotics, the *Kāmasūtra* (sixth century CE), Bāṇabhaṭṭa's romance, the *Kādambarī* (sixth century CE), Śrīharṣa's secondary epic, *The Life of Naiṣadha* (thirteenth century CE), etc.

Finally, a unified system emerged that came to be known as Bārhaspatya, Nāstika, Lokāyata, and the Cārvāka. Right from the eighth century CE these names and a few more (such as *bhūta-caitanya-vāda*, *dehātmavāda*, etc.) came to be used interchangeably in the works of the opponents of materialism. The last known stage, which superseded all previous ones, offered:

7. The base text of the Cārvākas, the *Paurandara-sūtra* and (most probably) its auto-commentary, the *Paurandara-vṛtti* (in or around 700 CE). Both survive only in fragments (for details see Bhattacharya 2009/2011: 83, 90).²³

8. Commentary on some earlier base text by Kambalāśvatara, and other commentaries, besides Puraṇadara's own, on the *Paurandara-sūtra* by Bhāvivikta (known by name only), Aviddhakarṇa, and Udbhaṭa (from 600 to 900 CE), available only in fragments.

9. Doxographical and quasi-doxographical works, from *A Compendium of Six Philosophies* (*Ṣaḍ-darśana-samuccaya*) by Haribhadra (eighth century), *The Collection of Principles* (*Tattva-saṅgraha*)

²¹ Śīlāṅka, *Ācāraṅgasūtram and Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtram with Nirukti of Ācārya Bhadravāhu Svāmī and the Commentary of Śīlāṅkācārya*, Ācārya Sarvānandajī Mahārāja (ed.), Re-ed. with Appendix by Muni Jambuvijayaji, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Indological Trust, 1978; *Nandī Sūtra with the Commentary of Śrīmanmalayagiri*, Mumbai: Srimati Agamadaya Samiti, 1924.

²² K. Aiyangar, *Manimekalai in Its Historical Settings*, London: Luzac & Co., 1928; A. Danielou, and T. V. Gopala Iyer (trans.), *Maṇimēkalai* (The Dancer with the Magic Bowl), New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993; P. Nandakumar (trans.), *Maṇimēkalai*, Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1989.

²³ R. Bhattacharya, *Studies on the Cārvāka/Lokāyata*, Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2009; London: Anthem Press, 2011.

by Śāntarakṣita (eighth century), et al. down to the *Collection of All Philosophies* (Sarva-darśana-saṃgraha) by Sāyaṇa-Mādhava, and other digests, all composed between the eighth century and the eighteenth century.²⁴

4 Materialist Ontology

The basic doctrines of materialism, particularly its epistemology, took time to develop. The first point we come across is, as stated above, the ontology, namely, its opposition to the concept of life after this life. It also implies the denial of rebirth, and of the doctrine of karma (karman). Thus the idea of reward and retribution in the form of attaining heaven or being consigned to hell, in accordance with one's deeds in this world (that is, during one's earthly existence), is also rejected. This is indeed something unique in the history of world philosophy. Philosophers, whether in Greece or in other lands, had always mulled over the origin of all phenomena as did some Indian philosophers too. There was no unanimity of opinion among them. Several such contending views are recorded in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.2. But what happens after death, is a question that concerns belief in (a) the existence of extracorporeal soul, (b) heaven and hell as actual places, and (c) *adr̥ṣṭa* as also *karmaphala* (the results of one's deeds). These three are closely linked to religious beliefs, not necessarily theistic. Both Mīmāṃsā and Buddhism are atheistic, nevertheless their belief systems encompass the third item. Materialism, by denying all three, strips off the mystique of death, thereby making all these redundant. The materialist ontology hits at the root of all religious beliefs. Ri-

²⁴ I have consciously omitted several Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical philosophical texts or commentaries thereon. They are mostly designed to refute, or rather denigrate materialism. The authors are not averse to misrepresent, and even distort the materialist doctrine in course of their exposition of the opponent's view (technically known as *pūrova-pakṣa*). For instances, see R. Bhattacharya, 'The Base Text and Its Commentaries: Problem of Representing and Understanding,' *Argument*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2013b, pp. 133–149. The same caution is to be taken in relation to the poems and plays that either fully or partly are 'philosophical' in nature, such as, Kṛṣṇamiśra's allegorical play, *Rise of Moon-like Intellect* (Prabodha-candrodaya), Haribhadra's *The Tale of Samarāditya* (Samaāricca kahā), Siddharṣi's *An Allegorical Tale of the World* (Upamiti-bhava-prapañca-kathā), and Jayantabhaṭṭa's closet play, *The Toxin of the Sacred Text* (Āgama-ḍambara), etc. Their accounts can be accepted only to a certain extent, but not in toto. With more than a pinch of salt, so to say.

tuals around post-mortem rites are considered to be a mere waste of energy and resources, and branded as utterly irrational (cf. Jābāli's speech in the *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.100 in Bhatt et al. 1960–1975, 2. 108 in vulgate) which corresponds to the views of both Pāyāsi and Ajita Kesakambala in the *Dīgha Nikāya*).

The first instance of rebutting proto-materialism is met with in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (composed in or before 600 BCE). Presumably the composition of this Upaniṣad was commissioned in order to stem the tide of skepticism concerning the immortality of the spirit. Who else but Yama, like Hades/Plutos, in Greco-Roman mythology, the lord of the city of the dead (*yamālaya*), could be a better choice to sermonize on the question of life after death? The structure of the Upaniṣad suggests definite closure at the end of Book I; the 'recital of benefits' (*phalaśruti*) stanzas (1.3.16–17) assure great merits to both the reader and the listener of the work. The whole of Book II has the appearance of being a later addition, although there is no manuscript support in favor of this conjecture yet.²⁵

5 Materialism in India Through the Ages

Materialism then is not a doctrine or a set of doctrines that appeared in the same garb both in India and Greece. The question of rebirth, although found in Plato (see *Phaedo* 71e, 1997: 62) and most prominently in Pythagoras, was never a mainstream doctrine in Greek philosophy.²⁶ Nor was it a part of the Greco-Roman religion. However, in the Indian context, materialism first appears as a denial of the idea of after-birth (*parañmanā*). This had both philosophical and religious implications. Not only the Vedists but also the Buddhists and the Jains (to name only the major religious sects) were firm believers in

²⁵ See Max Müller (1884: xxiii); Whitney (1890: 104). Müller however, observed: »I have little doubt, for instance, that the three verses 16–18, in the first Vallī of the Kaṭha-Upaniṣad are latter additions, but I should not therefore venture to remove them« (1884: xxv). F. Max Müller, *The Upanishads, In Two Parts*, Vol. XV, Part II, *The Sacred Books of the East, Translated by Various Oriental Scholars*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884. Whitney endorses this observation as a »very plausible suggestion,« adducing further evidence: »The last pāda [quarter verse] of 18 is the same with 12d, above [...]« (note on 1.1.18, 1890: 96).

²⁶ Plato, *Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

rebirth in one form or the other. It was a credo, an article of faith, with all of them. Thus materialism had to contend with all religious as well philosophical sects and groups, both theists and atheists (chiefly the Buddhists and the Jains, for instance). In other words, as a negativist doctrine as found in the exposition of Ajita Kesakambala's preaching, the deniers of the other-world and of rebirth were the main object of criticism and even the target of attack at every stage of philosophical battles.²⁷ The same is true of the Prakrit words *ñāhiyavādī* and *natthiyavāī* (*nāstikavādī* in Sanskrit) in *The Wanderings of Vasudeva* (1989 [1930–31]: 169.17 and 175.13 respectively).²⁸ In Jain works too *nāstika* in its various Prakrit forms is an umbrella term to designate all materialists, accidentalists and non-believers in ›true religion.‹

6 New Meanings of *āstika* and *nāstika*

The story of king Bena in the *Viṣṇu-Dharmottara-Mahāpurāṇa* (1.108) highlights the materialists' denial of the post-mortem existence of any extra-corporeal soul or spirit. Medhātithi glosses on the word *nāstika* in the book of religious law, *Manusmṛti* 4.30 and 11.65 as one who denies the Other World (*nasti paralokaḥ*) by referring to a line: ›There are no such things as given (in sacrifices), oblations, rites [...]‹ which is taken from the *Viṣṇudharmmotara Mahāpurāṇa* (1.108.19).²⁹

²⁷ To the Buddhist philosophers of the Common Era, materialism meant the doctrine of annihilation (*ucchedavāda*) as enunciated by Ajita (and Pāyāsi), which denies the other-world and rebirth. See the commentaries of Bhāvaivēka, Nāgārjuna (auto-commentary), Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti on Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakaśāstra* 18.6–7 (Vol. 2, 1989: 63–64, 67). Lokāyata is mentioned separately in a different context (*ibid.* on 16.1, Vol. 2, 1989: 3, 153), most probably in the sense of *disputatio* (*The Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with Akutobhaya, An Auto-Commentary by Nāgārjuna, Madhyamakavṛtti by Buddhapālita, Prajñāpradīpa by Bhāvaivēka, and Prasannapadāvṛtti by Candrakīrti*, ed. and restored to Sanskrit, R. Pandeya, ed., Delhi: MLBD, Vols. 1–2, 1988–1989).

²⁸ *Sanḥadāsagaṇi Vācaka, Vasudevahimḍī, Prathama Khaṇḍa*, Caturavijaya and Punyavijaya (eds.), Gandhinagar: Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, 1989 [1930–31].

²⁹ *Manusmṛti with Commentaries by Medhātithi and Others*, J. H. Dave (ed.), Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972–1984; *Viṣṇudharmmotara Mahāpurāṇa*, Mumbai: Kshemaraja Srikrishnadasa, 1834 Śaka [1912–1913].

However, in some other cases (as in his glosses on *Manu* 2.11 and 4.163), Medhātithi and other commentators explain the word *nāstikya* (*nāstikahood* if you will), as disbelief in (the infallibility of) the Veda, or refusal to admit the status of the Veda as the ultimate verbal testimony, the word of words. Thus it is found that the old pair, *āstika* and *nāstika*, acquires in the course of time a new set of meanings, viz., the adherer to the Veda and the non-adherer. This turned out to be the widely accepted meanings of the pair in Brahmanical philosophical literature. In common parlance, however, the words later came to suggest the theist and the atheist. However, God, in Indian philosophies in general, never occupied an important place, at least not so importance as the Veda. Even though in earlier literature (in the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, a later Upaniṣad, in particular) *avaidika* (7.10) and *nāstikya* (3.5) suggest the non-Vedic and the denier of the other-world and/or of the Veda respectively, it is only in the Brahmanical philosophical literature of the Common Era that *āstika* and *nāstika* came to signify respectively the believer in and the defiler of the Veda, and nothing else (*cf. Manu* 2.11: *nāstiko veda-nindakaḥ*).³⁰ In the writings of the Buddhists and the Jains, however, the earlier meaning (that is, the denier of the other-world) persisted, for denial of the authority of the Veda meant nothing to them, they themselves being opposed to the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Veda. The new meaning affected them in no way whatsoever. This new sense of *nāstika* in later times thus came to signify the materialists (more particularly the Cārvāka/Lokāyata) as well as the Buddhists and the Jains, for both of them were considered to be heretical and heterodox by the Brahmanical authorities.

This devotion to the Veda (*vedabhakti*) is indeed something unique in the world. The Christian's reverence for the *Bible*, ›the Book of Books,‹ or the Muslim's deference to the *Qu'ṛān* is hardly comparable to this fidelity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (Chatterjee), the well-known litterateur of nineteenth-century Bengal, was a devout Hindu in his own way. After a phase of atheism in his early years (roughly speaking, till the mid-1870s) he took a turn to become a devotee of Kṛṣṇa but never joined any of the numerous sects and

³⁰ I am indebted to Professor Mrinal Kanti Gangopadhyaya for drawing my attention to this matter. It should be noted in this connection that the *Smṛti*-s and *Purāṇa*-s mostly use the word *nāstika*, rarely Cārvāka or Lokāyata; only their commentators employ the latter names.

sub-sects of the Bengal Vaiṣṇava-s. Nevertheless, as in his irreverent youth so in his devout old age, he refused to accept the exalted position of the Veda (see 1973: 278, 1060 et sqq.).³¹ The status of this Holy Writ was above every other text or object, including God himself. In fact, one could deny the existence of God in India and go scot free, without suffering any punishment or social ostracism, but the denial of the infallibility of the Veda was viewed as a cardinal sin (For the view of the canonical law books concerning the *nāstika-s*, see Kane 1973: 15–16, 33–34).³² Thus two philosophical schools, Mīmāṃsā and Sāṃkhya, that denied the existence of God/gods were admitted as assenters or affirmativists (*āstika-s*), for they accepted the supreme authority of the Veda as much as such systems as Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Yoga did. On the other hand, the Cārvākas, along with the Buddhists and the Jains, stood condemned because of their refusal to fall in the line relating to the Veda.

This esteem for the Veda is another aspect of the Indian scenario that distinguishes it from all other philosophical systems and schools of the rest of the world.

7 Two Pre-Cārvāka Materialist Schools

The Tamil epic, *Maṇimēkalai* composed by Sethalai Sathanar, has already been mentioned (see above). It is a highly valuable document for the study of materialism, although it has rarely been utilized in the study of philosophies in India, neither at home nor abroad. It may be due to the fact that it is written in old Tamil, not in Sanskrit. There are, however, several English translations (at least three are known to me)³³ that provide a fascinating account of the philosophical systems current in South India during the early centuries of the Common Era. Exact dating of the epic is as yet not possible. All that can be said is that it was composed sometime between the fourth century and the seventh century CE. During her wanderings Princess Maṇimēkalai, the heroine of the epic, comes to meet the teachers of several philoso-

phical systems. They are: Lokāyata, Bauddha, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā (27.78–80). All the names are evidently borrowed from Sanskrit with minor but easily recognizable phonetic variations.³⁴ Even without knowing Tamil one can read the passage transliterated in roman and identify the systems with ease. The names of the masters (*aciriyar* in Tamil, *ācārya* in Sanskrit) are also mentioned: Bṛhaspati, Jina (Buddha), Kapila, Akṣapāda, Kaṇāda, and Jaimini respectively (27.81–82). Here too all the names can be understood from the Tamil text, except perhaps Bṛhaspati who is called Pirekarpati (See Appendix). Here for the first time we also read of the instruments of cognition (*pramāṇa-s*) admitted by these schools (27.83–85). Thus we are here given a glimpse of a particular juncture when the proto-materialist and proto-idealist ideas have been redacted into fully organized systems, each having a name to distinguish it from others. The names mostly refer to the essence of the doctrines, not to the founders or the redactors, although their names are not forgotten altogether.

More interesting is the fact that the Tamil epic speaks of not one, but two materialist schools, namely, *bhūtavāda* (*pūta vāta* in Tamil) and Lokāyata. *Bhūtavāda*, which is an exact synonym of materialism in Sanskrit, is not altogether unknown, as it occurs in later times. Śīlāṅka (ninth century CE), the Jain commentator, mentions this name in his commentary on the *Sūtra-kṛtāṅga-sūtra* (see glosses on 1.1.7 1978: 10–11, also *ibid.*: 19, »five-elementalists and others,« *pañca-bhūta-vādyādyāḥ*).³⁵

The name of the second school, Lokāyata, is well-known as a namesake of Cārvāka, although in the Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist tradition, Lokāyata invariably stands for *disputatio*, the science and art of disputation, not a philosophical system (see Bhattacharya 2009/11: 189, 195–196; Franco 2011: 632–663).³⁶ Yet right from the sixth cen-

³¹ B. Chattopadhyaya, *Baṅkim Racanāsaṃgraha*, Pravandha Khaṇḍa prthama o śeṣa aṃśa, Kalikata: Saksharata Prakashan, 1973.

³² P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. 4, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973.

³³ Aiyangar (1928); Danielou, and Gopala Iyer (1993); Nandakumar (1989).

³⁴ Some technical terms however are in Tamil while others retain their original Sanskrit forms. See Appendix. The Tamil text (http://www.projectmadurai.org/pm_etexts/pdf/pm0141.pdf, last accessed on 18 August 2015) and the English translations mentioned above are worth consulting.

³⁵ Rahula Sankrityayana, it may be recalled, translated the term »scientific materialism« as *vaijñānika bhautikavāda*. It is the title of one of his works written during his incarceration at Hazaribag Jail for taking part in the anti-imperialist movement. See R. Sankrityayana, *Vaijñānika Bhautikavāda*, Lokabharati Prakashan (on behalf of Adhunik Pustak Bhavan), 1974 [1942?].

³⁶ E. Franco, »Lokāyata,« in *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. 17, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011, pp. 629–642.

tury CE Lokāyata also means materialism in the Brahmanical tradition, as found in the *Kāmasūtra*, *Kādambarī*, etc. (see Bhattacharya 2015).

The *bhūtavādin* in the *Maṇimēkalai* expounds the materialist doctrines he adheres to and distinguishes his views from the Lokāyata as follows:

When fig leaves are macerated with sugar and other substances fermentation takes place. This phenomenon is similar to consciousness and sensation which develop when certain elements are put together. Then, when these elements separate and return to their individual state, consciousness gradually vanishes, like the resonance of a drum that little by little fades, and dies away.

By combining together, the various categories of element in which consciousness is present give birth to living being, while inert elements, on combining together, produce the various forms of inanimate matter. These two categories work independently as regards their formation, duration, and disappearance. Each living being is animated by a consciousness to which its components give rise at the very moment of its coming into existence. Such is the natural course of things. The other aspects of our doctrine concerning the tattvas, the world's constituent parts, which I could expound, are identical to the concepts of the Lokayatas, the pure materialists.

Of the means of proof, only direct perception (*pratyaksha*) is acceptable. All other means of knowledge, including deduction (*anumana*), must be rejected. There exists no reality other than the one we perceive in the present and the enjoyments we derive from it.

It is absurd to believe in the existence of another life in which we would gather the fruits of our deeds in this one. Our existence as well as our joys and sorrows terminate with our life.

Thus before the arrival of the »new materialism« of the Cārvākas (in or around the eighth century CE) we have at least two pre-Cārvāka materialist schools with their own ontology and epistemology. The *Maṇimēkalai* forms the link between proto-materialism and »old materialism« on the one hand, and also between »old materialism« and »new materialism« on the other.³⁷ The significance of the Tamil epic in this respect cannot be overemphasized, although it is little known even in the Indological circles of North India, not to speak of the western students of non-western philosophy.

³⁷ The points of difference between the two have been discussed in Bhattacharya (2013a).

It is from the eighth century CE that we first come to hear the name, Cārvāka, often used in the plural. Apparently, *cārvākāḥ*, »the Cārvākas,« refer collectively to a new group of materialists. They were also the last of the materialists to appear in India. After the twelfth century or thereabouts, all materialists, whether they were Cārvākas or pre-Cārvākas, appear to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Yet as long as they were there, they were considered to be the chief antagonist to be fought tooth and nail by all idealists and fideists. Not only did the adherents of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Vedānta, and Mīmāṃsā but also the Buddhists and the Jains (branded by the Brahmanical philosophers as negativists as much as the materialists for their non-adherence to the Veda) took up their pens to combat the Cārvāka view. In course of their polemics they did not care to distinguish between the Cārvākas and the non-Cārvāka or the Pre-Cārvāka materialists (see Bhattacharya 2013b: 133–149). Right from the eighth century then the name Cārvāka became the generic name for all materialists, whether they were Cārvākas or not. While referring to the materialists who spoke of five elements instead of four (which the Cārvākas did and hence known as *bhūta-catustaya-vādins*), Guṇaratna (1500 CE) calls them »some sections of the Cārvākas« (*cārvākaikadeśīya* 1914: 300).³⁸ Most probably he drew all his views concerning the materialists, including the existence of five-elementalists (*bhūta-pañcaka-vādin-s*), side by side with the four-elementalists from Śīlāṅka (see above). In the great philosophical debates that raged in India from the eighth century to the twelfth century, the common enemy of all philosophical systems, whether orthodox (Vedist) or heterodox (anti-/non-Vedist) was the Cārvāka/Lokāyata. The signal contribution made by the Cārvākas was the partial recognition of inference as an instrument of cognition. The Pre-Cārvākas were staunch upholders of perception as the one and only instrument; all other instruments were ruled out. The Cārvāka, however, declared that inferences were based on perception and verifiable by perception. However, all inferential conclusions based on verbal testimony, such as the Vedas, and concerning preternatural objects such as God, heaven and hell, the omniscient person, etc., were denied by them since they follow from non-perceptible sources. Purandara made this clear in so many words (Kamalaśīla 1981: 528) and Udbhaṭa, another com-

³⁸ Guṇaratna, *Tarkarahasyadīpikā*, in Haribhadra, *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*, L. Suali (ed.), Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1905–1914.

mentator on the base work, made a sharp distinction between the »probances well-established in the world« and those »established in the scriptures« (Vāidevasūri 1988: 265).³⁹

8 Summing up

To sum up: materialism in India developed in a way quite different from that of its western counterpart. The basic difference lies in the general background: rebirth was never a part of the world picture (I borrow this term from E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*)⁴⁰ of the ancient Greeks whereas it was the very plank of all idealist systems and religious bodies in India, not only of the Brahmanical ones and religious sects but of the »heretical« and heterodox Buddhist and Jain systems as well. Coupled with the doctrine of karma, it formed an essential part of the world picture inherited from the religious texts of these three communities, right from the sixth century BCE and continues to be held by the largest part of the Indian population. This is why in India both proto-materialism and its modified and fuller form, the Cārvāka/Lokāyata, took a shape quite distinct from its Greek counterparts. In a different context P. V. Kane observed: »The theory of karma and the theory of transmigration of souls (of pre-existence and post-existence) are inextricably mixed up in Indian thought from at least the ancient times of the Upaniṣads« (1973:39).⁴¹ This also reveals how the world of notions and beliefs held by a community continues to affect the human mind even after the world of myths is no longer in operation.

³⁹ Kamalaśīla, *Tattvasaṅgrahapañjikā* in *Śāntarakṣita, Tattvasaṅgraha*, D. Shastri (ed.), Banaras: Bauddha Bharati Varanasi, 1981 [reprint]; Vāidevasūri, *Syādvādaratnākara*, Delhi: Bharatiya Book Corporation, 1988.

⁴⁰ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963 [1943].

⁴¹ P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. 4, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973.

Appendix

Maṇimēkalai 27.78–82. Interlinear translation:

āṅkuṛum	ulōkāyatamē	pauttam
Systematic	Lokāyatam	Bauddham

cāṅkiyam	naiyāyikam	vaicēṭikam
Sāṅkhyam	Nyāyam	Vaiśeṣikam

mīmāṇcakam	ām camaya	āciriyaṛ
Mīmāṃsām	systems	founders

tām pirukarpati	ciṇaṇē	kapilaṇ
Respectively	Bṛhaspati	Jina Kapila

akkapātaṇ	kaṇātaṇ	caimiṇi
Aksapātha	Kanādan	Jaimini

Literal Translation:

These are the systems that accept logic:

Lokāyata, Buddhism, the Sāṅkhya.

Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā.

The teachers of these six: Bṛhaspati,

Buddha, Kapila and Akṣapāda,

Kaṇāda and Jaimini

(Prema Nandakumar 1989: 149; diacritical marks added).⁴²

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⁴² Acknowledgements: A. Mahalingam, Chennai, for kindly providing an interlinear translation of *Maṇimēkalai* 27.78–82, Amitava Bhattacharyya and Sunish Kumar Deb, Kolkata, for all kinds of assistance. The usual disclaimers apply.

Towards an Understanding of Islamic Ornament: Approaching Islamic Ornament through Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*’s Notions of the *Zāhir-Bāṭin* Interplay and the *Ṣūfī Ḥayra*

Abstract

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, *ḥayra* ›perplexity‹ is an unceasing movement between the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*), or the created world (*al-Khalq*) and the True God (*al-Ḥaqq*). Only this dynamic link is the truth itself, interlocking both sides of the universal order as mutually necessary and presupposing each other. It is important to bear in mind that this link is something other than the two interlocked sides, as it is a third thing that we arrive at after transcending the first two. Such an understanding of truth as a dynamic link, which transcends the interdependent and interlocked sides but is impossible without their interrelation, is basically different from a Platonic vision of truth as a static, unchanging idea independent of its material embodiments.

This understanding of truth as a dynamic link between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* and of the ›technology‹ of arriving at it by bringing the two to their unity by transcending them is projected in this paper onto the issue of Islamic ornament and its aesthetic and epistemological value. The paper argues that Islamic ornament is a visualisation of *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation. If viewed correctly, it permits the two sides to be transcended to their unity not depicted on media but nevertheless constituting the truth and the aesthetic value of the ornament. In this *zāhir-bāṭin* interdependence of the displayed (outward) picture and its hidden (inward) meaning the latter is by no means a Platonic idea ›materialised‹ by the artist. Here too, the aesthetic and epistemological effect is produced by the interrelation and dynamic link between the two sides which is arrived at by transcending them to their unity.

Keywords

Islamic art, miniature, ornament, *zāhir*, *bāṭin*, *ma‘na*, *ḥayra*, Ibn ‘Arabī.

1 Introduction

This paper attempts to apply the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm to interpret Islamic ornament. In the following section, I am going to offer a sketch of the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm developed into a basic epistemological scheme in a number of Islamic sciences. I will begin with the Qur’ān and culminate my sketch with Ibn ‘Arabī (Section 2). This will provide a necessary background for my query: Can the epistemological strategy of arriving at truth using the *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic be meaningfully deployed to understand at least some cases of Islamic ornament? I will not try to read the Ṣūfī meaning into Islamic ornament, or draw parallels between Ṣūfī ideas and technical specificities of Islamic art, as it has been done in numerous works (see, for example, Nader, and Laleh 1973; Akkach 2005).¹ Instead, I will attempt to test the applicability of the said *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic with one example. I will thus work to show that it accounts for at least some of typical traits of the *zāhir-bāṭin* relationship and can thus aid in understanding at least some aspects of its aesthetic meaning (Section 3). Finally, I am going to address the question whether the *zāhir-bāṭin* interpretation paradigm may be extended in Islamic aesthetics beyond the examined test case (Section 4).

2 The *zāhir-bāṭin* Relationship

In the Qur’ān, the terms *zāhir* and *bāṭin* and their derivatives are used on several occasions.² On four occasions, those two words come together and are clearly used as opposites. On all those occasions *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are consistently translated by Arberry as ›outward‹ and

¹ A. Nader, and B. Laleh, *The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973; S. Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*, Albany: SUNY, 2005.

² They mostly occur as the ordinary words to which any technical meaning can hardly be ascribed, for example, »We gave power to those who believed, against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed« (*aṣḥabū zāhirīn* – 61:14), or »and support (others) in driving you out« (*zāharū ‘alā ikhrāji-kum* – 60:9) (*The Glorious Qur’an, Translation and Commentary*, A. Y. Ali, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.y.). All sources cited in Arabic are my translations.

inward³ which is, to my mind, the most successful rendering. Firstly, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are divine names: »He is the First and the Last, the Outward (*al-zāhir*) and the Inward (*al-bāṭin*)« (57:3, *ibid.*). Next, we find that sins and blessings can be outward and inward: »Forsake the outward sin, and the inward« (6:120, *ibid.*). »He has lavished on you His blessings, outward and inward« (31:20, *ibid.*). And finally, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* come as topological opposites: »And a wall shall be set up between them⁴, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement« (57:13, *ibid.*). Twice we find the opposition with a similar meaning between the verbs of the same roots, *zahara* (was or became outward, apparent, visible) and *baṭana* (was or became inward, invisible): »[...] and that you approach not any indecency outward (*mā zahara*) or inward (*mā baṭana*)« (6:151, *ibid.*); »Say: My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the inward and the outward« (7:33, *ibid.*).

But what is the pivotal meaning of the *zāhir-bāṭin*-opposition that we find in the Qurʾān? Perhaps the best answer will be to say that it is the visibility-invisibility antinomy. To substantiate this hypothesis, I will provide some examples from Arabic lexicography and *tafsīr* (Qurʾānic exegesis) literature.

The *Kitāb al-ʿayn* (»The Book beginning with letter ʿayn«), the first comprehensive dictionary of Arabic compiled by al-Khalīl (died after 776), one of the two illustrious co-founders of the Arabic grammar tradition, defines the inward as the opposition (*khilāf*) of the outward, denoting the first by three synonyms (*baṭn*, *bāṭin*, *biṭāna*) and the latter by their counterparts (*zahr*, *zāhir*, *zihāra*).⁵ This definition suggests that *zāhir* and *bāṭin* not only oppose, but also presuppose each other, coming together so that whenever we find *zāhir* we may expect to discover *bāṭin* as well and vice versa, and thus their unbreakable opposition (like that of *zahr* and *baṭn*, literally: back and stomach) constitutes the basic meaning of those terms. The examples found throughout the *Kitāb al-ʿayn* testify to that. *Zāhir* and *bāṭin* denote the visible and invisible (front and rear, or front and bottom) sides of hand and foot (1:356, *ibid.*), shin (3:312, *ibid.*), hoof

(3:97, *ibid.*), ear (3:229, *ibid.*), eye's pupil (3:41 *ibid.*⁶), eyelid (3:178, *ibid.*), teeth (1:52, 3:212, *ibid.*), and the like. In all those cases, we have two sides of something which are normally not seen simultaneously, though they can be reversed. We can turn the hand upside down making the palm, which is normally hidden from the eye, visible. Hereby, the back of the hand, which is usually open to the eye, gets hidden. Visibility, being open to the eye is what the term *zāhir* and its derivatives imply (see 2:255, 2:266, 5:179, *ibid.*). *Bāṭin*, on the contrary, is what is hidden from the eye and invisible.

Zāhir and *bāṭin* may be understood more generally (or abstractly), as the outward and inward, or visible and invisible sides of »something« (*al-ʿamr*, »certain case«). Explaining the verb *tabaṭṭana* of the same root (*b-ṭ-n*), al-Khalīl says that if someone *tabaṭṭana fī al-ʿamr* it means that he »entered inside it« (*dakhala fī-hi*), that is, learned its *bāṭin* »inward«.⁷ One can speak about *biṭāna min al-ʿamr* »the inward of something« (it is called *dakhla* – *ibid.*: 4:230) or about *bāṭin* »inward« of some person (*ibid.*). *Zāhir* and *bāṭin* of a person may stay in accord or display discrepancy. If someone sees in a dream that he sowed wheat and reaped barley, it means that his *zāhir* is better than his *bāṭin*, says Ibn Sīrīn (died 728), the author of the famous dream-book (n.y.: 549; see also 388–389, 407).⁸ The *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance (or misbalance) is used by al-Sulamī (died 1021) as a classificatory vehicle to explain and systematize some of Qurʾānic terminology; thus, *zālim* (»evildoer«, according to Arberry's translation – 2:35, 2:51, etc.) is explained as »the one whose outward (*zāhir*) is better than his inward (*bāṭin*)«, *muqtaṣid* (»just«, also »lukewarm« – 5:66, 31:32, 35:32) as »the one whose outward equals his inward«, and the *sābiq* (»outstripper« in good deeds – see 35:32, 56:11 etc.) as »the one whose inward is better than his outward«⁹, thus exhausting the logi-

⁶ In the outward (*zāhir*), it is the black dot (*sawād*) of the eye and in the inward it is the opening (*khurza*) in the eye.

⁷ Al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:441 [8 vol.s.].

⁸ Ibn Sīrīn, *Muntakhab al-kalām fī tafsīr al-aḥlām*, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.y.

⁹ Those three terms come together in 35:32: »Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our Servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong (*zālim*) their own souls; some who follow a middle course (*muqtaṣid*); and some who are, by Allah's leave, foremost (*sābiq*) in good deeds« (Ali n.y.). They are used separately in other verses as well.

³ See A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York: Macmillan, 1955, 6:120, 31:20, 57:13, etc.

⁴ That is, between hypocrites and believers.

⁵ Al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmāl-Sāmarrāʾī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:440 [8 vol.s.].

cally possible modes of *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance (Al-Sulamī 2001: 167; see also Al-Nīsābūrī 1996: 517, and Ibn ‘Ādil 1998: 139).¹⁰

Beyond the Qur’an, the *zāhir-bāṭin*-opposition was utilized as a sort of basic paradigm in linguistics (*lafz-ma‘nā* – opposition), in Islamic ethics, and law (*niyya-fi‘l* – opposition). The ›word‹ (*kalima*) is generally understood as ›expression‹ (*lafz*) which ›points to‹ (*dalāla*) the ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*). The *lafz-ma‘nā* opposition is the opposition of *zāhir* and *bāṭin*: the ›expression‹ is something ›spoken out‹ (the verb *lafaza* means ›to spit‹), which has become external to the speaker and can be accessed by everyone. The ›sense‹, on the contrary, is something basically internal, invisible and inaccessible to anyone else, something rooted in the soul and never externalized¹¹. *Lafz* and *ma‘nā*, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are linked, however, by *dalāla* (›pointing to‹) – the relation which, as al-Taftāzānī explains, makes us know the thing pointed to (*madlūl*) provided we know the thing that points (*dāl*) and the ›linkage‹ (*‘alāqa*) between them (Al-Taftāzānī 21879: 149–150).¹² This theory explains why language operates as a meaning-conveying vehicle. To master a language means to possess the ›linking‹ mechanism between ›expression‹ and ›sense‹, so that whenever we hear the ›expression‹ (*lafz*, the *zāhir*), the ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*, the *bāṭin*) is actualized in our soul. We can never access the soul of the other and comprehend the ›senses‹ that flood it; however, the other can speak out ›expressions‹ which the person links to the intended ›senses‹, and whenever we hear the ›expressions‹, the linkage mechanism works the reverse way and invokes the ›senses‹ in our soul¹³. This is the basic trait of the *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation: it runs both

ways, and the *bāṭin* leads to the *zāhir* just like the *zāhir* leads to the *bāṭin*¹⁴.

A whole range of Islamic sciences uses the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm. In his groundbreaking *Structure of Arab Mind*¹⁵, al-Jābirī delineates three ›epistemological structures‹ (*nuzum ma‘rifiyya*) in classical Arabic culture: *al-bayān* (displaying, revealing), *al-‘irfān* (mysticism) and *al-burhān* (logical demonstration, proof). The third one is of Greek origin and is rooted in the Aristotelian paradigm (al-Jābirī 2009: 383), while the first two are native Arabic Islamic. Both are based on the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm, though they differ in the way they treat the *zāhir-bāṭin*-dynamic. The first moves from *zāhir* to *bāṭin*, that is, from *lafz* to *ma‘nā*, while the second travels in the opposite direction, from *bāṭin* to *zāhir*, or from *ma‘nā* to *lafz* (*ibid.*: 291). Since the *zāhir-bāṭin*-relation is basically reversible, the opposition between the *bayān* and *‘irfān* epistemological structures is relative and superficial rather than essential. This is why a reconciliation (*muṣālaḥa*) between them took place in the late classical age, when the *‘irfān* paradigm merged with the *bayān* and adopted the *zāhir-bāṭin*-balance idea (*ibid.*: 293). The first epistemological strategy (*bayān*), according to al-Jābirī, is that of grammarians, Qur’ān commentators, Mutakallimūn and *fuqahā’* (Islamic law doctors), while the second (*‘irfān*) is characteristic of the Sūfīs and the Shī‘ites. Thus the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm is in fact presented by al-Jābirī as the initial basis of all native Arab Islamic (not Greek-inspired) epistemology covering all the Greek-independent theoretical knowledge.

¹⁰ Al-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, Sayyid ‘Umrān (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2001, vol. 2. See also: Al-Nīsābūrī, Nizām al-Dīn al-Qumī, *Tafsīr gharā’ib al-Qur’ān*, Al-Shaykh Zakariyā ‘Umayrān (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1996, vol. 5; Ibn ‘Ādil, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥanbalī, *Al-Lubāb fi ‘ulūm al-Kitāb*, Al-Shaykh ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd, al-Shaykh ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwid (eds.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1998, vol. 16.

¹¹ See, for example, al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, (‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 75–76), where this celebrated *‘adīb* and Mu‘tazilite thinker (died 869) speaks with his characteristic eloquence about the *lafz-ma‘nā* relation. This *lafz-ma‘nā* relation of *dalāla* as constituting the word (*kalima*) and the speech (*kalām*) is elaborated throughout the Arabic grammar tradition starting with the Sibawayhi’s *Kitāb*.

¹² Al-Taftāzānī, *Tajrīd al-‘allāma al-Bannānī ‘alā Mukhtaṣar al-Sa‘d al-Taftāzānī ‘alā matn al-Talkhīṣ fi ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*, Second Part, Būlāq, 21879.

¹³ It follows that we cannot stop understanding the ›senses‹ once we hear the ›expres-

sions‹, for the linkage mechanism operates irrespective of our will – a thesis corroborated by our everyday experience of hearing a speech in a language we know: we comprehend the meaning of it regardless of our wish to do or not to do so.

¹⁴ This marks a point of difference with the semiotic relation of designation: generally speaking, we cannot say that it works both ways and the designated designates the sign just as the sign designates the designated (street signs designate traffic rules though it would be unexpected to say that traffic rules designate street signs). It is not by chance that Arabic theory excluded the *‘alam* (›sign‹, ›proper name‹) from the relation of *dalāla* understood as *zāhir-bāṭin*-linkage, because the *‘alam*, though designating the thing, does not correspond to any ›sense‹ (*ma‘nā*) in it (Ibn Ya‘īsh, *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, Cairo: Idārat al-ṭibā‘a al-muniriyya bi-miṣr, 1938, Vol. 1, p. 27, [10 vol.s.]).

¹⁵ This is the second volume of al-Jābirī’s four-volume series *Naqd al-‘aql al-‘arabī* (Critique of Arab Reason), the first being the ›Formation of Arab Reason‹, the third ›Arab Political Reason‹, and the fourth ›Arab Ethical Reason‹ (Al-Jābirī, *Bunyat al-‘aql al-‘arabī: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya naqdiyya li-nuzum al-ma‘rifa fi al-ṭhaqāfa al-‘arabiyya*, Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 2009).

The idea of *niyya-fi'l* balance and interdependence is the basic idea of Islamic ethics. *Niyya* ›intention‹ is explained by Islamic authors as a steadfast determination of the soul to reach a certain goal through a certain act, while *fi'l* ›act‹ is any movement performed by the parts of the body, including tongue. The ›deed‹ (*ʿamal*) is not just a bodily act (*fi'l*), but necessarily the act called for life, backed and coupled by intention (*niyya*) which should never part with the act as long as it is performed. The act (*fi'l*) is *zāhir*, evident for everyone, while intention (*niyya*) is only internal, *bāṭin*, rooted in the soul and unknown to anyone but the soul itself (save God, of course). It means that no other human being except the agent himself can testify to the existence or absence of *niyya*, its correctness (*ṣiḥḥa*), or corruption (*fasād*). *Niyya* as *bāṭin* in principle can have no ›objective‹ or ›formal‹ confirmation, it can be endorsed by nothing but has to be taken on a person's word. And yet *niyya* is the *conditio sine qua non* for the deed (*ʿamal*), just like the bodily act (*fi'l*) is: if, for example, the *niyya* gets corrupted during prayer (which can be testified to only by a praying person), the prayer as a deed becomes futile though all the required actions (*fi'l*) are performed as they should. This *niyya-fi'l* balance and interdependence, based on *zāhir-bāṭin*-paradigm, is a general rule for all *ʿibādāt* (relation of man to God) deeds and apply to as many *muʿāmalāt* (relation of man to other men)¹⁶ deeds as possible, thus extending itself to Islamic ethics and fiqh spheres.

Now, if *zāhir* and *bāṭin* are divine names and if *zāhir-bāṭin* relation displays a certain logic, being developed into a basic paradigm, as al-Jābirī pointed out¹⁷, then how do divine attributes fit into that paradigm? Can they be comprehended following the same logic? This is not an easy question, because Islamic doctrine insists on the invisibility of God¹⁸ proceeding from the basic idea of *tawḥīd* – God's

having absolutely nothing in common with anything created. Then what does it mean for God to be *zāhir* – displayed, evident, open to the eye?

Al-Thaʿlabī (died 1035) provides in his commentary on the Qurʾān a long list of opinions about the meanings that could be attached to those two Divine names (al-Thaʿlabī 2002: 227–230),¹⁹ and al-Māwardī (died 1058) brings different explanations into three classes of non-Ṣūfī and three classes of Ṣūfī (*aṣḥāb al-khawāṭir* ›people of insights‹) opinions. As for the first group, *zāhir* is explained as ›overtopping everything‹ because of God's highness, and *bāṭin* as knowing everything because of His closeness to anything. Secondly, *zāhir* and *bāṭin* mean that God ›subdues‹ (*qāḥir*) everything evident and hidden. Finally, those two names mean that He ›knows‹ everything evident and hidden. As Ṣūfī explanations run: firstly, God is *zāhir* because He makes His arguments (*ḥujaj*) evident (*iẓhār*) for minds, and *bāṭin* because He knows the inner side of everything. Secondly, because He is ›evident‹ (*zāhir*) for the hearts of His friends (*awliyāʾ*) and ›hidden‹ (*bāṭin*) from the hearts of His enemies. And finally, He is ›evident above‹ (*zāhir fawqa* – overtopping) everything apparent (*marṣūm*) and ›inward‹ (*bāṭin*) knowing everything unexpressed (*maktūm*) (Al-Māwardī n.y.: 469).²⁰ The famous Ḥanbalī faqīh Ibn al-Jawzī (died 1201) gives a similar explanation saying that *zāhir* (outward, evident) could mean that He is evident because of His shining arguments pointing to His uniqueness, or that He is elevated (*zāhir*) above everything because of his might, or His outwardness (*zuhūr*) could mean His highness (*ʿuluww*), or His dominance (*ghalaba*), while *bāṭin* (inward, hidden) means that He is veiled from the sight of the creatures having no quality, or His outwardness and inwardness (*zuhūr wa buṭūn*) could mean that He is veiled from the sight of the watching (*abṣār al-nāẓirīn*) but manifested to the inner sight of the contemplating (*baṣāʾir al-mutafakkirīn*), or that He

¹⁶ *ʿibādāt* and *muʿāmalāt* is the most general division of human deeds and, accordingly, of the fiqh (Islamic law theory).

¹⁷ Jūrj ʿArabīshī launched a fierce attack on al-Jābirī when he published his four-volumed *Critique of the Arab Reason* (*Naqd Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*; see ʿArabīshī, Jūrj, *Naqd Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*. Vol. 1: *Nazariyyat al-ʿaql*. Vol. 2: *Ishkālīyyāt al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*. Vol. 3: *Waḥdat al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī al-islāmī*. Vol. 4: *Al-ʿAql al-mustaḥqīl fī al-islām?*, Beirut: Dar al-sāqī, 2010) to match the four-volumed *Critique* of al-Jābirī. However, ʿArabīshī is mainly occupied with al-Jābirī's thesis of an ›epistemological break‹ (*qaṭʿa mā ʿrifiyya*) between the Mashriq (›East‹) and the Maḡrib (›West‹) and not with the views that we speak about here.

¹⁸ A vision of God will become possible in an afterlife according to a well-known tradition acknowledged as authentic (see Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhta-*

ṣar, Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, ed., Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, al-Yamāma, 1987, 1:277, hadith n.773, and others. Also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, ed., Beirut: Dār ihyaʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī. n.y., 1:167, hadith n.183). An explanation of this thesis presented the commentators with serious difficulties.

¹⁹ Al-Thaʿlabī, *Al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, al-Imām Abū Muḥammad b. ʿĀshūr (ed.), Beirut: Dār ihyaʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 2002.

²⁰ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn* (*Tafsīr al-Māwardī*), Al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Maqsūd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, n.y., vol. 5.

knows all the evident (*ẓāhir*) things and all the hidden (*bāṭin*) mysteries (Ibn al-Jawzī 1404 H.: 161)²¹.

Such explanations of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* as divine names shift the focus of discussion from God per se (from his *dhāt* ›Self‹) to his relation to created beings, or to the relation of created beings to Him, and the *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-logic of outwardness and inwardness as the two necessarily coupled and interchangeable sides of a single thing (or ›af-fair‹ – ›ʿamr‹) is hardly detectable here. Moreover, the *majāz* (metaphorical) explanation, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (died 1209), was given by those who said that »the meaning of those expressions is like when somebody says: this person is the first and the last in that affair, he is the outward (*ẓāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*) of it, which means that it is driven and accomplished by that person« (Al-Rāzī 2000: 186).²² Ibn al-ʿArabī (died 1148), the famous traditionist, says that the four names (the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward) are different but the First is exactly the Last, the First is exactly the Inward, and the Last is exactly the Outward, and so on in all combinations, because He ›as such‹ (*bi-ʿayni-hi*) is One (Ibn al-ʿArabī: n.y.: 177), thus refusing to apply those names to the Divine Self in direct (*ḥaqīqa*) sense.²³ The discussed verse (57:3) is mentioned as one of the *maqālīd al-samāwāt wa-l-ʿarḍ* (›the keys of the heavens and the earth« – 39:63, 42:12) among other formulas that point strictly to the Divine Self and to nothing else.²⁴ Al-Thaʿlabī mentions that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Yaḥyā²⁵ said that the conjunctions between those four names are ›extraneous‹ (*muqḥama*) and they should be read as a single name, not as four separate ones, because ›we‹ cannot be at once outward and inward, the first and the last: this clearly signifies the difficulty of explaining the outwardness and the inwardness of God in the way we can do it with anything that belongs to the world (Al-Thaʿlabī 2002: 228).

²¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr*, Beirut: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1404 H., Vol. 8.

²² Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-ghayb)*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000, vol. 29.

²³ Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (ed.), Lebanon: Dār al-fikr li-l-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr, n.y., vol. 4.

²⁴ See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-tanzīl*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī, ed. (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, n.y.), Vol. 4, p. 143.

²⁵ This is most likely ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Yaḥyā b. Maymūn al-Kinānī al-Makkī (died 854), the famous pupil of al-Shāfiʿī.

Against this background, all the more impressive is the position of the author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* ascribed to al-Fārābī²⁶, of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and of Ibn ʿArabī (died 1240), the celebrated »Greatest Shaykh« (*al-Shaykh al-akbar*)²⁷, for they apply the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dialectics to the Divine Self without digressing into metaphors, doing so on the basis of the *wujūd* (existence) category. We shall leave the question of influences aside, though they do not look improbable, and concentrate instead on the crux of the matter.

God is, in the interpretation of these authors, necessarily-existent-by-itself (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhāti-hi*), according to the author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* (this is a generally accepted thesis of the *Falāsifa* – Hellenizing philosophers), and this self-necessity is the most evident (*ẓāhir*) thing. It is so because to possess existence (*wujūd*) means to possess necessity (*wujūb*), and this necessity is transmitted to every thing by its cause. The cause, in its turn, has to borrow its necessity from its own cause, and so on until we arrive at the initial cause having no cause and possessing its necessity by itself. The world of ›existent‹ (*mawjūd*), which means ›necessary‹ (*wājib*), things demonstrates the existence of the necessary-by-itself First Cause (the God), whose Self (*dhāt*) is evident (*ẓāhir*) by virtue of that necessity-transmitting mechanism:

Necessarily existent is devoid of substratum and accidents, so there is no confusion (*labs*) in Him; so, He is unobscured (*ṣurāḥ*); that is, He is evident (*ẓāhir*) [...] He is the True; could it be otherwise, as long as He is necessary? He is inward (*bāṭin*); could it be otherwise, as long as He is outward (*ẓā-*

²⁶ R. Walzer (1991: 780) says that it belongs most probably to Ibn Sīnā, referring to the opinion of celebrated Semitist S. Pines (R. Walzer, »Al-Fārābī«, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume 2, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

²⁷ As W. Chittick has pointed out, »Western scholarship and much of the later Islamic tradition have classified Ibn ʿArabī as a ›Sufi‹, though he himself did not; his works cover the whole gamut of Islamic sciences« (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>; last accessed on 30 May 2015), and al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565) says in his »Red Sulphur« that Islamic law doctors, Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* commentators, grammarians, Mutakallimūn, and so on and so forth would find abundant knowledge for themselves in Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Al-Shaʿrānī, *Al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar fī bayān ʿulūm al-Shaykh al-akbar*, ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Muḥammad ʿUmar, ed., Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2005, pp. 7–8). Ibn ʿArabī's texts present himself as an interpreter of the whole of *Sharīʿa*, which he understands as all the Islamic texts and sciences. *Sharīʿa* represents the *ẓāhir*, which Ibn ʿArabī supplies with a necessary *bāṭin* counterpart, thus accomplishing the message of Islam. This mission certainly surpasses any given science.

hara)? He is the Outward (*zāhir*) inasmuch as He is the Inward (*bāṭin*), and He is the Inward inasmuch as He is the Outward. So move from His inwardness to His outwardness: He will become evident (*yazhar* ›become outward‹) and become hidden (*yabṭun* ›become inward‹) for you (al-Fārābī 1381 S.H.: 55–56).²⁸

The evidence of the invisible Divine Self is the meeting point for *Falsafa* and traditional Arabic Islamic theory of *dalāla* (›pointing to‹, demonstration). As the *lafz* (expression) points to the *maʿnā* (sense), so does the *naṣba* (›state of affairs‹): it also points to its sense (*maʿnā*)²⁹. This unbreakable linkage between *naṣba* and its ›sense‹ possesses a demonstrative force for the mind: once we have the *naṣba* pointing to its sense, we cannot but admit the sense itself as proven by *naṣba* that points to it. Now, the *naṣba* is the whole world of created (*makhḷūq*) things, and the sense it points to is its Creator (*khāliq*). It is absurd to speak about recipient without an actor, and once the recipient (the world) is before our eyes, the actor (God) is ›proven‹ (*dalīl* ›pointed to‹) for our mind. Both the world itself and its existence are evident (*zāhir*), yet the existence of its creator is no less evident by that logic, though the Creator Himself (as *al-dhāt* ›the Self‹) is hidden (*bāṭin*). Thus the Divine Self is both evident and hidden, outward and inward, *zāhir* and *bāṭin*: its existence is absolutely evident, though the Self as such is hidden. And yet, the Self and its existence are strictly identical! This is what causes perplexity (*ḥayra*) of human mind, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: the one splits into two, though there is, of course, no split in the Divine Self.

As for His being ›the Outward and the Inward (57:3)‹, you should know that He is Outward (*zāhir* ›evident‹) because of the existence (*wujūd*), for any emerging (*kāʾin*) and possible (*mumkin*) thing, as you can see, inevitably points to (*dalīl*) His existence (*wujūd*), fixedness (*thubūt*), truth (*ḥaqīqa*) and immutableness [...] The most evident thing (*aẓhar al-aṣḥā*) for the mind is that He is the Creator of all those created things and that He precedes them, and you have learned that the mind is perplexed (*ḥayra*) and bewildered (*dahsha*) by the knowledge of that firstness (*awwāliyya*). So what we have exposed above testifies that the Holy Lord ›is the First and

the Last, the Outward (*al-zāhir*) and the Inward (*al-bāṭin*) (57:3)« (Al-Rāzī 2000: 185–186).³⁰

Coming to Ibn ʿArabī (21980: 72), we discover that in the third chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* he says that the ›perplexity‹ (*ḥayra*) is caused by ›multiplication of the One by facets (*wujūh*) and correlations (*nisab*)«.³¹

Ḥayra ›perplexity‹ is with no exaggeration the pivotal epistemological concept for Ibn ʿArabī. It is important to bear in mind that for him ›perplexity‹ is a positive, not a negative, notion. That is, to be ›perplexed‹ does not mean ›to be deprived‹ of something, let us say, to be deprived of certainty, or to be deprived of truth. Rather, to be perplexed means ›to possess‹. The question is: to possess what?

Let me expand the context of quotation a little. Ibn ʿArabī comments on the Qurʾānic verse ›They have already misled many« (71:24). He explains that those words of Nūḥ mean: ›They have perplexed them in the multiplication of the One by facets and correlations (*ḥayyarū-hum fī taʿdād al-wāḥid bi-l-wujūh wa-l-nisab*)« (*ibid.*). The preposition ›in‹ (*fī*) – not ›by‹ (*bi-*) as one could expect – is used here on purpose. Ibn ʿArabī does not speak exclusively about epistemology, he means ontology as well. *Ḥayra* indicates not just ›perplexity in one's knowledge‹, *ḥayra* implies as well ›perplexity in one's being‹. As Ibn ʿArabī puts it: ›The [Universal] Order is perplexity, and perplexity is agitation and movement, and movement is life (*al-ʿamr ḥīra wa-l-ḥīra qalaq wa-ḥaraka wa-l-ḥaraka ḥayāt – ibid.*: 199–200; see also 73).«

I read the Arabic word حيرة here as *ḥīra* not *ḥayra* following Ibn ʿArabī's intention to identify ›perplexity‹ and ›whirlpool‹. حيرة ›perplexity‹ can be read as *ḥīra* as well as *ḥayra*, Arabic dictionaries tell us, and ›whirlpool‹ (*ḥīra*) is one of the favourite images of universal life and order in Ibn ʿArabī's texts. The *ḥāʾir* ›perplexed‹ human being finds himself in constant movement. He cannot gain a foothold at any point, he is not established anywhere. This is why Ibn ʿArabī says that he is ›perplexed in the multiplication of the One‹: this ›multiplication‹ is not just epistemological, it is ontological as well, and the perplexed human being is moving in the whirlpool of life and universal Order and at the same time realises that he is in that movement.

²⁸ Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma wa-ṣharḥu-hu li-l-sayyid Ismāʿīl al-Ḥusaynī al-Shanb Ghāzānī maʿa ḥawāshī al-Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir al-Dāmād*, ʿAlī Awjabī (ed.), Tehran, 1381 S.H. (faṣṣ 9, 11).

²⁹ There are three other kinds of ›pointing to‹ a sense: *khaff* (›written expression‹, to match *lafz* ›oral expression‹), *ishāra* (gesture) and *ʿaql* (fingers configuration standing for numbers).

³⁰ Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Maḥāṭib al-ghayb)*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000, Vol. 29.

³¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 21980.

Now, can we grasp this movement, this onto-epistemological *ḥayra* by any philosophical concept? I think the answer is positive. *Ḥayra* is the movement between the two opposites which presuppose each other and make sense only in conjunction; this is why the movement from one to the other is endless since those two opposites can be only together, and by this constant transition from the one to the other is the Universal Order constituted. The Universal Order is dynamic, not static; it is a process, not a substance.

Those two opposites are God and the world, *al-Ḥaqq* (The True) and *al-Khalq* (The Creation). Those two notions are perhaps the most general ones, and the *ḥayra*-like transition between them is exemplified by many other, more particular, pairs of opposites, for example, *ʿabd* 'slave' and *rabb* 'lord' (*ibid.*: 74), and the movement and transition between them. This is why *ḥayra* is the very truth itself, since this movement is the basic principle of the Universe.

Let me take another step and make another generalisation. *Al-Ḥaqq* and *al-Khalq* are the 'inward' (*bāṭin*) and the 'outward' (*ẓāhir*) aspects of the Universal Order. *Ḥayra* means constant movement from the outward to the inward and visa versa with no final stop point. This fundamental ontological principle accounts for Ibn 'Arabī's theory of causality, his ethics, and anthropology (to name only some aspects of his teachings). Taking up any being (any *ṣūra* 'form', to use Ibn 'Arabī's terminology), the Greatest Shaykh treats it through the logic of *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-correlation and transition. He thus discloses meanings otherwise not evident in it.

Let me summarise. The question was posed above: to be in *ḥayra* means to possess what? Now we can answer it. It means to be capable of transition between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects of the Universal Order and the ability to place any being in this *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-transition. Thus the ultimate truth of the thing in question is disclosed: it boils down to the stability of the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dynamics, that is, the unchanging, though dynamic, linkage of its outward and inward, its visible appearance and invisible meanings.

In this section, I have attempted to develop a framework to understand the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* relationship. But what light does this framework shed on Islamic ornament, and by implication, Islamic aesthetics? Within the scope of this paper, I will apply this framework on one ornamental art piece as a test case.

3 Applying *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm to Islamic ornament: A Test Case

Now let us move on to Islamic ornament³². Can the idea of *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-transition further our understanding of what Islamic ornament is? Al-Jābirī did not touch upon Islamic aesthetics in his *Critique*. If he is right in saying that the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm lies at the core of Islamic sciences, then we are justified in putting the question in the following way: does this paradigm explain anything in the realm of Islamic art? Is it relevant for understanding what it is about? Of course, within the scope of this paper any such treatment would have to be cursory. However, I think that this paradigm can at least in part be meaningfully applied to this subject.

Let us have a look at the coloured cover page of the Qur'an created in Maghrib in the eighteenth century (Illustration 1). This is simply one example of an intricate and charming geometrical ornament. It is no exaggeration to say that such designs are plenty across the vast lands of Islam³³.

This ornament is composed of coloured veins changing their colour after each intersection. I shall argue that such ornaments are based on the *ẓāhir-bāṭin*-paradigm of construction and perception.

Its distinct multi-colouredness makes it very clear that the ornamental pattern is not apparent *at once*. It is not grasped, so to say, *at a glance*. Had we been seeking such an overall pattern, an overall image to be perceived right away in this ornament, our efforts would have fallen short of this goal. There appears to be no complete figure (circle, triangle, or the like) in this pattern³⁴. Indeed, no vein retains its

³² As Eva Bayer has observed, »the problem begins [...] with the definition of ornament itself«, whether it refers only to non-figural and aniconical art or the term has a broader sense, and whether ornament has to be understood as mere ornamentation and embellishment or it »tells us something comprehensible« (Bayer 1998: 1). I think the last is true and will provide my answer with reference to geometrical kind of ornament (E. Bayer, *Islamic Ornament*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

³³ For further examples of similar patterns which incorporate epigraphic elements and vegetable motifs, see Addendum, Illustrations 2–4.

³⁴ Such patterns have a strict and precise initial geometrical design consisting of circles and straight lines, of which only some sections are painted out to produce patterns in which this geometry stays hidden, not manifested. This is another way of interpreting the geometrical ornament through *ẓāhir-bāṭin* paradigm, where the initial complete design plays the part of the inward, and the manifested pattern is the out-

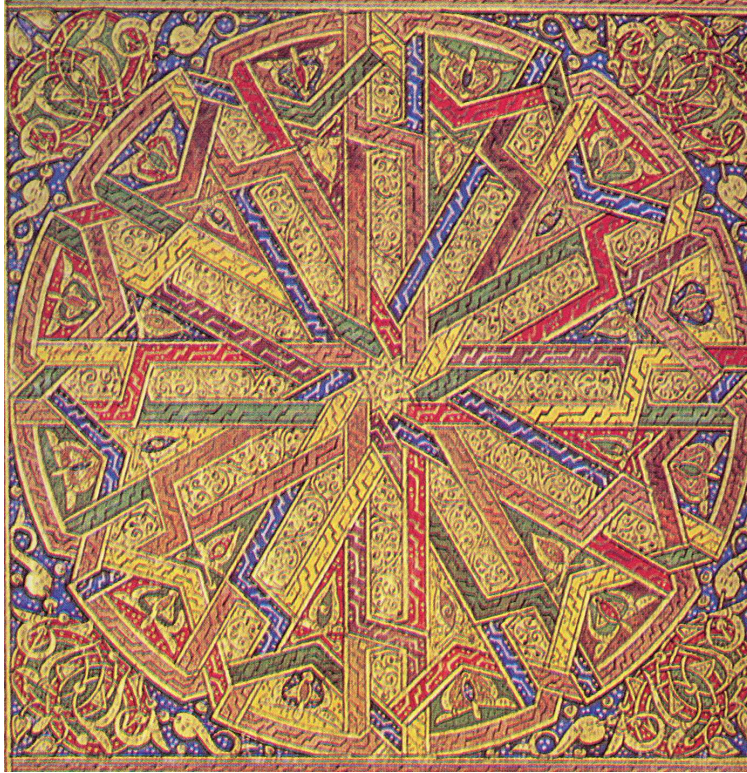


Illustration 1: Central part of the Qu'rān created for Moroccan prince in 1729, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 114).

colour as it intersects with another one; emerging after some time of running beneath, it changes its colour as if suggesting an interruption of this successive movement. Noticing it we cannot but recall Ibn 'Arabī's words: »The one who follows the stretched path is biased and misses the desired goal« (Ibn 'Arabī 1980: 73).

The Greatest Shaykh speaks about *ḥayra* as opposed to the »stretched path« of discourse and argument organised according to

ward. Then the sensual perception would be a transition from the manifested pattern to its hidden complete geometrical design and vice versa, which the trained spectator is supposed to accomplish.

Aristotelian principles of rationality. This ornament appears to be an illustration of this idea. The colour contrast seems to be aimed at splitting the image into the domain of evident and manifested, and the domain of veiled, covered, and hidden. The first appears as *zāhir*, standing in front before our eyes, while the second seems to step behind, hiding beneath and constituting the *bāṭin* of the image. This *zāhir-bāṭin*-contrast is underpinned by a colour distinction. However, it is no less important for the other ornaments as well, and the multi-colouredness is only an additional means to stress and accent this *zāhir-bāṭin*-structure.

Such interrupted-colour strapwork ornaments were famous in Islamic culture. A special term was coined to denote such kind of workmanship. It was called *mujazza'* »of interrupted colour«. The word *mujazza'* is explained in *Lisān al-ʿarab* (n.y.: 48)³⁵ as *muqatta' bi-alwān mukhtalifa* »cut by different colours«, where, for example, white is interrupted by black, and its origin is *jaz'* which means cutting a rope or a stick into two halves or two parts (but not pinching off the end of it). This explanation agrees nicely with the nature of the interrupted-colour strapwork ornament constituted by coloured veins which look as if they were cut in two.

»Cutting in two« seems to be the basic meaning of *jaz'*, and examples provided by Ibn Manẓūr testify to that: *kharaz mujazza'* »two-coloured beads« (usually black and white), *lahm mujazza'* »red-and-white meat« (meat of partially altered colour), or metaphorical *jaza'* used for *ḥuzn* »misery« because misery »cuts« the human being off his concerns (*ibid.*). Though mostly associated with colour interruption and colour discontinuity, *mujazza'* may mean as well any splitting into two parts irrespective of colour or any sensual perception.

»Interruption« and »discontinuity« are negative terms implying only the absence, the lack of something (lack of integrality, lack of continuity). I argue that they are therefore inadequate for understanding what the *mujazza'* ornament *does* convey to the spectator, rather than saying what it *does not* do. The positive content of *tajzī'* »cutting into two« is, to my mind, represented by the procedure of building up the *zāhir-bāṭin* structure for sensual perception. The col-

³⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.y., vol. 8. *Lisān al-ʿarab* (»Tongue of the Arabs«) is the most comprehensive dictionary of classical Arabic compiled by Ibn Manẓūr (1233–1312).

our change in the vein, paralleled by the vein's hiding beneath the other one, hides the cut-off piece from the view, turning it into the *bāṭin* (hidden, inward) in relation to the vein which the view follows until it gets interrupted and which is manifested (*zāhir* ›outward‹) to the immediate perception. Then the linkage of the two differently coloured veins is constructed, and reconstructed in ever new combinations, in the process of sensual perception by the educated spectator.

This two-layer structure, I suppose, is perceived as *zāhir-bāṭin*-correlation, and the movement between those two layers, the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin* one, and transition from the one to the other and backward, constitutes, so to say, the ›content‹ of ornament perception process and the aesthetical meaning of *mujazza* 'ornament'.

Thus continuity is brought into the perception of the ornament. It is the continuity of *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement, and the more intricate and multi-optional such transition is, the more beautiful the ornament appears to perception rooted in the aesthetics of Islamic culture³⁶.

The *mujazza* 'ornament' was distinguished in Islamic thought from other kinds of decoration and embellishment, and especially from imported mosaic (*fusayfisā* 'or *mufaṣṣaṣ*). A special term, as we have seen, was used to denote the *mujazza* 'ornament' and to convey the meaning of its two-layer composition. The more intricate the relation between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* is, the deeper will be the aesthetic pleasure and delight the ornament brings to the spectator.

Let me quote a couple of evidences for such kind of ornament perception the classical Islamic literature provides us with. Giving account of *al-Ḥijr* (a location near Ka'ba inside the Mecca mosque), Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217)³⁷ mentions marble of interrupted colour (*rukhām mujazza* 'muqatta') which covers some parts of the walls and the yards. He does not spare a word to express his rapture and admiration of it:

³⁶ That kind of *zāhir-bāṭin*-linking and the perception has to be differentiated from the ambiguity and flip-flopping involved in Gestalt images. The *zāhir-bāṭin* kind of perception is complete when the new, third entity is perceived as a linkage between the two, the manifest (*zāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*). The transcendence to that third entity is the transcendence to the beauty and to the truth. There is no figure-background ambiguity involved here.

³⁷ Ibn Jubayr was a famous traveller and author of the »*Rihla*« (»The Travel«), who depicted the lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iraq and Syria.

It was put together in amazing order (*intizām*), miraculous arrangement (*ta'rif*) of exceptional perfection, superb incrustation (*tarṣī'*) and colour discontinuity (*tajzī'*), excellent composition and disposition (*tarkīb wa rasf*). When one looks at all those curves, intersections, circles, chess-like figures and the other [patterns] of various kinds, the gaze is arrested by this beauty (*ḥusn*), as if it sends one on a journey (*yujīlu-hu*) through the spread flow-ers of different colours (Ibn Jubayr n.y.: 75)³⁸.

The word *ijāla* which I render here as ›sending on a journey‹ means also ›to send around‹, ›to put in a circular movement‹. Once again, we cannot but recall Ibn 'Arabī's explanation of *ḥayra* as an endless circular movement. In both cases, in the highly sophisticated theoretical discourse of Ibn 'Arabī and in the account of immediate sensual perception of *mujazza* 'ornament' by the traveller Ibn Jubayr, the circular movement is the movement between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects, and its endlessness, expressed by its circularity (but not caused by it), is grounded in the logic of *zāhir-bāṭin*-correlation, as *zāhir* and *bāṭin* make sense only together and only due to mutual transition, so that the movement from the one to the other and back is, so to say, the core of their life and being.

If *zāhir-bāṭin* structure is complicated enough, contemplation of the ornament becomes not just pure sensual perception and delight, it grows into a contemplation similar to theoretical meditation worthy of a sage. Speaking about *al-Jāmi* 'al-*ʿUmayyī*, the famous Omeyyad mosque in Damascus, al-Muqaddasī, the greatest geographer of the tenth century, leaves his dry and barren style of technical survey of dimensions, positions and directions and suddenly expresses sincere feeling of admiration:

The most amazing thing there is the arrangement of interrupted-colour marble (*rukhām mujazza*'), each *shāma*³⁹ to its counterpart (*kull shāma ilā 'ukhti-hā*). If a man of wisdom goes to visit it for a whole year he would derive from it a new formula (*ṣiḡha*) and a new knot (*'uqda*) every day (Al-Muqaddasī 1980: 146).⁴⁰

The *'uqda* (›knot‹) is the *zāhir-bāṭin*-interlacing point. This interlacing is, so to say, an apex of *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement, since it

³⁸ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, Beirut, Miṣr: Dār al-kitāb al-lubnānī, Dār al-kitāb al-miṣrī, n.y.

³⁹ *Shāma* means ›mole‹ or any colour spot contrasting the surroundings.

⁴⁰ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (*Mukhtārāt*), Damascus: Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa-l-irshād al-qawmī, 1980.

is a place where *zāhir* and *bāṭin* meet immediately and directly. It is no wonder that such a place is perceived as a sort of a generating centre for the new *ṣiġha*, as al-Muqaddasī puts it. The word *ṣiġha* is usually rendered into English as ›formula‹. Perhaps it is not the best translation in this case, since ›formula‹ is associated with ›form‹, while *ṣiġha* is not *ṣūra* (Arabic equivalent of ›form‹). Speaking of *majazza* ornament, Ibn Jubayr and al-Muqaddasī use *shakl* and *ṣiġha*, whereas, according to Arabic authors, *fusayfisā* ›mosaic‹ presents us with *ṣuwar* ›forms‹⁴¹. The difference between the two is the difference between perception through *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition-and-movement – and perception ›at a glance‹, perception of the evident, of the manifested form only.

Al-Muqaddasī speaks of ›the man of wisdom‹ (*rajul al-ḥikma*). This takes us again to the concept of truth. Genuine truth, in this reading, can hardly be detached from the genuine beauty, that is, they do not exist separately, there is a very close relation between the two. Now we can see how exactly such a relation is perceived. The *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition discloses the truth of the thing in question when we, transcending both the outward and the inward, elevate ourselves to their linkage, which is the third entity (as is case of *al-Ḥaqq-al-Khalq* correlation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy, as well as in many other cases in non-Ṣūfī thought). A deep aesthetic feeling arises out of this endless *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition movement which constitutes the sensual perception of a beautiful ornament. Thus truth and genuine beauty meet and become – in a sense – the same.

It is well known that the Qur’an and sunna criticise *zukhruf* (›gold adornments‹), and, in a wider sense, *zakhrafa* (›embellishment‹). *Zakhrafa* is associated on a number of occasions with *tamwīh* (›concealment‹), *tazwīr* (›distortion‹), and *kidhb* (›lie‹)⁴². However, this well-known position expressed in classical texts of Islamic religion does not mean an outright and absolute denial of beauty and beautiful. What is denied and denounced, I argue, is the lack of *zāhir-bāṭin*-concord and adequacy. In the *muzakhraf* thing, be it a wall or a speech-act, the evident and manifested (*zāhir*) does not comply with the inner (*bāṭin*); or, we can say, it is not possible to transit from

such a *zāhir* to its *bāṭin* because the natural and normal correlation between the two has been ruined by *zakhrafa* of the *zāhir*. It is because of this disassociation between *zāhir* and *bāṭin* that *zakhrafa* is called ›concealment‹ and ›lie‹. However, the lack of *zāhir-bāṭin*-conformity is incompatible with true beauty as well.

4 Extending the *zāhir-bāṭin* Interpretation Model Beyond the Test Case

Zāhir-bāṭin-transition may be used as a good explanatory model for different ways of describing the distinctive traits of Islamic ornament. Eva Bayer says that its

richness and variabilities stem from subdivisions and linear extensions of the geometric network and from continuous interlocking and overlapping of forms that *bring about new sub-units and new shapes* (Bayer 1998: 125–126).

This observation reminds us of what al-Muqaddasī said about ›the man of wisdom‹ who derives ever new designs when contemplating interrupted-colour ornament, and my hypothesis is that this kind of perception is rooted in the habit of perceiving the *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic. Oleg Grabar puts forward one of the principles of Islamic ornament saying that

the ornament can best be defined as a *relationship between forms* rather than as a sum of forms. This relationship can most often be expressed in geometric terms (Grabar 1987: 187).⁴³

This observation agrees well with the *zāhir-bāṭin*-transition principle and may be derived from it, if we interpret the ›relation‹ as a *zāhir-bāṭin* dynamic movement. Moreover, it helps clear up some age-long misreadings of Islamic ornament in Western scholarship, such as the ›horror vacui‹ principle presumably characteristic of Islamic ornament. Nasr’s (1987: 186–187) argument against this presumption is more than persuasive, as he stresses that ›the arabesque enables the void to enter into the very heart of matter‹ (*ibid.*: 186)⁴⁴. Islamic ornament is perceived and contemplated *not* as a figure against back-

⁴¹ See al-Khalīl, *Kitāb al-‘ayn*, Maḥdī al-Makḥzūmī, Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā’ī (eds.), Dār wa Maktabat al-hilāl, n.y., 7:203.

⁴² See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.y., 9: 132–133). The other meaning of *zakhrafa* is ›perfection‹ (*kamāl*) and ›beauty‹ (*zīna*).

⁴³ O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

⁴⁴ S. H. Nasr, ›The Significance of the Void in Islamic Art‹, in S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987.

ground, which is in fact a goes-without-saying-presumption for the Greek-rooted artistic tradition. Nasr's argument may be with full right considered through the *zāhir-bāṭin*-interpretation model, so that the void, the material, the opposite of the Divine is taken as a counterpart of the figural, the spiritual, or the Divine: the two come interlocked together, and the ornament as such a *zāhir-bāṭin*-construction is a complete *dynamic* unit which lacks nothing. To understand Islamic ornament we have to delve into it and realize its inner *zāhir-bāṭin*-movement, instead of looking at it as a complete *static* unit, as a figure against background.

Logic is something that provides access to the truth, and the truth is something for the wise to seek. As we have seen, Ibn 'Arabī's *ḥayra* is a constant, unceasing *zāhir-bāṭin*-movement which is the truth: Truth is dynamic by its nature, and it is only the dynamic involved in the *zāhir-bāṭin* mutual correspondence that provides unchanging stability to it (like the stability of a bicycle rider whose movement stays stable in spite of her weaving back and forth or from side to side). Building up more *bāṭin* layers of meaning results in providing a greater dynamic and therefore more truth and stability: a real thing to do for a wise man. If European culture and history of art in general sees in Islamic ornament nothing more than embellishment, it is only because it is looking – by default – for *vorgêndes bilde*⁴⁵, pre-existing eternal and *static* idea and therefore misses its rhythm, its *dynamic zāhir-bāṭin*-transcendence-to-the-truth nature.

Several authors have noted that the unity of Islamic art cannot be explained by uniformity of style or continuity of some pre-Islamic tradition.⁴⁶ Then by what should it be explained? According to Burckhardt, 'Islamic-Arab art' is produced by a

marriage between a spiritual message with an absolute content and a certain racial inheritance which, for that very reason, no longer belongs to a racially defined collectivity but becomes a 'mode of expression' which can, in principle, be used universally (Burckhardt 2009: 43).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E. Panofsky observes that for the European medieval artist »art was nothing more than the materialization of a form that neither depended upon the appearance of a real »object« nor was called into being by the activity of a living »subject«; rather this form pre-existed as *vorgêndes bilde*« (E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art History*, J. J. S. Peake (transl.), Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968, p. 52).

⁴⁶ See for example Nasr (1987: 3–4).

⁴⁷ T. Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative Edition, World Wisdom, 2009.

But what exactly is the 'mode of expression' and does it really boil down to a mere technical media for dissemination of religious ideas? Is it something specifically religious, as Burckhardt and Nasr (and many others) claim? Or does it transcend the realm of religious ideas; does it encompass Islamicate (related to Islamic civilization but not necessarily dependent on Islam) as well as Islamic? Fadwa El Guindi (2008: 137) speaks of »the rhythmicity of interweaving spatiality and temporality«, claiming that »a Muslim feels and lives Islam and experiences time and space in interweaving rhythm« and, moreover, »this is what immigrants in an adopted homeland must miss [...] despite regular praying at home and in mosque, fasting, participating in Islamic community life« (*ibid.*: 123).⁴⁸ This suggests that this interweaving rhythm is something beyond the specific and unchanging content of Islamic liturgy or community life, something other than it – and yet in a sense more important than it, for it represents the core of Islamic life and the unity of Islam (*ibid.*: xi–xii). Burckhardt and Nasr present to us a sort of 'essence' as something that answers the question 'what it means to be Islamic?', while El Guindi refers to a certain kind of dynamics which is not confined to any fixed 'essence'. Of those two types of answers, I would opt for the second. The *zāhir-bāṭin* interplay which I proposed in this paper to examine as an interpretation paradigm is not an 'essence' in any sense of the word. If it is true that it extends itself from the Qur'ānic text throughout Islamic sciences, then it is the logic supposed by that paradigm, and not any kind of 'essence', be it religious or secular, that explains at least some of the recurrent traits of what is referred to as Islamic and Islamicate.

To conclude: In this paper, the *zāhir-bāṭin* paradigm was traced back to the Qur'ānic text. With the development of Islamic sciences it became, as al-Jābirī argued, the basic structure for building knowledge not dependent on Greek legacy, which accounts for a vast body of epistemic production in the Islamic world. I suppose that this paradigm extends itself onto non-verbal sphere as well and explains the specificity of a certain type of Islamic geometrical ornament. If the arguments developed in the paper are sound, the positive test case examined here seems promising for Islamic aesthetics in general.

⁴⁸ F. El Guindi, *By Noon Prayer: the Rhythm of Islam*, Oxford: New York: Berg, 2008.

Addendum

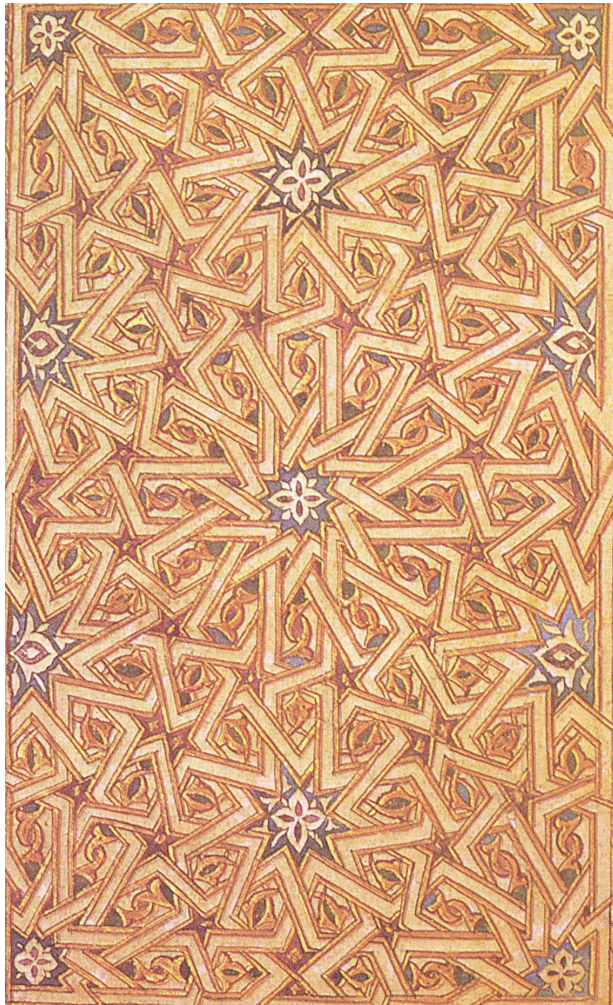


Illustration 2: Central part of the last page of the Qu'rān created in Morocco in 1568, British Library, London (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 109).

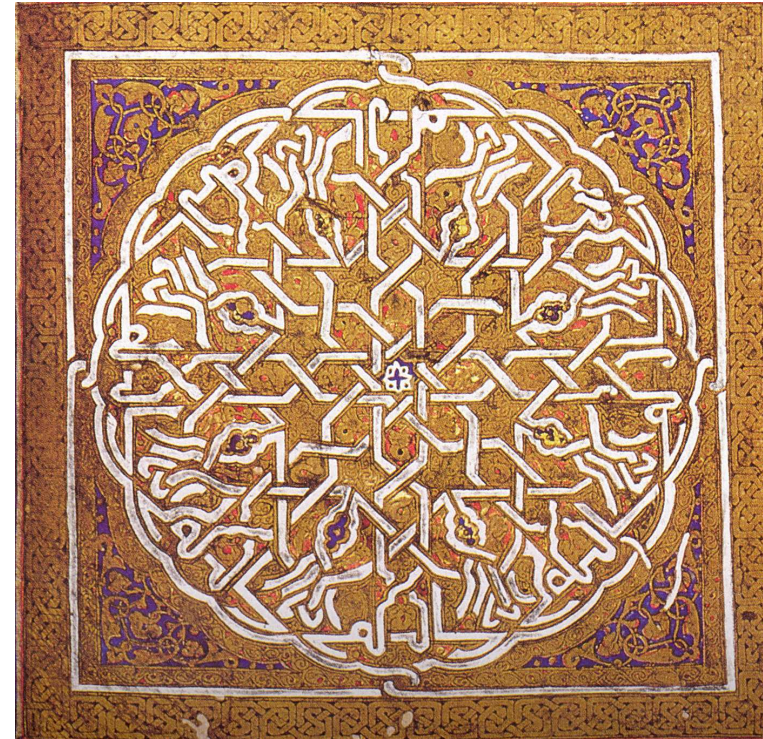


Illustration 3: Central part of the last page of the Qu'rān created in Valencia in 1182/83, Istanbul University Library (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 100).

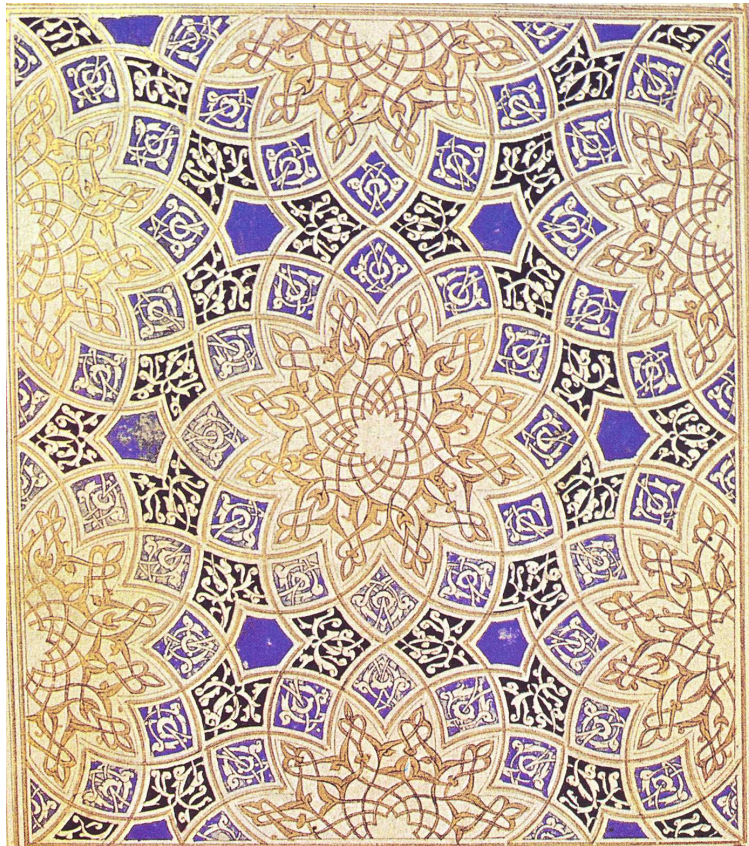


Illustration 4: Central part of a page from the Qu'rān produced by Abdallah Ibn Muhammad al-Hamadani in 1313, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 54).

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Relationships Between Early Modern Christian and Islamicate Societies in Eurasia and North Africa as Reflected in the History of Science and Medicine

Abstract

During the last two decades, it has become fashionable not merely to write about issues concerning the exchange of knowledge between Jesuits and China or the acquisition of goods and knowledge in the Iberian colonial empires, as was previously the case. Historians of science now direct their attention also to other areas of the globe, where such processes took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Depending on their specific expertise, they focus on Dutch trade in what is called today Southeast Asia, networks of knowledge in the Mediterranean or in the Transatlantic world or on colonial institutions in the western parts of the Spanish colonial empire. The actors relevant to these broader historical explorations are mostly men from a selected number of states in Christian Europe. The exclusion of most parts of the world, among them many parts of Europe, from these new narratives continues to be their most glaring deficit.¹ In this paper, I will highlight the continued, even if at times submerged, existence of Eurocentric views and attitudes as expressed in some highly appreciated publications of the last twenty years.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, methodologies, knowledge cultures, Asia, North Africa, history of science, Pietro della Valle, Garcia da Orta.

¹ S. J. Harris, «Networks of Travel, Correspondence, and Exchange,» in L. Daston, K. Park (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science*, Volume 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 341–362; H. J. Cook, «Medicine,» in *ibid.*: 408–434, in particular pp. 416–423; K. A. Vogel, «European Expansion and Self-Definition,» in *ibid.*: 818–839.

1 Introduction

Since more than half a century, historians of science studying the intellectual histories of non-Western societies and cultures struggle to undo the damage caused by centuries of Eurocentric depictions of the intellectual histories in those regions of the world. While an impressive progress was achieved in the investigations of these intellectual histories, Eurocentric beliefs and their methodological fundamentals have so deeply permeated western academic and public perspectives on Asia and Africa that even after the many controversial debates this unfortunate intellectual heritage continues to inform judgments and demands among historians of science specializing in early modern history across western Europe.

I will demonstrate the stubborn resistance of this overall perspective on the cultural ›Other‹ with examples on two levels. In the following section, I discuss some positions and their shortcomings in the latest companion book on early modern history of science published in 2006 by the Cambridge University Press (Section 2). Although this book is almost ten years old by now, as a handbook and teaching resource it remains a standard work for students and readers from other fields of historical research. Hence, to understand the deep-seated and pervasive traces of Eurocentric perspectives in those contributions that concern cross-cultural encounters and the ways in which they are approached and interpreted is not an exercise of outdated academic scholasticism. Sections 3.1. and 3.2. offer the second level of discussion. There, I present two specific historical examples of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the differences between my views and those of early modern historians in order to highlight the impact of qualifications, historiographical positions and access to non-Western resources on questions, categories and interpretations.

In my final remarks, I will explain my views about the causes of this longevity of Eurocentrism among historians of western sciences, medicine, philosophy and technology specializing on the early modern period, when they write about knowledge cultures in Asia and North Africa or cross-cultural knowledge products (Section 4). I attribute them primarily to the disciplinary fragmentation of European and other western academia and the corresponding educational shortcomings, the continued impact of older intellectual traditions and their ideological underpinnings on current methodologies, and to the

unreflected retrospective application of current values to past cultures and their products.

2 Problems of Approach and Interpretation

The chapters of the *Cambridge Handbook on History of Science* (Volume 3) that touch on mostly Asian societies or cultures are those by Stephen J. Harris, Klaus A. Vogel, William Eamon, and Londa Schiebinger.²

Harris, in his survey on networks of travel, correspondence and exchange, for instance, postulates:

Indeed, it was no accident that the growth of the Republic of Letters and the curiosity cabinets coincided with the expansion of European travel because each fed the other. The curiosity of scholars and the thirst of administrators of overseas enterprises for hard information led to a demand for ›news from the Indies.‹ Colonial bureaucrats, commercial agents and missionaries – themselves often the products of a humanist education – could easily meet the demand in the reports written in the course of their duties (Harris 2006: 351).

Anybody who is familiar with early modern travels in Eurasia and North Africa recognizes immediately how misleading this statement is. The scholarly interests of various members of the Republic of Letters in Amsterdam, Leiden, Tübingen, Paris, Carpentras, London, Rome, Venice or Naples, to name only a few cities where men lived who either traveled to far away countries or wrote letters to others who went or lived there, covered much more than the Indies or ›hard information.‹ It is not even clear what Harris means when he calls the information collected by different groups and individuals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in many different places on earth ›hard.‹ Much of what interested the scholars was not information, but material – coins, manuscripts, inscriptions, animals, plants, paintings, sweets, drugs, spices, cloth and other things. Information was only a small part of the diversifying exchanges between scholars, merchants, princes, missionaries, ambassadors, converts, prisoners of war and fugitives. This is in particular the case for the regions mostly ignored by historians of science of the early modern period – North

² For Harris and Vogel, see footnote 1; W. Eamon, ›Market, Piazzas, and Villages,‹ in *ibid.*: 206–223; L. Schiebinger, ›Women of Natural Knowledge,‹ in *ibid.*: 192–205.

Africa, southern Europe and West Asia. Colonial bureaucrats, commercial agents and missionaries were rarely capable of meeting the demand for information, and it was certainly not easy for them to provide such information. Very few of them knew more than a smattering of one of the various local languages – whether Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Amazigh, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayālam, Bengali or Dakhnī, to limit myself only to examples from North Africa, West Asia, and South Asia. All of them needed social, cultural, scholarly, and practical help from local people of different social status and education. But none of their informants, teachers, superiors, healers, or slaves appears in Harris' survey paper, not even as a category.

Equally problematic is Vogel's chapter on *European Expansion and Self-Definition*. For him, Europeans are only Spaniards, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch, Italians, and Germans, in short those people and regions that every author of *The Cambridge History of Science* considers as »the Europeans« (Vogel 2006: 818–821, 827, 829 et al). They are defined by their participation in overseas travels and the fact »that even the early stages of European overseas explorations – between 1492 and 1526 – were characterized by spontaneous curiosity, practical observation, and learned reflection« (*ibid.*: 819). The colonized people or the empires these travelers visited and settled in are simply called »natives.« Their elites were offered European knowledge as »an opportunity for integration and (to a certain extent) for development, which they could not refuse« (*ibid.*: 820). Vogel is clearly mistaken when he writes: »Since antiquity, Europeans had maintained a relatively stable relationship with the wider world. Contacts were mostly indirect, and longer engagements, such as that of Marco Polo at the court of the Mongolian leader Kublai Khan in the second half of the thirteenth century, were few and far between« (*ibid.*: 821). As Phillips Jr. (2007: 93), for instance, observed »medieval people traveled far more frequently than we think, especially after the eleventh century.«³ But the problem with Vogel's quote is not limited to this contrast in perception with regard to traveling in and beyond medieval Europe. At its center is the reduction of Europe and Europeans to some small part in the Catholic world. Muslims, Jews,

³ W. D. Phillips Jr., »Individual and Community among the Medieval Travelers to Asia,« in C. H. Parker, J. H. Bentley, *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World*, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007, pp. 93–107.

Christians of the non-Catholic churches in eastern Europe, or the various nomadic groups in Europe are simply not included in this picture of Europe. There can be no doubt that this reduction is conceptual and thus ideologically grounded. It is one of the silent components of our ways to think about ourselves in the past and today. Arguments like those by Janet Abu Lughod (1989) made more than two decades ago according to which a different world system extended through Eurasia until about 1350 undeniably have not reached the historians of the early modern period (yet?).⁴ But the methodological problems of this approach to a global history of science in the early modern period are not limited to the constrained perspective of what Europe was and meant then. A further version of this *pars pro toto* vision of the past is the identification of some Jesuit missionaries with all of them and of the Jesuits with the missionaries of all the other orders. Vogel's generalization of a short passage by the Jesuit Francis Xavier (1505–1552) concerning the alleged lack of knowledge about nature and the heavens among the Japanese reflects this treatment of the actors and their sources:

Thus instruction in European natural knowledge was not simply a strategic tool employed by the European missionaries to win attention. It was self-evident to these missionaries that natural knowledge and theology were interconnected: the deficits of East Asian natural science not only pointed to a weakness in their religious beliefs but also provided a point of entry to prove the superiority of Christian doctrine (*ibid.*: 829).

To me, Vogel's generalization contradicts letters and reports from Jesuits as well as other missionary orders about the purposes of their teaching activities in India, Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and the Caucasus Mountains. These sources show that many missionaries and their superiors often did not care much or at all for teaching about nature or the heavens. Those who did care to some degree did so due to personal initiative and chance or for luring children, adolescents, and princes away from their beliefs and faith communities. Missionaries could suffer punishment for too much curiosity and study of the stars or other subjects. The differences between the activities and evaluations sent from East Asia to Rome and those from India or the Middle East have so far not received the attention due to them.

⁴ J. L. Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World system A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Eamon's depiction of foreign knowledge and the construction of its practitioners as exotic aliens at the streets and market places of Venice does not represent a more sophisticated achievement:

The piazzas were also the sites of displays of exotic rarities and demonstrations of nature's wonders. A sixteenth-century *ciarlatano* who called himself ›il Persiano‹ claimed that he possessed ›marvelous occult secrets of nature‹ from Persia, and a Venetian distiller advertised a cabinet of curiosities that included ›ten very stupendous monsters, marvelous to see, among which there are seven newborn animals, six alive and one dead, and three imbalmed female infants‹ (Eamons 2006: 214).

Without any contextualization, it is very difficult to know whether this ›Persiano‹ was a convert, left behind by his compatriots from one of the various merchant groups that traded in Venice during the sixteenth century as Giovanni B. Ramusio (1485–1557), for instance, reported in his collection of travel accounts, or whether he indeed was an impostor who sold his wares as a false persona, a charlatan, as Eamon writes.⁵ In the early sixteenth century, Safavid Iran might have been indeed too far away for being anything else to an Italian city dweller than one of the exotic ›Other.‹ Over the course of the century and even more so in the following one, however, readers, spectators, and courts in Italy, Russia, Spain, England, or the dukedom of Holstein could enjoy embassies sent by the Safavid shahs to negotiate trade and military contracts and several defecting members of these embassies like Faysal Nazari (1560–1604), the later Don Juan of Persia (Safavid embassy to Spain 1599–1602), or Haqq Virdi (Safavid embassy to Holstein, 1636), who remained in Europe, wrote books about the land of their birth and their conversion, or collaborated with German, Dutch, and other scholars.⁶ New maps of the territory ruled by the Safavid dynasty (r. 1501–1722) were compiled in Venice in cooperation between men from different origins and

backgrounds: Giacomo Gastaldi (d. 1567), a self-trained cosmographer from Piedmont; Giovanni B. Ramusio, the secretary of the Venetian government; the translators of the Venetian government like Michele Membré (1505–1595) from Ottoman Cyprus; merchants from Iran; and a very well educated and highly skilled anonymous informant. The final product mixes an equally broad variety of elements: Ptolemaic terminology; names found in letters by Venetian ambassadors to the court of the Aq Koyunlu (r. 1378–1501), a dynasty, which ruled in western Iran before the Safavids; visual representation from portolan charts of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries; an occasional set of coordinates taken from the Arabic geography of the Ayyubid prince Abū l-Fidā' (1273–1331); and a broad variety of toponyms of Iran, previously unknown to mapmakers and collectors of maps across Christian Europe (Brancaforte, and Brentjes 2012: 135, 148–151).

Michele Membré was the first Venetian ambassador who traveled to Qazvin to greet Tahmasb (r. 1519–1576), the second Safavid shah, to propose a trade agreement, and to cleverly explore his thoughts about the Ottomans and other subject matters.⁷ Further inquisitive envoys followed later. Ambassadors were not the only men from Italy, England, Germany, Spain, France, or Russia who came during the early modern period to Iran. Merchants, scholars, and missionaries stayed often months or even years in the capitals and major provincial towns. The same applies to the Ottoman Empire and different kingdoms in South Asia as well as the Portuguese colony around Goa.

In contrast with earlier centuries, merchants, scholars, and special envoys bought in the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Iran, and Sa'di Morocco (Sa'di dynasty officially ruled from 1554–1659 but was practically defunct by 1631) substantial numbers of Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Hebrew, and Armenian manuscripts on a broad range of topics.⁸ Today, these manuscripts form the core of the major collections in Rome, Leiden, Berlin, Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford. Some of them, like Giovanni Battista Raimondi (ca. 1584–1614), Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), Jacob Golius (1596–1667), John Greaves (1602–1652), Raphael du Mans (1613–1696), Johann Mi-

⁵ E. Brancaforte, S. Brentjes, ›From Rhubarb to Rubies: European Travels to Safavid Iran (1550–1700). The Lands of the Sophi: Iran in Early Modern Maps (1550–1700)‹, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1–2, 2012, p. 150; G. B. Ramusio, *Navigazione et viaggi, Venice, 1563–1606*, with an Introduction by R. A. Skelton, and an Analysis of the Contents by G. B. Parks, Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm Ltd., 1968, Volume 2, fols. 14b, 16a.

⁶ G. Le Strange (ed.), *Don Juan of Persia: A Shi'ah Catholic, 1560–1604*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2005 [1926]; R. Matthee, ›The Imaginary Realm: Europe's Enlightenment Image of Early Modern Iran‹, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2010, pp. 449–460, here p. 454.

⁷ A. H. Morton (ed. and transl.), *Michele Membré, Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539–1542)*, London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1993.

⁸ I thank Justin Stearns, Abu Dhabi for this information.

chael Vansleb (1635–1679), or Ange de Saint Joseph (1636–1697) learned Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, modern Greek, or other languages. They compiled dictionaries and wrote grammars in cooperation with Armenian, Arabic, or Persian Christians or converts and Muslim scholars, book merchants, or scribes in Isfahan, Aleppo, Basra, and Istanbul. They translated texts from the languages they had learned into Latin, Italian, or French, summarized Tycho Brahe's (1546–1601) new model of the universe in Persian for an astrologer from Lar, discussed Copernicus' (1473–1543), Brahe's and Ulugh Beg's (1394–1449) models and works in Arabic or Turkish in Aleppo or Istanbul, printed religious and scientific books in Arabic, Syriac, or Hebrew in Rome and exchanged maps in Istanbul. And they wrote about their travels in a form full of prejudices, seeing their native town/s and culture as the measure of all things. They often integrated knowledge gleaned from ancient Greek and Latin authors or medieval and early modern writers of their own countries. The pictures, which they created in this manner, were colorful, but flawed.

Thus the images of the various Islamicate states in early modern Christian Europe were not only much richer than the mere exotic suggested by Eamon's example. There were many people from different walks of life who had a personal impression of the one or the other due to war, trade, diplomacy, scholarly interests, and manly desires for short-term relationships, whether with slave girls, through marriages for a short time, visits in bordellos, or illicit adventures. A well-balanced history of the early modern sciences will have to include these rich and multifaceted encounters across Eurasia and North Africa.

Schiebinger is one of the few authors in *The Cambridge History of Science* who points in this direction. She admits that »(the) negotiation between European and exotic natural knowledge traditions is a complicated story that remains to be told« (2006: 204). She emphasizes that locals were part of the acquisition of new knowledge and that what she calls »unlettered women« played a role in many instances. Her example is a female slave of Garcia da Orta (d. 1568), whom I will discuss below in section 3.2. But she too places the greater scholarly achievement in the hands of the colonizers. She believes that it was them who systematized and universalized knowledge, which in her view had been (merely) local (*ibid.*).

Things are, however, as always in human relationships and activities, much more complex and complicated. The various kinds of

knowledge that da Orta and other authors from Catholic and later also Protestant countries in Europe sent home or reported about after their return were only rarely truly unsystematic or locally confined. Many of the cultures they encountered, interfered with, or mutilated, had their own systems of knowledge and networks of short- as well as long-distance trade and exchange. A brief look into trade histories of South, East, and Southeast Asia could have taught the authors of the *Cambridge History of Science* that their perspective from the various corners of the »West« was imprecise, insufficient, and self-centered.⁹ For centuries, societies in India practiced a systematized healing culture, which included oral, written, and visualized registers of drugs, therapies, anatomies, or forces.¹⁰ Similar claims can be made about China, Japan, or Korea in East Asia or societies in West Asia and North Africa.¹¹ Writing the history of early modern sciences and medicine in a manner that is fair to the historical actors and their conditions, necessitates abandoning the parochial focus on a few societies in Europe and on their men or women who acted as producers of knowledge, or agents of knowledge transfer and transformation. Such a shift in attitudes presupposes the acquisition of new skills or new relations of cooperation. It is inadequate to analyze da Orta's book, for instance, without knowing some of the languages he refers

⁹ From the vast number of publications on this topic, see for instance: K. N. Chauduri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean. An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988–1993 [2 vol. s.]; G. Wade, »An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900–1300 CE,« *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2009, pp. 221–265; K. R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia, Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100–1500*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2011.

¹⁰ See, for example, J. Filiozat, *The Classical Doctrine of Indian Medicine*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1964; C. Leslie (ed.), *Asian Medical Systems: A Comparative Study*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977; G. J. Meulenbeld, and D. Wujastyk, *Studies on Indian Medical History*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987 [Reprint: 2001]; G. J. Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Groningen, The Netherlands: E. Forsten, 1999–2002 [5 vol.s.].

¹¹ See, for example, J. Needham and G. D. Lu, *Science and Civilization in China*, Volume 6: *Medicine*, N. Sivin (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; V. Lo, and C. Cullen, *Medieval Chinese Medicine, The Dunhuang Medical Manuscripts*, London and New York: Routledge, Curzon, 2004; T. J. Hinrichs, and L. L. Barnes, *Chinese Medicine and Healing, An Illustrated History*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2013.

too or without cooperating with someone who does so.¹² Only then will it be possible to understand what da Orta did before writing his book, what his sources really might have been and which difficulties his crossing of intellectual boundaries might have entailed. The same applies to all those reports about foreign countries, natures, and cultures that the reporters sent to their families, peers, kings, or orders or composed and published with the help of people who never had seen, smelled, heard, or otherwise experienced the foreign matters the travellers talked about.¹³ Only an analysis of the testimonies about how knowledge was acquired abroad from different angles and perspectives, among which the travellers' role is merely one, will uncover the multifaceted processes that intersected in different manners when producing cross-cultural, systematized, und universalized (if at all) knowledge. A similar position, albeit without including explicitly the foreign actors and their knowledge, was already formulated in 2002 by Marc A. Meadow who wrote:

The question of how the Fuggers, or other firms like theirs, contributed to the procurement of exotica for these collections, and the implications thereof, is not a trivial one. The objects collected in *Wunderkammern*, especially the exotica, flooded in from throughout the known world, and even at times from beyond it. In an era before the establishment of disciplines such as zoology or botany, ethnography or anthropology, the stories these objects told derived in no small part from the biographies they acquired moving from hand to hand. Their original contexts, uses, and narratives were filtered through the numerous people involved at each stage of their journey (Meadow 2002: 183).¹⁴

¹² G. da Orta, *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, facsimile of Conde de Ficalho's edition of 1891, 2 Vols., s.l.: Imprensa nacional, s.d. (English translation: G. da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India*, New Edition, Edited and Annotated by the Conde de Ficalho, Translated with an Index by Sir C. Markham, London: Henry Sotheram and Co., 1912 [Lisbon 1895]). Although Markham's English translation of 1912 is often very problematic, I provide a reference to it here and elsewhere for the reader who cannot access the Portuguese text. For the quotes I chose, the differences between Markham's and my understanding of the Portuguese text are comparatively minor and do not concern matters of relevant content.

¹³ One extreme example of this distance between traveler and travel report is A. Thevet's (1516–1590) cosmography, see F. Lestringant, *André Thevet, Cosmographe des derniers Valois*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1991.

¹⁴ M. A. Meadow, »Merchants and Marvels. Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer,« in P. H. Smith, and P. Findlen (eds.), *Merchants & Marvels. Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 182–200.

Hence, the new standard survey of the history of the science, medicine, and technology should not only have diversified its perspectives within the disciplinary, professional, institutional, gendered, and performative ranges of knowledge about nature, but also with regard to the cultures, people, and systems of knowledge, which interacted in producing the outcomes and contexts discussed in *The Cambridge History of Science*. This is obviously not the case. Despite all diversification explicated in the volume, the concept of a single, linear history of knowledge toward »modern science« continues more or less silently to orient its authors' perspectives and remains a major gateway for Eurocentric readings of the past. Obviously, many more discussions are needed before the history of science, medicine, and technology becomes truly pluralistic and global and leaves behind its adherence to one specific system and to one set of cultures of knowledge.

3 Two Historical Cases

I will now briefly discuss two specific cases with the aim to highlight some of the complexities that need to be considered when we wish to move towards a pluralistic and more open-minded historiography. The first case concerns the manner in which Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), a Roman nobleman, wove knowledge from different cultures together with the explicitly formulated goal of securing enduring fame. But the texts he produced did not fit together as an expertly woven carpet. Rather, they remained a patchwork characterized by losses, rejections, and incompatibilities. The second case discusses the above mentioned Garcia da Orta, a physician of multiple »national« and religious backgrounds, which endangered the lives of his relatives and the peace of his corpse. His university education and his talents opened up ways to high-ranking patrons of knowledge and customers of his medical skills. These social networks allowed him to move to a far away corner of the Portuguese Empire, where he could escape the clutches of the Inquisition as long as he lived. Family members in Portugal and friends in Goa, however, were not so fortunate. They were burned for their complicated background in Sephardic Jewry and enforced »New Christianity,« which they shared with da Orta. This background was deeply aspersed and despised of by many a man in the highest control body of the Church of Rome in Portugal

and Spain. Like the Roman patrician, this physician created a complicated and complex web of knowledge from different cultures, through which he evaluated authorities, skills, and products. Both men are appreciated today in a similarly reductionist manner, one in the history of early modern medicine and pharmacology, the other in Safavid Studies. Neither of the two, however, has ever attracted enough respect to secure them a fair and comprehensive analysis of their words, stories, texts, emotions, and relations with other people. In this they are not alone. Many people, even those who left behind traces, have been written out of the history of science, medicine, and technology, partly like da Orta or fully like della Valle.

3.1 *Pietro della Valle*

Pietro della Valle is one of the most famous travellers through the Ottoman and Safavid Empires of the early seventeenth century. Those who wished to travel later through these lands, like Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667), Ambrosio Bembo (1652–1705), or Angelo Legrenzi (1643–1708), often admired and relied upon his large and lengthy volumes which supposedly described his experiences and encounters while traveling through deserts and mountain ranges, visiting cities and villages, falling in love, or following the Safavid shah to a military campaign.¹⁵ His fame reached far beyond the seventeenth century. In his *East-West Diwan*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe praised him for his precise observations and entertaining narrative. Today, della Valle is seen by historically-interested Iranians as one of the most reliable narrators of early-seventeenth-century Safavid Iran, whose texts did not just make the traveler famous. His letters bring, as they believe, fame and reputation for their country even today. Historians of Safavid Iran and early modern Italy consider della Valle as one of the most reliable reporters about Iran, who looked at the people he met with sympathy and attention. His work is highly appreciated by them. In the respective entry for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, John Gurney wrote, for instance, that della Valle was »one

¹⁵ See, for instance, E. Sabadini, »Safavid Persia Through Italian Eyes: From Reign of Freedom to Land of Oppression,« in A. M. Ansari, *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myth, and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 163–182), p. 169.

of the most remarkable travelers of the Renaissance, whose *Viaggi* is the best contemporary account of the lands between Istanbul and Goa in the early 17th century (n. p.).«¹⁶

But things are much more complex than this simplified summary of della Valle's literary impact on the perceptions of Iran, its people, and culture suggests. A recent book on the narratives created about Iran, its identity, and value tries to tackle these complexities. Elisa Sabadini, one of its contributors, argues that the early modern perceptions of Safavid Iran in Europe changed from one of a land of freedom to being one of a land of oppression. In her article she argues that early modern Italian visitors of Iran created a positive myth of the country, which appeared in two different discursive forms. One of these discourses stressed, she believes, the marvelous character of this piece of earth. The other one takes a more realistic tone and identifies land, people, and culture in thoroughly positive terms: »a high degree of civilization, a kind attitude towards Christians, security and justice also assured to the foreigners, and richness and power of the highest degree« (Sabadini 2014: 167). Sabadini characterizes della Valle's portrayal of the land, its inhabitants, and elites as »the apex of the creation process of the myth. With this work, a precise image of Persia is definitely shaped and fixed, reaching its more complex formulation« (*ibid.*). She believes that della Valle's letters, once published, had an immediate success, which »assured a wide and rapid spread of this image, at least among Italian readers« (*ibid.*). She overlooks, however, that the letters were only published almost thirty years after della Valle's home coming. She does not ask why that was the case, what happened to the letters in the meantime, and what induced della Valle to present in the published form the image he did. She mistakes sales numbers for acceptance without tracing the Italian readership of the letters and its perception of the image della Valle presented in them. Moreover, she focuses her view of della Valle's messages on the four points she considers as the fundamental elements of the myth, without analyzing the complete set of letters for their judgments about foreign cultures and their members. Sabadini apparently neither read other material that della Valle had produced during his travels such as his diary, letters to his family and friends except Mario Schipano, or the thick volumes containing excerpts which della Valle wrote be-

¹⁶ J. Gurney, Pietro della Valle (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/della-valle>; last accessed on 27 July 2015).

tween 1626 and 1652 in Rome. These volumes reflect his painstaking effort to modify his letters so that the Inquisition would grant him the permission to publish them. In short, she did not realize that della Valle's published letters were not simply descriptions of his travel experiences abroad, but a mirror of his difficult publication experiences as well as other serious problems at home.

Della Valle's published letters are as much a panorama of Roman social relationships, scholarly expectations, religious dictates, and cultural norms as they are a depiction of the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, Portuguese Goa, and other parts of western India. Although della Valle remained the only speaking person, many people contributed to his texts directly or indirectly. Della Valle, of course, saw the cities and landscapes through which he traveled as an eye-witness. But he was guided by books he carried with him while traveling, the erroneous content of which increasingly annoyed him. Nevertheless, della Valle returned to them and others from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and early modern western Europe after he had come back to Rome. Their perspectives were complemented by the views of Persian historians, whose works della Valle had bought during his voyage. As important as these accounts by male authors were for the final form of della Valle's letters, his Assyrian wife Sitti Ma'ani (d. 1622), whom he had married in Baghdad, was responsible for essential parts of them. Her access to the female areas of private houses in Iran greatly enriched her husband's experience, in particular of Safavid noble society and of the court's noble Georgian hostages. Furthermore, della Valle profited from local people he and Sitti Ma'ani talked to, dined with, or were intimately linked with. His second wife Tinatin de Ziba from Georgia, whom Sitti Ma'ani had adopted as a child and who was a very active member of della Valle's household in Rome, left behind a rich array of documents which need to be analyzed for her contributions to della Valle's printed oeuvre. Finally, there were his sons with Tinatin, who edited his two volumes on Iran and India, but who never had seen either of the two regions nor their mother's home-land, the Caucasus Mountains. These diverse participants in and contributors to della Valle's book endow his texts with a similarly complex intellectual biography as Meadow claimed for the exotica that the Fuggers traded and that their customers displayed in the cabinets of curiosity. Even if we consider della Valle's own textual practices alone, isolated from his various social and intellectual contexts and the people who populated them, it is not difficult to discover

their manifold layers of sources, goals, and narrative styles as I have shown in an earlier paper.¹⁷

Della Valle wrote his original letters with the explicit goal to acquire eternal fame, but not to present a description of his adventures. Adventures are actually relatively rare in the many pages he wrote while travelling. He compiled a diary as a preparation for his later letters. But it did not consist of simple notes he made during a reception, a visit or after a conversation. He often drafted long parts of the letter he would write the next day or some time later. In this diary, he summarized rumors or more specific information about the court of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1586–1629), about the Shah's Georgian hostages or about ambassadors from courts in Europe. After he had left Iran, he added here and there thoughts or information about activities as if these were items he had remembered while in the country. In all likelihood, the diary not only served him as a space for sorting his thoughts, collecting data, and drafting a story while traveling. He also used it at home when undertaking the much longer journey through ancient books (mostly in Latin translation), Persian and Arabic manuscripts and early modern travel accounts, geographies, histories, as well as other topics in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and French. One result of this journey was the transformation of his letters in three principal formats. He removed the visualization of his efforts to learn local languages and to inquire in them about the toponymy and history of the places he traveled through. His journey through books in Rome thus countermanded his learning new knowledge while traveling through far away countries. Della Valle obviously felt he had to discard some of this new knowledge in order to reach his personal goal – publishing a text that would preserve his name and fame for later generations.

The second format he changed in the process of altering his letters for print was the addition of books that had played no role in his letter-writing while he traveled. It is not always easy to determine whether his occasional complaints about his lack of access to printed books in Isfahan, for instance, was more than one of the numerous rhetorical strategies that the Roman patrician employed to establish

¹⁷ S. Brentjes, »The Presence of Ancient Secular and Religious Texts in the Unpublished and Printed Writings of Pietro della Valle (1586–1652),« in S. Brentjes, *Travelers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Seeking, Transforming, Discarding Knowledge*, Variorum CS961, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010; III.

his own reputation and authority. It might well be that the Carmelites and Capuchins who had opened their convents in the Safavid capital before he arrived there in late 1617 or early 1618 had not brought a substantial library with them. But the various convents at Goa certainly possessed sufficiently well endowed libraries for their teaching as well as private collections of books, parts of which are still present today at Goa State Central Library. Nonetheless, neither della Valle's letters nor his diary contain any references to his reading activities while in town.

The addition of quotes from books and references to manuscript texts increased the academic status of della Valle's published letters. But they also altered the narrative about the three regions through which he had traveled and where he had lived. Della Valle had already noted his displeasure with certain cultural and political features in Safavid Iran. The image he drew of Iran in his diary and the original letters was not exclusively positive. He did not like Persian poetry, thought that the shah and his courtiers spoke in a less refined manner than Italian fish wives and thought of himself as the better human being because of his adherence to the only ›true‹ faith. Della Valle's letters do not portray him as someone eager to become intimately familiar with local knowledge forms, their themes and questions as well as their discourses. His later Persian text, written to an astrologer from Lar, confirms this impression. It shows unmistakably that his knowledge of scientific Persian was very meager.¹⁸ His familiarity with the local scholars' knowledge of mathematics and astronomy corresponds with his own self-representation as a person little interested in getting to know better the court's astrologers, despite the fact that he and his household lived for some time in the house of the court's main astrologer due to the shah's command. The addition of quotes from, and references to ancient works furthered another negative effect in della Valle's portrayal of Iran. Della Valle used them in a manner that he could often draw the conclusion that nothing had changed in the country from antiquity to his own days.

The third change, which he introduced as a result of his exploration of books mainly from his own culture, consists in the devaluation of his former acceptance of the kind of knowledge pursued and appreciated in Safavid Iran. This recontextualization of Iranian learning through ancient texts is one of the many forms in which authors from

Catholic and Protestant countries in Europe constructed a narrative over the centuries, which continues – even if in a fragmentary form – its hold till today. According to this narrative, scholars in Islamicate societies had translated ancient Greek texts for no other purpose than their preservation for those who were truly interested in their knowledge, namely ›Us.‹ Islamicate scholars only translated the sciences, which served their practical needs in medicine and astrology or helped them debate the various religious communities in those regions. Although the academic stories told about these processes today are more complex and fit the historical processes better than older stories, they still possess some of the flaws created by the early modern textual practices. These practices combined ancient and medieval narratives about ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, or ancient Iran as well as Islamicate lands centuries after these narratives were formulated with prejudices and reports about filtered experiences of the traveler's own times and making. Using ancient authors as a yardstick prevented a rapprochement to an understanding of the foreign society's internal values and modes of operation. Certainly, della Valle was curious and liked Iran better than the Ottoman Empire in terms of strategy and politics. He was also willing to learn and change his views and values. But he was not a twenty first-century anthropologist.

Thus, changing the original formats of his letters was not a violation of the rights of his hosts to a fair and just description of their ways of life. It was a necessity for cementing the reputation he had already acquired at home while being away and which was increased in lectures, ceremonies, brawls, correspondences, scholarly texts and conflicts with the Pope and the Propaganda Fide. Creating knowledge in the early modern period incorporated all these elements of the personal, the communal, and long-distance travel. It embodied desires, losses, pains, and activities of pride. Without his marriage to Sitti Ma'ani, della Valle would have been unable to access information about the Georgian queen and Safavid hostage Ketevan. Without his wife's death and his own life-threatening disease, he would not have learned anything about the persecuted community of *nuqtavis* in Lar, people who apparently believed in letter magic (a specific form of natural philosophy), and the endowment of planets with souls. He would not have met Mulla Zayn al-Din (early seventeenth century), his brothers and friends, all highly educated men in southern Iran, who first nursed him back to health and then included him in their community, talking openly and freely about many scholarly and

¹⁸ MS Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica, Pers. 10.

other themes. It was this kind of heightened personal experience that induced della Valle in Goa to write a Persian summary of beliefs about the universe held by an Italian Jesuit who was on his way back from Siam to Italy. He may or may not have sent this text to Zayn al-Din in Lar, which is the first Persian description of Tycho Brahe's mixed model of the heavens. It reports briefly about scientific and religious debates among scholars and clerics of the early seventeenth century in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Although this text has by now found its way into several academic articles, it has not arrived yet in the narrative of the early modern history of science, medicine and technology. The same is true for della Valle and his other texts about Safavid geography, Turkish grammar or Shah 'Abbas I, his collection of Oriental manuscripts or his role in the emerging Coptic and Samaritan studies in the Republic of Letters. None of these things are unknown to the academic world studying early modern Europe. But the historians of early modern science, medicine, and technology tend to pay no attention to them as *The Cambridge History of Science* demonstrates. Pietro della Valle, like many of his contemporaries who traveled to or lived in North Africa and West Asia, have no place in their stories. Neither do the Carmelites, Capuchins, or Augustinians who operated west of China. The Jesuits and their study by modern historians of science, medicine, and long-distance networks of knowledge have obliterated all those other actors and their contributions to early modern knowledge across the globe.

3.2 *Garcia da Orta's Coloquios dos simples, e drogas he cousas medicinais da Índia, Goa, 1563*

In this sub-section, I will reflect on the connection between da Orta's life and his only printed book, the colloquies on simple remedies drugs and medical things of India. I decided to focus on three texts, which evaluate this book, because they had, and have, a broad impact within history of science. I exclude many of the recent articles written primarily in Spain, Portugal and France, because they do not alter the basic diagnosis I present here and because I discuss them in another paper on issues of methodology.¹⁹ My intention here is to highlight

¹⁹ S. Brentjes, »Issues of Best Historiographical Practice: Garcia da Orta's *Colóquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da Índia* (Goa, 1563) and Their Conflicting

some of the fundamental tensions that permeate the three texts and which are not overcome in the more recent literature.

Garcia da Orta was born at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the little Portuguese town Castelo de Vide. His father and mother had fled Spain some years earlier as a result of the persecution of Muslims and Jews by Spain's rulers Isabella (r. 1474–1504) and Ferdinand (1475–1516) after 1492. Both parents had been forced to convert to Catholicism after the Portuguese King Manuel (r. 1495–1521) proclaimed on 5 December 1496 the general expulsion of all Jews from the country, a decree that was changed in 1497 into a general conversion order (Saraiva 2001: 1).²⁰ Da Orta studied natural philosophy and medicine at the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares. After two years of possibly pharmaceutical practice in his hometown, he moved to Lisbon, where in 1525 and 1526 he received two certificates that allowed him to ride a mule, which was sign of his social standing, and to practise as a physician. In 1527, he applied repeatedly for a professorship at the University of Lisbon, which he finally received in 1530. He taught natural philosophy, logic and other fields of knowledge until 1534. In 1532, he became a member of the university council and engaged actively in the institutional affairs. Da Orta also established strong relationships with members of the Portuguese court. When the pressure of the Portuguese royal family against the so-called »New Christians« increased under King João III (r. 1521–1557), da Orta left Portugal for Goa in 1534, sailing with Martim Afonso de Souza (d. 1571), captain-major of the Indian Ocean in 1534–1538 and governor-general of the Portuguese territories in India from 1542 to 1545. This protection may have helped da Orta and later also his mother, sisters and brothers-in-law to leave Portugal's threats to their well-being, since on 14 June 1532 the Crown had stipulated that no »New Christian« could leave the country. According to Saraiva this draconic law, however, did not bring the wished results, but rather induced more middle-class people to flee the country (*ibid.*: 35).

Saraiva's thesis, supported and modified by subsequent studies,

Interpretations,« in H. Wendt (ed.), *Globalization of Knowledge in the Iberian Colonial World*, Berlin, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science: Edition Open Access, forthcoming.

²⁰ A. J. Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians 1536–1765*, Leiden: Brill, 2001.

about the Portuguese Inquisition and its persecution of the so-called »New Christians« is as important for analyzing da Orta's life and work, as are the activities of the Inquisition. None of the historians of science, medicine and technology in Europe and North America, whose texts I had access to, – neither those on whom I focus in this paper nor those of the more recent articles – considered either of the two aspects when explaining their particular readings of da Orta's book and practices.²¹ The widespread understanding of the Portuguese Inquisition outside the small circle of experts consists in the acceptance of the inquisitorial self-legitimizing rhetoric. According to this self-representation, the Inquisition's purpose was to weed out those who allegedly continued to practice elements of the allegedly Jewish faith of their parents or grandparents. They were tortured, their property was confiscated, they had to do penance or were burned, if they survived their interrogations. Saraiva contests this description of the events. In his reading of the written, tabular, or visual sources the purpose of the Inquisition as the representative of the top echelon of Portugal's landed aristocracy was to destroy the growing Portuguese mercantile middle class by inventing the category of the »crypto-Jew,« of Christians who secretly practised Judaism (*ibid.*: IX).

Hence, da Orta's case, as a transmitter of knowledge across cultures and people, needs to be approached from many more angles than the purely scientific or the cross-cultural. We need to inquire what it meant to him to flee like his parents the land of his birth and to see family members and friends, both in Portugal and in Goa, fall victim to the Inquisition and its auto-da-fés. We also need to ask what da Orta's affiliation to his patron, the nobleman and governor of Goa Martim Afonso de Souza, and his participation in de Souza's various punitive campaigns against Muslim rulers in western India meant. We have to question da Orta's ascent to one of the richest merchants of Portuguese Goa, his landownership in Mumbai and his possession of numerous female and male slaves from among the local population. Only when all these aspects of da Orta's life style and activities

²¹ None of these authors discuss Saraiva's thesis. Several refer to the role of the Inquisition in da Orta's life and those of his relatives, but do so in a non-analytical fashion. Moreover, all those I have read use the language of the Inquisition without any reflection. Some even use it as the basis for constructing their peculiar interpretations. For a more detailed discussion of these features see my paper wholly dedicated to the issue of best historiographical practice mentioned in footnote 19.

are included, might we discover the meaning that his book on drugs had for him.

These investigations do not explain, however, the success of the Latin reformulation of da Orta's work by Carolus Clusius (1526–1609) in the Netherlands and other European countries. Hence, da Orta's ascent to an expert of Indian medical and culinary botany, whose knowledge served as a point of reference for three centuries, is not merely the outcome of his book printed in 1563 in Goa and transported to Portugal where Clusius allegedly happened to stumble over it in some small bookshop. The book's fate was, like Meadow's *exotica*, shaped by more than one trajectory, more than one life, more than one biography. Two of these biographies are connected with Cristóbal Acosta (d. 1594) and Tomé Pires (d. around 1540?), like da Orta authors of books on Indian drugs. Tomé Pires was an apothecary of Afonso (d. 1491), son of King João II. He arrived in India in 1511 in order to trade in drugs for the Portuguese Crown. According to Cortesão, who collected all snippets available on Pires' life, the royal factor lived for two and a half year at Malacca where he wrote most of the first Portuguese account of Asian plant drugs, the *Suma Oriental*. He finished the book in India, before he was sent, in 1516, as the first Portuguese envoy to China, where he seems to have died some twenty years later.²² Pires, and not some higher ranking Portuguese noble, was sent to China, because he »had been apothecary to the Prince Dom Afonso, and was discreet and eager to learn, and because he would know better than anyone else the drugs that were in China.«²³ Pires' text came as a manuscript to Portugal and from there to England and France. But it was never printed and thus was lost in the sediments of human memory until the 1930s, when Cortesão discovered a modified version of it in Paris and published it in 1944. The question that needs to be addressed in a future study is whether da

²² A. Cortesão (ed. and transl.), *Suma Oriental of Tome Pires. An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China. Written in Malacca and India 1512–1515. And the Book of Francisco Rodriguez, Pilot-Major of the Armada that Discovered Banda and the Moluccas*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1944, pp. xvi, xviii–lxx [Reprint: *An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515, and The Book of Francisco Rodrigues, Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East before 1515*; Volumes I–II, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010].

²³ Quote from Fernão Lopes de Castanheda's (d. 1559) *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos portugueses* by Cortesão, *Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, p. xxvii; my translation.

Orta indeed had access to either the manuscript or parts of it in a written form or via oral transmission.

Cristóbal Acosta is said to have been a so-called ›New Christian‹ like da Orta, whose student he possibly was for a short time at Goa. But it is not clear from where he hailed. He might have been born in one of the Portuguese colonies in Africa – Tangier, Ceuta, Cap Verdes or elsewhere, because he called himself Africano. In contrast to Pires and da Orta, Acosta arrived in 1550 in India as a soldier. He fought in several military campaigns of the Portuguese and is said to have been captured in Bengal. After being released, he returned to Portugal where he joined the entourage of his former captain Luís de Ataíde (1517–1580), who had been named viceroy of India in 1568. Arriving in this year in Goa as the personal physician of the new governor, Acosta was appointed a year later to the Royal Hospital of Cochin at the Malabar coast (Kochi in Kerala). During this time, he collected plant specimens about which he published a book in Burgos in 1578. The title of this book refers explicitly to da Orta and his work. In January 1572, he returned to Portugal, but moved on to Spain where he became a physician in 1576 and surgeon in Burgos. Acosta's *Tratado de las drogas, y medicinas de las Indias orientales* has been called a plagiarised version of da Orta's book or defended as an extension and enrichment of the same. Thus, like Clusius' Latin revision of da Orta's book it belongs intellectually and materially to the latter's biographies, while Pires' writings may be linked to it exclusively due to their material setting in Portuguese and Asia drug and plant trade networks. Hence, da Orta's book and its relevance to the early modern history of medicine and botany need to be viewed as a point of intersection in a complex network of conflict and cooperation between people and communities, emotions and desires, languages and plants, trade and war, literary appropriation, adaptation and piracy, political, religious and economic institutions and memberships in interpersonal systems of protection and support.

Very few historians of science, medicine and technology of the early modern period in Europe, North Africa or India take more than one of these elements into account when discussing and often glorifying da Orta's work. None of those whose articles or books I checked ever defined his or her project in this comprehensive and complex manner. Most writers about da Orta do not reflect on his life as the context of his book. Clearly, I do not claim that nobody studied da Orta's biography. But I like to draw the attention to how interpreta-

tions of the book tend to integrate this biography, if at all, rather superficially. Even those who focus solely on the book, consider only singular aspects. Works on the subject have been published after 2005 by Teresa Nobre de Carvalho, Isabel Soler, Juan Pimentel, Timothy Walker, Ines Županov, Palmira Fontes da Costa, and others.²⁴

For this paper, I chose two of the more elaborate discussions of da Orta's book, because they highlight a broad range of methodological problems. The first one is Richard Grove's highly appreciated *Green Imperialism* (1995).²⁵ Harold J. Cook's book *Matters of Exchange* (2007) has won a similar high acclaim as Grove's work on knowledge exchange in Asia.²⁶ Both scholars include in their discussions of da Orta's book to some degree the physician's background and parts of his life in India. They fail to raise, however, the important question as to whether the manner in which da Orta set up his narrative, included certain, but not other details of his life into it, and how he formulated some of his claims are intimately linked to these circumstances. Both recognize that his origin in a forcibly converted Sephardic family may have had an impact on what he discussed and how he wrote. Grove concedes this point more clearly than Cook. But his formulation of the cause of this possible relationship is so contorted that it remains unclear whether he realized what he wrote:

In general the text is remarkably subversive and even hostile of European and Arabic knowledge, regarding it as superfluous in the face of the wealth of accurate local knowledge. The reader becomes aware of a dialogue developing at several levels, some more hidden than others, in which Orta allows his own position to remain publicly indeterminate. We may be allowed, I think, to make a connection between the subversive element of the text and the personal problematic and ambivalence in Orta's status as a hidden Jew, a

²⁴ However, it can be said that as a matter of methodology those that I read continue to suffer under most of the historiographical shortcomings discussed here. The two cases (della Valle, da Orta) chosen for my methodological intervention do not aspire to be read as a review essay of the entire literature ever published about della Valle or da Orta. Moreover, I analyze the more recent writings on da Orta in my more extended article ›Issues of Best Historiographical Practice,‹ which is exclusively dedicated to that author. See footnote 19.

²⁵ R. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

²⁶ H. J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange. Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.

status he retained only with difficulty and which his family failed to retain (Grove 1996: 81).

There is no indication in the text that da Orta considered himself a »hidden Jew.« On the contrary, he presents himself as a good Catholic who was part of a thick network of missionaries and colonial administrators. It is in particular the emphasis on his good relationships with Martim Afonso de Souza as well as Miguel Vaz Coutinho (d. 1547), the Vicar General of India and one of the co-founders of the Society of Jesus in Goa, almost two decades after de Sousa had left Indian soil and Vaz Coutinho had died, which suggests that da Orta's book should be read as much more than a purely scientific work.²⁷ The complete absence of his mother and sisters, who had fled the Inquisition at home, hoping to be protected at Goa by their wealthy and well-connected brother, and the lack of any reference or even only an allusion to the burning of two of his Portuguese friends and physicians by the Goan Inquisition confirms that the *Colóquios* were intended to achieve more than merely providing a testimony to local botanical vocabularies, and healing practices.

When we take Saraiva's analysis of the Inquisition's policy against the people disparagingly called »Judaizers« seriously, then da Orta really had no reason to »retain the status of a hidden Jew« as Grove claims. Nor did his family have such a reason. The »crypto-Jew« and similar such terms were simply not their categories. But even when we dismiss Saraiva's insistence on the socio-economic nature of the persecution of 40.000 Portuguese Christians by the Inquisition between 1536 and 1821, da Orta would have had no reason to maintain a status as someone whom the Inquisition wished to kill. His goal would have been, as many of the documents of this dark period show, to present himself as a good Catholic with strong social connections within Portugal, Portuguese Goa and beyond its borders. This is exactly what the narrator named »Orta« in the *Colóquios* does.²⁸

²⁷ da Orta (s.d. Vol. 1: 4, 6, 32, 97, 205), (s.d. Vol. 2: 16, 120, 140, 260, 329, 339); Cook (2007: 97).

²⁸ The continued usage of the terminology of the Inquisition by all modern writers about da Orta, including the current ones mentioned previously, shows that there was, and is, little effort to understand da Orta's categories and his complex and complicated narration of his life in India on his own terms. This lack of effort is also indicated by the absence of an edition of those parts of the material on da Orta and his family

Although Cook does not explicitly discuss possible connections between da Orta's biography and his book, he mentions more biographical details than Grove and thus considers them in all likelihood relevant for his later comments on the text itself. He speaks, for instance, about the persecution of da Orta's family in Goa after his death, emphasizes da Orta's dedication of his book to his long-term Portuguese patron Martim Afonso de Souza and points to the poem of the famous Portuguese poet Luis de Camões (d. 1580), who in 1553 was sent to Goa as a punishment. He stayed there for a short time, before being sent to Macao. Cook sees, unfortunately, no reason to ask why da Orta dedicated his book in 1563 to a man who had left Goa in 1545 or why he printed it in a small print shop of the Jesuits at Goa, whose German and Portuguese owners apparently lacked the philological competence to assure a correct setting of the Portuguese text (Cook 2007: 96–98). Da Orta disposed of sufficient financial and social means to arrange for having his book printed in Portugal, should he have wished so. These features of present as well as absent people and their decisions speak strongly for the thesis that da Orta's book addressed first and foremost the upper echelon of the Portuguese society of Goa. While this idea was already suggested by Županov²⁹, she did not ask what da Orta wished to achieve with such an approach (Županov 2002: 2–5), given that numerous historical and political details, often well known to his contemporaries in Goa, are incomplete or simply false. Similarly, the botanical and medical details are often presented in such a fashion that no reader could have made use of the plants or drugs for healing purposes. These two issues are not the only, but two central features of da Orta's book that oblige us to ask what his purpose in writing the book may have been instead of reading it either in the tradition of a positivist Eurocentric history of scientific progress or in the verbose postmodernist, but often superficial narrative of bodies, sex, and cross-cultural discovery of Asian nature.

Grove and Cook deviate substantially from each other in their answers to a part of these questions, namely the evaluation of da

created by the Inquisition in Lisbon as well as Goa that are available today in Portugal's National Archive.

²⁹ I. G. Županov, »Drugs, Health, Bodies and Souls in the Tropics; Medical Experiments in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese India,« *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2002, pp. 1–36.

Orta's book as a scholarly text about remedies and foodstuff. Cook offers an interesting direct evaluation of the text, recognizing da Orta's ingenious interlinking of his learning about simples and drugs in India with his studies at Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares. He identifies the fictitious character Dr. Ruano in da Orta's dialogues as mirroring Jean Ruel or de la Ruelle (1474–1537), the humanist editor of Dioscurides' *Materia medica*. Da Orta had studied with Elio Antonio de Nebrija or Lebrija (1441–1522), the Spanish commentator of this new edition (Cook 2007: 97). Thus, da Orta's repeated, explicit rejection of ancient Greek and Latin authorities is more than merely an expression of his own, better knowledge. It is, as he says clearly into Ruano's face, a rejection of the humanist project: »You seem very much attached to these modern authors who, in order to praise the Greeks, speak badly of Arabs and of some Moors born in Spain, and others of Persia, calling them Maumetist barbarians (which they hold to be the worst epithet there is in the world), especially the Italians [...]« (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 33).³⁰ In a similar manner he chastizes his esteemed teacher Nebrija for carelessness in his use of Greek sources: »Ruano: Did Antonio de Lebrixa, in the Dictionary, say *anacardus*, a herb often approached by Galen? Orta: It is true that Lebrixa has said this, and that he was very learned and curious, but he erred in the Greek name. Without paying more attention he said that Galen had said it. He was careless, and you need not be surprised at this, for the good Homer sleeps sometimes« (*ibid.*: 65–66).³¹

Cook reads da Orta's dialogues, however, primarily as speaking for »the knowledge of things« than the knowing of texts, although he admits that the Portuguese author also relied on numerous texts:

Orta's character plays the part of the new natural historian: he gives answers based on knowledge of the things themselves. [...] Although the element of this discussion that is most apparent is Orta's use of his own and contemporaries' experiences with things themselves, it is also clear that he drew heavily on texts as well, especially ones about the drugs and plants of South Asia (Cook 2007: 97–98).

³⁰ da Orta (s.d. Vol. 1: 31). According to the Portuguese editor, the complete sentence is incorrect and unclear. Since the last part seems to be of no direct relevance to the issue formulated in the first part, I omitted it instead of trying to force a meaningful translation. da Orta (1912: 13).

³¹ See also (da Orta 1912: 33).

Cook justifies the latter judgment by the botanical vocabulary of da Orta's book. He believes that »his transcriptions of many words show his contact with native speakers,« a statement he uses to argue for da Orta's acquisition of some Arabic at Goa (*ibid.*: 98). This claim highlights one of the problems that historians of early modern science, medicine, and technology face when working on texts composed in other countries than those in western Europe. Da Orta's transliterated Arabic words mostly come from Latin translations and indicate, if anything at all, da Orta's lack of understanding of Arabic orthography, pronunciation, and elementary grammar. His transliterations of words from Indian languages oscillate between good and hopelessly corrupt, if not outright false. Sometimes he also attributes words to a language, which does not use it.

Some of these problems that outline da Orta's limited access to the locally spoken, but also to the major written languages can already be recognized early on. In the second session, da Orta answers Ruano's demand for naming the first drug in various languages: »[...] and I say that *aloes* or *aloe* is Latin and Greek. The Arabs call it *cebar*, and the Guzeratis and Deccanis *areá*; the Canarese (who are the inhabitants of this sea-coast) call it *catecomer*, the Castilians *acibar*, and the Portuguese *azevre*« (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 25).³² This first example in the *Colóquios* indicates that da Orta did not know Arabic, Gujarati or Dakhni well, although he explicitly claimed to have read Ibn Sīnā's medical oeuvre, *al-Qānūn fi l-tibb*, in Arabic and compared it with Andrea Alpago's (d. 1521) translation. (*ibid.*: 36)³³ There are several Arabic words for aloe. One of them is *šibr*. A similar reservation applies to da Orta's knowledge of Gujarati and Dakhni. The word offered by da Orta is misspelled. The word he probably meant is *alwah* or *alia*. The first of the two is used in Arabic, Persian, Panjabi, Urdu, and related languages and dialects in India. Gujaratis, however, call the plant *kunvāra*, in all likelihood derived from a Sanskrit ancestor. The nineteenth-century Portuguese editor of the *Colóquios* already pointed out the fact that da Orta had only a modest grasp of the various Indian botanical names. He identified, for instance, da Orta's Canarese *catecomer* as a corruption of the Sanskrit *ghrita kumārī* (*ibid.*: 37).

A fair analysis of da Orta's text and its various layers and func-

³² See also (*ibid.*: 6).

³³ See also (*ibid.*: 18).

tions in the physician's life presupposes a careful study of the multi-lingual vocabulary, the histories of the eight languages da Orta most often refers to (Arabic, Persian, Gujarati, Bangla [Bengali], Dakhni, Malayālam, Malay, and »the language spoken at Goa«). Da Orta calls the language of Goa Canarese. Its speakers he identifies as »the inhabitants of this coast« (*ibid.*: 25). This identification indicates some of the problems that da Orta faced. Canarese is usually identified with the Dravida language Kannaḍa. Kannaḍa is today the official language of the state of Karnataka, which surrounds the state of Goa in the East and the South. Today's official language of Goa is Kōṅkaṇī. Kōṅkaṇī is a language, which has as its basis an Indo-European substrate related to Sanskrit, but was influenced by elements from many other languages and dialects, among them the Dravidian Kannaḍa. Today's state language of Mahārāshṭra, where da Orta owned land and a house in the region of Mumbai is Marāṭhī, another Indo-European derivative from Sanskrit. This language is not named in da Orta's book, although he mentioned once the name Mombaim [Mumbai] and referred more often to his house and garden (*ibid.*: 326). The example of *catecomer* as a Canarese word, presented above, increases the confusion, since it is not a Dravida word and thus could belong to Kannaḍa only as an Indo-European element. I was not able, however, to find proof that it indeed had been part of that Dravida language in the first half of the sixteenth century. Thus, until a systematic study of the various so-called Canarese words presented by da Orta has been undertaken, it needs to remain an open question as to which spoken language da Orta's Canarese refers to. A further complication of the linguistic mixture presented by da Orta results from the observation by Mitchell that the separation and identification of various languages as a measure of ethnicity was only introduced by the British Raj in the nineteenth century.³⁴ Moreover, today's division of major parts of the Indian Subcontinent according to majority languages was introduced even later, namely during the twentieth century.³⁵ This reveals that it is very difficult to identify with reliability what Canarese may have meant to people in Goa in 1563 and which lan-

³⁴ L. Mitchell, »Parallel Languages, Parallel Cultures: Language as a New Foundation for the Reorganisation of Knowledge and Practice in Southern India,« *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2005, pp. 445–467.

³⁵ P. A. Mishra, *Divided Loyalties: Citizenship, Regional Identity and Nationalism in Eastern India (1866–1931)*, Ph D Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2008, pp. 4–5.

guage/s they named by this label. Even the explanation by the early modern Portuguese author João do Barros (1496–1570) that »(t)he narrow strip of land that runs from the sea to the Ghats is called Concan and its inhabitants Conquenijs even though our people call them Canarijs« does not clarify with certainty whether da Orta had learned the corrupted word from an inhabitant of that strip who only spoke Kōṅkaṇī (which is highly unlikely) or both languages or from some other person or even from a book.³⁶

These and other features of da Orta's text contradict Grove's and Cook's interpretations of the author's knowledge and goals as reliable local knowledge, experimentalist and as aiming to know things, even when both historians emphasize different features of the book. In particular, Grove subscribes on the one hand to strong epistemological claims, when discussing the *Colóquios*, while acknowledging on the other that da Orta had not really penetrated local knowledge beyond the mere surface. Grove's desire to recognize da Orta's book as the first European text on South Asian ethnobotany anchored in a local »system of cognition« that rejected not merely ancient Greek and Latin, but equally Arabic and Brahmin medical systems, seduced him to merge the dominant glance at da Orta's text through the lense of Clusius' Latin reformulation with an erasure of the differences between da Orta's work and Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein's (1639–1691) *Hortus indicus malabaricus*. This latter book was written more than a century after the *Colóquios* in Cochin, more than 770 kms south of Goa, by a Dutch nobleman, soldier, and colonial administrator. Grove states:

[In] these texts, contemporary Hippocratic emphases on accuracy and efficacy tended to strongly privilege Ayurvedic and local Malayali medical and botanical (and zoological) knowledge and to lead to effective discrimination against older Arabic, Brahminical and European texts and systems of cognition in natural history. Inspection of the mode of construction of the *Colóquios* and, even more, of the *Hortus malabaricus* reveals that they are profoundly indigenous texts. Far from being inherently European works, they are actually compilations of Middle Eastern and South Asian ethnobotany, organised on essentially non-European precepts. The existence of European printing, botanical gardens, global networks of information and transfer of materia medica, together with the increasing professionalisation of natural history, seem actually to have facilitated the diffusion and dominance of a

³⁶ Quoted after M. Rai, S. Dessa, *A History of Konkani Literature* (Pune: Sahitya Akademi, 2000), p. 2.

local epistemological hegemony alongside the erosion of older European and Arabic systems (Grove 1996: 78).

In my view, such an identification of the two texts as fundamentally in agreement in form, content, context, and purpose is misleading. It seems to have been born from Grove's desire to argue for »(the) dominance of low-caste epistemologies and affinities in the diffusion of Asian botanical knowledge after 1534« (*ibid.*: 80). Furthermore, Grove's evaluation is marred by elementary mistakes of separating and opposing medical and botanical knowledge forms, which interpenetrated in their historical trajectories. The system he calls »European« depended heavily on texts and methods of classification and healing that were written in Arabic and practiced in the Middle East as well as South Asia. Arabic medical and botanical writings and goods were, of course, at home in the Middle East, but also in South Asia, central Asia and North Africa. Da Orta's book does not at all privilege Ayurvedic and local knowledge along the Malabar Coast. If da Orta privileges anything in his book, it is his own knowledge. The second rank, moreover, is given to medical and pharmaceutical texts written by authors from Islamicate societies and translated into Latin as well as orally distributed knowledge of merchants and physicians. In the second session, for instance, da Orta lists some of his informants – a Parsi (Zoroastrian) merchant, Muslim physicians of Burhan Nizam Shah (r. 1508 or 1510–1553), ruler of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, Hindu physicians of Bahadur Shah (r. 1526–1535, 1536–1537), ruler of Gujarat, Jewish merchants from Jerusalem who were sons of physicians and druggists (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 26, 28–29, 34, 36 et al.).³⁷ Other merchants are mentioned in other parts of the *Colóquios*, sometimes even with names, while physicians remain almost completely name- and faceless.

The different treatment of informants suggests considering da Orta's book as comprising different layers of intentions and messages the author wished to submit to his readers. This different treatment reflects on the one hand different personal experiences of da Orta in different parts of India. On the other hand, it signals that da Orta inscribed his text with more than one message that he wished his readers to recognize. One of the functions of the physicians is to serve as a tool for da Orta vouching for his expertise in West Indian, Arabic

and Persian materia medica. A second function is to tell tintillating stories about the dangers India offered. He makes it very clear that the local doctors considered him a threat. He reports that they countermanded his medical advice to the Muslim ruler more than once (*ibid.*: 204–206 and Vol. 2: 123).³⁸ Thus naming them would have given them too much visibility and honor.

The names that he presents when talking of Persian or Hindu doctors are those of their Muslim royal patrons. On a first glance, this repeated reference to the two Muslim rulers of Ahmadnagar and Gujarat mirrors his continued emphasis on his excellent relationships with Portuguese noblemen and high-ranking clerics. Da Orta posits himself as an esteemed and protected client of all major power players in Goa and her neighbours. At a second glance, the situation is less transparent. Bahadur Shah, for instance, was a rather unwilling ally of the Portuguese, forced into their embrace by the Mughal attack at Gujarat in 1535. He died in 1537 while visiting one of the Portuguese ships that anchored at the coast of Gujarat to attack Diu. Both sides accused the other for the sultan's death. Moreover, Bahadur Shah had resisted Portuguese conquest of his land time and again and had asked the Ottoman Empire for naval support. The Ottomans sent a fleet twice to cooperate with him or his successor against the Portuguese. The first time, in 1531, the Ottoman-Gujarati alliance succeeded in holding off the Portuguese, while in 1538 it suffered a resounding defeat. Thus presenting in 1563 Bahadur Shah time and again to the Portuguese readers of Goa will not have endeared da Orta to them. At the very least, Bahadur Shah's presence in the *Colóquios* would not have contributed to sending a message to the Goan Inquisition, which motivated its members not to persecute da Orta and his family. The death of Burhan Nizam Shah in 1553 also would not have contributed to portraying da Orta as well protected by Muslim forces. Hence, we should, perhaps, read the presence of these two potentates in the *Colóquios* as a confirmation of da Orta's loyalty to the Portuguese Crown and Goa. This assurance is explicitly made in the book, when da Orta reports, for instance, about Burhan Nizam Shah's lucrative offer to visit him every year for a few months (*ibid.* Vol. 1: 119).³⁹ A further way to understand da Orta's decision to talk about them repeatedly is his explicit claim that he knew better than they and their

³⁷ See also (*ibid.*: 8–17 and elsewhere).

³⁸ (*ibid.*: 121–124, 300).

³⁹ (*ibid.*: 68).

physicians how to cure local diseases, even in severe cases (*ibid.* Vol. 2: 139–143).⁴⁰ The stories that da Orta tells in these instances pit local against Portuguese medical expertise. The rulers, or their physicians, are certain that they know how to treat local diseases and disqualify the practices of Portuguese doctors in general. Da Orta describes himself as a socially skilled person who would not contradict a prince or fight the local physicians, but who knew nonetheless that the claim was false and that his ›western‹ medical training would prevail. His stories thus provide him the opportunity to tell his Portuguese readers of the superiority of his and through him their culture of knowing and doing things related to disease and health (*ibid.*: 140).⁴¹ This is certainly a message that will have pleased his Portuguese audience in 1563.

While the Muslim and Hindu physicians obviously are of inferior relevance in da Orta's narration, the merchants clearly mattered more. One of the main explicit orientations of da Orta's book is the trade of drugs and remedies. This narrative choice reflects his own status as a successful and wealthy merchant of such goods, which, while true, appears to have been a defensive strategy of da Orta against the Inquisition. He portrayed himself not merely as sheltered by strong social networks of patronage, as loyal to the Crown and as more knowledgeable than the local doctors. He also showed himself as an expert in the most important economic activity that the Portuguese Crown pursued in Asia – the trade with drugs, spices, and gemstones. None of these specific elements of da Orta's book was, however, of any relevance to van Reede or Clusius. Thus, approaching da Orta's *Colóquios* through the lenses of these two Dutchmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Grove does, or through Clusius' lens as Cook does in a weak form, divests the book of its proper layers of narration and its author of his goals, hopes, and efforts. It leads both historians, moreover, to different, but questionable determinations of the role of da Orta's book in the transfer of knowledge between South and West Asia and Catholic and Protestant Europe. The biography of the *Colóquios* needs to be told first and foremost for Goa about Goa and Portugal. It is certainly possible that other readers will interpret the various stories, claims, and clues in the *Colóquios* differently than I suggest here. But such differences do

⁴⁰ (*ibid.*: 309–312).

⁴¹ (*ibid.*: 309).

not diminish our obligation to address the explicit statements formulated by da Orta as made in Goa and ask for their meanings there and not far away in Catholic, let alone Protestant, Europe. The book's biographies in those European countries as a monument of early modern medicine, pharmacology, botany and botanical gardens, however, need to be studied there. It seems plausible to assume with Cook, Groves, and many other historians that Dutch physicians, in particular Clusius, were major actors in this respect. But Acosta, the African soldier turned physician, should not be ignored.

4 Final Remarks

The goal of my paper was to argue that even after decades of critique of all kinds of Eurocentric interpretations of the histories of knowledge in different cultures and despite all the new approaches and turns developed in the humanities since the last third of the twentieth century, historians of science, medicine, and technology specializing in the early modern period are still deeply anchored in Eurocentric views, modes of speaking, and interpretive practices. While there are of course visible differences between modernist and postmodernist styles of seeing and writing, in this fundamental regard the differences tend to be negligible. I see several reasons for this deplorable situation.

The first consists in the kind of education we acquire. It is much less complex than the knowledge needed to competently analyze cross-cultural products of any period, including the early modern one discussed here. The knowledge and skills acquired in academic education are either focused in terms of disciplines, regions, cultures, and periods and hence philological and other technical skills or the education tries to be cross-disciplinary, long-term or even global. The latter lacks, however, too often the necessary breadth and depth of the corresponding philological and technical skills. Hence, the only way to study cross-cultural products adequately is cooperation between scholars of those fields that intersect in the early modern products. In the case of Pietro della Valle such a cross-disciplinary cooperation needs to include experts of social, cultural, economic, intellectual, military, ecclesiastic, and diplomatic history of Rome, Naples, Istanbul, Cairo, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Isfahan, Tabriz, Lar, Shiraz, as well as the Persian Gulf of the Safavid

Empire, Hormuz and Goa for the Portuguese colonial empire in Asia and western India. With regard to issues pertaining to the technicalities of the history of science, medicine, and technology, this means that approximately ten languages need to be mastered. In addition, methods and topics of astronomy, astrology, natural philosophy, geometry, geography, medicine, history writing, numismatics, and related disciplines must be assessed for ancient, medieval, and early modern times in Europe and western as well as southern Asia. Similarly broad are the demands for an adequate study of da Orta's book on drugs and plants, his life in Portugal and Goa and the kingdoms he visited in western India. Most of the historians of science, medicine, and technology who write on da Orta know neither any of the Asian languages nor the histories of societies in South Asia and the Middle East. South Asianists, on the other hand, seldom know Semitic languages, Latin, or history of medicine, botany, and natural philosophy in western Europe and the Middle East. No methodology can compensate for such limitations. Only cooperative teamwork can overcome them.

The second reason is closely connected with these limitations in our education. There can be no doubt that history of science, medicine and technology continues to be dominated by research questions and methods developed in, and for, western societies. This dominance carries a bag of prejudices in its structures that devalue in a variety of forms knowledge cultures in other regions of the globe. The greatest stumbling block for a more balanced approach to the diverse cultures is the deeply ingrained belief that theoretical achievements and innovations supercede any other kind of knowledge practice like teaching, instrument making or craftsmanship in metallurgy, ceramics, color production and the like, despite the fact that the latter forms have become important research areas for early modern societies in western Europe and East Asia. Claims that da Orta's book is the first European book ever about Asian plants and drugs can only be repeated time and again because their writers do not consider Islamicate societies in Europe as European societies. The reduction of Europe to Catholic and Protestant societies in western and central Europe is the ideological background of such claims. History of science, medicine, and technology in other regions is often thought of outside of history as reflected by descriptors such as history of science, medicine and technology in Islam, India, or China. The historical trajectories of such identifiers differ. The one point, which unifies them, however,

is their ahistorical character. This allows writers about da Orta, for instance, to formulate such meaningless claims as da Orta rejected or devalued Arabic medicine. When da Orta commented on Christian, Jewish, and Muslim medical writers and their works, he only spoke about their Latin translations as he had studied them in Spain, or the early modern re-translation in Italy in the case of Ibn Sīnā. Although he knew that these authors had originally written their works in Arabic, he learned their knowledge in Latin and as part of a Spanish educational program. These works had become part of da Orta's own medical culture. The works used in western India differed, however, quite substantially in authorship, time and region of composition and language from those he knew, with one major exception – the medical opus magnum of Ibn Sīnā. Da Orta, however, speaks of none of those other works. Hence, his critical as well as appreciative comments on Latin translations of Arabic medical texts need to be studied not within different historical phases of writing about medicine in Islamicate societies, but with regard to a limited body of texts as part of Latin medical education in Catholic western Europe.

Similar problems consist with regard to the study of Pietro della Valle's travel account and his other written products such as his letters to other people than Mario Schipano, the recipient of the letters that constitute the travel account, della Valle's diary, his Persian and Turkish manuscripts and letters, or his published and unpublished scholarly works. Many researchers use only the printed versions of the letters to Schipano and completely ignore the differences between them and the handwritten originals, including the editorial changes introduced into them by della Valle after his return to Rome. The material he brought back from the Ottoman and Safavid Empires is usually only studied by experts of those Islamicate societies. Historians of early modern Italy do not include them in their work. Thus, an important part of della Valle's engagement with the cultures and societies he lived in for almost a decade are not considered by early modernists, which cannot but distort the latter's perspectives and results. Consequently, the impact of della Valle's assumptions about what his envisaged readership would be willing and able to cherish and what the Roman Imprimatur would confirm for publication on the final version of his travel account is neither analyzed nor understood. This has serious consequences for the interpretation of his portrayal of the Ottoman and Safavid societies and their religious, cultural and political features. The wealth and diversity of della Valle's

archival heritage allows, however, to investigate much more profoundly the layers of perception and description that he chose when writing about foreign lands than that of other travelers from Europe. A comprehensive study of all of della Valle's papers has the potential to substantially alter our understanding of the processes that shaped the cultural misrepresentation of western and southern Asian cultures and societies in the early modern period.

The third reason for the continuity of Eurocentric perspectives in current academic works about early modern cross-cultural knowledge products is the continuation of those older layers of perception of the ›Other‹ in current views of ›Us‹ and the ›Other.‹ Almost all researchers working on da Orta continue to speak about him and his work in the language of the Inquisition and do not reflect upon what this language signifies and what it does to their interpretation of da Orta's life and book. This applies to any kind of interpretive stance, i. e. I do not see a significant difference of this impact in the case of a modernist or any kind of postmodernist approach to da Orta. The alternative language used mostly by researchers working on the victims of the Inquisition and/or the Jewish diaspora is that of victimhood. It too accepts the basic pretensions of the Inquisition. Other appearances of this continued presence of early modern (and sometimes also medieval) perspectives on neighbours within Europe or people in Asia and Africa concerns the depiction of other religious groups and other forms of political organization, knowledge, or modes of living. Early modern writers are interpreted as early ethnographers, when writing about such other communities, while they constructed, like della Valle, their reports not on the basis of careful observations of and learning about such other groups of humans, but on a good number of ancient, medieval, and early modern books, their own assumptions and values about ›good and evil‹ and a limited number of interrogations with the help of translators, who, for many people thus portrayed, knew their languages and customs only in a very rudimentary manner.

The fourth reason is the retrospective application of values and perspectives of our own times on texts and people of the past. Methodologically, there is no difference between declaring da Orta, for instance, a pioneer of modern epidemiology or a broker between East and West, because he was neither the one nor the other, except in our own minds. Political correctness does not guarantee a more reliable interpretation of a historical source. Only competence, sound

analysis, and the work with sources from the various knowledge cultures addressed directly or symbolically in da Orta's book, i. e. a synchronic multiperspectivism, can improve our interpretive skills and reduce our dependence on ideologically grounded prejudices.

Finally, the last major reason for the unsatisfactory evaluation of early modern cross-cultural knowledge products in many current historical studies is the fragmentation and decontextualization of these sources and their histories. One example I described above is the selective inclusion of the material produced and acquired by Pietro della Valle. Disciplinary boundaries are one important cause for this fragmentation. Further causes are traditions of historical and other narratives that lived from separating and opposing cultures in and outside Europe and which continue to be followed by the one-sided organization of the academic systems in Europe. A greater attention to our own intellectual ›entanglements‹ in Eurocentric beliefs and the parallel investigation of cross-cultural products from different cultural perspectives are urgently needed, if we wish to overcome this silent prison of assumptions and customs that direct our research practices.

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**Symposium:
How Are Histories of
Non-Western Philosophies
Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?**

Abstract

The view that philosophy is a uniquely and essentially European endeavor rooted in ancient Greece became dominant in Europe only in the late eighteenth century, eclipsing several centuries during which Europeans had denied this proposition. Advocates of intercultural philosophy aim to integrate Western and non-Western philosophical histories and traditions in hopes of better addressing the crucial questions facing global humankind. A Native American standpoint charges this project with being exploitative, and disrespectful.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, history of philosophy, intercultural philosophy, Native American philosophy, integration, Bernasconi, Hountondji, Norton-Smith, Wimmer.

How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?

Philosophy is, whatever else can be addressed by the term, an academic field established worldwide. But this is in fact true for only one of many philosophical traditions which humankind has produced in different regions of the world, namely the occidental. If one is talking or writing – be it in academia or in popular media – about questions of ethics, for example, quoting solely occidental terminology, texts, and authors, commonly one does not feel the need to call the outcome *western* or *occidental* ethics – although is this exactly what she or he does. The outcome will simply be termed *Ethics*, without further specification. On the other hand, if somebody in approaching ethical issues alludes only to terms stemming from, say, African, Chinese, or Islamic etc. lore, that is: from non-occidental traditions, the outcome is inevitably qualified as being *African*, *Chinese*, or *Islamic* etc. ethics. The same holds true of other fields of philosophy, and surprisingly enough even of the History of Philosophy. It seems to somehow sound *normal* to treat occidental philosophy under the heading of *Philosophy*, while other traditions, even if treated in detail, need to be subsumed under *World Philosophies*. Although a regional-cultural marker seems unnecessary, actually redundant for some people, in the first case, it seems definitely necessary, at least to be expected, in the other cases.

Even if assumed to be *normal*, such linguistic behavior is certainly not *natural*. It does not reflect the differentiated past – and present – of philosophical thinking of humankind. Nor is it normal going even by the history of occidental thought. It is rather a relatively modern development in occidental self-understanding, which has proved to be dominant in the general process of globalization, a process which seems to possess many features of occidental culture.

Some of the points mentioned above require a critical examination from the perspective of an emerging world-culture which may be expected not to be a merely globalized form of occidental culture but

something new; one emerging by various factors out of different pasts. One of these factors will be philosophy, but then it will not rely on one culturally-homogenous history, which is conceived as being the one and only universal history of thought. It, rather, will have to look out for and integrate diverse developments of thinking, differing in many and constitutive aspects.

And there is yet another point. To a surprising extent, subjects and questions from the history of philosophy play a role in academic philosophy – generally and worldwide – and this holds good for any philosophical school (with some exceptions regarding Analytic Philosophy). In fact, even systematic discussions including those within systematically oriented schools such as phenomenology are influenced by this development. To interpret and to comment on texts of – other – philosophers counts in and of itself as a philosophical activity. This is neither necessarily so, nor has this been the case always. It is also not self-evident in every historical stage of philosophy everywhere in the world. In its common academic practice in western countries, the interest in (occidental) philosophy's history is also connected to the hegemonialization of occidental philosophy in modern times, and therefore is somehow contingent. In this regard, it already seems to be a tiny revolution if texts and thinkers from philosophy's past in different regions of the world are considered to be relevant. Asking for other voices from the world history of philosophical thinking is one characteristic of interculturally oriented philosophy. However, *intercultural philosophy* simply is *philosophy*, albeit oriented – and not necessarily ›occidented‹ – in a global perspective.

Therefore, we ought to shorten the question of this paper a little bit: Are the histories of non-western philosophies *relevant to philosophizing*? Put this way, the answer will simply be ›no,‹ if we agree with a ›normal‹ understanding of the general term philosophy as sketched above. The answer, though, will definitely be ›yes,‹ if we act on the assumption that philosophy is to be understood in a culturally generic way. Philosophy in an intercultural orientation – ›intercultural philosophy‹ – may open the mind to elaborate new paths in this direction, but its goal can only be to supersede the specifying adjective. Historiography of philosophy in such an orientation will have to criticize the mono-cultural traits and concepts of past and present; it will have to do that both theoretically, by analyzing the assumptions driving selections, interpretations and dispositions, and practically, by searching and reconstructing philosophical reflections on a truly

worldwide scale. Finally, it shall have to ask for alternative ways to teach history of philosophy (of humankind).

The historiography of philosophy has gained its prominence and developed its standing as a literary genre in modern times in Europe. For a very long period of time in most of its different approaches, it produced a simple equation – history of philosophy was history of occidental philosophy, and vice versa. No one from non-occidental regions had made use of reason the way philosophy does, as Hans-Georg Gadamer still told us in 1993: »[T]he concept of philosophy is not yet applicable to the great answers to humanity's great questions which have been given by the highly sophisticated cultures of East Asia and India – as these questions have been asked by philosophy in Europe again and again« (Gadamer 1993: 68)¹. There was nothing like ›philosophy in the strict sense‹ outside the Occident. That was general opinion, but not from the very beginnings of philosophical historiography in Europe.

Only at the end of the eighteenth century in general histories of philosophy has been established one correct answer to questions regarding the origin, place, age, and founder of philosophy for the whole of humankind.² The right answer to such questions became true for generations to come – philosophy was Greek not just by its name but by its very essence. Thales of Miletus from the sixth century BCE was its originator. There were no uncertainties any more in the said questions for a long period of time for students everywhere in the world. When being asked about the origin of philosophy, there was one true answer. Consequently, history of philosophy became the history of a process leading from Thales unto the present.

Of course, Aristotle had stated the same long before. But now this statement had been reestablished after lengthy discussions, ex-

¹ Unless specified otherwise, all the translations are mine. »Es ist im Grunde völlige Willkür, ob wir das Gespräch eines chinesischen Weisen mit seinem Schüler Philosophie nennen oder Religion oder Dichtung.« The same is claimed for Indian traditions. Further, [der] »Begriff der Philosophie [ist] noch nicht auf die großen Antworten anwendbar, die die Hochkulturen Ostasiens und Indiens auf die Menschheitsfragen, wie sie in Europa durch die Philosophie immer wieder gefragt werden, gegeben haben« (Gadamer 1993: 68).

² There still is an explicit discussion of the point made by Dieterich Tiedemann in 1791, but he also decisively marks the new standard view: philosophy starts with Thales and other Pre-Socratics and there is no evidence for any origins elsewhere. For most of later authors, argumentative statements concerning this standard of selection even seemed needless. Cf. Tiedemann (1791).

cluding rival traditions one after another. It is worth remembering that during the early centuries of book printing in Europe, when the historiography of philosophy was growing into a literary genre of its own, not only the biblical Chaldeans and Babylonians, Egyptians and Hebrews were regularly featured in these accounts, but Indians, Scythians and Celts as well. During the seventeenth century, information from China and Japan widened the field. These ›barbarian‹ traditions of philosophy had been rated equal or even above the Greek by some authors³. However, very rarely did any of these traditions show up in books on the general history of philosophy after 1800. In his lectures in the eighteen-twenties, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel extensively dealt with Chinese and Indian thinking to show that ›oriental‹ wisdom was truly only a preliminary stage to philosophy proper. In spite of detailed research and many translations during the century of colonization, the mainstream around 1900 was convinced: There is no such thing as philosophy in the strict sense except in its Greek and occidental form. Non-western ›philosophies‹ were literally given their asylum in separate wards of the academy, if at all.

Even comparative or cross-cultural studies, thriving fields since the beginning of the twentieth century, did not alter the situation of academic philosophy too much. These studies concentrated mainly on comparisons between *East* and *West* – and on *comparisons*. Consequently, other regions like the Islamic World, Africa south of the Sahara, Latin America etc. were left out of focus. Secondly, mainstream philosophy could continue its disputes without risking to be seriously interrupted by non-western voices. One did not have to know about non-western views or theories concerning whatever issue, when writing a philosophical thesis about this issue. Such at least was my situation as a young researcher in the 1970s, and I guess it was not so different from students in other parts of the world. I was expected to know about discourses concerning my research field in some leading European languages – except Spanish and Russian among others – non-western discourses were definitely deemed irrelevant. Moreover, I would had to go to special places or to some department of regional specialization (as, e.g., Indology or perhaps Sinology) in order to learn about non-western philosophies. A ›normal‹ department of philosophy did not deal with these fields. If things may have changed somewhat since then in Europe, this is due more to

political and societal developments than to needs felt from within academic philosophy itself. It may not be so easy today to overtly declare that there is no such thing as Chinese or African philosophy. And yet, it is not too difficult to organize conferences, to edit books, and to practice curricula in the field of philosophy, as if there were no such things.

Therefore, it might be useful to know what happened with the history of philosophy since it began as a discipline around 1700 and afterwards. The most illustrating part of disciplining its subject may be the discussion ultimately leading to the exclusion of Chinese philosophy. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, one of the leading philosophers of those days, had published his views on China in 1697 in a tract entitled *Novissima Sinica*, relying mainly on information, translations, and interpretations of Confucian sources provided by Jesuit missionaries. The starting paragraphs of this text depict the complementary cultures of the East and the West of Eurasia. Both of them were considered to be on an equal standing in the sphere of technology. Leibniz argued that the West is superior in theoretical fields, like in mathematics and metaphysics, and of course by its religion based on true revelation. China, surprisingly, is said to be superior in practical philosophy: ›they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals.‹ Hence his proposal: China should ›send missionaries to us to teach us the purpose and use of natural theology, in the same way as we send missionaries to them to instruct them in revealed theology‹ (Leibniz 1994: 46).

There are impressive voices during the eighteenth century that shared these views on China, such as Christian Wolff and Voltaire to mention the most prominent ones. Still, at the end of the century, the satirical formula of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1985 [1796]), that there only are ›philosophants, no philosophers‹ in China, is more characteristic for the period when theories on racial conditions of intellectual faculties, which were relatively new in Lichtenberg's time, were elaborated to such a degree that finally ›the Chinese‹ could be described as being ›organically unable even to rise to the imagination of metaphysical thinking‹ as Houston Stewart Chamberlain puts it around 1900 (Chamberlain 1906: 707). Reason in its highly esteemed forms literally got ›whitewashed,‹ it finally could be expected to flourish in no other individuals than ›Aryans,‹ as a highly reputable Ger-

³ Cf. Baldwin (1547) (This book had ten editions until 1630); Bolduanus (1616).

man dictionary from the heydays of racial theory tells us: »Philosophy is the creation especially of the nordic-aryan mind« (Schondorff, and Schingitz 1943: 444). Nowadays, racial theory is banned from the historiography of philosophy, of course. Culturalism however remains, and provides sufficient reasons to treat »World Philosophies« separately from »Philosophy« in a general sense.

In this context it is worth remembering an almost forgotten way of explaining history of mankind by biblical premises, still prominent in the early Enlightenment. It was suitable to interpret some peoples' – the most ancient ones' – traditions as handing down primordial wisdom to later generations. A contemporary of Leibniz, William Whiston, the British geologist and archeologist had found an answer to the long-lasting riddle of Chinese chronics reaching back to or even beyond the Great Flood. Some of the calculations, he said, were erroneous, and Fuxi, the first of the mythological emperors of the Chinese, was no one else than Noah himself (Whiston 1696). The solution seemed plausible and relevant to many authors of that time. However, it subsequently became obsolete together with the degradation of antediluvian wisdom as such. Until then, the superiority of Chinese traditions in the fields of practical philosophy and political theory was explicable by their connection to the last of the antediluvian patriarchs. Johann Christoph Gottsched, a follower of Christian Wolff and one of the influential proponents of this thesis, repeated it until 1762 in seven editions of his *Erste Gründe der gesamten Weltweisheit* (Gottsched 1983 [1734]. Further on it can be traced in general histories of philosophy until the days of Hegel's lectures. Later on, the biblical story of humanity ceded away and was substituted by a story of immense and unimaginable epochs, and of evolutionary concepts. Interpretations of an integrative centrist form gave way to expansive centrist⁴ ones: There was one culture which was not a culture among others, but the inculturated form of universal reason itself.⁵

I maintain, however, that there is no history of philosophy in a

general sense without the histories of all philosophies. Therefore, the historiography of philosophy ought to direct its interest to all sources of philosophical thinking, from whatever region, in whatever medium, and language it may come. This obviously cannot be achieved by any single individual for evident reasons. And it will not be achieved by individuals coming from one cultural background either, for reasons not so evident. But then it shall also be necessary to discuss new ways in periodization, classification, as well as interpretation of history.

It goes without saying that any periodization which has been deemed adequate for a single cultural tradition must not be suitable to other traditions. Easily this can be shown for the triple distinction of ancient, medieval, and modern epochs. This distinction still underwrites curricular as well as historiographical approaches in the field, although most historians would agree that it hardly makes sense for the occidental history where it has been invented. Nor would some equivalent of dynastic features seem adequate, as it had been practiced in Chinese historiography. A detailed proposal for periodization for »Global History of Philosophy« has been formulated by John C. Plott (1979)⁶. However, beside the fact that it does not include traditions outside Eurasia, this proposal does not appear plausible in every respect, the most persuading part of it concerning the beginnings in an »axial period« based on Karl Jaspers. To my knowledge, the most developed alternative to region-bound periodization is the Marxist historiography of philosophy. A truly internationalist and global research has been carried out in this perspective and is worth being reconsidered in the future.

Secondly, there is the problem of classification, of finding descriptive terminology for what is to be described. Ideally, the historian of philosophy ought to have distinct terms to denote theories or traditions in an unambiguous way at his/her disposal. In practice, the situation in the historiography of philosophy in this respect seems

⁴ For different types of centrism, see Wimmer (2007a).

⁵ In 1936 Husserl (1970: 16) asked whether »European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea« (»trägt eine absolute Idee in sich«), »rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like »China« or »India.« (ist nicht nur »ein anthropologischer Typus wie »China« oder »Indien.«). His criterion was a »universal philosophy.« Only if »Europe« produces more than just a »type« of humanity, »it could be decided whether the spectacle of the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to

the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than to a historical non-sense, of the world.«

⁶ Starting from the »Pre-Axial Age«, philosophies evolve throughout Eurasia during the »Axial Age« (750–250 BCE), followed by the »Han-Hellenistic-Bactrian Period« (250 BCE–325 CE); »Patristic-Sutra Period« (325–800); »Period of Scholasticism« (800–1350); »Period of Encounters (1350–1850); concluding finally with »Period of Total Encounter« (1850 ss.). There are parallel developments claimed in all of Eurasia for any of these periods.

to be quite *naturwüchsig*, naturally grown – there are personalized denotations (as, e.g. *Aristotelian* or *Marxist philosophy*); others refer to languages or peoples, even continents (*Chinese* or *African philosophy*) or religions (*Christian* or *Buddhist philosophy*); there are denotations like *Daoism* or *Lebensphilosophie*, *Analytic* or *Existentialist Philosophy* etc.; finally there are denotations like *materialism* or *idealism*, *empiricism* or *rationalism* and the like.

Here again, classifying terminologies stemming from only one of the philosophical traditions of the past will not do the job. Nor will sheer multiplicity be the answer. To me it seems that some sort of terminology starting from very general terms (like *material* and *immaterial*) applicable in ontological, epistemological, and ethical contexts,⁷ ought to be elaborated.

Thirdly, there is the question of hermeneutics, that is, of adequate interpretation of very different ways of thinking, expressed in seemingly or actually mutually untranslatable terminologies. Here again, it is the challenge of intercultural philosophy to work out new ways of mutual interpretations, avoiding both ›total identity‹ and ›radical difference‹ by an »analogous hermeneutics,« as Ram A. Mall puts it, searching for »homeomorphic equivalents« in Raimon Panikkar's words (Mall 2000: 15–17; Panikkar 2000: n.p.).

Ultimately, the history of philosophy, of western as well as non-western philosophies, will be judged as per its aptitude to contribute to crucial questions of global humankind.

–Franz Martin Wimmer, Emeritus,
University of Vienna, Austria

⁷ For a detailed, though formal, proposal, see Wimmer (1990).

The Kantian Canon: Response to Wimmer

I fundamentally agree with Professor Wimmer's proposition that the histories of non-Western philosophies are relevant not only to intercultural understanding but also to philosophizing. Indeed it could be otherwise only once – *per impossibile* – all cultural difference had been abolished. I also maintain that the widespread reduction of the history of philosophy to the history of Western philosophy is an obstacle to intercultural understanding and I agree with him that it was only during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that so-called Western philosophy as an academic discipline decisively claimed for itself a hegemonic role. Scholars like Giovanni Santinello (1993, 2011), Ulrich Johannes Schneider (1999), and, most recently, Peter Park (2013) have shown that the origin of philosophy was located in Greece only at the end of the eighteenth century. Earlier in the century the ideas of the Chaldeans, Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Persians, Indians, Phoenicians, Celts, and so on were included in histories of philosophy.¹ Even more significantly for our purposes Jacob Brucker in 1744 included under the title »Exotic Philosophy« a discussion of the so-called Malabars (primarily the Tamils), the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Canadians (or Native Americans).² To be sure, Brucker was not especially sympathetic to either the so-called »barbarian« or the exotic philosophies that he described, but they were not excluded by him from the outset as they largely were by the end of the eighteenth century. The philosophical canon that was established then largely remains in place today with relatively few changes. Literature departments here revised the literary canon; historians of art reflect changes in taste; but the philosophical canon is set in stone and it serves as the rock to which contemporary philoso-

¹ Brucker (1742); [Boureau-Deslandes] (1742); Samuel Formey (1760); [Adelung] (1786); Eberhard (1788).

² Brucker (1744).

phy clings as it tries to retain a certain purity against what are seen as ›external‹ challenges.

If we are to expand and indeed overthrow the inherited canon in the name of intercultural understanding, we need to understand how this narrow canon was established and why it has been maintained with largely the same content and within the same parameters. Until we have answers to those two questions, appeals to change it are likely to be as effective as shouting into the wind. The task is a big one and I can here point only to a few factors. The first factor to be considered is religion. The study of the ideas governing societies outside of Europe did not cease with their exclusion from philosophy. As Professor Wimmer says, »non-Western ›philosophies‹ were literally given their asylum in separate wards of the academy, if at all« (Wimmer 2015a: 128). They were frequently transferred into the study of religion and from the perspective of Christianity could be dismissed as paganism and thus false.³ Immanuel Kant could rely on the Christians of his day to assent to the proposition that there can be only one religion, albeit »several kinds of faiths.«⁴

The tendency to exclude non-Western philosophy was further assisted by the secularization of academic philosophy in much of the West. It was no longer the case that Christianity was the only religion admitted into. Given that non-Western philosophies had already been consigned to the status of religions, the secularization of philosophy served to reinforce their exclusion. To be sure, attempts to tell the history of philosophy without reference to religion tend to lapse into a kind of incoherence. One often sees this clearly in histories of ethics. The history of ethics is taught almost always as if Christianity had made only a slight contribution to the philosophical idea of ethics, if any, even though it was only in the context of Christianity that ethics became an autonomous philosophical discipline in its own right.⁵ What seems to matter to writers on ethics today is to establish a continuity between the questions that especially Aristotle and Kant were asking in spite of the fact that Kant was the heir of Christian experi-

ences of the will, conscience, intention that were entirely foreign to the Greeks. Given how reluctant many Western philosophers are to acknowledge a positive Christian contribution to our ethical understanding, it is perhaps not surprising that they refuse to acknowledge the contributions of so-called non-Western philosophies, dismissing them as non-philosophical because religious. Confucius was introduced as a contributor to philosophical ethics before Confucianism was dismissed from philosophy and given a role in the history of religions. Today the West, especially Europe, tends to think of itself as tolerant and largely secular, but the prevalence of Islamophobia shatters that self-image. The contribution of Arabic philosophy even to a narrowly constituted Western philosophy is still not acknowledged, still less more contemporary Islamic perspectives.

It should be understood that during the period from 1780 to 1830 when the history of philosophy was being rewritten for reasons I explain below, the philosophy of history was growing increasingly preeminent and this amounts to a second contributing factor. Here Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel played a decisive role: one can clearly see parallels between the way he excluded India from the history of philosophy ›proper‹ and the way it also lay outside the philosophy of history ›proper‹ when he responded to Friedrich Schlegel's attempt to include Indian philosophy.⁶ Furthermore, this history was established on a teleological model whereby its meaning lay entirely in its end and not in its individual moments, following a model established by Kant in his ›Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent.‹ The philosophy of history, which was almost always in the nineteenth and early twentieth century tied to a narrative of Western triumphalism, may have sunk into obscurity, but aspects of the narrative survive. It is shocking to see the extent to which ideas of progressive development have survived the genocide of the twentieth century and academic philosophers are far from being immune from it, if that is not to give too much credit to their relentless pursuit of what is fashionable.

Finally, we need to look at the role that racism has played in the construction of philosophy as Western and its continuing reaffirmation of itself as Western though its insistence on a racist canon. The place of Christoph Meiners of Göttingen in this regard has already been demonstrated by Peter Park and there is no need to repeat it here

³ See Bernasconi (2009).

⁴ Kant (1914: 155, 107–108) [in the English translation 1996a: 178, 140]. See also Kant (1968a: 367) [in the English translation 1996b: 336].

⁵ Wieland (1981). Today the idea that Judaism is central to the history of moral philosophy is presented as if it was eccentric, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth century this was not thought of as strange, even though it led to the claim that Pythagoras was a Jew. See Schneewind (1997).

⁶ See Bernasconi (2003a).

(Park 2013: 76–82). I have argued elsewhere that John Locke, Kant, and Hegel were racist and in ways that went significantly beyond that demonstrated by many of their contemporaries.⁷ It is telling how easily philosophers today still happily ignore that. More telling still is the way that the history of political philosophy within modernity is taught according to an agenda set in the nineteenth century among a class of people who confused freedom with establishing the priority of property rights. That may have been the most important issue to them, but the great issue of the period 1750 to 1865 (and in some parts of the world later even to today) was slavery, the property that some claimed over other human beings whom they were happy to baptize but not liberate. Not only is the debate over slavery almost always ignored by historians of philosophy, many specialists are either ignorant or largely indifferent on the question of what these philosophers on whom they specialize had to say on the issue. We are told that Kant, the defender of the enslavement of Africans, is not the real Kant, but the fact that this aspect of his thought is ignored or disregarded seems only because it hurts his reputation and thus damages the privilege Kantian philosophy claims for itself.⁸ This is just another way in which those in the West combine to draw the wagons together to form a circle, the circular fortification that maintains the philosophical canon in its present shape. But until Western philosophy is prepared to confront its own historical contribution to the prevalence of racism in the West it is not open to an honest dialogue.

I have looked back at this history in order to demonstrate the degree to which the West's dismissal of non-Western philosophy is rooted in its deep-seated self-conception of itself as at the vanguard of history. But I also wanted to explain why I believe it would be naïve to assume that it is simply ignorance that sustains this view. The challenge that representatives of the dominant culture must prepare themselves for as they enter into dialogue with representatives of those cultures it has oppressed is that the former have to face the shock of seeing themselves for the first time as they have been seen.⁹ The bravado that the representatives of the West show in the political arena, when they enter into conversations where the power of money and armaments rule, does not seem to pass over into honesty about

the historical sources of its power, which can be traced back to the Atlantic slave trade and colonial genocide. Some academic philosophers seem to be equally insecure when it comes to asking the question of why certain ideas have won out in the battle of ideas.

But is this enough to explain how non-Western philosophies came to be excluded? When I review the various factors I have identified as determinative – whether they concern religion, history, or race – Kant's role seems to have been decisive. Kant seems to have shown very little interest in the history of philosophy or even in history conceived more generally, compared with his philosophical contemporaries elsewhere, but he was concerned with his own place within that history. He bristled at any suggestion that he was not deeply original. It seems that it was in part to establish his place that the impetus to present the history of philosophy as a narrative in which subsequent philosophers displace their predecessors by the power of their arguments was the way his followers promoted his importance. But his followers, in their attempt to establish the uniqueness of his contribution, insisted on telling the history of philosophy in such a way that the history culminated in him (Park 2013: 20–21). What did not lead in that same direction could be discarded. From this point on the history of philosophy became in a new and more exaggerated way not about the challenge of the past or about alternative ways of thinking. The history of philosophy came to be written from the present with the aim to legitimate the present state of philosophy. This way of thinking of philosophy established it as a narrow tradition and in the name of reason philosophy paradoxically constituted itself as a narrative shaped largely by its exclusions.¹⁰ On this model, one cannot understand any philosopher without repeating the dialogue that philosopher entered into with (unfortunately usually) *his* predecessors. From this perspective academic philosophy begins to look like a cult that repeatedly reaffirms its identity and cannot see outside itself because what lies outside has been established as on principle irrelevant to the ongoing conversation.

It might seem paradoxical that Kant has proved to be such a strong obstacle along the path to intercultural understanding, given the way people like to appeal to his notion of cosmopolitanism to legitimate everything from lifting restrictions on immigration to moving beyond racism and nationalism. However, this seems to

⁷ Bernasconi (2011a, 2002, 1998, forthcoming).

⁸ Bernasconi (2003b, 2011b).

⁹ See Sartre (1948: ix–xii).

¹⁰ Bernasconi (1997).

amount to a major rewriting of what he meant when in his essay on the idea of a universal history with cosmopolitan intent he stipulated that Europe will »probably someday give laws to all the others« (Kant 1968: 29–30).¹¹ The privilege accorded to Europe was paramount and was in marked contrast with the approach of Johann Gottfried Herder, whom Kant specifically attacked.¹² I have recently attempted to show in detail how Kant in his *Physical Geography* in his concern to turn the ›Hottentots‹ into objects of study (and even amusement) excluded the efforts of his contemporaries to understand them and above all efface the judgments that the ›Hottentots‹ had issued against the European that they had encountered.¹³ That attitude remains largely in place. As Professor Wimmer says, it is not as easy as it once was to deny the existence of Chinese and African philosophy, but their contributions are still often ignored, especially when their approaches diverge from those dominant in the West. I have tried here to identify some of the forces that brought this about and to show how deeply entrenched the canon from Thales to the present is especially if we recognize that its core is the canon from Thales to Kant.

—Robert Bernasconi, *Pennsylvania State University,
Pennsylvania, USA*

¹¹ Kant (2007a: 119).

¹² Kant (1968b: 43–66); Kant (2007b: 124–142).

¹³ Bernasconi (2015).

Franz Wimmer's Statement: A Comment

This statement is remarkable. Franz Martin Wimmer tries to develop a non-Eurocentric way of philosophizing. He questions therefore the usual tendency to particularize non-Western systems of thought. The need generally felt in the academia to qualify such systems as being for instance ›African,‹ ›Chinese,‹ or ›Islamic‹ while Western philosophy is viewed as philosophy simply without any geographical specification or ›regional-cultural marker‹ clearly expresses the assumption that anything born and grown outside the West is particular while intellectual traditions developed in the West have a universal value.

Franz Wimmer observes however that this kind of Eurocentrism is recent. The idea that philosophy is Greek in its essence (and not just because of the etymology of the word) and dates back to Thales of Miletus in the sixth century BCE was established at the end of the eighteenth century after lengthy discussions. Prior to this, intellectual traditions from other parts of the world were rated equal and even sometimes superior to the Greek one. Wimmer engages therefore in a fruitful history of the history of philosophy which results in putting into perspective the Eurocentric stance prevailing nowadays. To him, a good historiography of philosophy today should integrate the histories of all philosophies worldwide.

While I fully agree with Wimmer, I wish nevertheless to add a few comments.

1 Eurocentrism

First, African scholars trained in Western philosophy have often been shocked by the same kind of Eurocentrism rightly denounced by Wimmer. The late Marcién Towa (1931–2014) for instance began his short but strong booklet, the *Essay on Philosophical Problems In Today's*

Africa, by recalling Hegel's divagations on the ›dark continent‹ which he thought had not yet entered universal History.¹ Amady Aly Dieng (1932–2015), a brilliant economist and philosopher from Senegal, expressed the same view in his *Hegel, Marx, Engels and the Problems of Black Africa* (Dieng 1978). I remember having a strong discussion when I was fellow of ›Ecole normale supérieure‹ in Paris in the 1960s with some of my French colleagues during a seminar led by Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), on a booklet by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), *Was ist das – die Philosophie?* where the German philosopher stated among other things that philosophy is Greek in its essence and not just because of the etymological origin of the word, that philosophy speaks Greek, and therefore, phrases like ›European‹ or ›Western philosophy‹ amount to a mere tautology (Heidegger 122008). I just could not understand the logic behind such a statement. To me, the fact that a cultural form appears in a geographical area is just an accident, and it is pure sophistry to convert this accident into essence or to imagine behind this accident some sort of historical necessity.

There is more. While reading Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) Vienna lecture on *The Crisis of European Humanity and Transcendental Philosophy*, I was struck by his bad joke about the Papuan (Husserl 1970). To show how important philosophy is to the spiritual heritage of Europe and how it contributes to European identity, he mentions incidentally: just as man is as Aristotle puts it a rational animal, and in this sense, *even the Papuan is a man*, philosophical reason on the other hand is specific to the European humanity. I assume, by the way, that neither a single Papuan was present nor did anyone feel any degree of solidarity with the Papuans.

The writer and political activist from Martinique, Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), in his short but powerful *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), made fun of all kinds of ideological statements about the so-called duty of Europe to civilize Africa. In this context, he criticizes the theory of ›primitive mentality‹ formulated by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) and his followers. These people, he says, seem to be unaware of the very first sentence of the *Discourse on the Method* by René Descartes (1596–1650), a statement which can be considered as a charter of universalism: ›Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed‹ (Descartes 1909–1914).

¹ Towa (1971). Towa deceased in July 2014 at the age of 83. A book of homage has just been published some weeks ago in Germany. See Mabe (2015).

Kwasi Wiredu (1931–) makes similar remarks on David Hume (1711–1766) and Karl Marx (1818–1883). Indeed, many Western writers and philosophers among the most innovative and politically progressive, many of those legitimately considered by their African readers as the most inspiring, happen also to prove occasionally Eurocentric and even sometimes racist in their formulations. Wiredu writes therefore:

Neither Hume, nor Marx, displayed much respect for the black man, so whatever partiality the African philosopher may develop for these thinkers must rest mostly on considerations of the truth of their philosophical thought (1980: 49).

Hume for instance was able to write in his *Essays*:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilised nation of that complexion, nor ever any individual, eminent either in action or speculation [...] In Jamaica, indeed they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly (1987: 208, Footnote 10).

Quoting this statement, the Ghanaian philosopher comments: ›Considerable maturity is required in the African to be able to contemplate impartially Hume's disrespect for Negroes and his philosophical insights, deploring the former and acknowledging and assimilating the latter‹ (Wiredu 1980: 49, Footnote 13).

Such nonsensical statements have been made by many others including Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who count among the most respectable and respected thinkers from the West. The late Emmanuel C. Eze (1963–2007), a Nigerian-American philosopher, published an impressive anthology of these writings under the title: *Race and the Enlightenment* (1997). He was certainly right to take up Wiredu's suggestion and reproach these authors for being racist. My suggestion however is this: before any value judgment, we should ask first which kind of audience these authors were addressing.

2 Choosing One's Audience

However scientific, objective or rational a discourse claims to be, it is always directly or indirectly shaped by its potential audience. As a

matter of fact none of these authors suspected that they could be read some day by the ›Negroes‹ of Africa or the ›Papuan‹ of New Guinea. They felt free therefore to talk about them without fearing to be contradicted. A discourse is partly determined in its content by the actual configuration of the discussion circle in which it is performed and by the frontiers, both visible and invisible, of this circle. What I say depends on *whom I am **not** talking to* as well as *whom I am addressing*. Such exclusions are usually made spontaneously without questioning their legitimacy. This problem, it should be observed, goes far beyond the writings by philosophers. Scientific discourse in all disciplines has also been developing so far within the *Western circle of interlocution*. This limitation may have impacted, at least indirectly, on the identification and formulation of problems as well as the way they are solved. Moreover there is a domain where the impact is always direct: the social sciences, because the very matter of discourse here is human society itself.

In an excellent report written for the Gulbenkian Foundation and published as *Open the Social Sciences* (1996), Immanuel Wallerstein (1930–) and his colleagues drew attention to the considerable increase of the number of professional social scientists throughout the world after World War II. Among other consequences, this expansion produced a deep restructuring of the social sciences and a complete renewal of scholarly issues and themes. I assume that neither Hume nor Kant would feel free today in this new context to write about the Black people in the same way. Nor would Husserl paternalistically dare to concede to a student, or former student of the University, of Papua New Guinea that »even the Papuan is a human.«

3 Historicizing Non-Western Philosophies

The most important however is this: while Wimmer's demand is basically right, saying that a universal history of thought should include the histories of non-Western as well as Western philosophies, it should be noted that the very idea of non-Western histories of thought is quite new. For instance African systems of thought used to be viewed as something stable and permanent, a creed universally shared by all Africans or by such and such an African community and which is part of their identity. Such is the case of the »Bantu philosophy« constructed by Father Placide Tempels (1906–1977), the »philosophy of being of the Bantu people of Rwanda« defined by Alexis Kagame (1912–1989), or the »moral philosophy of the Wolof« advocated by Assane Sylla.² Such is the case of the »mind of Africa« described by William Abraham or the »African systems of thought« discussed by Meyer Fortes, Germaine Dieterlen and others, and more recently by Ivan Karp.³ The study of such systems has been labeled by Marcien Towa and myself as »ethno-philosophy« as opposed to philosophy proper.⁴ Both of us used the term in a derogatory sense but it should be noted that the initial meaning was quite positive. Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972) for instance claimed to be doing ethno-philosophy in his PhD dissertation written at the University of Pennsylvania.⁵

Many readers were shocked therefore by the very first sentence of my 1970 article which became the first chapter of *African Philosophy, Myth and Reality*: »By ›African philosophy‹ I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves« (1983: viii).

Beyond the huge controversy spurred by this unusual definition, an increasing number of scholars have been admitting ever since that African philosophy should not just be understood as a permanent system of thought; that it means first and foremost philosophy done by Africans. African philosophy is not just an implicit worldview consciously or unconsciously shared by all Africans; it lies first in the explicit discourse articulated by Africans, no matter if this articulation remains oral. African philosophy is equal to African philosophical literature, no matter if the concept of literature is enlarged in such a way as to include oral literature.

Only then does it become possible to conceive of a history of African philosophy. As a matter of fact, I do not know of any work attempting to write such a history that was published before 1970, i. e.

² Tempels (1945); Kagame (1956); Sylla (1978).

³ Abraham (1962); Fortes, and Dieterlen (1966); Karp (1980).

⁴ Hountondji (1970); Towa (1971).

⁵ *Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethno-Philosophy With Special Reference to the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast, West Africa*. Nkrumah mentions this thesis in his autobiography. Cf. (Nkrumah 1957). The thesis itself remained however unfinished and was never defended before he left the USA in 1945 to London where he was invited to serve with George Padmore (1902–1959) as co-secretary of the third Pan-African Congress in Manchester. William E. Abraham graciously offered me a photocopy of the typescript at Stanford University in the early eighties.

before the first critique of ethno-philosophy. All available publications were written later, starting with the modest but excellent »Bibliography of African Thought« published by my Belgian colleague Alfons Smet in 1972 and the subsequent publications or prepublications by the same.⁶ Writings by Théophile Obenga (1936–) from Congo-Brazzaville and Grégoire Biyogo from Gabon are even more recent.⁷

Africa however is just an example. Non-Western philosophies have long been conceived in terms of collective and permanent world-views. It could be argued of course that in the case of oral cultures as in traditional Africa, there was no alternative to this ethnographic concept of philosophy. The fact however is that even in old literate cultures like the Chinese, or the Indian, Western scholars used to apply the same ethnographic concept. This clearly shows that we have to do with some kind of prejudice.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that beyond the turbulent history of philosophical doctrines in a given culture, there is still something stable and permanent, something implicit and unformulated which orients and predetermines all explicit doctrines. This however is another story.⁸

–Paulin J. Hountondji, Emeritus,
National Universities, Benin

⁶ Smet (1972, 1974, 1975a, 1975, 1975–1977).

⁷ Obenga (1990); Biyogo (2007).

⁸ Cf. for instance Augé (1975).

A Shawnee Reflection on Franz Wimmer's »How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?«

kiwaakomelepwa! nitesitho Thomas Norton-Smith. saawanwa nilla no'ki ni m'soma peleawa. That is, I am Thomas Norton-Smith, Turkey clan Shawnee. I have been given the opportunity to comment on Professor Franz Wimmer's »How Are Histories of Non-Western Philosophies Relevant to Intercultural Philosophizing?« from an American Indian perspective (Wimmer 2015a). I speak for no one but myself, so any errors or misinterpretations are mine alone. I am full of mistakes.

I understand Prof. Wimmer's project to be twofold. First of all, he wants to criticize contemporary Western academic philosophy for its failure to recognize and appreciate non-Western philosophical traditions and their histories – and sometimes even its own history. Second, Prof. Wimmer seeks to promote an *intercultural philosophy*, a way of doing philosophy that is oriented in a global perspective as it integrates both Western and non-Western philosophical traditions and their histories so as »to contribute to crucial questions of global humankind« (*ibid*: 132). I welcome and respect his critique of contemporary academic philosophy; indeed, I could not agree more with his observation that, while racial theory is banned from the historiography of philosophy, »[c]ulturalism [...] remains, and provides sufficient reasons to treat ›World Philosophies‹ separately from ›Philosophy‹ in a general sense« (*ibid*: 130). However, from a Native perspective, to the extent that Prof. Wimmer envisions and promotes a globally oriented philosophy that »integrates diverse developments of thinking« (*ibid*: 126) – one emerging as an amalgam of Western and non-Western philosophical pasts and traditions – I could not disagree more.

First comes my praise for Prof. Wimmer's criticism of contemporary academic philosophy because of its disdain for non-Western philosophical traditions. Indeed, his account of the early twentieth century dismissal of Chinese philosophy on the grounds that the Chi-

nese were »organically unable even to rise to the imagination of metaphysical thinking« (Chamberlain 1906: 707, cited by Wimmer) sounds strikingly similar to ethnographer L. T. Hobhouse's observations about the lack of Western metaphysical distinctions in American Indian worldviews:

[...] primitive thought has not yet evolved those distinctions of substance and attribute, quality and relation, cause and effect, identity and difference, which are the common property of civilized thought. These categories which among us every child soon comes to distinguish in practice are for primitive thought interwoven in wild confusion [...] (1907: 20–21; cited in Gilmore 1919: 10).

In the same vein, I am especially fond of explorer, ethnographer, and grave robber J. W. Powell's dismissal of Native religious traditions:

The literature of North American ethnography is vast, and scattered through it is a great mass of facts pertaining to Indian theology – a mass of nonsense, a mass of incoherent folly [...] ethically a hideous monster of lies, but ethnographically a system of great interest – a system which beautifully reveals the mental condition of savagery (1877: 13).

Of course, Western academic philosophy's disdain for these non-Western traditions, as Prof. Wimmer observes, was (and continues to be) grounded in the belief that the Western conception of reason – as well as the metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological distinctions following in its train – is somehow a privileged standard against which more »primitive« philosophical world views are to be analyzed and evaluated. »The use of non-Western logics and philosophical categories,« so the Western academy argues, »is evidence of philosophical unsophistication.« This view, however, is a pernicious Eurocentric philosophical bias, and I applaud Prof. Wimmer for exposing it.

Unfortunately, our agreement on this first point does not extend to the second, namely, Prof. Wimmer's call for and promotion of a globally oriented philosophy that integrates various aspects of Western and non-Western philosophical histories and traditions. As Indians are wont to do, I'll begin with a story, »Languages Confused on a Mountain,« recorded in 1908 from the Blackfoot oral tradition:

After the flood, Old Man mixed water with different colors. He whistled, and all the people came together. He gave one man a cup of one kind of water, saying, »You will be chief of these people here.« To another man he gave differently colored water, and so on. The Blackfoot, Piegan, and Blood

all received black water. Then he said to the people, »Talk,« and they all talked differently; but those who drank black water spoke the same. This happened on the highest mountain in the Montana Reservation [Chief Mountain?] (Wissler, and Duvall 1908: 19).

It is a misguided commonplace that Native stories like »Languages Confused on a Mountain« are explanatory, in this case, giving a rather simplistic – and implausible – explanation for why different peoples speak different languages. Rather, the purpose of such stories is not to give a Western styled explanation, but to convey traditional Native values. That is, Native stories are essentially *normative*. I understand the Blackfoot moral story about »confused« languages not to be a literal explanation for linguistic differences, but instead to teach that different nations *ought to* have different languages, since Old Man – the Creator – made it that way. And in so far as philosophical world views have linguistic foundations, different nations also have different philosophies. That's how it *ought to* be.

To the extent that Prof. Wimmer envisions and promotes a globally oriented philosophy *integrating* diverse Western and non-Western philosophical histories and traditions, my interpretation of the Blackfoot story challenges the wisdom – if not the morality – of his vision. I do not question the value of attempting to *compare* American Indian and other non-Western world views to Eurocentric philosophical traditions and histories – although Native world views were largely eradicated by the imposed »civilization« of Western colonial powers. Indeed, an appeal to a vanishing American Indian philosophical history is just another problematic aspect of Prof. Wimmer's proposal. Am I attributing to Wimmer (and like-minded intercultural philosophers) a romantic view of the »vanishing« American Indian? Am I claiming that intercultural philosophy represents yet another iteration of the colonial-imperialist project that seeks to incorporate native traditions and in so doing contributes to the vanishing of American Indian philosophies? Neither. I am arguing simply that to the extent that Wimmer wants to integrate Indian philosophical *history* into an intercultural philosophy, the proposal won't work – there's no »there« there, in large part because of colonialism. That said, a globally oriented philosophy has as little right to integrate Native knowledge as the Western tradition has to exploit it. The Old Man gave our language, history, and wisdom to us – not to the West, and certainly not to the world.

Prof. Wimmer's proposal that all philosophical histories and traditions should be integrated into a global, world historical philosophy – the value of which to be judged by its contribution to the problems of global humanity – reminds me of a current conversation of a different sort, another one in which indigenous people have been asked to contribute to global welfare. The Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP), brought under the auspices of the Human Genome Organization (HUGO) in 1994, was charged with collecting, analyzing, and preserving the genetic material of indigenous peoples, just in case it might sometime be useful to humanity. (Hey, you just never know when the next global pandemic will come along, and your DNA will hold the secret of humanity's salvation.) Dubbed the »vampire project« by indigenous people, there is general resistance to HGDP among Native people and scholars, because the Old Man gave our DNA neither to the West nor to the world, but to us (Whitt 2009: 81–83).¹

All that said, I wonder whether the kind of descriptive classificatory terminology and hermeneutical language Prof. Wimmer's intercultural historian of philosophy desires and requires – a way to interpret »seemingly or actually mutually untranslatable terminologies« (Wimmer 2015a: 132) reflecting radically different ways of thinking – is even possible. An intercultural philosophy could surely recognize critical Native ontological categories, e.g., the *animate* and *inanimate*, and perhaps even notice that these Native categories are not coextensive with »similar« Western categories. However, beyond such rudimentary observations, I doubt that the kind of thoroughgoing understanding of radically different philosophical historical traditions is achievable. Indeed, the very notion that American Indian philosophy has a *history* to be integrated into a global philosophical orientation seems literally »out of place.« Indigenous peoples are place and space oriented – not situated in history and time like folks in the Western tradition – so the call for Native people to contribute to a world historical philosophy itself reveals a Eurocentric misunderstanding of indigenous world views (Norton-Smith 2010: 120–122).

To be clear, I am not arguing that there should be *no* conversa-

tion between Indigenous philosophers, ourselves trying to recover our lost Native philosophical history and traditions, and the Western philosophical tradition – although, frankly, I know some Indian colleagues who hold and persuasively argue for that view. My position is, rather, that such a conversation must be grounded in *mutual respect* for each tradition, not the appropriation of elements of one tradition for use by – for *integration* into – the other. A story from the Menominee tradition, »The Indian and the Frogs,« teaches this to us:

Once an Indian had a revelation from the head of all the frogs and toads. In the early spring, when all the frogs and toads thaw out they sing and shout more noisily than at any other time of the year. This Indian made it a practice to listen to the frogs every spring when they first began, as he admired their songs, and wanted to learn something from them. He would stand near the puddles, marshes, and lakes to hear them better, and once when night came he lay right down to hear them.

In the morning, when he woke up, the frogs spoke to him, saying: »We are not all happy, but in very deep sadness. You seem to like our crying but this is our reason for weeping. In early spring, when we first thaw out and revive we wail for our dead, for lots of us don't wake up from our winter sleep. Now you will cry in your turn as we did!«

Sure enough, the next spring the Indian's wife and children all died, and the Indian died likewise, to pay for his curiosity to hear the multitude of frogs. So this Indian was taught what has been known ever since by all Indians that they must not go on purpose to listen to the cries of frogs in the early spring (Skinner and Satterlee 1915: 470).

This story baffles the Western ethicist. The Indian did not *intend* to *harm* the frogs and his action *resulted in no harm* to the frogs, so punishing him and his family is unjust. What is even more baffling from a Western philosophical perspective is that the Indian's actions could well be judged as *praiseworthy*. After all, isn't the acquisition of knowledge Western philosophy's principal goal? And yet, by appropriating the knowledge that belonged to the frogs without permission, the Indian ignored the fundamental Native moral duty to treat others with respect. The lesson the Indian learned about the frogs' song – not the one he had hoped to selfishly steal away – was that the respectful acquisition of knowledge is a gift, not a theft. The Indian took the knowledge, so he shared the frogs' sorrow and fate. He became brother to the frogs.

Like the Indian in the Menominee story, it seems to me that the intercultural philosopher »admires the songs« of other philosophical

¹ The Home page of the Human Genome Diversity Project is found under: <http://www.hagsc.org/hgdp/>, 2007. For a Native perspective, see the statement made by the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism (http://www.ipcb.org/publications/briefing_papers/files/hgdp.html, 1995; both last accessed on 25 February 2015).

traditions, and »wants to learn something from them.« Now, that learning can either be a disrespectful appropriation and integration of knowledge that belongs to others – a theft – or it can be a mutually respectful exchange of gifts – a *mindful conversation*. In the case of American Indian philosophy, a *mindful conversation* means that conversants understand and respect that Native knowledge belongs to the People, is given as a gift, and there are some things that cannot be shared – let alone integrated into a global intercultural philosophy. The story teaches that there will be unfortunate consequences for the intercultural philosopher should she choose the former road to walk.

Rather than overemphasizing the negative, however, I would like to close by returning to my opening praise for Prof. Wimmer's call for the philosophical academy to welcome and respect Non-Western philosophical histories and traditions. Native people want their traditions respected, not usurped.

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Reply

There seems to be a common agreement in the commentaries concerning the thesis that a Eurocentrist history of the philosophy of humankind ought to be overcome in some way or another. Since this does not mirror standard academic practices, most academic curricula, or prevalent politics of research in the field of philosophy in general, and it is not evident how exactly such historiography can be overcome, some more considerations might not be superfluous.

1 The Particularity of Philosophy's Historiography

To vary some sentences from the comments by Prof. Paulin Hountondji and Prof. Thomas Norton-Smith, a cultural-centrist understanding of the history of philosophy can be surmounted only when philosophers realize that every cultural-regional instance of philosophy – be it occidental or African, Chinese or Arabic and so forth – is »just an example« (Hountondji 2015: 144) of philosophy conceived of as something culturally generic. Any of these instances then by account of its very particularity ought to be brought to mutual »respectful exchange« (Norton-Smith 2015: 150) of the gifts of their thought. Historiography of philosophy ought to teach us about such examples. Students ought to be introduced to philosophy, not to just one cultural instance of it. The topic of the discussion here so far primarily is *history* of philosophy, it is not philosophy in a more comprehensive way. Still, to re-orientate historiography in the field, a different orientation of doing philosophy as such seems necessary. But let us start with history and the canon again.

We are far from ranking occidental philosophy to be *just an example*. In quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) in my introductory statement, I did omit a quite intriguing passage from the same text: »philosophy in whose name we are gathered here devel-

oped entirely in Europe,« Gadamer confirmed. Now, as Hountondji rightly stresses in his commentary, the audience a philosopher is addressing must not be neglected. In this case, taking the sentence as an empirical proposition, the speaker most probably was right. The question is, whether he intended – and was understood to express – nothing else other than an empirical statement. If the phrase, as I suspect it actually was intended, was not meant empirically, the proposition can be true or false regardless of what the speaker and his audience thinks. Let me try to describe the point briefly.

In German the phrase reads: »die Philosophie, in deren Namen wir hier versammelt sind, [ist] ganz und gar in Europa entstanden.« As it happens, German by its use of articles lets us easily ask about possibly different emphasizing. It obviously makes a decisive difference here whether we read »die Philosophie« or »die *Philosophie*.« To prove or disprove correctness according to the first reading (the equivalent in English might be: »philosophy in whose name *we* are gathered here«), a simple opinion poll would have done the job, and it probably would have been affirmed. However, it can be doubted whether such a result would have been sufficient to satisfy either the speaker or his audience – their empirical »we« would have had to accept »them,« others and »their« philosophy in exactly the same sense as is »ours,« and this was denied explicitly by Gadamer at least in regard to the traditions of China and India (cf. Wimmer 2015a: 127).

There is no marker of emphasis in the text, but the second reading in all likelihood was intended as well as understood. Talk was about »*philosophy* in whose name we are gathered here« which allegedly had developed entirely – and, I would like to infer, exclusively – in Europe. It cannot be tested as easily whether this is a true or an adequate understanding of what »philosophy« means or ought to mean. The claimed »tautology« of phrases like »Western philosophy« which had puzzled Hountondji when reading Gadamer's teacher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) is not out of debate when the educated majority takes it for true, or is acting as if it were so. As I already said, in my understanding philosophy ought to be conceived of in a »culturally generic« way. One of the obstacles to this concept certainly is the culturally-bound, narrow canon »set in stone« as Prof. Robert Bernasconi puts it (Bernasconi 2015b: 133). Further historical analysis of its coming into being and of its effectiveness ought to show whether its historiographic bases are immune to critique.

In this context it remains astonishing that the first formulations

of an exclusively Greek origin of philosophy did not have much impact for quite a long time. First in this respect was the »*Discours sur la philosophie, où l'on fait en abrégé l'histoire de cette science*« authored by Pierre Coste (1668–1747), a young philologist, and published as an introductory chapter in a handbook of Cartesian philosophy in 1691. The text starts with a remark about the mainstream: »everyone agrees that philosophy came from the Orientals«¹. But with this common understanding of philosophy's origin in the »orient,« there remains the quarrel about priority. Who were first, the Chaldaeans or the Egyptians (Coste does not allude to any other candidates)? This is to him an empty quarrel altogether, since there is nothing worth the name of philosophy with either of them – what is known from those »orientals« as »first philosophy was so unformed, that it hardly deserves the name. It could more rightly be called a *superstitious theology*.«²

Consequently, Coste begins his 43-paged survey on the history of philosophy with Thales and Pythagoras. The handbook reappeared in a Latin translation in 1705 for the international public, and the introductory history was reviewed by the first theorist of a renewed and »scientific« historiography of philosophy, Christoph August Heumann (1681–1764), in 1716³. This review mistakes the prominent Cartesian Pierre Sylvain Régis (1632–1707), the author of the handbook, to be the author of this introductory history as well, therefore erroneously praising the fact that here finally a philosopher dealt with philosophy's history, not another philologist⁴, as had been the case since generations. Thereby, truly »good and thorough« understanding of philosophy according to Heumann was to be expected, and he was happy to find in the text some of the principles of a scientific treatment of the historiography of philosophy which he previously had assumed to be his own findings: »e.g. that oriental philo-

¹ »Tout le monde tombe d'accord que la Philosophie est venue des Orientaux; mais les Orientaux ne s'accordoient point eux-mêmes sur les premiers inventeurs de cette Science« (Coste 1691: xxxiii). For the question of the authorship and interpretation of this text see Piaia (2010).

² »Cette première Philosophie étoit si informe, qu'à peine merite-t-elle ce nom. On pourroit l'appeler à plus juste titre *une Théologie superstitieuse*« (*ibid.*). Unless specified otherwise, all translations are mine.

³ »Was die Philosophie der Morgenländischen Völker anlangt, so hält er dieselbe dieses schönen Namens nicht werth, sondern will, daß man sie lieber nennen soll Theologiam superstitione imbutam« (Heumann 1716: 1065).

⁴ This same error is repeated in Braun (1973: 62–63).

sophers bear this name abusively, that Greeks were first to philosophize, that Pythagorean philosophy was miserable stuff, not worth of esteem«⁵.

Although Heumann's influence on historians of philosophy of the eighteenth century – especially on Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770) – is eminent, the next of so many histories of philosophy written during this century (overtly starting with Thales and the Greeks, and not feeling bound to describe »orientals« any more) was to appear exactly a hundred years after Coste.⁶ Remarkably, this ancient-oriental-part seems to be indispensable in these historiographic accounts although most of what could be called »ancient oriental« thought – known since antiquity – relied only on secondary sources.⁷ Moreover, it can be observed that the descriptions of these so-called oriental philosophies gradually get shorter in most cases leading to the impression that some authors simply try to get rid of the issue or to warn their readers that these philosophies should not merit serious attention⁸.

The case is different with what I would call the »recent orientals«, namely traditions from Asia not known to authors in antiquity. In general histories of philosophy some of these »recent orientals« show up last and vanish first. Most interesting in this respect is the way Chinese philosophy has been treated. Only two in a sample of nine works before 1700 mention China⁹; during 1700 and 1750 only one among thirteen authors did *not* mention it¹⁰; in the wave of histories of philosophy between 1750 and 1800 eleven from a sample of twenty-two works at least mention Chinese philosophy¹¹ (together

with »ancient orientals«), while nine do not¹² (although »ancient orientals« are still there, somehow), and two of them – Tiedemann (1791), Tennemann (1798) – explicitly excluded any sort of »orientals.« The story continues in a slightly different way during the nineteenth century, and will have to do very much with the understanding of religion, with cultural imperialism, and increasingly with racist theory and racism, as Prof. Bernasconi rightly states. The process of these exclusions is part of the European identity discourse in the period of globalizing colonialism.

I cannot go into more details here, but I would like to sketch something like a *damnatio memoriae* with respect to things Chinese.

In 1697 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz published the *Novissima Sinica*, praising Confucian ethics and political theory, as I mentioned in my introductory statement (Wimmer 2015a: 129). In 1721, Christian Wolff delivered his *Oratio de Sinarum Philosophia Practica*¹³ in the University of Halle, which provoked massive objections by pietist theologians and finally led to Wolff's expulsion from Prussian territory in 1723. Henrik Jaeger (2012: 156) summarizes the episode as follows: »In this lecture Wolff tried to show the complete inner conformity of his philosophy with the Confucian tradition. Chinese Philosophy appeared as a new legitimation for an ethics completely independent of any »revealed« or »natural religion.« One would think that such an episode, which provoked such a substantial debate, should have been mentioned by historians of philosophy, given the influence of Wolff in German enlightenment. However, Jaeger continues: »Wolff's Chinese background is rarely discussed in the field of the history of Enlightenment« (*ibid.*). The same is true for Leibniz.

Authoritative works on the history of philosophy from the late nineteenth century do not even mention the appreciation of Confucian philosophy by Leibniz or Wolff any more. This is the case e.g. in Friedrich Ueberweg's, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1863), in Wilhelm Windelband's *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1892) as well as in Karl Vorländer's *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1902). All these works have witnessed numerous editions and reprints till today. There is no hint to Leibniz' *Novissima Sinica* in any of these histories, as if this book never had been written. Concerning Wolff, one certainly is told by the authors that in 1723 he had

⁵ »etliche principia [...], von welchen ich vorher glaubete, daß sie mir zu erst wären in den Sinn, oder doch in die Feder gekommen [...] z. E. daß die Orientalische *Philosophi abusive* also genennet würden; daß die Griechen zu allererst *philosophiret* hätten; daß die *Pythagorische Philosophie* elendes Zeug und keiner Hochachtung würdig sey [...]« (*ibid.*: 1096).

⁶ Tiedemann (1791).

⁷ Neither Egyptian nor Chaldaean scripts were deciphered; any reconstruction had to rely on Greek and Roman sources.

⁸ One certainly gains this impression in the following works: Meiners (1786); Eberhard (1787); Buhle (1796). The latter is published after Tiedemann, and will be used extensively by Hegel.

⁹ Hornius (1655); Burnet (1692).

¹⁰ Kalckstein (1715). All of the more prominent authors of the time – like Buddeus, Deslandes, Brucker etc. – dealt with China.

¹¹ Amongst them are: Buonafede (1766); Gurlitt (1786); Gmeiner (1788).

¹² Like for example: Formey (1760); Batteux (1769); Adelung (1786); Meiners (1786).

¹³ Wolff published the *Oratio* in 1726 with annotations.

to leave Halle and Prussia because of differences with »orthodox and pietists,« that the conflict produced an »enormous literature of pamphlets,« but one does not learn about its contents. The *Oratio* is never mentioned, neither as a publication nor the topic of it. In these publications, students are told that Leibniz and Wolff were the most famous philosophers of the period in Germany, and that they fought for rationality, for rationally grounded metaphysics and morals. Their engagement with Chinese philosophy is, however, not considered worthy of mention. To make things worse, a closer look will show that this sort of *damnatio memoriae* had already been practiced by authors during the eighteenth century after Brucker, and continued in the twentieth century.

So I fully agree with Bernasconi that we first of all ought to know how the (monocultural) canon was established. But then we must see that establishing another canon will only be possible by new orientations and interactions in philosophy worldwide, by conversations »grounded in mutual respect for each tradition« as Norton-Smith (2015: 149) says where philosophers are ready to acknowledge and assimilate (Hountondji 2015: 141) ideas from different cultural traditions because they are »inspiring« in their own respective contexts. I try to describe such interactions with the notion of *polylogues*.¹⁴

2 The Need for Polylogues

Let me start a sketch of it with a personal experience which comes to my mind because of Norton-Smith's warning against »preserving [...] material of indigenous peoples, just in case it might sometime be useful to humanity« (Norton-Smith 2015: 148). Around 1985, I started a project to learn about philosophy in Africa, Asia and Latin America. For this purpose, I sent letters to colleagues in these regions requesting them to answer four questions. These were:

a) What do you consider to be good reasons to deal with the history of philosophy in an intercultural perspective? Which criteria do you suggest for an evaluation of different approaches in this field?

b) Which possibilities do you envisage which can solve problems of »translating« philosophical core concepts from the context of non-

¹⁴ cf. Wimmer (2007a).

European cultures into the context of contemporary, primarily European-angloamerican philosophy?

c) What institutional, political, traditional particularities are constitutive for philosophical research in your cultural context in the present?

d) Wherein do you see the contributions of traditional philosophies of your cultural context to the concepts of world and man in present time, and how can these contributions be made fruitful in face of the coming into being of a global culture?

This then led to a book (in German) simply titled *Four Questions Concerning Philosophy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* which had some merit since there was very little information available in German language on similar subjects.¹⁵ But I later went on to think that my questions, although novel when they were formulated, had some serious flaws.

– They were partly naive as it is the case for the first question. One can hardly expect an evaluation of something that does not exist. Historiography of philosophy in a global intercultural perspective virtually did not exist in those days in any noteworthy sense except under Marxist premises.

– The second question may not have been as naive, but it is irksome in the sense that it clearly asked for a one-way-process. There was no allusion to the inverse need – in every dialogue – of translating and interpreting mutually.¹⁶

– The third question was one-sided again. Therefore, I am not so happy with my questions from 1985 anymore, with one exception, namely the last one, concerning the possible fruitfulness of thoughts from whatever cultural tradition for philosophy in a globalized world, regardless of the language or form in which they are expressed. I still think that there is a need of working on ways to do philosophy in an intercultural perspective, where a different canon – together with critical analysis of exclusive centrism – is but a necessary, not a sufficient condition. Nor is mere comparison sufficient. What is needed are all-sided dialogues, i. e. polylogues on philosophical issues.¹⁷

¹⁵ cf. Wimmer (1988).

¹⁶ Among others, Wiredu's (1997) project of decolonizing philosophical concepts should have warned me, but unfortunately it was not known to me at the time.

¹⁷ The following paragraphs are abbreviated and slightly altered from Wimmer (2007b).

I propose not to talk about ›dialogues‹ but about *polylogues*, considering that any question discussed by philosophers coming from different cultural backgrounds and traditions, ought to be argued by conceptual means and from the viewpoints of *many*, virtually from the viewpoints of *all relevant* philosophical traditions¹⁸. The first question then will be: *What can be expected to be the subjects and the purposes of intercultural polylogues in philosophy?*

In many cases, mutual interest between philosophers who come from different cultural backgrounds, shall lead them to explain to each other the different concepts and theories, and the meaning of what had been said in the teachings and texts of one's tradition. Without going into more details, I consider this process to be the aim of ›comparative philosophy‹ with the purpose of understanding culturally different philosophies. As such, it is not yet what intercultural philosophical polylogues should aim at.

The issue of intercultural dialogues or polylogues in philosophy is not only mutual understanding. It rather is mutual criticism, mutual enlightening, by activating all the different traditions of thought with their respective concepts and insights, their methods of argumentation, etc. So what would be the issues concerned? Theoretically, every philosophical question or concept or theory can be the subject of intercultural polylogues. Practically, however, those subjects, which are controversial from the point of view of the leading traditions of culturally different groups, will be discussed in an intercultural orientation.

At this point one has to formulate two more questions: *Does philosophy intrinsically need such intercultural polylogues?* Moreover: *Are they possible?* I want to answer the first of these questions with a hypothesis: Philosophy as such – be it occidental, Indian, Chinese, African or from any other cultural background – is confronted with a dilemma, the *dilemma of culturality*. By this I mean something very simple: Philosophy as such aims at universally acceptable,

¹⁸ The simple reason for the term ›polylogue‹ lies in the fact that (a) the association with ›dialogue‹ very often seems to be that there be (only) *two parties* involved – though the Greek »διά« simply means ›between‹ or ›inter‹ and does not imply any number – and that (b) there are conceptual and methodological differences between dialogues where *only* two parties are involved compared to others where *more than two* are. Without developing my claim, I can merely state furthermore – that it is a fact that *in most cases* where there are cultural differences relevant to philosophy, there will be *more than two cultural traditions* concerned.

universally intelligible insights, propositions, and theories. This is one side of the dilemma. The other side: No philosopher and no philosophical tradition have any means to show and to express what they think other than symbolic systems developed within particular cultures and worldviews. Most philosophical thought is expressed in a language – not to forget: in one of many human languages which differ, among other things, in their ability to formulate abstract ideas – and there is no such thing as one language of reason.

Every single language used to express philosophical thought can transport hidden presuppositions that may make plausible something which would be highly implausible or even impossible to formulate in some other language(s). Every language or symbolic system in general has certain particularities which might be a virtue or a vice with respect to philosophy – and it is not only language that needs to be mentioned here: religious or cultural backgrounds play a role as well.

This dilemma of culturality is the main reason which makes me think that there is an *intrinsic need* for intercultural polylogues in philosophy. Without the trial of intercultural verification one simply cannot be certain about one's particularities. Therefore, the alternatives to intercultural polylogues in philosophy are only two forms of cultural centrism: either *separative centrism* (avoiding the claim to universality, aiming only at something which is ›true‹ or ›valid‹ for ›us,‹ i.e. for a particular human community) – or *expansive/integrative centrism* (claiming universality of one's own position and not taking into any account others' positions, as far as these differ from the own position). The outcome will be relativism in the first, mere propaganda and persuasion in the second case.

Now let us consider the next question, already mentioned before: *Are intercultural polylogues in philosophy possible at all?* In controversial matters, stemming from different traditions, we do not know whether one or none of the parties is right, that is whether a postulate would have been universally intelligible or valid, before a dialogue or polylogue has taken place.

A theoretically pure model of polylogue would imply that every party is ready to give up its own *convictions* – except for very few basic principles of logic without which no argumentation would be possible at all – *if and only if* there are stronger arguments given for one of the others' position. Since there are no other exertions of influence other than convincing arguments – not persuading nor manipulating –, no one is ready to give up his or her convictions for any

other reason. It is however not likely that such a disposition is normally to be expected in real life – not among philosophers, even less among people strongly bound to religious, political, or deep-rooted cultural thinking habits.

The first consequence of this observation with respect to intercultural polylogues in philosophy will be that no such thing can be expected from encounters of representatives of any provenience. It is not trivial to underscore the following: Philosophical dialogues and polylogues are *not* between cultures, nor between political units, nor between religions (which would ask for representatives of religions, of states, or of culturally defined communities, all of them relying on or bound to defend some extra-theoretical interests), but between human beings trying to argue for or against propositions or theories on purely theoretical grounds.

Still, this remains a theoretical consideration in itself. It is quite unlikely that discussions between philosophers, whose thought is rooted in culturally different philosophical traditions, ever take place under conditions of complete equality in any non-theoretical matter.

Therefore, we should ask for practically feasible consequences. There might be *practices* in academic philosophy tending towards intercultural polylogues, as it could be taken as a practical rule to look for the discussion of an issue under consideration in at least one culturally rooted philosophical tradition different from one's own. For westerners that would mean not to close their lists of authorities at the borders of the ›occidental‹ lore. Such opening and curiosity quite often will provide unexpected thoughts and insights – and it is possible thanks to translations and the global nets of intercommunication of our globalizing world.

One last question remains: *What can be expected from intercultural philosophical polylogues?* These are two questions: *What can the rest of humankind expect when philosophers activate intercultural dialogues and/or polylogues in their disciplines?* And second: *What can be expected for philosophy itself from such dialogues and polylogues?*

The answer to the first version of the question is not very easy. We certainly ought to distinguish between consequences for other academic disciplines, and such consequences as might be relevant to extra-academic fields.

Academic philosophy would ›globalize‹ in such a perspective at least in the way that it would become natural for philosophers to

know the basics of more than their own regional tradition. This, after the impact of colonialism, might not be easy for non-westerners, just as it will be a difficult task for westerners, although in a different way. However, parallel interest within other disciplines – as, e.g., in linguistics, psychology, history, social theory and others – might not only help, but bring about interesting questions and viewpoints for a globalizing society, as we would learn about the different concepts of other regional traditions.

Furthermore, dialogical and polylogical habits in the field of philosophy could even have an impact on fields other than the academic and scientific one. Such habits and practices could contribute to avoiding common presuppositions of superiority-inferiority of ›cultures,‹ ›ways of life,‹ etc., even in politics. Just one example: it is my personal experience that in political discussions about the goals and the means of what formerly has been called ›developmental policy,‹ and now is labeled ›developmental co-operation‹ the concrete ways justifying the ›co-‹ often are very unclear and searched for elsewhere. If philosophers were trained in truly *inter*-cultural encounters in their own field, I do not doubt that they would be asked by others about their respective experiences.

The answer to the second version of the question above can be very short: *By intercultural dialogues and polylogues philosophers may come closer to what they aim to by profession, i. e. to true universality.*

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Philosophical Journeys

Comparative Philosophy and I

Abstract

The paper narrates the author's becoming as a comparative philosopher. Elaborating a series of intellectual crises, aporia which the comparative philosopher thought her way out of, the paper develops the claim that as simultaneously »I« in the flesh and »I« in the text, the comparative philosopher is singular. The claim opposes the orthodoxy of philosophical biography and autobiography, which asserts the figure as a duality. This is significant when it comes to considering the knowledge practices of comparative philosophy and its truth claims.

Keywords

Philosophical autobiography, African thought, Yolngu Aboriginal thought, predication-designation, ontological-ontic.

This short paper partially narrates my becoming as a comparative philosopher. I begin by characterizing this figure who, as a knowing self, might compose such an autobiography. Comparative philosophy being inevitably, at least to some extent, autobiographical, it seems the comparative philosopher is a duality, the »I in the flesh«, and the »»I« in the text«.¹ In opposing that formulation I propose the I of the comparative philosophy as a singular particular knowing self. This I, the knowing self, is like all other knowing selves, in expressing the

¹ This is the dualistic self of the autobiographical philosopher in the Western tradition (see J. L. Wright, *The Philosopher's I: Autobiography and the Search for the Self*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). Here »an Outer, rhetorical self, the literary, social, and/or psychological ego represented in texts as the source of one's identity [and authority]«, (*ibid.*: 9) is set against an Inner »self as referent of particular statements and actions, an internal (Inner) perspective of the self as active creator of one's statements and actions« (*ibid.*: 5). These two given or found entities, which are metaphysical commitments of such a philosopher, are separated by a »chasm [that] never collapses completely« (*ibid.*: 9).

tensions between realness as ontically expressed and realness as ontologically expressed. Later in this short paper I explain the distinction between these two ends of what I see as a continuum, but to say it quickly here, it arises in tensions between the organising of things through bodily materialised collective action on the one hand, and the collective actions of word-using, (linguaging we might name it with a rather ugly neologism) on the other. I see the expression of that tension as a condition of human existence and as the basis for human knowing. I argue that settling the ontological question of the character or figure of the comparative philosopher is crucial in comparative philosophy, in that it is preliminary to asking about the epistemological status of comparative philosophical knowledge claims.

But that is not all that is at stake here, and indeed may not be the most significant aspect of what is at issue. It may be that what is of most interest in characterising the knowing self of the comparative philosopher is the clues it provides for articulating a knowing self that might resist and subvert the new universalism of the knowing self marketed by twenty-first century capitalism – the knowing self as a centre of economic enterprise. The realpolitik of a thriving (or otherwise) community devoted to comparative study of world philosophies involves negotiating passage through this complex global force of the new capitalism, proposing as it does this form of human knower as a new universalism. In many places (including Australia) this has so fundamentally changed the institution of the university and its associated educational organisations (schools and so on), that those institutions can no longer be relied upon to provide a context supportive of endeavours such as comparative philosophy.

Consider the following, equally my experiences as analyst in the flesh and ›my experiences‹ which have re-emerged as experiences of a comparative philosopher ›I‹ in analytic texts. These are my life experiences and con-texts for philosophising. The list begins with working alongside Nigerian Yoruba classroom teachers in modern schools in Africa in the 1980s. Unexpectedly I found myself engulfed in confusion, as number, up until that time a taken-for-granted universal, fractured into several distinct culturally located objects. Then on returning to my homeland after eight years with my family in Nigeria, I found to my delight that my work with Yoruba teachers had prepared me for involvement with Yolngu Aboriginal Australian knowledge authorities, who in the 1990s were actively engaging with mathematics educators in seeking to invent a modern school curricu-

lum that drew on the dual logics they saw as expressed in their kinship categories on the one hand, and in numbers on the other.

Later, and now recognizing myself and being recognised by others as ›a philosopher‹, I engaged with Yolngu Aboriginal Australian landowners who were determined to connect with, yet stay separate from, environmental scientists in devising land management strategies. All these engagements involved intense immersion, long periods of bodily co-presence amongst practitioners of disparate knowledge traditions as they were struggling to go on together in doing their differences respectfully and generatively.

Then in the first decade of the twenty-first century, teaching and further family duties impinged strongly on the fleshy comparative philosopher. Such long-term bodily involvement with ›others‹ became more difficult. In consequence I found myself involved with colleagues from Charles Darwin University in what were officially funded as ›projects‹. The first such project involved younger Aboriginal men and women who saw possibilities in appropriating digital technologies – in which unnoticed ontological assumptions lurked, for Aboriginal purposes.² My involvement in such a project could be pursued through more limited and episodic, bodily co-presence.

More recently and more vaguely, and now as an old woman, this analyst in the flesh and comparative philosopher in the text, works with younger Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians committed to involvement in ›developing‹ their ›remote places‹ in Australia's north. Nowadays, it is not school curricula or land management strategies that are their focus, but rather the struggle now is to devise new Indigenous institutional forms. Collectively designing Indigenous organizations fit for engagement in the services market economy that the Australian state is intent on establishing in their communities is what drives the Yolngu Aboriginal Australian comparative philosophy work I now do, with the *Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance* team at Charles Darwin University, mostly from my remote Melbourne setting. In a similarly vague and bodily-removed manner I work also with Saami politicians and academics in Norway's Arctic region. Here we seek to devise ways to infuse (and to some extent selectively refuse) the processes of the

² For examples see H. R. Verran, ›On Assemblage: Indigenous Knowledge and Digital Media (2003–2006), and HMS *Investigator* (1800–1805)‹, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Vol. 2, No 1–2, 2009, pp. 169–183.

modern European institutions of parliament and university, with the political and epistemic processes of Saami life.

The list points to a rich set of life experiences and even more, extraordinary good fortune. Like the philosophically inclined anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) I was able to ride the flood tide of the global expansion of the Western academy's university in the second half of the twentieth century. Just as he did, I rode »crest after crest, until today, when it seems at last, like me, to be finally subsid-ing« (Geertz 2001: 4).³ Here I picture that series of waves generated by the global expansion of what is now seen as old-fashioned scholarly higher education, a current which originally transported me from my banal Sydney childhood to a provincial university in Australia's New England that modelled its life on Oxford University, a current I revelled in being caught up by, as serial plunging into confusion; again and again struggling my way back to the surface for philosophical breath. Being dumped again and again (as waves do) into aporia where confusion reigned, for much of the time it was not evident in which direction the surface might be. The guiding metaphor of this piece of autobiographical philosophy derives then from the seemingly everlasting summer of my Sydney war orphan childhood, a hot, jolting bus ride away from the northern beaches. Being led along by this (and other metaphors) it will be in ending the story that I come back to the knowing self of the comparative philosopher with its seeming bifurcation, and the question of if and how this figure might provide clues in articulating a figure of the knowing self who might engage, resist, and subvert the newly vibrant economic enterprise self of twenty-first century capitalism.

Studying biological sciences, and graduating as a metabolic biochemist to take up a lecturing position in a UK university in my mid-twenties is not only a quite surprising position for a girl of my social background to land herself in, it is also a quite unlikely position from which one might become a philosopher of any sort. Such a transformation began in child rearing, proceeding through unemployment, teacher training and work as a primary school classroom teacher, and later as a science teacher educator. So it was that, with a stroke of good luck, in my mid-thirties I found myself teaching teachers in Nigeria. The first moment of the intellectual trajectory that carried me to

comparative philosophical analysis occurred in the humble surrounds of Yoruba Nigerian primary school classrooms in the 1980s. In the hopeful aftermath of Nigeria's Biafran war (1967–1970), in struggling for a reconciled civil society, universal primary education had been declared, putting pressure on Nigeria's teacher training capacities. Employed at what is now Obafemi Awolowo University, in Ilè Ifé as an expatriate Australian teacher of science teachers, I was working with dedicated and skilled Nigerian teachers in devising ways that modern science and local Yoruba knowledge might equally inform children's learning.⁴

The experience had unexpected outcomes. I found myself forced to confront a quite uncontroversial philosophical assumption. The proposition that numbers are not universal abstractions, but rather are historically and culturally located objects forced itself upon me in these classrooms.⁵ I saw clearly that numbers as taught by skilled and experienced Yoruba teachers, and as they exist in Yoruba life, are not those prescribed by the universalism of science; there are conceptually disparate numbers. Experiencing numbers as different was for me tied with up the requirement that I assess and evaluate the classrooms lessons of my students. The experience was painful because often when the number practices being taught were »wrong« the lessons were a wonderful success and the children clearly learned the metric system of enumeration. But often when the content of the lessons was correct, the lessons failed pedagogically, sometimes spectacularly so.

If I was to engage with my Yoruba students and their pupils in good faith I must abandon my commitment to numbers as abstract universals. Yet at the same time I was aware that it was commitment to knowing well, where numbers as universals seemed a central tenet, which motivated me as much as the enthusiastic teachers in my classes, and perhaps even their pupils. Nevertheless through participating in the happenings in these classrooms I became convinced that, just as there are radically distinct languages, there are radically dis-

³ C. Geertz, *Available Light. Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

⁴ This aim to integrate the »universal knowledge« that universities peddle with »local knowledge« was (and is) commonly articulated and almost invariably ignored. The teachers and I were unusual perhaps in the way we made this an explicit aim of our teaching and learning.

⁵ I describe the struggle to find passage out of this aporia in Chapters 1 and 2 of *Science and an African Logic* (H. R. Verran, *Science and an African Logic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

tinct numbers. At first I assumed that there were different kinds of numbers – numbers are conceptually plural (same but different). However the consequences of this quite unnoticed assumption in my analysis meant that the analysis was fatally flawed, as I explain below. I would need to find a way to acknowledge numbers as multiples – as fundamentally different, but capable of being linked up and connected. Giving an account of numbers as conceptually disparate is what started me towards comparative philosophy, but at first I did not proceed in what I now account as the manner of the comparative philosopher.

Articulating the distinctions between the numbers that circulate in Yoruba life, and those that have life in laboratories that function according to the epistemic standards of science: one form of enumeration originating in the collective thinking that first came to life in Europe's so-called scientific revolution, and the other in trading commodities, including slaves. How might such a comparison of number be done? At first this seemed to be an exercise in orthodox foundationist scepticism – relativism.⁶ I began systematic enquiry into using English and Yoruba number names in the practical bodily routines of tallying, into the patterns of generating number names, and into using number names in speech by considering the grammatical structures of English and Yoruba. This approach saw both bodily practices and linguistic practices as historically constituting a conceptual schema, and assumed the schema might be discerned by considering practices in the here and now.

Yoruba numeral generation involves a multi-base recursion (bases of 20, 10, and 5) where the working processes are division and subtraction. This contrasts markedly with the Indo-European system (incorporated into science) where a base ten and simple additive recursion applies. Nevertheless the digital human complement lies hidden in both. In Yoruba life valuation processes are almost invariably oral, whereas in modern life valuation proceeds most commonly in

⁶ I am refusing the convention in philosophy that characterises scepticism and the relativism that follows as ›non-foundational‹. I argue that sceptical relativists do propose knowledge as founded. They merely disagree with rationalist universalists over the nature and origins of foundations. The former find foundations in categories that emerge in instituted particular social, cultural, and historical processes and collective practices (and hence find truth conditions in coherence), the latter find foundations in categories given in the nature of reality which determine what is institutionalised by social organisation (and hence find truth conditions in representation).

written textual practices. Perhaps most challenging of all, I found that adjectives do not exist in Yoruba grammar. However can one value through qualities (like the numerosity involved in counting or the length involved in measuring) if qualification with adjectives cannot be achieved in one's speech patterns?

Eventually I was able to formulate and evidence a contention that Yoruba numbers work through modal abstraction, and numbers in science and Indo-European languages proceed as qualifying abstraction. Later I recruited children and had some of them tell me in Yoruba and others in English about how they were meshing their actions with hands and eyes and words in tallying and measuring. I summed up these findings in papers arguing and evidencing the contention that Yoruba and English language numbering equally proceeded by logic, each valid and internally consistent. Each offered possibilities for numbering as truth telling through a coherent conceptual schema, but the truths – the values articulated in enumeration, were incommensurable.

Ten years later, well into completing a book manuscript, which had the working title *Numbers and Things*, where I argued for, and evidenced, this sceptical proposition of different numbers within an analytic framework of epistemological relativism, I experienced a second profound intellectual shock. I recognized that orthodox sceptical analysis of numbers as culturally distinct concepts, *explains difference away*. My explanation of difference, proposed as an exit from the puzzle of how, in the absence of facility in Yoruba forms of life, I could trust the experienced Yoruba teachers I worked with to make appropriate conceptual innovations in those Yoruba classrooms by accounting difference, had launched me into a second aporia.

I had experienced differing forms of numbering in those hopeful Nigerian primary school classrooms, but in attempting to articulate that difference in an orthodox sceptical account which has the grounds of knowledge as social and historical in origin, I had explained the difference away, rendered it as absolutely outside human capacities of intervention.⁷

⁷ Rendering might seem an odd English verb to use here. But the usage is apt for I came to recognise that orthodox accounts of the process of abstraction in conceptualising, propose it as analogous to the process of rendering the scraps of a pig carcass into lard. In that usage rendering is a process of managing difficult and messy pig bodies so that both live and dead pig bodies are removed from the present here and now.

One might choose to recognise all the elaborate and messy labour of accom-

Accounting the difference in numbers so that it could be engaged with in those hopeful classrooms was my motivation, yet my explanation of the difference as modal versus qualifying abstraction, had injected an imagined past into the transcendent domain of the ideal – albeit rendering it a more complicated ideal. My painstaking effort was directed towards learning to engage with the difference explicitly in those hopeful classrooms, yet the sort of difference I accounted was absolutely unavailable for engagement. It was found; a given.

The difference of sceptical relativism has numbers as conceptual objects linguistically and practically determined in a misty historical past that has become some sort of cultural ideal. As abstract symbols populating an internally coherent conceptual schema, the truth telling of such numbers (in valuing) depends on the internal coherence of the schema. Yet in those Nigerian classrooms I had witnessed and been excited by teachers choreographing conceptual confluence in numbering in the present. Proceeding joyfully in their conceptual innovations, not even a whiff of the dead hand of my imagined conceptual schema had been present. I had discerned that it was important to be able to explain this process so that a careful consideration of better and worse in the manner of conceptual confluence in the various here-and-nows of African and other such classrooms, might be devised. This is what I came back to as I recognised that my entertaining stories, focussing on numbering to tell of abstraction differences in Yoruba and modern life (with its scientific numbering deriving in the Indo-European linguistic heritage) had abandoned the present of those classrooms.

How to understand numbers as made and remade (differently and/or the same) in the present? In accepting the challenge of this new aporia, I saw that no longer was the task to explain difference,

plishing that, but usually a kilo of lard is just taken for granted as abstracted, or rendered, actual pig. Lard seems to ›magic pigs away‹, numbers also ›magic pigs (and lard) away‹. One can never retrieve actual pig bodies (live or dead) from lard, just as one can never retrieve actual messy situations of valuing through enumeration, from numbers. (Perhaps the experience of being fostered, and working long hours, on a farm in Western New South Wales in my late childhood might be detected here?)

Telling conceptualisation as abstraction allows a good story, but the realness of storying is different to the realness of embodiment-attending to the translations between those realnesses is all important in comparative philosophy. Foundationisms as analytics (relativism and universalism) both deny that any translating work is involved.

but now I needed to explain how difference could be engaged in an emergent present. How a workable robust sameness might be achieved for long enough to go on together doing (and respecting) the evident differences between numbers, now became the puzzle. An entirely new account of what numbers are and how they work needed to be devised.

Across a few painful months as I came to terms with abandoning my *Numbers and Things* book project, I accepted that I had revealed that difference which might be generatively engaged with in a here and now, needed to be framed by means quite outside Western philosophical orthodoxy. At this point, as I see it now, I began to become as I, the comparative philosopher, setting about assembling a new manuscript as a way of working my way out of this new aporia. The text of *Science and an African Logic* gradually accumulated across the 1990s after I had left Nigeria and was living in Melbourne in Australia. During those years I was spending months working closely with Yolngu Aboriginal Australian groups and individuals who as clans, collectively own estates in Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory, and inevitably what I was learning of Yolngu Aboriginal Australian thought began influencing my rethinking of this Yoruba material.

With white Australian teachers, teacher educators, curriculum officials, and later environmental scientists, my new Aboriginal friends were working to bring to life an epistemic base that might prove adequate to the new modern Yolngu institutions they were inventing – schools and environmental NGOs, for example. In addition, within what was then the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, I was teaching undergraduates courses in sociology and philosophy of science, and beginning to supervise graduate students in science and technology studies. While my children, still mourning the loss of the wonderful childhood they had experienced in Ilè Ifé, were becoming young inner-city adults, I found myself rearing my grandchild. In subjecting her to a childhood similar to that I foistered on my children, during the periods I spent with my Yolngu friends in Arnhem Land, I always took her along.⁸

⁸ By disclosing this family information I attempt to reveal how the condition of the figure of the comparative philosopher impinges on the lives of others, which includes one's close family members as much as one's co-participants in projects of doing dif-

Over several years I collected and re-arranged the arguments and empirical evidence of *Numbers and Things* to constitute the complicated sequence of chapters in *Science and an African Logic*. Concepts, in this case numbers as objects known, and equally the concept of the knower of such concepts as number, are presented here as collectively enacted sets of routine, variously complicated, embodied and socially embedded practices, including utterances – objects known and the knowers of those objects, knowing subjects, are equally multiple bundles of practices in a here and now, and hence each a unique and particular concatenation. Counter-intuitive, and frankly uninspiring, though that formulation is, both knowers and the objects they know are events; happenings in the present. In concluding this paper in considering the I of comparative philosophy, I come back to the question of how that figure, an event who happens to, in, and from the here and now (a mere bundle of disparate sets of practices), might be considered an authoritative knower, one who publishes autobiographies such as this text. A specific aspect of this is the tricky issue of the relation between knowers in the flesh (including the comparative philosopher) and the knower in the text who tells stories of all those knowers in the flesh as embodied and embedded bundles of materialising and signifying practices.

I leave aside for the moment that worry over the basis of any authority the I of comparative philosophy has. That anxiety is related of course to the epistemological status of knowledge claims made from within in the presentist analytic I came to adopt in finding a way out of the painful aporia that recognising the explaining *away* of difference had plunged me into, an analytic that for me *is* comparative philosophy. I go on now to focus on the third aporia treated in *Science and an African Logic*.

This constitutes the book's third triptych (chapters nine, ten, and eleven). Here a divergence is signalled. Oddly much of the second part of chapter nine is in actuality, a beginning to the eight chapters that have preceded it. In contrast the first part of the chapter starts off another story that is not about numbers at all, but rather about language, words, grammar, predication, and designation. Here lurking at the end of a book about numbers and number-

ference together. I acknowledge that the individual lives of the children I reared were made more difficult by my becoming I, the comparative philosopher.

ing, in the final two chapters, a third aporia, one that concerns language, is introduced.

A difficulty to do with language that I had only alluded to in the previous chapters is the focus. In assembling the stories for *Science and an African Logic*, I discovered that while the effect of re-articulating my metaphysical commitments in exiting foundationism was dizzying, and the entities I found myself engaging with felt strange, I could proceed in a more or less straight line of arguing and evidencing – at least for a short while. Then the crest of the wave curled again. The first time I experienced this I was plunged into confusion over recognising difference in numbers, at a time when I was committed to numbers as same – universals. The second time confusion struck it was the outcome of recognising that the only intellectual tools I knew how to use limited me to attending to idealised past and future; they made difference in the present, the here and now, inaccessible. The third dumping concerned language. The third aporia of this story is in a sense a wave constituted within the huge dumper of the second aporia. In my relativist work I had been committed to language use as »referring to the world« while assuming it as historical, a socially constituted practice. But my new commitment to a single realm of realness, an emergent present, where worlds »clot« in collective acting, *there is no world »out-there« to be referred to!*

In taking up a »presentist« analytic frame where realness is constituted in the single domain of the here and now, the story of languaging through uttering (or writing) words with its predicating and designating,⁹ must be closely attended to. It demands a quite alterna-

⁹ In the account I am about to give of negotiating this third aporia around language use I will make frequent reference to the linguistic processes of predicating-using verbs, and designating-using nouns as the subjects of sentences. This singling out of these linguistic processes from the many other grammatical tools that language users engage without recognition of their doing so, will strike many as odd. To understand the full significance of how I see predicating designating featuring in comparative philosophy readers will need to take on the challenge of part three of *Science and an African Logic*. Here is how I explain the significance of these grammatical processes near the beginning of chapter nine.

In developing use of the signing code language, classifying is central. There are two distinct types of classifying that beginning talkers engage in: classifying over types of bodies, and classifying over types of interactions between bodies. The first of these classificatory acts has children accumulating lexical items which come to function as nouns; general terms. In English these are terms like »mama« and »doggy«. The boundaries of the classes labelled with such terms are

tive account of language than that which serves in foundationism (Verran 2001: 179). Recognising word-using as expression of embodied and embedded collective going-on in the here and now, we are obliged to locate the collective action of word using, uttering sounds, notably including predicating and designating, by bodies in place. Language now became for me an expression of embodiment in a particular here and now, with the forms of predicating and designating, that a unique signature of various language families, having historically clotted as form in past practices of uttering, yet as continually re-enacted, and infinitely plastic, in the present.¹⁰

Such a description of languaging, as performance here and now, seems obvious when we pay close attention to children learning the practices of word using,¹¹ or indeed when we pay close attention to how we, as philosophers learn to use words in philosophising. Linguistic determinism with its assumption of language as embedded in the workings of minds (universalism) or societies (relativism) is pervasive, and its influence is often difficult to discern, since each and all languages, being always ontologically particular, have a capacity to hold us in their thrall, oddly, even as, in using language, we escape.

I discovered the hard way that considering languaging and word-using as just one among many of the routine materialising and signifying practices contributing the practical collective work of going on together in a here and now, requires continuing effort to resist language's story of itself. Word using is an amazing generative force and it requires explicit attention from an analyst committed to articulat-

of various sorts, children learn the boundaries and the classificatory labels by ostensive training.

We often think that it is through extending their use of this sort of classifying that children come to talk of the world ›properly‹, that is, learn to refer or designate. However classifying over bodies is only secondarily involved in learning to refer/designate. The real strength of the encoding practices which come to be useful in making meaning lies in encoding over the actions that bodies engage in. This second classification results in children accumulating lexical items that in time will come to function as predicates (verbs) in making meaningful sentences (*ibid.*: 179).

¹⁰ See H. R. Verran, »Epistemisch-politische Aspekte von indigenen, modernen und von Vergangenheiten abweichenden Zukünften – Gan̄ma: Wie eine Allegorie im Mathematikunterricht der Grundschule zur Wirkung gebracht wird«, *psychosozial*, Vol. 38, No. 140/4, 2015 (forthcoming).

¹¹ This is the form my evidencing took in chapter eleven of *Science and an African Logic* (Verran 2001: 220–234).

ing the present in the present for the present. Language is always threatening to take off, to soar upwards towards the realm of ideals with just a few wing flaps, like the grey heron that occasionally makes off with frogs from my garden ponds.

Engaging with this third aporia had me bringing language use into the folds of embodiment, understanding predication and designation as bodily practice re-enacted routinely and usually unthinkingly, in the present of uttering or writing/reading. In looking back I see now that it is the particularity of numbers' conceptual constitution that me obliged to undertake this work in completing *Science and an African Logic*. Inadvertently adopting numbers as my horse,¹² my Rocinante, later I saw that numbers turn out to be a hardest case for analysis conducted through a commitment to concepts as clotted materialized meaning making routines as the here and now. It was because numbers were (are) my companions in doing comparative philosophy, that this third aporia around language, which had me differentiating ontology and ontics,¹³ caught me up in its vortex.

Numbers as words (and graphemes invoking words) emerge within, and inhabit the categorical logics of particular languages actively and routinely collectively (re)precipitating quite unnoticed,

¹² Perhaps surfboard would be a more elegant metaphor here, but since I have never ridden a surfboard, and as a war orphan often fostered on a wheat and sheep farm I rode horses many times, I will mix my metaphors, especially since the analogy with Cervantes' Don Quixote and his Rocinante seems apt.

¹³ ›Ontics‹ is a term that may baffle readers. A neologism derived from the English adjective ›ontic‹, itself a 1940s neologism coined from the ancient Greek term for being (ont), ontics as I use it has beingness as actively accomplished, as enacted in the here and now in collective action (not necessarily involving humans). Ontics as I use it is doing what it takes to enact a thing like a number (or indeed a rock). I imagine numbers, like all entities as inhabiting the spaces or intervals between collective enactments. Numbers seem to lie there mostly just out of focus in collective life, always ready to actively re-exist when the right actions are done and the right words said. I imagine numbers pulsating and quivering there in these intervals, always in *potentia*, apart from their brilliant, ephemeral realisation or clotting in enactment, time and time again. Rocks' existences can be told in a similar manner, but that is not my task here. This implies that there is always a lurking virtual enacted as *doppelgänger* of the real, which vanishes of course in the moment of its being addressed directly.

To give an example in showing what a commitment to ontics entails, let me remind readers that Aristotle is often said to have articulated an ontic formulation of the principle of non-contradiction namely »a thing cannot at the same time be and not be« (*Metaphysics*, Bk. 3, ch. 2, 996b, pp. 29–30). In contrast, having realness as actively accomplished in the here and now, having the real enacted in the doing of ontics as the present, equivocates on this principle of non-contradiction.

practices of predicating (and designating). Language (including numbering with words and graphemes) articulates an emergent ontological realm, an arena where the ontic (as unlanguageed realness) can be studied, talked about, and argued about. The categories of an ontological realm (languageed realness) are peculiar to the linguistic grammar it has life within, and numbers embed that categorical logic in their structure.

On the other hand numbers also have an equally vibrant life in the real world unlanguageed, as enacted sets of routine embodied gestures of material arranging and re-arranging, and its outcomes. As much as they arise in language and carry the particular form of a language's predicating and designating, numbers equally arise in and carry with them, the unseemly burden of ordering within the materialising mess of ›stuff‹ in meaning-making. Numbers express an emergent ontic realm and many emergent ontic realms express numbers in the complete absence of words (and graphemes) attesting that, particularly in numbering, predicating-designating can act backwards so to say. If numbers have a life of their own then, it lies in and enacts, the tensions between these domains. Each manifestation of number is particular and unique, embodying the tensions that inform the achievement of its expression. Neither domain is ever escaped from.

The argument I make in chapters ten and eleven of *Science and an African Logic* implicitly proposes that, as a number, one is as much of the linguistically mediated ontological, as it is a thing of unlanguageed ontics. And the same is true of one as the knowing self in its always inevitably particular emergence. But, and this is important, in being so this does not imply that one is a duality – that there is a numeral and a number, a knower in the flesh and a knower in the text. One and ›one‹ are different in being the same and the same in being different, precisely because one is simultaneously many parts and a single whole. In one (as self, as much as number) same/different, and different/same are iterations of being enacted as present collective action. Or, rather, to be precise here, when predication and the form of designation that it precipitates is taken as a form of active, routine, collective embodiment in the present, in a particular here and now, the non-dualism of ›one‹ and one holds. In contrast, when languageing is purely symbolising, emanating from either minds or societies, same and different become metaphysically distinct in both numbering, and in doing the self.

To put this in a more general form and to be explicit about a condition I see as enabling human knowing, and indeed comparative philosophy as I articulate (enact) it, ontology becomes recognisable as iterated ontics, itself an iterative realm. Each and every assertion about *being* that is made in acting either with words or without words¹⁴ in articulating commitments, hides further commitments within it. My claim is that the means of working through these iterations must be constantly attended to in truth-making (including valuing in enumeration) in the emergent present, and that I take to be the work of philosophical knowing including comparative philosophy.

All knowing expresses tensions between the ontic and the ontological; between realness as engaged with hands and eyes, felicitous and less felicitous concatenations of bones, muscles, neurones, and so on, and realness as engaged with sonorous and less sonorous utterances of words, elegant and less elegant combinations of inscribed strings of lexical items. Each and every knowing self assembles a larger or smaller repertoire of such practices and achieves varying levels of facility in them.

So how might we discern if a particular knowing self is to be trusted as authoritative? Everything seems so slippery and relative here. Why should the I of this text be taken notice of? In contrast to this figure (whom you as a reader must judge), let me point to the childish knower of Lucy who features as a knower in the text of *Science and an African Logic*. Back in the 1980s she provoked indulgent smiles from a future comparative philosopher in the flesh, her less than skilled practices in conserving matter marked her as a knower without authority. Her evident engagement in the ontics of conserving matter was not matched by facility in the ontological aspects of conserving matter (Verran 2001: 126). Then in the 1990s, her status as a beginning knower and her telling comment elicited respectful treatment from the comparative philosopher in the text (still smiling indulgently perhaps) who narrated her as a companion knower in the text (*ibid.*: 156).

In part, as always, discerning authoritativeness is a matter of judgement on the part of the listener/reader. But of course the practices and the judgement of facility with practices, can be much en-

¹⁴ Can one articulate metaphysical commitments without words? I would cite preparing a meal and becoming a parent as articulating metaphysical commitments. Neither requires words.

hanced by developing techniques. Lucy was no doubt thoughtfully helped to develop such techniques in the practices relating to managing the ontic-ontological tensions involved in conserving matter in the English language mediated knowing community, as 'Dupe was no doubt helped by the Yoruba speaking adults who cared about her – teachers, parents and grandparents and so on. In less than a year probably each of them would be able to discern the lack of authoritativeness in the practices of conserving matter in their younger brothers and sisters. Much of our modern education system is concerned with developing authoritativeness and the possibility of discerning it in others. (And many of the tricks of capitalist marketing are about evading and scrambling the possibility of discerning authoritativeness, systematically confusing the techniques we moderns have all so painfully acquired.)

But while the stories of Lucy and 'Dupe are entertaining – not to speak of seemingly irrelevant asides about capitalism, our focus here is philosophical authoritativeness, particularly comparative philosophical authoritativeness. Your interest as a reader of philosophy, and my interest as a writer, might be agonistically opposed, but we are both interested in the epistemic-epistemological status of the claims I am making here. What techniques characterise the practices of philosophically working the ontic-ontological tensions that constitute the repertoire of philosophical knowing, practices that are salient to judging the authoritativeness of this odd knowing self I claim as the I of philosophy (including comparative philosophy)? I suggest that skills in asking and formulating answers to four questions constitute the skills of philosophical knowing: Who knows? (issues of how knowers are figured); What is known? (issues of ontics-ontology); How is it known? (issues of methods and methodology); and How is it known to be known? (epistemics and epistemology). All four questions and answers are intimately embedded in all the others. In a reflexive move the philosopher poses those questions to his or her own knowing, usually setting himself or herself as the generic universal knower. Thus all philosophy is autobiographical, although most is covertly so.

The comparative philosopher not only asks those questions of her (or his) own knowing but also of the knowing collectives she finds herself embodied and embedded within, thus comparative philosophy is necessarily empirical philosophy. My claim is that the answers to those questions, which help reveal the metaphysical assumptions that

inform knowing, are aporia, they present as paradoxes. In undertaking the work of a comparative philosopher, the empiricist necessarily equivocates about paradox in finding ways out of the aporia that just keep coming. In each situation the epistemic-epistemological status of comparative philosophical knowledge claims must be judged on a case-by-case basis, and on an on-going basis. The epistemic-epistemological basis of a knowledge claim is, like everything else, emergent, embedded in the actual workings of particular institutions and organisations.

So what of the case of my current engagement which I mentioned in beginning? How does all this emerge where analyst in the flesh and comparative philosopher in the text, works with inhabitants in ›developing Australia's remote places‹, where the struggle is to devise, say an Indigenous Yolngu organization, fit for engagement in the services market economy that the Australian state is intent on establishing in their communities? All four epistemic-epistemological questions are salient in our current work, but here, in stopping my narration, let me consider the issue of ›Who knows?‹ for that is felt as a particularly excruciating question by my Yolngu colleagues, faced as they are by the demand that their newly invented institutions should become collectively as competitive enterprise centres marketing services to their kin and compatriots.

In the past in my work with my Yolngu colleagues and friends this question of ›Who knows?‹ was important, but in the case of the innovative school curriculum and the land management strategies, for the state institutions involved, questions around the figure of the knower were overshadowed by that of ›What is known?‹ In the 1980s, and for much of the 1990s when there was more toleration and respect for difference in Australia, the institutions that were interested to engage with good will towards Aboriginal Australians were puzzled about the differences between the objects known as they struggled to engage across what they saw as a cultural divide. Those anxieties have not gone away, but in the era of new capitalism when states take the development and expansion of economic infrastructure as their main concern (coupled of course as it is with a concern to guard the security of that economic infrastructure), engagement becomes dominated by the question of who (collectively) knows – thus the worry about inventing new Indigenous institutions that might engage in the twenty-first century. Of course the question is coupled with a surveillance regime to ensure collective compliance with the

norms and standards of what is known in Australia as the new public management organisation. What can my story here tell us? How can a contemporary organisation be both (and neither) a traditional Yolngu Aboriginal organisation and a competitive enterprise centre, marketing services to their kin and compatriots? It seems a wave, albeit forming in a new current, has engulfed my thinking yet again. Excuse me while I struggle to discern which way is up.

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Philosophy as Auto-Bio-Graphy: The Example of the Kyoto School

Abstract

In the following, I would like to advance the position that it is too early to write down my own ›auto-bio-graphy.‹ For this purpose, I attempt to develop the idea of philosophy as auto-bio-graphy in three theses and to do so with the example of the philosophy of the Kyoto School so that the conception of philosophy as auto-bio-graphy can be expounded in consideration alongside some of the aspects of the philosophy of the Kyoto School.

Keywords

Kyoto school, Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, noetic union, nothingness.

1 Outline of the Kyoto School

In the following, I would like to advance the position that it is too early to write down my own ›auto-bio-graphy.‹ For this purpose, I attempt to develop the idea of philosophy as auto-bio-graphy in three theses and to do so with the example of the philosophy of the Kyoto School so that the conception of philosophy as auto-bio-graphy can be expounded in consideration alongside some of the aspects of the philosophy of the Kyoto School.

Before doing this, the outline of the Kyoto School should be briefly explicated.¹ Somewhat like the Frankfurt School in Germany, the Kyoto School developed over several generations. Its founder, Ni-

¹ For more on the philosophical background of the Kyoto School see the »Introduction« of my edited volume, *Die Philosophie der Kyōto Schule: Texte und Einführung* [*The Philosophy of the Kyoto School: Texts and Introduction*] (Freiburg: Alber Verlag, 1990 [2011 is a expanded volume with a new Introduction; 2014]).

shida Kitarō (1870–1945), certainly did not intend to become the founder of a school, but his personality and his philosophical thinking attracted many students, who then developed the thinking of their teacher in various directions, albeit departing from it as well. This thinking can be characterized in the following way: One of its roots lies in European philosophy, while the other lies in the East Asian spiritual tradition. If one understands the so-called ›first philosophy‹ in the Occident as ontology, that is, the philosophy of Being, then the Kyoto School developed the philosophy of absolute nothingness. On the one hand, Nishida incorporated the thinking of William James' (1842–1910) pragmatism, Henri Bergson's (1859–1941) life philosophy, Emil Lask's (1875–1915) Neo-Kantianism, etc., but on the other hand he occupied himself intensively with Zen practice, without whose experience his philosophizing would not have come about in the way that one knows it today.

With regard to philosophical thinking, his successor to the chair Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), was certainly the greatest critic of Nishida. However, despite his criticism of Nishida, he likewise developed a philosophy of absolute nothingness, which was later influenced more and more strongly by the Buddhist body of thought. If one dubs Nishida and Tanabe the first generation of the Kyoto School, then several of their students like Hisamatsu Shinichi (1889–1980), Kōsaka Masaaki (1900–1969), Nishitani Keiji (1900–1989), and Kōyama Iwao (1905–1991) are understood as the second generation of the school. The philosophers of the second generation were persecuted towards the end of World War II in the Pacific by the extreme right within the military regime. Their historical-philosophical thinking was said to denote simultaneously a latent but decisive critique of extreme nationalism. After the end of the War in the Pacific, the philosophers named above were repeatedly attacked mainly by left-oriented critics who passed themselves off as liberal. They were attacked on the grounds that these philosophers had collaborated with the military regime.

The third generation of the Kyoto School consisted of disciples of the philosophers of the second generation. Their confrontation with European philosophy too takes place more or less in the direction that had been introduced by Nishida and Tanabe and sustained by the second generation.

2 The ›Auto‹

My first thesis reads: Philosophizing is the knowledge of ›*to auto*,‹ that is, ›the self.‹ It is to know one's own self. At the beginning of the history of Western philosophy, Plato understood the adage handed down in the Temple of Delphi, ›*gnōsi sauton*‹ [know yourself], as an instruction for oneself. This thesis implies that my own self, as well as the self of the world, is indeed always somehow familiar to me, but they are not known by me. One's own self must first be known. As with all philosophical themes, one also finds here the starting point of aporia and astonishment: As long as I wonder what my own self and the world is, I know what it is, but as soon as I ask myself about it, I do not know it anymore.

One's own self is neither identical with one's own ego nor with the subject, although conversely this ego or subject, thematized again and again in modern philosophy since René Descartes, is a modern name for the self. The development of modern philosophy is the development of the thinking about the ego, that is, the subject as ›*res cogitans*,‹ as Descartes in ›*Meditationes secunda*‹ said. The principle that he discovered was supposed to be the foremost certainty, upon which the secure building of philosophy could first be erected. Indeed, the Cartesian ego could not fully become aware of its own self. It certainly knew *that* it is, but it did not know *from where* it was supposed to have come. As is well known, Descartes further asked in ›*Meditatio tertia*‹ from where this otherwise self-secure ego came: ›*Nempe a quo essem?*‹ (1964–1976: 48).² This ›a quo‹ (from where) was in the end dubbed ›God,‹ upon which the ego could first be grounded.

I do not want to undertake an historical tracing of the modern lines of development of the philosophical thinking that lead to the ego and the subject here. It would suffice to indicate that terms like Gottfried W. Leibniz's (1646–1716) ›monads,‹ Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) ›transcendental apperception,‹ Johann G. Fichte's (1762–1814) and Friedrich W. J. Schelling's (1775–1854) ›absolute ego,‹ Georg W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) ›absolute,‹ Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) ›transcendental ego,‹ etc., despite all the distinctions that could be made among them, all imply the same thing: modern philosophy

² R. Descartes, ›*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*,‹ *Oeuvres de Descartes*, C. Adam, and P. Tannery (eds.), Vol. 7, Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–1976.

was the impulse to bring to full consciousness one's own self, as well as the self of the world, within the horizon of subjectivity.

The philosophy of the Kyoto School likewise involves this facticity of the self. In order to illustrate the experience of one's own self and the self of the world that is preserved and handed down in the Kyoto School, I will cite Nishitani Keiji, who in an autobiographical essay [*»Waga shi Nishida Kitarō sensei wo kataru (Memories of My Teacher Nishida Kitarō)«*] describes a memory of his teacher, Nishida Kitarō: »For these essays of Nishida, I had a more intimate feeling than I had for any other essay I had read before, as well as for no other person that I had heretofore met. They gave me a qualitatively different impression, for it seemed as if it has originated from the innermost depths of my own soul« (Nishitani 1978: 16).³

The expression ›out of the innermost depths of my soul‹ reveals the inborn affinity between the two thinkers. Beyond that one can hear his appeal to Nishida's conception of the ›self,‹ which he partially worked on in his study of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328). Furthermore, the appeal becomes clearer when one hears the following words: the encounter with Nishida would have been for him the encounter with a person, »who is closer to me than I am to myself.« The expression ›closer to me than I am to myself‹ was very probably adopted from Meister Eckhart, who said God is »nearer than the soul is to itself,« just like the Holy Spirit »is more immediately present to the soul than the soul is to itself« (Meister Eckhart 1955: 201).⁴ For Eckhart, the soul was not an objectively describable object, but rather the inside of ›me.‹ Eckhart would also have said that God is nearer to me than I am to myself. When Nishitani perceives the relationship between God and the human in the relationship between his teacher and himself, this does not mean a mystification of the teacher-student relationship, but rather an experience of what my own self is: the self of another is the same as the self of my own ego. When one understands by this ›other‹ any other that is in the outer world, then this

self is the same as that of the world. The question repeats itself here: what is this self?

Nishitani describes the core of the relationship between God and the human phenomenologically as it were, and finds in it ›the end part of the noetic union.‹ The union in the customary sense is that of present essences A and B in a higher essence C. A noematic union of that kind concerns the present objects, but it is not the noetic union in Nishitani's sense, namely, different eyes becoming the same in their inexchangeable noetic act of seeing. In lieu of seeing, one can also bring into play hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, etc. In this simple act of perception, no one can take the place of the other. Even the most intimately familiar person to me can never see, hear, feel, smell, taste, etc., in my place. What is of concern here is not a mystical experience, but rather the experience that everyone constantly and without noticing has in a quotidian fashion.

In this banal experience everyone is actually someone in whose stead no one can enter. This uniqueness can be ascribed to everything that exists and is indeed the self of each thing. Yet humans first know this uniqueness. For them this means: everyone is the other to everyone else. This otherness of the other shows itself in each sensation and each feeling, and, in the most extreme case, in death. Even humans who love each other cannot make the death of the other into their own experience. Yet precisely with regard to this noetic act that can never be exchanged with the other, everyone is in the same manner of being like the other. In the noetic aspect of this otherwise utterly banal perception and sensation, everyone is the other to everyone else. In this respect everyone is the same as everyone else. Precisely at the point, where everyone maintains their otherness and uniqueness in opposition to everyone else, is everyone united with everyone else.

One remark is indispensable here. In this noetic union, bare egoity is breached. In a pure noetic act one is without ego. An example: In play one forgets oneself, and precisely at the point in which one forgets oneself can one play best. Even the sober supervision and calculation of the game demands this lack of an ego. In this ego-less dedication one is unified with the noetic that is likewise exercised in the game.

This lack of egoity comes close to the concept of ›nothing.‹ This nothing is what the Kyoto School called ›self,‹ preeminently in the sense used by Nishida and Nishitani.

³ Nishitani Keiji *Chosaku-shū* (Collected Papers Keiji Nishitani's), Vol. 9, Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1978.

⁴ Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, J. Quint (ed. and transl.), Munich 1955. See Meister Eckhart, »Sermones,« *Die Lateinischen Werke [The Latin Works]*, J. Koch et al. (eds.), Vol. 4, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1956. The sermon in Latin reads: »(Deus) intimior est animae quam anima sibi ipsi« (1956: 356). To quote the first sermon: »Spiritus sanctus immediator est animae quam anima sibi ipsi« (*ibid.*: 3).

3 The ›Bios‹

My second thesis comes to bear precisely here: Philosophy always concerns the *bios* of the *autos*, life by which the otherwise ego-less self of my own ego expresses itself and maintains its egoity. In this self-expression one also recognizes the other, with whom the ›world‹ forms an ego and is determined by this ›world.‹ The philosophy of ›selfness‹ as the philosophy of the ›nothing‹ must develop itself as the philosophy of ›life‹ and of the ›world.‹ This thesis is also not new at all. The leading idea of Greek philosophy, ›to live well,‹ already refers to this idea. The moot point in the debates between Socrates and the Sophists was whether the good life in the sense of *eudaimonia* is finally achieved through the acquisition of power, wealth and fame in this world or first in the world of the *eidos* as the state of the soul. After philosophy had achieved the position of a discipline within the university, around the time of the Enlightenment, and became more and more a drive towards scientific activity in the name of research, it lost this leading idea of *eudaimonia*. But as long as written texts engage with the good life, mere philologically oriented research alone cannot entirely depart from this objective.

In the structure of life first of all is just to see what was just now glimpsed in the structure of the ›self‹: my life is thoroughly my own life, and nevertheless it is united with that of others. Indeed, no one can carry out my life in my place, but precisely in the mode which I carry out my life, which is otherwise independent from that of all others, I stand in the same manner of being that the others bear as others. One is united with the others in the noetic immersion in this manner of being. This noetic unification can only be proved true in noetic transcendence, that is, in the immersion in one's own ego-less self. The biological connection of individual creatures that is visually detectable in the evolutionary lines of all creatures since ancient times, but also in the ecological context of the natural world, is the reflection of this noetic unity. No creature has given birth to itself but was rather born from another. The death of an individual creature is seen precisely as Leibniz once described it in his mature treatise, *Principes de la Nature et de la Grace, fondés en raison* [*Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*]. It is not the mere cessation of life, but rather the ›metamorphosis‹ of the components of the organic

body, which always transform themselves into another life (Leibniz 1965: 601).⁵

The relationship of individual creatures to the organic whole, like to the great life, which is easy to see in the biological world, is similar to the projection of infinite plenitude. From the perspective of the theory of plenitude, each part *is* the whole. This relationship of biological life must also hold for social and historical life. It first becomes clear in social and historical life that the individual life *is* not only the whole, but rather also a unique life opposed to other individuals, that is to say, that it is free and creative and that it cannot be substituted with another.

According to the philosophy of the Kyoto School, the self-consciousness of this historical life is expressed in the form of a historical philosophy. That the philosophy of absolute nothingness can be thematized as something like history, and the manner in which this can be done, would be found as quite problematic. For history is certainly the world of being and not the world of nothingness. But, as stated above, what is called nothingness is not a mere vacuous nothingness in the sense of an absence of objects, but rather the self, which since it cannot be objectified does not admit of predication and thereby admits of the genuine status quo of creation.

Incidentally, it was not the Kyoto School which considered history for the first time under the aspect of nothingness. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) already perceived the Christian European world under the aspect of the nihilism of the eternal return of the same. In the world in which God is dead and/or has been murdered, there lacks, he said, a final answer to the question ›why.‹ The historical world, which recurs without an answer as to why, has neither a goal nor a meaning. Nietzsche did not call the overcoming of this nihilism a deception about this insignificance. In the well-known allegory of the ›Three Metamorphoses,‹ he narrates the bearing and enduring of the heavy burden of this insignificance of the world, until the bearer, the camel, transforms into a lion. The latter affirms even this insignificance as ›I want‹ in order to finally transform in

⁵ G. W. Leibniz, *Principes de la Nature et de la Grace, fondés en raison*, §6, in *Die philosophischen Schriften*, Vol. 6, New York, Hildesheim: Olms, 1965. The English passage can be found in *Philosophical Essays*, R. Ariew, and D. Garber (trans.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), p. 209.

this »great Yes« (»großes Ja«) into a »child« (Nietzsche 1988: 29–31).⁶

Then again, when Max Scheler (1874–1928) after the World War I elucidated »absolute nothingness« as the point of departure for philosophizing, the spiritual situation of Europe had changed. Doubts about the reliability of reason were still intensifying in the face of a world catastrophe, which was thought to be a consequence of Enlightenment and its respective civilizations. Furthermore, Scheler believed that Europe's position had been put into question by Asia's drive to expand. He deemed First World War I a »conciliation« between these East-West contraries (Scheler: 1954: 430).⁷ The altogether unstable nature of this parity soon showed itself in the 1920s and 30s. The ground of existentialism, *angst* about nothingness as the mood of the times, was already underway. The philosophy of nothingness according to the Kyoto School was in any case not a solo effort, but rather belonged to the contemporary path of philosophy in the twentieth century in Europe and Japan.

The »nothing« of the Kyoto School is, as has been said, the formless self of the subject, which never admits of reification. The »subject« was never conceived by these philosophers in the direction of »subjectivity,« but rather in the direction of subject-lessness. The subjectless subject was simply what the Kyoto School meant by »nothingness.« The latter as the self of my own ego does not form an egotistical center, from which the ego would be individual and sovereign and rule the periphery. The Kyoto School wanted to question the previous view of the conception of history, according to which the world should be universal and whose center signified Europe. »Nothingness,« otherwise understood exclusively as a thought belonging to the philosophy of religion, was in this context conceived as the prin-

ciple of the historical world and dubbed the »universal of nothingness« (Nishitani 1956: 319).⁸

Only insofar as one takes this nothingness as one's point of departure, can the individual be creative and inwardly bound with the state, which likewise takes this nothingness as its point of departure, and which co-forms the »world-responsible-world« (Japanese: *sekai-teki-sekai*). The Kyoto School wanted to consider this world-responsible-world as one in which the Eurocentric Anglo-Saxon, modern world would have been overcome. The religiosity of the »nothing« should also not only be realized in human interiority, but also in the world-responsible-world.

As was mentioned in the beginning, radical right partisans attacked the Kyoto School because the latter's views were contrary to ultra-nationalistic views of the time. These views imply de facto that one should maintain the self-consciousness of one's own nation so that the other nations and peoples are seen only out of this minute angle and not from the perspective of intercultural togetherness. The plurality of the world was never as such envisaged. To defend this plurality meant at that time a critique of the prevailing ultra-nationalism. When one thinks of confrontations with totalitarian regimes and fundamentalists of yesterday and today, one can imagine how serious the jeopardy to one's life was for those who uttered such a critique. For its part, the Kyoto School had indeed not practiced any explicit critiques of the regime at that time, with the exception of Nishida's Marxist-oriented students such as Tosaka Jun (1900–1945) and Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945). They must have died tragically in prison shortly before or after the end of the Pacific War respectively. The other philosophers of the Kyoto School attempted with their philosophy of history to provide a new orientation for and justification of the Pacific War, which more or less meant a latent critique of the military regime. The imprisonment of Nishida by the military regime did not occur in the end, but it had in fact been planned. Without the aid of the Marines, he would possibly have soon been arrested together with some of his students (cf. Ohashi 2001: 12).⁹ The tragedy

⁶ Cf. F. Nietzsche, »Also sprach Zarathustra,« in *Sämtliche Werke (Kritische Studienausgabe)*, Vol. 4, G. Colli, and M. Montinari (eds.), Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Berlin, and New York: de Gruyter, 1988. The English citation can be found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, G. Parkes (trans.), (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 23–24.

⁷ M. Scheler, »Vom Ewigen im Menschen,« in *Gesammelte Werke*, M. Scheler (ed.), Vol. 5, Berne: Francke Verlag, 1954. The English citation can be found in *On the Eternal in Man*, B. Noble, (trans.) (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 430.

⁸ »Sekaikan to kokkakan« [Worldview and Stateview], in *Nishitani Keii Chosaku-shû* (Collected Papers Keijii Nishitani's), Vol. 4, Tokyo: Sôbunsha, 1956.

⁹ R. Ohashi, »Kyoto gakuha to nihon kaigun – shin shiryô «Ôshima memo wo megutte (Kyoto-Schule und the Japanische Marine – To the new Materials »The Memorandums of Ôshima«), PHP, Tokyo 2001. See also: H. Furuta, »Sekai shin chitsujô no

of imprisonment could be avoided, but another, much longer abiding tragedy accompanied it: their attempt at a new orientation of the reality failed in the end not in its execution, but rather in the hardness of the reality itself, which was prosecuted by a monstrous state will. Japan's capitulation aggravated for some philosophers of the Kyoto School the extreme living condition that resulted from losing their positions. But mentally the capitulation meant the failure of their thinking about the Pacific War. However, it is therefore important to investigate whether their idealistic arguments were really in no respect sensible, or whether the arguments, liberated from the conditions of their time and seen anew from a contemporary standpoint, contain insights that can only be appreciated today.

4 The Graphē

We now come back to the theme of ›auto-bio-graphy.‹ Our third thesis is: Philosophy as the *biōs* of the *autō*, the life of the self, demands *graphē*, that is to say, the description of a particular meaning. Philosophy as the description of the life of the self is in accordance with its form as an auto-bio-graphy.

The philosophy of history as it was pursued since Augustine (354–430) and further pursued in a secularized form in Kant, Hegel, and Karl Marx (1818–1883), and whose echo can be heard in Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968) and Francis Fukuyama (1952–), is essentially characterized as Christian-eschatological. That is to say, what appears in experience can never be constructed in the whole of history, despite all of the variations, by the Christian-eschatological idea. As a consequence of this, it must have a metaphysical character. The writer (*grapheus*) of history in particular always contemplates it from a bird's eye view, which does not suit humans, and by which the writer constructs the historical world in accordance with an idea and pre-determines it through this idea. The historical world represented in this way is not the brute fact that one encounters in immediate experience.

If one wants to liberate oneself from this kind of philosophy of history, one will be confronted with the following question: how

should one in the description of all of what is and what happens, that is, the world, describe it as how it is, and thereby as the world, as it is encountered in immediate experience? If the claim ›to the things themselves‹ may be understood as the leitmotif of phenomenology, then the question posed above is one of phenomenology.

The fundamental idea that the Kyoto School's philosophy wants to contrive is an answer to this question. By way of an example: Nishida answers this question by referring to the self-determination of the world. The world, which in natural science is described and determined in a mathematically and physically objective fashion, is not yet the ›primary world,‹ as Husserl for example understands it. This world stands before any objectification. The objective image of the world is basically subjective insofar as there cannot be an object without a subject. Even if this subject does not mean something merely individual, but rather a faculty for cognition common to all humans, or even intersubjectivity, objectivity continues to remain the flipside of subjectivity.

The ›self-determination of the world,‹ as Nishida termed it, is the event that emerges in immediate experience before any subject-object division, before it is reified, calculated, and analyzed by the beholder. The arising of the world-event in the particular immediate experience of an individual, seen from the perspective of that individual, means that it becomes ego-less, but in such a way that the description that ›I‹ undertakes, is indeed egoistic but nonetheless also ego-less, so that it counts as the self-determination of the world. Nishida elucidated this seemingly abstract formula with a simple example: »Not that ›this bird‹ flies, but rather the fact ›this bird flies‹ is what there is« (Nishitani 1978: 168).¹⁰ Neither is ›this bird‹ perceived noematically as the subject of a proposition nor does the noetic ›ego‹ as a knowing subject see this bird. In the ›there‹ of the factual world, the brute fact ›this bird flies‹ arises and this arising belongs as much to the ego as it does to the bird. The dawning awareness of this fact is the realization of the self-determination of the world. The writer is not an egoistic subject, but is rather nothingness in the sense of the subjectless subject.

More words regarding the structure of this description are in

genri kō« [Considerations Concerning the Affair ›Principle of a New World Order‹],« Nishida Kitarō zenshū, furoku (Nishitani 1978: 107–110, 165–170).

¹⁰ »Watashi no zettaimu no jikakuteki gentei to iu mono« [My Sense of the Determination of Absolute Nothingness Becoming Aware of Itself], in *Nishitani Keiji Chosaku-shū* (Collected Papers Keiji Nishitani's), Vol. 6, Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1978.

order: every *graphē*, every description, is the achievement of a subject. Yet this subject does not absolutely have to be egoistic. It can be subject-less so that her or his description can be grasped as the self-description of the world materializing through her or him. This relationship can be understood more easily in the realm of art. The work of an artist, who is somehow ›inspired‹ and motivated by this inspiration, is surely the artist's work, and at the same time the artist is not simply his work. What the artist has created can be understood as the self-creation of the world as it happens through the artist. The term ›gift‹ in relationship to ›gifted,‹ as in the expression ›this artist is gifted,‹ refers to this subject-less dimension of consciousness in the artist who otherwise wants to be strongly individualistic. Every focus of the self-determination of the world is always individualistic and unique.

The description of the world by a subject-less subject, who strives to know his own self and the self of the world, results in the knowledge of the ›auto,‹ as the performance of the ›bios.‹ It results in the auto-bio-graphy of the world. The philosophy of the Kyoto School was a special case of this auto-bio-graphy.

As is the case of every philosophy, the philosophy of the Kyoto School also finds itself in a historical becoming, which continues to this day. The question posed above regarding the argumentation of the Kyoto School concerning the Pacific War (which admittedly remains partly too idealistic) was sensible in some respect when seen anew today, also applies to becoming. That is to say, this philosophy can be understood as a question that is posed in the contemporary constellation. In today's intercultural times, one sees that the philosophers of the Kyoto School had anticipated and foreseen something, which only in recent times is explicitly stated and should be made clearer. This is the necessity of the world-responsible-world, in which every cultural world by maintaining its creative subjectivity, co-determines this ›world,‹ without recourse to any ego-centered domination, let alone to ›Orientalism‹ or ›Occidentalism.‹ It is admittedly a further question as to how one would describe the self auto-bio-graphically in the contemporary world, a world being molded through normalization and leveled by so-called ›world technology,‹ which originates in Europe. Having posed this question, I now provisionally conclude my considerations.

Accordingly, my own ›auto-bio-graphy‹ should follow, however not yet, and, for now, it remains uncertain how long this ›not yet‹ will

take. For, to write an auto-bio-graphy means a kind of accomplishment of the author's life; hence I must wait till my life is accomplished.

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Survey Articles

Have We Got a Method for You!

Recent Developments in Comparative and Cross-Cultural Methodologies

Abstract

Recent developments in comparative and cross-cultural philosophy converge on the question of philosophical methods. Three new books address this question from different perspectives, including feminist comparative philosophy, Afrocentricity, and metaphilosophy. Taken together, these books help us to imagine interventions in the methodologies dominant in Western academic philosophy through a fundamental reevaluation of how we think, reason, and argue. Such reevaluation underscores the problems that Eurocentrism poses for feminist discourse and the resources that comparative philosophy offers for addressing these problems.

Keywords

comparative philosophy, cross-cultural philosophy, feminism, postcolonial studies, Afrocentricity, philosophical methods, aesthetic experience.

The three texts selected for this review article all address the social and political ramifications of the methodologies employed in cross-cultural philosophical work: *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions* edited by Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor, *The Demise of the Inhuman: Afrocentricity, Modernism, and Postmodernism* by Ana Monteiro-Ferreira, and *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy: Philosophy as Combat, Play, and Aesthetic Experience* by Sarah A. Mattice.¹ Taken together, these books help us to imagine

¹ J. McWeeny, and A. Butnor (eds.), *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; A. Monteiro-Ferreira, *The Demise of the Inhuman: Afrocentricity, Modernism, and Postmodernism*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2014; S. Mattice, *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy: Philosophy as Combat, Play, and Aesthetic Experience*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.

interventions in the methodologies dominant in Western academic philosophy (such as analysis, hermeneutics, and the phenomenological method) through a fundamental reevaluation of how we think, reason, and argue. Such reevaluation underscores the problems that Eurocentrism poses for feminist discourse and for philosophy in general, as well as the resources that comparative philosophy offers for addressing these problems.²

1 Feminist Comparative Philosophy

McWeeny and Butnor are explicit in their intention to present the methodology that they label »feminist comparative philosophy« as »a new mode of philosophical practice – one that could well serve as an exemplary methodology for any twenty-first century philosophy« (2014: 2). The editors characterize a methodology as feminist »insofar as it regards the voices and experiences of women as philosophically significant in a manner that is not sexist or discriminatory, but instead promotes the expression and flourishing of those who have been oppressed due to this social location« (*ibid.*: 4). They describe a methodology as comparative »insofar as it regards the ideas of more than one disparate tradition of thought as philosophically significant in a manner that respects each tradition's individual integrity and promotes its expression« (*ibid.*). Taken together, feminist comparative philosophy is »the practice of integrating feminist and non-Western philosophical traditions in innovative ways, while still being mindful of the unique particularity of each, in order to enact a more liberatory world« (*ibid.*: 3). The last phrase speaks both to the progressive political commitments that accompany this methodology as well as to the notion of performativity that guides its practical application. As the authors explain: »An essential principle of feminist comparative methodology is that philosophical works should be assessed both in terms of their explicit content and in terms of the claims that they

perform within the wider social-political contexts in which they are situated« (*ibid.*: 2).

The essays gathered in the collection all seek to enact this »more liberatory world« through philosophical interventions both critical and creative. The book is organized into five parts, the first of which focuses on various approaches to gender in Asian traditions, including Hsiao-Lan Hu's chapter on karma as a lens through which to view issues of agency and determinism in the performance of gender; Kyoo Lee's chapter on gendered language in the *Daodejing*; and Ranjoo Seodu Herr's argument against historical distortions of Confucian teachings within patriarchal social systems. All three chapters are forward-looking, stressing the relevance of their source material to contemporary feminist inquiry.

The second part, on the topic of consciousness-raising, contains Keya Maitra's chapter on feminist self-consciousness and Jennifer McWeeny's chapter on María Lugones and Zen Master Hakuin. Both of these look to Buddhist practices as resources for developing a feminist political consciousness. The third section on »place« includes a chapter on situated knowing in the *Zhuangzi* and feminist standpoint epistemology (Xinyan Jiang) and a chapter on Vandana Shiva's use of the Hindu feminine principle *prakriti* in her ecofeminism (Vrinda Dalmiya). As Dalmiya says, *prakriti* provides an epistemological tool for mitigating differences between communities of knowers in ways that do not simply privilege rationalism, universalism, and contemporary scientific materialism.

The fourth section on selfhood contains two contributions on care ethics: one focused on Confucianism (Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee) and one on Zen Master Dōgen (Ashby Butnor). Both highlight ways that Asian traditions can expand, and at times challenge, contemporary care models in ethics. A third chapter in this section (by Erin McCarthy) enters the conversation from the perspective of continental feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray, discussing points at which contemporary Japanese philosophy can intervene in discussions of nondual subjectivity. The final section contains a chapter by Namita Goswami as well as an engaging »Feminist Afterword« by Chela Sandoval that provides some general reflections on the significance of the volume as a whole within contemporary feminism.

I would like to focus attention on the chapter by Goswami, since it presents an application of feminist comparative philosophy outside of the »East-West« comparative context. In »De-liberating Traditions:

² My title is a reference to M. C. Lugones, and E. V. Spelman, »Have We Got a Theory for You!: Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for »the Woman's Voice«,« *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1983, pp. 573–581. This influential article marks an early engagement with questions of cross-cultural theorizing against the backdrop of feminist politics.

The Female Bodies of Sati and Slavery,« Goswami begins by arguing against the uncritical acceptance of values rooted in Western philosophical inquiry, such as free will. As she discusses, when we measure the apparently diminished agency of oppressed groups against the gold standard of free will *qua* rational autonomy, we overlook the imperialist and Eurocentric history of this particular picture of the thinking, willing, individual subject. Goswami credits Gayatri Spivak for calling attention to this problem, but she also notes that Spivak's critique could benefit from a »comparative methodology« that more explicitly engages differences in the histories of various colonized peoples (2014: 249). Goswami's own comparison focuses on postcolonial and African-American feminisms respectively, and she draws attention to the different statuses of Indian, African, and African-American women vis-à-vis the socio-economic disparities associated with the North-South divide.

In more general terms, this chapter raises an important question regarding the relation of feminist comparative philosophy to postcolonial theory, given that the intersection of race, gender, and class is an issue in both fields. What is the origin of the »East-West« dynamic that so dominates contemporary comparative philosophy? Why is comparative philosophy not more widely associated with, for example, African, Latin American, and indigenous scholarship? Goswami's chapter reminds us that the North-South dynamic can complicate the cross-cultural philosophical project by addressing issues of race and gender as these affect the unequal distribution of cultural power and legitimacy within contemporary academia. Attention to this North-South framework – or, in other words, attention to the global inequalities in which all scholarship is located – must be a priority for feminist comparative philosophy.

2 Afrocentricity as a Methodology

Monteiro-Ferriera's statement of her own methodological commitments in *The Demise of the Inhuman* addresses a similar set of issues and seems well in line with Goswami's call for diligent attention to specific, historical realities: »Afrocentric theory seeks neither a totalizing nor a universal scope and certainly not an essentialized perspective on knowledge. [...] [W]hat the Afrocentric perspective on knowledge requires is *location*: African *location* as the methodological

approach to African traditions and cultures while refusing the subaltern place that has always been conferred to Black expressions, artistic and cultural, by Eurocentric scholars« (2014: 3). And, like McWeeny and Butnor, Monteiro-Ferriera presents Afrocentricity as a methodology that might be adopted widely, i.e., by any scholar concerned with Eurocentrism in a given discipline.

In addressing the scope of Eurocentrism, Monteiro-Ferriera's sustained critical engagement with postcolonial theory both contextualizes and complicates the landscape in which progressive methodologies such as Afrocentricity and feminist comparative philosophy operate. Monteiro-Ferriera portrays postcolonial theory as caught between two moments of critique: On the one hand, postcolonialism rejects the systematic philosophy of modernism, which under the guise of rationality passed off European culture and history as universal. On the other hand, postcolonialism casts doubt on whether any attempt to return to pre-colonial indigenous cultures can rise above naïve, atavistic essentialism.³ Monteiro-Ferriera worries that this scarcity of resources leaves postcolonial studies in a position of perpetual anti-Eurocentrism, unable to put forward positive claims or fully sever ties with Eurocentric discourses. The methodologies of postcolonial theory are, as Monteiro-Ferriera points out, critical tools derived in part from debates internal to European history: Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and postmodernism.⁴

To be clear, my own scholarship is deeply indebted to postcolonial theory. We might complicate Monteiro-Ferriera's picture by pointing out that postcolonialism itself provides both critical and constructive answers to the double bind that she describes.⁵ That said, Monteiro-Ferriera's aim, too, is both critical and constructive. She

³ See especially her discussion of Stuart Hall's work on pages 148 to 150. She references works such as Hall's »When Was »The Postcolonial«? Thinking at the Limit,« in I. Chambers, and L. Curti (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 242–260 and »Negotiating Caribbean Identities,« *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 290, 1991, pp. 3–14.

⁴ Throughout her discussion of postcolonial theory, Monteiro-Ferriera identifies these methodologies associated with various postcolonial scholars (2014: 137–156). These same methodologies are the subjects of critique in earlier parts of the book, where Monteiro-Ferriera describes them as problematically Eurocentric and hence not suitable for the project of Afrocentricity; see especially 128–129.

⁵ I would also note that the vexing question of research methods is addressed in detail in fields such indigenous studies and cultural studies. For example, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London:

critiques the dominance of Eurocentric methods while at the same time issuing a call for an Afrocentric methodology that can support innovative and forward-looking scholarship within and about Africa. Her proposal for a renewed look at the intellectual traditions of pre-colonial African societies asks us to consider how contemporary scholarly methods have constrained the fields of study that make up academia at large. The aims of the Afrocentric project help make explicit the often-implicit potential of fields such as comparative and Asian philosophy to intervene in such methods. That is, the tools of comparative philosophy – including proficiency in Asian languages and familiarity with critical discourses internal to Asian traditions – point to methodological possibilities that would not be imaginable within the framework of Western philosophy alone.

However, the success of such methodological developments in feminist comparative philosophy, Afrocentricity, and other cross-cultural philosophical projects will require, I suggest, a more wide-ranging reevaluation of the theories and methods of philosophy in general. By ›theories‹ I mean broad explanatory frameworks in which we understand and interpret phenomena, and by ›methods‹ or ›methodologies‹ I mean scholarly practices or ways of conducting research and inquiry. Within philosophy these terms tend to overlap, as when we use the terms ›feminist theory‹ and ›feminist methodology‹ interchangeably to describe the same set of scholarly commitments. We perhaps come closer to the concrete, practical methods of philosophy in activities such as analysis, hermeneutics, and phenomenology – these are methods for reading texts, articulating concepts, reflecting on experience, and, in general, *doing* philosophy. Recent developments in cross-cultural methodologies invite us to imagine interventions in philosophical practices at such a concrete level.

3 Non-Combative Philosophical Methods

Mattice's work in *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy* concerns these most basic of philosophical methods: how we think, reason, and argue. And yet, ultimately, her portrayal of these core philosophical activities will not map neatly onto terms such as analysis, hermeneu-

tics, phenomenology, or other Western-derived methods. In this sense, her sustained engagement with Chinese sources throughout the book indelibly marks her vision for philosophy as both a discipline and a profession.

Her project takes initial inspiration from the influential work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on metaphor. As she says, »although theories of metaphor going all the way back to Aristotle relied on the assumption that metaphor was a special kind of language, Lakoff argues that when we examine closely how language – and so thought – functions, we find that metaphors are an intrinsic part of how we think« (2014: 3).⁶ Metaphors are, at the most basic level, conceptual mappings that allow us to understand what anything ›is.‹ Mattice explains: »the most fundamental metaphors, those that make up our conceptual systems [...] are inference preserving; they provide a slide for reasoning used in one domain to be imposed on the second domain« (*ibid.*: 4). This »slide« is one of the avenues by which Eurocentrism constrains how we think, particularly when we understand terms such as ›philosophy‹ and ›religion‹ on European models. In academic inquiry, such models significantly limit the kinds of questions that we ask and the kinds of answers that we find plausible, hence shaping what we accept to be known and knowable.

For example, in his book *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, Jason Ānanda Josephson also draws on the work of George Lakoff to discuss the so-called prototypes that anchor our networks of inference-preserving, metaphorical mappings (Josephson 2012: 76).⁷ Discussing the inadequacy of the category »religion« as applied to non-Western cultural traditions, Josephson explains that Christianity serves as the prototype member against which other potential members are judged (*ibid.*: 76–77). The issue goes well beyond the academic study of religion. In the long history of Western colonial expansion, to be appropriately religious was counted as a mark of civilization; hence, to have one's tradition included in the category »religion« – and not, say, in the category »pagan« or »heathen« – afforded a measure of protection against colonial conquest (*ibid.*: 15–17).

⁶ See, for example, the now-classic, G. Lakoff, and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003 [1980].

⁷ J. Ā. Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Zed Books, 1999). See also Kuan-Hsing Chen's *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

In Mattice's work, the issues at stake in how we define the category ›philosophy‹ are similarly political. Mattice draws explicit attention to contemporary standards for so-called philosophical rigor, that is, the standards that mark ›strong‹ arguments and ›good‹ reasoning. These standards, as she demonstrates, have been imported from the language of war, such that a ›combat metaphor‹ indelibly shapes our understanding of philosophy, and philosophy *qua* combat serves as the prototype against which the intellectual and scholarly traditions of other cultures are judged.

In her second chapter, Mattice discusses the historical conditions that gave rise to the dominance of the combat metaphor in defining philosophy. She notes: ›The general adversariality of philosophical discourse is, at least in some ways, a socially and historically located feature – a by-product, as it were, of the situation of the Greeks and the importance of Greek philosophy in western narratives‹ (2014: 24). As Mattice notes, many Indian philosophical traditions ›also prioritized combat metaphors and methods for philosophical activity‹ (*ibid.*: 25). So, her point is not that the combat metaphor is particularly ›Western‹ but that it has come to be prominent in Western discourse to the extent that its status as metaphor has been obscured: ›The combat metaphor can seem almost like it is not a metaphor, but simply part and parcel of philosophical activity‹ (*ibid.*). Under the influence of this received narrative, contemporary academic philosophy becomes a battle for truth: Just as victory in combat is decisive and unambiguous, so too philosophical success is defined as a matter of establishing truth with the certainty of unassailable conclusions. However, when we are able to understand philosophy outside the yoke of the combat metaphor, we find resources for handling ambiguity, nuance, and complexity that a zero-sum game for deductive certainty simply cannot accommodate.

Throughout the book, Mattice draws such resources from Chinese material. For example, as she discusses, the split between logic and rhetoric has no analog in Chinese intellectual traditions. As a result, these traditions do not privilege logic, and the attendant search for certainty, as the best method for philosophical inquiry (*ibid.*: 26). Moreover, combat in general is not viewed as an opportunity for victory; rather, the need to go to war always marks important failures on the parts of all those involved (*ibid.*: 27). Accordingly, across Chinese intellectual traditions, metaphors for philosophical activity are drawn not from the domain of war but from domains such as ›traveling,

agriculture, and the natural world‹ (*ibid.*: 26). Mattice builds on these resources from Chinese traditions to describe, in her final chapter, an alternative method for philosophical inquiry based not on combat but on aesthetic experience. In her source domain – aesthetics – she focuses on the interrelated roles of ›artist, work of art, and participant‹ (*ibid.*: 84). She discusses artistic creativity not as the work of individual genius but rather in terms from Chinese art theory – for example, the balance ›between *ziran* (自然 naturalness) and *fa* (法 regularity)‹, the relation between imitation and transformation, and the successful manipulation of the vital energy of *qi* (氣) (*ibid.*: 99–100). Similarly, she describes the aesthetic attitude of viewers, and their interactions with artworks, in Chinese terms such as *guan* (觀 observation and attention), *he* (和 harmony), and *ying* (應 resonance) (*ibid.*: 92–96).

Extending this structure from the domain of aesthetics to that of philosophy, Mattice discusses the relevance of ›aesthetic distance‹ to philosophical activity. Similar to the phenomenological reduction or Gadamer's suspension of prejudices, Mattice's notion of philosophical distancing serves to foreground and make visible those assumptions that inevitably color speculative inquiry. However, somewhat unlike the philosopher in Western phenomenology or hermeneutics, Mattice's ›philosophical artist‹ is more concerned with imagination than investigation. Such imaginative philosophizing is not simply a matter of free play and fantasy – to the contrary, the source domain of aesthetics provides its own standards for evaluation, judgment, and appropriateness. Such standards, Mattice concludes, help redefine our understanding of philosophical rigor in ways that take into account the complex and at times ambiguous relations between philosophers, works of philosophy, and participants or readers of those works.

Mattice's proposed method for doing philosophy is the creative and syncretic product of a comparative inquiry, informed by both European and Chinese sources. In this sense, she models the method that she describes by demonstrating standards for good reasoning that take into account aesthetic resonances across her various sources. As I say above, such retooling of basic philosophical activities is an important component of any discussion of Eurocentric methods in philosophy – both feminist comparative philosophy and Afrocentricity require this fundamental reevaluation of how we think, reason, give evidence, and seek conclusions. Taken together, the three books

reviewed here provide ample resources for future scholarship concerned with such reevaluation and committed to enacting liberatory practices within the profession of philosophy at large.

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An Epistemological Turn in Contemporary Islamic Reform Discourse: On Abdolkarim Soroush's Epistemology

Abstract

Abdolkarim Soroush's thought is regarded by some researchers as a turning point in contemporary Islamic reform discourse. This article concerns Soroush's epistemology as a determining factor in this paradigm shift and interprets this shift as an *epistemological turn* in Islamic reform discourse, shifting from ›Islamic genealogy of modernity‹ to (re)rationalization of Islamic methodology. After a short introduction to Soroush's intellectual biography, this article will isolate neo-rationalism or neo-Mu'tazilism, religious post-positivism (post-scripturalism), historicism, hermeneutics, and dialogism as main features of Soroush's epistemology. This paper suggests that rationalism as reasoning independent from revelation and non-essentialism are two main determining pillars of Soroush's epistemology. In the conclusion, I shortly compare Soroush's thought with some other contemporary Muslim reform thinkers and discuss how and why Soroush's thought can be interpreted as an epistemological turn in Islamic reform discourse.

Keywords

Abdolkarim Soroush, Islamic reform discourse, Islamic religious epistemology, epistemological turn, neo-Mutazilism, intellectual discourse in post-revolutionary Iran.

1 Introduction

When Abdolkarim Soroush (born 1945), Iranian philosopher and theologian, referred to the Qu'ran as being ›The Word of Mohammad‹ in 2007¹ there was a diverse reaction. While many Muslim

¹ A. Soroush, ›The Word of Mohammad,‹ in A. Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophe-*

theologians rejected this idea as heresy and called for Soroush to »return to the fold of the Islamic *umma*»², other scholars regarded these words and generally Soroush's system of thought as the beginning of a paradigm shift and new phase in Islamic thought. *Post-Islamism*,³ *post-fundamentalism*⁴ *neo-rationalism*⁵, *neo-Mu'tazila*⁶, *post-revivalism*⁷ *postmodernism*⁸ have been used by these researchers to interpret the intellectual movement lead by Soroush in post-revolutionary Iran as a breaking phenomenon. This paper will discuss the epistemology that underlines this paradigm shift. The paper has three main parts: I. An introduction to Soroush's intellectual biography (Section 2). II. The main features of Soroush's epistemology (Section 3). III. An explanation of how and why Soroush's thought may be interpreted as an epistemological turn in Islamic reform discourse (Section 4). One methodological point that should be remarked here is that this text does not adopt a theological or normative perspective. The paper does not intend to examine whether Soroush's interpretation of Islam is right or wrong; or, whether it is loyal to »original« Islam or not. It simply tries to illustrate the internal structure of Soroush's thought and explain it through a contextualization of Soroush's argument.

tic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 271–275. Originally posted on *Soroush's Official Website*, December 2007, <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-The%20Word%20of%20Mohammad.html> (last accessed on 17 April 2015).

² J. Sobhani, »Ayatollah Sobhani's First Letter [to Soroush],« in Soroush (2009: 276–287). The letter was originally posted on: *Fars News Agency*, 08.12.1386/25.02.2008, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8612070740> (last accessed on 01 May 2015).

³ A. Bayat, »The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society,« *Critique: Critical Middle East Studies*, No. 9, Fall 1996, pp. 43–52.

⁴ F. Jahanbakhsh, »Religious and Political Discourse in Iran: Moving Toward Post-Fundamentalism,« *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2003, pp. 243–254.

⁵ F. Jahanbakhsh, »Introduction: Abdolkarim Soroush's Neo-Rationalist Approach to Islam,« in Soroush (2009: XVI).

⁶ M. Hashas, »Abdolkarim Soroush: The Neo-Mu'tazilite that Buries Classical Islamic Political Theology in Defense of Religious Democracy and Pluralism,« *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 109, No. 1, 2014, pp. 147–173.

⁷ Y. Matsunaga, »Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran,« *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, December 2007, pp. 317–329.

⁸ A. Dahlén, »Towards an Islamic Discourse of Uncertainty and Doubt,« *ISIM Newsletter*, Vol. 10, No. 02, July 2002, p. 22.

2 A Brief Intellectual Biography of Soroush

Soroush's main concern has been the tradition-modernity dilemma; a concern that most Iranian and other Muslim religious intellectuals have shared since the late nineteenth century. Soroush explicitly suggests this intention in the introduction of *The Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge* (henceforth CERK) where he asserts that the mission of modern and contemporary religious reformers is to *transit* religion through the *dangerous passageway* of the modern age: »The intention of the formers was saving religion from misunderstanding and misusing but the intention of contemporaries is transiting the religion safely from the dangerous passageway of the time and giving meaning and relevance to religion in the evolutionary age« (1386/2007: 48).⁹ In the late 1970s he appealed to Mulla Sadra's (Sadr al-Din Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Yahya Qawami Shirazi) philosophy and post-positivist epistemology to make Islamic tradition understandable in the modern context and to defend Islam against materialism and Marxism. In this period he wrote books such as *Nahad-e Na-aram-e Jahan* (The Dynamic Nature of the Universe)¹⁰, which was a modern reading of Mulla Sadra's theory of *substantial motion* and *Tazadd-e Dialektiki* (Dialectic Antagonism)¹¹ both published in 1978. After the Islamic Revolution (1979) he cooperated with the Islamic Republic; he took part in televised discussions on Marxism and was nominated by Ayatollah Khomeini as a member of *Shuray-e Enqelab-e Farhangi* (Advisory Council on Cultural Revolution). Soroush was so close to the Islamic Republic in its early years that he was regarded by some as its »premiere ideologue« (Vakili 2001: 153).¹² After some years, however, it seems that Soroush

⁹ A. Soroush, *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shariat: Nazariyye-ye Takamol-e Marefat-e Dini* (Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge), Tehran: Serat, 1386/2007 (ninth print, first print 1370/1991). A note on translations and quotations from Soroush's works: The translations are mine unless another source is specified. Quotations are from paper editions of Soroush's works unless an e-edition is mentioned.

¹⁰ A. Soroush, *Nahad-e Na-aram-e Jahan* (The Dynamic Nature of the Universe), Tehran: Serat, 1357/1978b.

¹¹ A. Soroush, *Tazadd-e Dialektiki* (Dialectic Antagonism), Tehran: Serat, 1357/1978c.

¹² V. Vakili, »Abdolkarim Soroush and Critical Discourse in Iran,« in *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, J. L. Esposito, and J. O. Voll (eds.), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 150–176.

realized that political Islam not only does not help, in his own words, »transiting religion safely from the dangerous passageway of the time« (1386/2007: 48) but also actually it hinders realizing that goal. This *ideologized* and *maximalist*¹³ Islam causes, in Soroush's words, »[a]nyone who encourages people to expect too much of religion (in the fields of ethics, practical behaviour, economics, hygiene, planning, governance, etc.) and places this excessive burden on religion, gradually robs religion of its standing and legitimacy« (2009: 115). Islamism increased indeed the conflict between Islam and modernity and made the understanding and defense of Islam in a modern context more difficult. So, Soroush shifted his critiques after the Islamic Revolution towards Islamism. He used diverse sources from Islamic mysticism and philosophy to post-positivist epistemology, hermeneutics and liberal Christian theology to provide a »minimal« and »faith-based« reading of Islam. So began Soroush's reform theology.

In the first phase of his reform theology, beginning from CERK in 1988, Soroush targeted religious knowledge and criticized traditional religious epistemology. Soroush distinguished between religion and religious knowledge and regarded religion itself as ahistorical but religious knowledge as historical and changeable. This was the primary focus of his first theory in this book. He intended to achieve two goals through historicization and pluralization of religious knowledge: Firstly, the de-legitimization of the Islamic state that was justified through claiming to have an absolute true understanding of Islam. Secondly, he aimed to dissolve the conflicts between religion and modernity through shifting such conflicts from religion to the human religious knowledge. This theory excluded and exonerated *religion itself* from the religion-modernity conflict. However, this theory has developed in the CERK, had shortcomings.¹⁴ It was not enough for a reconciliation of Islam and modernity; it left the Qu'ran ahistorical; a source that has been cited by Islamists. And also it see-

mingly contained many conflicts with modern reason and science. Therefore, Soroush began traversing an alternative direction, which led him to a slippery slope. It culminated in the second phase of his thought since 1998 and ended in *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience* (henceforth EPE). Soroush developed a second theory that historicized not just religious epistemology but religion itself including Islam as well as Mohammad and the Qu'ran. The Qu'ran as »The Word of Mohammad« (Soroush 2009) is indeed the result of this long way that led to the historicization of the revelation. A historicized Qu'ran and a minimal religion should disarm both Islamists and secularist modernists. If the Qu'ran is a historical and contextual text, then the legal and political systems that it offers cannot be interpreted as ahistorical and hence obligatory in contemporary era. Similarly, a humanized theory of religion, as the interpretation of the prophet from his religious experience, secures religion from critiques regarding its parts that are not, seemingly, compatible with modern reason and science. Making a brief conclusion about Soroush's intellectual biography, it can be said that his thought evolved from an *apologetic Islamic modernist theology* during the 1970s to a pluralist, historicist, and liberal theory of religion in Islamic thought starting in the 1990s.

3 Epistemological Nature of Soroush's Thought

Epistemology can be regarded the core of Soroush's reform project as a response to the tradition-modernity dilemma. Soroush's first main theory developed in CERK is about religious epistemology. Inspired from post-positivist philosophy of science, Soroush distinguishes religion from religious knowledge and argues for the contextuality and historicity of religious knowledge as human understanding of sacral texts. He rejects the idea of absolute religious knowledge, arguing instead for a diversity and fluidity of religious knowledge as interpretations of religion. The epistemological nature of Soroush's intellectual project can be seen in his next intellectual phases too. Soroush, for example, says that his theory of religious pluralism, *seratha-ye mostaqim*, is an »epistemological view rather than theological« (1380/2001: 1).¹⁵ In his other main theory, EPE, Soroush extends and generalizes, indeed, historicity and plurality from religious episte-

¹³ For Soroush's concept of ideologized and maximalist religion, see: A. Soroush, *Farbeh-tar az Ideologi* (More Substantial than Ideology), Tehran: Serat, 1372/1993; A. Soroush, »Din-e Aqalli va Din-e Aksari« (Maximalist Religion and Minimalist Religion), in Soroush 1385/2006, pp. 47–62.

¹⁴ See for example: R. Hajatpour, *Iranische Geistlichkeit zwischen Utopie und Realismus. Zum Diskurs über Herrschafts- und Staatsdenken im 20. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2002; K. Amirpur, *Die Entpolitisierung des Islam: 'Abdolkarim Sorouschs Denken und Wirkung in der Islamischen Republik Iran*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2003.

¹⁵ A. Soroush, *Seratha-ye Mostaqim* (Straight Paths), Tehran: Serat, 1380/2001.

mology to religion itself (sacral texts). He suggests the epistemological character of his project also in an interview about Muslim intellectuals in the twenty-first century. After mentioning what, according to him, a modern Muslim intellectual is not, namely a Muslim »who thinks of modernity in terms of its axiological phenomena like consumerism or material development,« Soroush further suggests that:

The modern Muslim intellectual has to be one who understands the fundamental differences between Islam and modernity, and would therefore be able to bridge the gap between the two. But in order to do this, he or she has to know how and why Islam and modernity are different, and where the differences actually lie. They cannot simply talk about differences in terms of dress, culture or behavior – these are merely the symptoms of difference, but they do not constitute the actual epistemological difference itself (2002: 20).¹⁶

4 Main Features of Soroush's Epistemology

It can be said that rationalism, as reasoning independent from revelation in a religious context, and non-essentialism, as the historicity and constructiveness of knowledge, are two main pillars of Soroush's epistemology. Based on these two elements, some other epistemological concepts such as pluralism, nominalism, dialogism, hermeneutics, critical-historical and contingency can be regarded as core concepts of his epistemology too. Asef Bayat regards pluralism and historicity as making up the essential character of the post-Islamist turn in post-revolutionary Iran: »Islamist movements in Muslim societies are undergoing a post-Islamist turn characterized by rights instead of duties, plurality in place of singular authoritative voices, historicity rather than fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past« (Bayat 2005: 5).¹⁷ This paper will review these concepts in Soroush's works as some of the main epistemological concepts of his thought.

¹⁶ A. Soroush, »The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century,« in F. Noor, *New Voices of Islam*, Leiden: ISIM, 2002, pp. 15–21.

¹⁷ A. Bayat, »What is Post-Islamism?« *ISIM Review*, No. 16, 2005, p. 5.

4.1 Rationalism, Neo-Mu'tazilism

The epistemological nature of Soroush's thought and post-Islamist discourse is expressed sometimes by referring to Soroush as neo-Mu'tazila, the rationalist theological school in early Islamic scholarship (Hashas 2014). Soroush also often calls himself neo-Mu'tazilate.¹⁸ By this Soroush means believing in rational reasoning which is independent of religion and revelation. In this regard, he says in this interview »I am interested in the Mu'tazilate's view on religion and ethics. My main interest in this school is because they spoke about reason independent from revelation« (1387/ 2008: n.p.).¹⁹ A more specific aspect of Soroush's thought that makes him a »neo-Mu'tazilate« is that he regards values as being independent from religion. If Mu'tazilate argued that justice, for example, is valid independently from revelation, Soroush argues that democracy and freedom, likewise, are valid independently of religion and revelation. The text, namely the Qu'ran, being the product of a contextual interpretation of Mohammad from his individual religious/prophetic experience, loses its central authority/position in post-Islamist Islamic epistemology. Both Mu'tazila and neo-Mu'tazila argued for the independence of reasoning and values from revelation and religion. They pursued this goal and justified it through rejecting an orthodox dogma about the Qu'ran; Mu'tazila rejected the Qu'ran being *qadim* (eternal, not created) and neo-Mu'tazila questioned the Qu'ran's status as being a verbal revelation and the word of God.

The prefix of »neo« in neo-Mu'tazilae does not mean just a new emergence of Mu'tazilate but that neo-Mu'tazila goes further and regards the Qu'ran not just as *hadeth* (created by God) but as created by Mohammad, and not God. In the case of Soroush, the prefix »neo« also stands for some vital differences with classic Mu'tazilate ration-

¹⁸ A. Soroush, »Nov-Mo'tazeli Hastam« (I am Neo-Mu'tazilate), *Ordibehesht* 1387/ May 2008, *Soroush's Official Website*, <http://www.dr.soroush.com/Persian/Interviews/P-INT-13870200-NoMotazeli.html> (last accessed on 20 June 2015); A. Soroush, »Tajdid-e Tajrobe-ye E'tezal« (Reviving the Experience of E'tezal), A Lecture in Amir-Kabir University, 1381/2002, *Baztab-e Andishe*, No. 30, Shahrivar 1381/ September 2002, pp. 7–12.

¹⁹ See also his recent lecture: A. Soroush, »Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam,« Kenyon College, Ohio, USA, 2014, *Soroush's official website*, uploaded: 23.10.2014; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S04GZ7e8ovk#t=1994> (last accessed on 06 July 2015).

alism. The main difference between Soroushian neo-Mu'tazilite rationalism and classic Mu'tazilite rationalism can be understood by taking into account his historicism.

4.2 *Post-positivism: From Scientific Post-Positivism to Religious Post-Positivism*

One of Soroush's first main theoretical frameworks was post-positivist philosophy of science. During his studies in London in 1970s Soroush became familiar with some post-positivist philosophers of science such as Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Willard Van Orman Quine, and Imre Lakatos. Popper's philosophy of science but also his political philosophy was significant in Soroush's debates against both Marxists and Occidentalists during the early 1980s in Iran. That is the reason why Iranian academia and media regarded Soroush as being the main representative of the »Popperian« stream in post-revolutionary Iran. In a biographical interview in 2000, Soroush discusses his contact with the post-positivist philosophy of science:

The first philosopher of science I encountered was Karl Popper. [...]. The year 1974, the year I started my studies in the philosophy of science, coincided with the wider acceptance of the ideas of Thomas Kuhn as well. [...] I remember that the ideas of Karl Popper, Paul Feyerabend, and Imre Lakatos [...] dominated class discussions (2000: 9).²⁰

Post-positivist epistemology was very present in Soroush's thought since his early works. For example in *Elm Chist, falsafe Chist?* (What is Science, What is Philosophy?) he refers to Thomas Kuhn as »contemporary historian and philosopher of science« (1357/1978a: 8).²¹ Soroush talks more specifically about the influence of post-positivist philosophy of science in his theory CERK referring to Lakatos' concept of *research programs* (2000: 15). Post-positivism criticized the positivist concept of science as an objective picture of nature. These theories showed that different branches of knowledge are interconnected. Therefore, a change in one branch of knowledge influences the other branches of human knowledge. Soroush's main idea in CERK was that religious knowledge is no exception and as a part of

human »web of beliefs« it changes when other parts of knowledge experience change. In an interview, he remarks that it was Quine's theory of science that guided him to the theory of CERK. He goes on to add:

His [Quine's] theory is that all science is interconnected and, as such, judged as a whole, not as a collection of individual discrete theories, in the tribunal of senses. [...] It was Lakatos who, with the help of Quine's ideas, developed the notion of »research programs« in science: a whole family of theories, organized in a research program, enter judgment's court. In my book *Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge*, I have based one of my main arguments on this thesis (2000: 15–16).

Post-positivist epistemology that Soroush used in the 1970s and early 80s to criticize Marxism and its claim of »scientific realism« and Occidentalism will be instrumental later in his critique of *religious realism* and Islamism.

Soroush accused Marxists of positivism and occidentalists of both essentialism and Hegelian determinist historicism. During the following years he, however, realized the problematic consequences of a dogmatic and exclusivist Islam. Conservative and traditional Islam thus became a new ground of struggle. In his later intellectual phase, he directed, one might argue, those critiques towards Islamists' ideological and dogmatic interpretation of Islam. To do this, in CERK he shifted the focus of post-positivism from science to religion. He denied any objective and neutral interpretation of religion (religious experience and religious text). Furthermore, he criticized the kind of religious realism that argued for possessing the *ultimate truth* in a religious text, which I refer to as *scriptural positivism*. Scriptural positivism, like scientific positivism, presupposes a naive realist concept of knowledge. It holds that the text has an *ultimate and ahistorical meaning* that can be reached by an appropriately qualified reader. Soroush argued in CERK that a religious text can be understood differently in differing contexts. He mentioned his transition from philosophy of science to philosophy of religion in a biographical interview in 2000. In this interview Soroush discusses the »embryo phase« of this theory that occurred around 1982–1983 when he presented the primary formulation of this theory in twenty sentences to a selected audience at a regular lecture meeting. He says:

I remember the first thesis went roughly something like this: Religiosity is people's understanding of religion just as science is their understanding of

²⁰ Soroush, »Intellectual Autobiography: An Interview,« in Soroush (2000: 3–25).

²¹ A. Soroush, *Elm Chist, Falsafe Chist?* (What is Science, What is Philosophy?), Tehran: Hekmat, 1357/1978a.

nature. [...] At any rate, my philosophical understanding of scientific knowledge as a collective and competitive process and my subsequent generalization of this understanding to religious knowledge opened new gates for me (2000: 15).

If, according to post-positivism in science, science cannot reveal to us any ultimate truth about nature, then, according to religious post-positivism, religious scholarship cannot declare any final and exclusive meaning of religion (religious text or experience).

4.3 *Hermeneutics*

An important aspect of Soroush's thought is the diversity of understanding that results from the interpretive and subjective nature of human perception. If hermeneutics is the interpretivity of understanding, it should be then said that hermeneutics is at the core of his thought in different phases. This can be seen in Soroush's early application of post-positivist epistemology in humanities in the late 1970s to his last main theory EPF (1999) and *The Word of Mohammad* (2007). For example, in »What is Science, What is Philosophy« (1978a), he wrote about the subjectivity and interpretivity of human knowledge, saying that:

The theories affect even the observation of the facts. It means, two people with two [different] images in mind do not see a specific thing same. In other words, there is no naked event [phenomenon] that has for all people the same meaning. Every person has an inner tailor that clothes the body of phenomena with a cloth of interpretation. Then this clothed entity enters the mind (1357/1978a: 10).

Soroush reveals in his interview with Sadri that he combined philosophy of science with classic Islamic scholarship, as a result coming to a kind of hermeneutics without knowing that it actually was hermeneutics. On this note, he said, »My first attempts at interpretation concerned the Qur'an and an important Sufi text, *Mathnavi*. Later on, when I combined these insights with my knowledge of the philosophy of science and philosophy of history, I arrived at a relatively comprehensive hermeneutical theory (2000: 7).

In CERK Soroush rarely uses the word *hermeneutics*. He introduces CERK more as a theory grounded in »epistemology,« »philosophy of religion,« and »new theology.« CERK was mostly a combina-

tion of post-positivist philosophy of science, Islamic classic scholarship, *Religionswissenschaft*, and several topics in philosophy of religion or theology such as the religion-science conflict. However, since the mid-nineties Soroush has referred to hermeneutics increasingly. He reveals in his autobiographical interview that during the formulation of CERK he was not familiar with Hans-Georg Gadamer and was surprised when he learned of the similarity between his and Gadamer's thought, particularly about the latter's hermeneutics. He says: »To tell you the truth, up to the time that I composed the thesis of contraction and expansion I had not studied the hermeneutical theories of scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer. Indeed, I was struck by the affinity of my positions and those of Gadamer« (*ibid.*).

The main focus of Soroush's first theory was the change and evolution of religious knowledge, the human understanding of religion in its interaction with other parts of human knowledge. Inspired by hermeneutics – especially philosophical hermeneutics in his theory of EPF – Soroush introduces the Qu'ran as Mohammad's interpretation of his own individual religious experience. In this theory Soroush expands the subjectivity and interpretivity of not just religious texts but of religious/prophetic experiences, and argues for the historicity and contextuality of religion itself, i.e. religious texts and experiences. Some scholars have interpreted this development as a shift from Popper-Quine and the analytical paradigm to Gadamer-Derrida and the hermeneutic-continental paradigm. Ghamari-Tabrizi acknowledges this shift when he observes:

In his earlier works, Soroush was influenced by analytical philosophy and a post-positivist logical skepticism. Later, he adopted a more hermeneutic approach to the meaning of the sacred text. Whereas earlier he put forward epistemological questions about the limits and truthfulness of knowledge claims, later, in two important books *Straight Paths* (1998) and *Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* (1999), he emphasized the reflexivity and plurality of human understanding (2004: 516).²²

Ghamari-Tabrizi regards this theory as a *radical break* from traditional theology. This »radical break« is indeed what I formulated as the expansion of interpretivity from religious knowledge to religious experience; in other words: from textual hermeneutics to philosophi-

²² B. Ghamari-Tabrizi, »Contentious Public Religion: Two Conceptions of Islam in Revolutionary Iran Ali Shari'ati and Abdolkarim Soroush,« *International Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2004, pp. 504–523.

cal hermeneutics. Considering Soroush's own words that he discovered Gadamer later (2000: 7), it might be said that after getting more familiar with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Soroush expanded interpretivity from the *text* to the (religious) *experience*.

4.4 Historicism

Historicity is another important element of Soroush's religious epistemology. Soroush points this out explicitly in the preface of *Bast-e Tajrobe-ye Nabavi (The Expansion of Prophetic Experience)*. He suggests that CERK is about the historicity of religious knowledge while EPF is about the historicity of religion itself. He writes, »*The contraction and expansion of the religious knowledge* was about the human, historicity and earthianity of the religious knowledge and now in *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* the subject is humanity and historicity of religion itself and religious experience« (1385/2006: 4).²³ Thus, according to Soroush, religion and religious knowledge are not *ahistorical* but are constructed in a specific historical context. Religion, the prophetic experience, and its interpretation by the Prophet are historical. Moreover, religion should be understood from a specific context, which is also historical.

Soroush acknowledges the role of human agency in religion which entails in turn the acknowledgement of the endless possibilities of change and evolution in religion. Historicity and contingency played such an important role in Soroush's epistemology and theory of religion that he used them in the title of the English edition of his book. The book is titled *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (hereafter: EPE). Contingency means that circumstances and events in this world are not determined. They are contingent or could happen in different ways. For example, the Qu'ran has some verses that explicitly answer several questions which Mohammad's people proposed. Accordingly, Soroush argues that if there were more questions the Qu'ran would be longer or if Mohammad lived longer the Qu'ran would be thicker.

²³ A. Soroush, *Bast-e Tajrobe-ye Nabavi (The Expansion of Prophetic Experience)*, Tehran: Serat, 1385/2006 (first edition: 1378/1999) Quotation based on *Gerdab* edition 1385/2006.

Islam is not a book or an aggregate of words; it is a historical movement and the history-incarnate of a mission. It is the historical extension of a gradually-realized prophetic experience. [...] Someone would go to the Prophet and ask him a question. Someone would insult the Prophet's wife. Someone would set alight the flames of war. Some would accuse the Prophet of being insane. Some would spread rumors about the Prophet marrying Zayd's wife. [...] And all of this would find an echo in the Qur'an and the Prophet's words. And if the Prophet had lived longer and encountered more events, his reactions and responses would inevitably have grown as well. This is what it means to say that the Qur'an could have been much longer than it is; even perhaps could have a second volume (1385/2006: 14).²⁴

Soroush argues for the historicity and temporality of intellectual systems and adds that each paradigm has its own unthinkable elements. He asserts that »[e]very intellectual system makes some things unthinkable and unquestionable. The fairest intellectual paradigm, as it is a system, removes some questions and neglects some questions and makes them unquestionable. This is not limited to religious thought« (1385/August 2006: n.p.). Soroush uses historicity as a contrast to the divine and sacred. By »historicity« he intends that human and non-divine dimension of religion should be taken into consideration. He suggests that neglecting the human dimension of Mohammad is due to the mystification of Mohammad's personality in the Islamic tradition. Soroush criticizes this in his preface to *EPE*, arguing that Sufism has played a significant role in this particular theological problem. Soroush cites a verse of the Qu'ran, in which Mohammad introduces himself as »just a human« receiving revelation: »I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me« (18:110). Soroush says in this regard: »However, this was neglected in Islamic tradition. Especially our mystical tradition made its most and made the divine aspect of the Prophet very heavy. This tradition drew the Prophet as a spirit without body, a sun without shadow, a form without material, transcendence without immanence and a status without history and geography« (1378/1999: 3).

Soroush suggests that the »new theology« aims to demystify and humanize religion, including Islam. Thus he introduces his book, *EPE*, as a contribution to this very humanistic mission. He states:

Today the new theology aims to enter the humanity and historicity elements in religion to open intentionally a new chapter in the science of re-

²⁴ Translation from English edition: Soroush (2009: 16–17).

ligion and realize a promise that has been ignored for centuries. *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience* is a small effort in this great [intellectual] jihad (1378/1999: 4).

However, Soroush's concept of historicity is not ›absolute‹ historicism and does not include the deterministic aspect of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's historicism. Historicism has had two different principle strands in post-Kantian philosophy, which may be called Herderian and Hegelian historicisms. While Hegelian historicism entails a kind of determinism, Herderian historicism avoids it. Christopher Thornhill writes in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, »Historicism follows both Herder, in attempting to do justice to objective history in its discontinuity and uniqueness, and Hegel, in attempting to determine general patterns of historical change« (1998: 443).²⁵ Both constituted a critique of Enlightenment and Kantian universalist epistemology and normativity: »It [historicism] is intended as a critique of the normative, allegedly anti-historical, epistemologies of Enlightenment thought, expressly that of Kant« (*ibid.*). In addition, both emphasized the specificity and ›situatedness‹ of knowledge. However, while Hegel argued for a teleological, progressive and deterministic line of history, Johann Gottfried Herder's historicism was free from such determinism and the notion of progress. Herder's concept of historicism has been influential in contemporary epistemology including post-structuralism. The genealogical approach in humanities, including works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, is the development of Herderian historicism rather than Hegelian. Herderian historicism emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of reason. This was originally the critique of Herder's tutor Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) of Kantian Enlightenment and its universal reason. »Hamann stressed the social and cultural dimension of reason, which had been much neglected in the eighteenth century. In this regard his teaching was influential upon Herder and anticipates the historicism of the nineteenth century« (Beiser 1998: 215).²⁶ Soroush's concept of historicism in historicity of religion embraces Herder's ›particularistic‹ and ›perspectivist‹ historicism that rejects any ultimate knowledge and that entails pluralism and uncertainty. In the

following, he provides a vivid explanation of the situatedness of knowledge that entails plurality and relativity:

The earlier, simplistic view that those closest to an event know it better has now been supplanted by a more refined theory: each group looks at an event from its own viewpoint – which immanently defines the limits of what it knows. No standpoint is inherently superior to any other. Each event creates waves – like ripples of a pebble in a pond – that widens into history and fades into eternity. Each generation receives the wave at a different distance from the point of origin and in a different pitch; each reconstructs a new picture of the original event. These pictures are infinitely numerous. The events themselves are not available for understanding as long as they are not flowing, that is as long as they are not historicized. The more they flow, the more they will grow and come to the foreground. There is no limit to the growth of this understanding (2000: 187–188).²⁷

Soroush also connects historicism to uncertainty and relativity. He states, »Western science, philosophy, and technology have so shaken the foundations of human reason and mind; historicism has raised such a storm, and scientific and philosophical theories advanced so swiftly that no latitude has been left for stability and certitude« (2000: 125).²⁸

This distinction between Hegelian and Herderian historicism also explains a seeming paradox: how historicity is so important to Soroush's thought although he criticized Occidentalists in post-revolutionary Iran for historicism. Occidentalists, inspired from counter-Enlightenment including Martin Heidegger criticized the West for its ontological and ethical decline. They also criticized the modernist Muslims, including Soroush, for being influenced by the corrupt and declined West and called them »West toxicated.« Soroush rejects these assumptions by accusing Occidentalists for historicist determinism and essentialism. He writes: »Those who propagated the decadent, deterministic, and historicist version of the idea of West toxication among us were themselves feeding from the same trough that fed the followers of extreme antireligious nationalism« (2000: 166).²⁹ Soroush criticized indeed the Hegelian determinist historicism. However, the historicity to which Soroush appeals later in the 1990s is Herderian: one that argues for contingent situatedness. In

²⁵ C. Thornhill, »Historicism,« in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, Vol. 4, pp. 443–446.

²⁶ F. Beiser, »Hamann, Johann Georg (1730–88),« in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 215–217.

²⁷ Soroush, »Let us Learn from History,« in Soroush (2000: 184–198).

²⁸ Soroush, »The Idea of Democratic Religious Government,« in Soroush (2000: 122–130).

²⁹ Soroush, »The Three Cultures,« in Soroush (2000: 156–170).

the same vein, Popper (one of the prophets of post-positivism that inspired Soroush) was very critical of Hegel's historicism. Popper criticized indeed Hegelian determinist historicism, but not Herderian historicism, as a source for totalitarianism (Thornhill 1998: 445).

4.5 Critical-Historical Approach

Soroush's neo-rationalist and historicist religious epistemology indeed entails the possibility of critical-historical approach and methodology to religion including religious experience, texts and religious knowledge. In his works, he often calls for a critical-historical approach to Islam. He sees this as entailing a distinction between the »essentials and accidentals« of religion. In his article, »Essentials and Accidentals in Religion«, he argues that only the essentials of Islam are obligatory for being a Muslim, but not the accidentals. He asserts, »Islam (and any other religion for that matter) is a religion by virtue of its essentials, not its accidentals. And being a Muslim demands belief and commitment [just] to the essentials« (1385/2006: 20).³⁰ In this article Soroush suggests some elements, such as Arabic language, Arabic culture, historical events that entered into the Qu'ran and Sunnah (the precepts of Islamic law), abilities and understanding of the people addressed by religion, as accidentals of Islamic religion.³¹ Accidentals, according to Soroush, include all elements of a religion that are not necessary for its ultimate purpose and that have entered into the understanding and text(s) of a religion due to the social and cultural conditions of its emergence. Soroush writes in this regard: »There is no doubt that, had Islam come into existence in Greece or India, instead of in *Hijaz*, the accidentals of a Greek or Indian Islam – accidentals which penetrate so deep as to touch the kernel – would have been very different from those of an Arab Islam« (*ibid.*: 37; 2009: 77).

³⁰ Soroush, »Zati va 'Arazi dar Adyan« (Essential and Accidental in Religions), in Soroush (1385/2006: 20–46). Translation from English edition: Soroush (2009: 63).

³¹ The complete list is: a. Arabic language; b. Arabic culture; c. the terms, concepts, theories and presuppositions used by the Prophet; d. historical events that entered into the Qu'ran and Sunnah; e. the questions posed by believers and opponents and the answers to them; f. the precepts of Islamic law; g. fabrications, inventions and distortions introduced into religion by its opponents; and h. abilities and understanding of the people addressed by religion (Soroush 1385/2006: 20). Translation from English edition: (Soroush 2009: 63).

It is according to this historicist approach that Soroush calls the Qu'ran *The Word of Mohammad*. Based on his theory of religion, he argues that *fuqaha* (scholars of *fiqh*, a normative discipline in Islamic knowledge culture that contains both legal and moral norms, similar to *Halakhah* in Jewish tradition) should use the historical-critical studies in their methodology. Soroush holds that there should always be a kind of »cultural translation« in the interpretation of religion and not a »literal translation.« By »cultural translation« he means an interpretation that takes the cultural condition of the formation of holy texts into consideration and does not regard the cultural and social characteristics of early Islam as being an essential part of religion as well as *Sharia* as Islamic normative system. In this regard Soroush often refers to Shah Waliullah Dehlavi (1703–1762) as being a pioneer of critical-historical approach in Islamic scholarship. He writes: »So far, Shah Wali Allah has spoken of two important accidentals of religious law [*Sharia*]: first, the characteristics of prophets and, second, the characteristics of the peoples being brought under the laws« (*ibid.*, 43; 2009: 86).

However, Soroush does not undertake a systematic historical-critical study of Islam. He merely occasionally suggests some examples of critical-historical analyses of Islamic sources, including the Qu'ran and Sunnah. He discusses, for example in his article »The Essential and Accidental in Religions,« the historicity and hence accidentality of some concepts such as *huri*, description of paradise as a garden and hell as fire and other metaphors that are inspired by the geography and culture of Arab society of Mohammad's age (*ibid.*). Soroush, one might argue, has merely provided the theoretical base for such a methodology. He has in this manner provided an Islamic legitimacy and justification for a critical-historical approach to Islam and the Qu'ran.

4.6 Dialogical and Translational: Beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism

A main characteristic of Soroush's methodology is the diversity of his sources. His thought contains different elements from classic Sufi (Islamic mysticism) tradition and Islamic rationalist tradition to modern liberal Christian Theology, post-positivist epistemology, post-structuralist discourse and hermeneutics. He refers to thinkers as var-

ious as Abu Nasr Farabi (870–950), Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), Shah Waliullah Dehlavi (1703–1762), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1936), Karl Popper (1902–1994), Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000), Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) and John Hick (1922–2012). He uses mystical-intuitional concepts, rationalist concepts, hermeneutics, and post-positivist elements. For example, he employs, Kant's distinction between noumenon-phenomenon and John Hick's theory of religion as »Human Response to the Transcendence« as well as Rumi's mystical poems on the social and intellectual diversity as God's different manifestations in providing an interpretation of religious pluralism.³² The diversity of Soroush's sources is not just geographical but also methodological. He utilizes for example both Islamic rationalism (Mu'tazila) and mysticism. He uses the concepts of *zahir-batin* (apparent-hidden, Rumi) or *tazahorat-e haq* (manifestation of God) and *vahdat-e vojud* (the unity of Being, Ibn Arabi) from Islamic mysticism and at the same time refers to the sufficiency and independency of reason in understanding values (a contribution of Mu'tazila thinking to classical Islamic tradition). This eclectic characteristic has been interpreted by some critics as inconsistent and indicating a contradictory methodology. Ghamari-Tabrizi, for example, contends that: »Soroush's thesis was shaped by multiple and at times contradictory sources, both in western philosophy and the Muslim Gnostic traditions« (2004: 517). At the beginning of his reform project – namely in developing the theory of CERK – Soroush was strongly inspired by post-positivist philosophy of science and Qu'ranic exegeses. He points out in his interview with Sadris that he was inspired by different Islamic and Western sources in developing the theory of CERK. After narrating a biographical review of the background of the formulation of this theory, Soroush summarizes the theoretical sources of this theory into four main subjects. The first field that inspired him to explore the human aspects of religion and developing his theory of CERK was his self-taught knowledge on the *diversity of Qu'ranic*

exegeses. The second field was a *comparison between mystics and politicians*. Knowing the spiritualist interpretations of Islamic mystics of Islam, Soroush witnessed politicians such as Mehdi Bazergan (1907–1995) and Ali Shariati (1933–1977) »who favored extracting their political doctrines from religion. [...] Both the world-flight ideology of the Sufis and world-domination ideology of the politicians were extracted from the Qur'an [...] I wondered why a certain class of interpretations of religious texts rise in a particular time and not in others« (Soroush 2000: 14). Soroush's early encounter with the *scientific interpretations of religion* in Alavi Madrasa was the third factor inspiring him to develop his theory of religious knowledge. He means by scientific interpretation of the Qu'ran those interpretations that tried to extract new theories in natural sciences from the Qu'ran. Finally his knowledge of philosophy of science that he encountered during his education in London played a role in the formulation of his new attitude towards religion. Soroush often talks about the influence of contemporary Western thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Quine, Lakatos and Kuhn on his thought (see above). In his first theory CERK, Soroush was inspired by both Islamic and Western sources. From Islamic sources came the diversity in the interpretation of religion in the Islamic tradition, such as mystical and political readings of Islam as well as the diversity within a specific field of Islamic scholarship, namely Qu'ranic exegeses. From Western sources the main inspiration came from some directions in the post-positivist philosophy of science that emphasized the contingency and collective nature of knowledge. Indeed, one might argue that the theories in philosophy of science namely post-positivist interpretation of knowledge helped Soroush to explain the diversity that he recognized already in Islamic scholarship and religious knowledge. He used the post-positivist epistemology to theorize and hence justify the diversity in religious knowledge.

Some critics have regarded this characteristic of Soroush's thought as being inconsistent and inauthentic. However, this aspect of his methodology might be interpreted as exemplifying a kind of *cosmopolitan epistemology*. This is what distinguishes Soroush from other contemporary Iranian thinkers, such as nativist/Occidentalists thinkers, who take the orient-occident dichotomy into consideration. Soroush often explicitly says that he does not care about the source of an idea; as, according to him, truth does not have geography (Sor-

³² See: H. Shadi, »An Islamic Theology of Religions,« *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Theologie*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2013, 32–60; A. Dahlén, »Sirat al-Mustaqim: One or Many? Religious Pluralism among Muslim Intellectuals in Iran,« in I. Abu-Rabi (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 425–428.

oush, 1363/1984: 19).³³ In an autobiographical interview, Soroush suggests that all truths are stars shining in one single sky:

»I believe that truths [...] are all the inhabitants of the same mansion and stars of the same constellation. [...] Thus, in my search for the truth, I became oblivious to whether an idea originated in the East or West, or whether it had ancient or modern origins. Obviously, we don't possess all of the truths, and we need other places and people to help unfold different aspects of it« (2000: 21).

Let me draw on an example: In »What is Science, what is Philosophy?« (1978) after writing about the concept that theories and world views influence the understanding of a person while observing and absorbing facts, he cites some post-positivist philosophers such as Kuhn (1357/1978a: 10) and then immediately cites a poem by Rumi emphasizing the subjectivity of our perception of the external world:

If thou art narrow (oppressed) at heart from (being engaged in) combat,
thou deemest the whole atmosphere of the world to be narrow;

And if thou art happy as thy friends would desire, this world seems to
thee like a garden of roses.

How many a one has gone as far as Syria and 'Irâq and has seen nothing
but unbelief and hypocrisy;

And how many a one has gone as far as India and Hirâ (Herât) and
seen nothing but selling and buying.³⁴

This characteristic of Soroush's project can also be interpreted in a positive way and called ›dialogical.‹ Another term that may explain this point is ›translationality‹ of culture. One can hold that Soroush brings different intellectual traditions to dialogue in specific topics. The dialogical characteristic of Soroush's project saves him from tripping over the concept of ›authenticity,‹ a main concept used by both religious and secular nativists in Islamic world, namely Islamists and occidentalists, encountering the modern West. Not being enchanted by cultural ›authenticity,‹ Soroush is able to go beyond the false circle of West toxification/Anti-westernism, continually repeated during the last two centuries in the Iranian intellectual arena.

In spite of a soft nativist accent in some of Soroush's early

works³⁵, his epistemological cosmopolitanism can be traced even in his early works.³⁶ This is a familiar concept throughout the history of Islamic scholarship. Hellenic culture was translated and appreciated by classic Islamic scholars. Ya'qub Ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi, for example, a pioneer of Islamic philosophy, says in this regard:

We ought not to be ashamed of appreciating the truth and of acquiring it wherever it comes from, /even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. For the seeker of truth nothing takes precedence over the truth, and there is no disparagement of the truth, nor belittling either of him who speaks it or of him who conveys it. (The status of) no one is diminished by the truth; rather does the truth ennoble all (Al-Kindi 1974: 58).³⁷

Suroosh Irfani is one of the few scholars who have stressed the dialogical nature of post-revolutionary intellectual discourse in Iran. By discussing the signs of an emerging intellectual paradigm in the post-revolutionary media in Iran, Irfani has come to realize the dialogical characteristic of an alternative Iranian modernity. He maintains that post-revolutionary Iran has two dialogues: dialogue with its local and native as well as with its Western heritage (Irfani 1996: 22).³⁸

Soroush also talks explicitly about the hybrid and translational nature of his thought as a modern Muslim intellectual. He appreciates that modern Islamic reform discourse is hybrid and in dialogue with many partners; with the past and the present, with the West and the East. He says:

³⁵ For example Soroush writes in the introduction of *Nahad-e Na-aram-e Jahan* (The Dynamic Nature of the Universe): »Referring to the words of Sadr al-Din Shirazi [Mulla Sadra] and using his opinions [in this book] is firstly for his rich philosophy and secondly is to prove the authenticity of this idea [substantial motion] and removing any feeling of bagging from this or that philosophy or school and [thereby] creating a feeling of sufficiency and independency in the contemporary Islamic thought.« (1357/1978b: 5, e-edition).

³⁶ Soroush (1363/1984: 19).

³⁷ Ya'qub Ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics, a Translation of Ya'qub Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi's Treatise »On First Philosophy«* (Fi al-Falsafa al-Ula), Translation with Introduction and Commentary, A. L. Ivry, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974. Also see: S. H. Nasr, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, L. E. Hahn, R. E. Auxier, and L. W. Stone (eds.), The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. 25, Chicago: Carus Publishing Company, 2001, p. 118.

³⁸ S. Irfani, »New Discourses and Modernity in Post Revolutionary Iran,« *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1996, pp. 13–27.

³³ A. Soroush, »Vojud va Mahiyyat-e Gharb« (Existence and Substance of the West), *Keyhan-e Farhangi* (Cultural World), No. 5, Mordad 1363/July 1984, pp. 19–22.

³⁴ Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Mathnawî*, R. A. Nicholson (ed.), Vol. 5, London: Luzac & Co., 1933, poem No.: 2371–2374.

Modern Muslim intellectuals are, in a sense, a hybrid species. They emerged in the liminal space between modern ideas and traditionalist thought. We have seen the emergence of such figures in many Muslim countries that have experienced the effects of colonization and the introduction of a plural economic and educational system. They have their feet planted in their local traditions as well as the broader world of the modern age. As such, they are comfortable in both, handicapped by neither (2002: 20).

Soroush treats intercultural and inter-civilizational intellectual exchange as a natural and human phenomenon. In an interview about Enlightenment he says that Spinoza's historical concept of religion was influenced by al-Farabi's theory on religion and prophecy:

What makes Spinoza modern is that he historicizes all prophethood; but his ideas of prophethood are inspired in part by al-Farabi and Moses Maimonides. Like al-Farabi, Spinoza thinks that philosophy is prior and superior to prophethood: philosophers usually work with their speculative or intellectual faculty ('aql), whereas prophets mainly work through the imagination; they cast the universal in particulars and symbols and thus make it accessible to the layman. All of this you can find in Spinoza, but the roots are in al-Farabi; Maimonides thinks that Prophet Moses is above imagination, but for Spinoza, all prophets are on the same footing (2002: 36).

Soroush then suggests that the influence of al-Farabi on Spinoza was indeed mediated by Maimonides. This shows that Soroush is well informed about the very long and complicated ways of the historical interpretation of prophethood. In Soroush's understanding, the dialogical nature of his thought is not limited to other religions or consenting philosophies but to the critics of religion: »Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx and Feuerbach were respectful critics of religion. Religious people are till the end of time indebted to their intellectual scrutinies« (1991/2012, n.p.).³⁹

5 Epistemological Turn in Contemporary Islamic Reform Discourse

Let me now go on to explain why Soroush's thought can be interpreted as an epistemological turn in Islamic reform discourse. The

³⁹ A. Soroush, »Ke Del Be Dast-e Kaman Abruist Kafar-Kish,« *Ruz*, 17.03.1391/06.06.2012, <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2012/june/06/article/-4d4c71941a.html> (last accessed on 10 July 2015).

early modernist Muslim thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century appreciated modernity and understood it as being a partner in fighting political despotism, lack of literacy and other social and political problems. They requested and established modern schools, constitutions, and courts. Acting against their critics and in order to legitimize modern education and politics, they appealed to religious sources. These were mostly attempts to »bring out« the so called modern values and institutions from the Qu'ran and Sunnah. The philosophical foundations of modernity were hardly elaborated on. However, the core of Soroush's project is epistemology and hermeneutics. His first main theory in his reform project, CERK, tried to contextualize and historicize religious knowledge. One of the main characteristics of Soroush's thought is his criticism of the monopoly, not just of religious knowledge but monopoly of general cognition and the truth as well. If the early generations of reformists tried to justify the new emerging values and institutions in the Islamic context by referring to Islamic sources, the new paradigm re-thinks religious knowledge and argues that there is really no »official« and absolute interpretation of religion and religious texts. In this way they delegitimize religion as a source of legitimization for socio-political affairs. As Bayat says, post-Islamist discourse ends the professionalization of religious interpretation and individualizes religiosity. Referring to post-Islamism he says:

Epistemologically, it calls for a hermeneutic reading of the Quran, rejecting a single »true reading,« or, for that matter, an exclusive »expert reading« by the *ulama*. In fact, the Alternative Thought Movement seeks to end the professionalization of religious interpretation by the clergy, who subsist on their monopoly of religious knowledge (1996: 47).

Soroush's interpretation of religion and religious knowledge is an epistemological evolution in the Islamic reform discourse. Ghamari-Tabrizi seconds this reading and comments that Soroush's thought is »a radical break with all movements of Islamic revival« (2008: 15).⁴⁰

The methodology of post-Islamism was adopted due to the failure of the methodology of early modernists. Early modernists tried to reconcile Islam with modernity by providing legitimization of modern values and institutions from Islamic sources. However, this meth-

⁴⁰ B. Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2008.

odology has faced the problem that in these Islamic sources one can find confirmation of many different interpretations. One can look to the Qu'ran for religious pluralism and peaceful co-existence with other religions while others can look to the Qu'ran in support of religious exclusivism and the legitimization of discrimination and hate. While Muhammad Husain Naini (1860–1936) and Jamaluddin Afghani (1838–1997), for example, looked to the scripture in seeking support for democracy, Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) and Ruhullah Khomeini (1902–1989) looked to it in support of their vision for a theocracy. This fact has led the new generation of Muslim reformers to change their methodology and try to justify modern values independently of Islamic sources. For this reason Soroush argued that the text is »silent« and lets the reader speak. Soroush demanded therefore a neo-Mu'tazila approach and a new *ijtihad* (reasoning) in Islamic thought. He called sometimes this new approach »ijtihad dar usul« (reasoning in principles) borrowing *ijtihad* from conventional Islamic methodology that has used *ijtihad* more on legal affairs not on theological and methodologies topics.

If Islamist discourse after the 1960s was a response to the failure of the first phase of modernity in Islamic world in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, post-Islamist discourse since the 1990s can be interpreted as a result of the failure of the Islamist discourse in some cases. While Sayyid Qutb, Abul'ala Maududi (1903–1979), Ali Shariati and Ruhullah Khomeini »maximized« and ideologized Islam, Soroush and other the post-Islamist Muslim thinkers, »minimize« and de-ideologize Islam through developing a new methodology in Islamic reform discourse that was introduced in this paper.

6 Conclusion

Inspired by post-positivist philosophy of science, Soroush has for several decades generalized and transmitted the relative and changeable nature of (post-positivist) science onto religion. He has applied these theories in the philosophy of science to philosophy of religion. Soroush combined Islamic classic scholarship and post-positivist philosophy of science arguing for the subjective interpretivity of religious texts, resulting in the belief of plurality and the fluidity of religious knowledge. Later inspired by philosophical hermeneutics and Sufism, Soroush extended interpretivity from religious knowledge to »reli-

gious/prophetic experience« and the text. This led him to regarding the Qu'ran as »The Word of Mohammad.«

Soroush's path to this position, which has been interpreted as a potential theology for post-Islamism, went through the Islamic Revolution and the practical dealing with the problems of Islamism in Iran. In addition, he knew that the methodology of an earlier generation of modernist Muslim intellectuals in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that tried to justify modernity through Islamic sources was used by the Islamist discourse too. Both early modernists and Islamists referred to the Qu'ran or Sunnah to justify democracy or theocracy, respectively. So, Soroush searched for a new methodology in reconciliation of Islam and modernity; a methodology that is free from shortcomings of the methodology of early Muslim modernist namely: dependency on the scripture. He shifted the Islamic reform discourse from »an Islamic genealogy of modernity« to a new epistemology that can (re)rationalize the Islamic methodology and de-scripturalize it. It delegitimizes the political-social claims of the religion through historization and pluralization of religion. This epistemological approach to the problem that distinguishes Soroush not only from Islamists but also from early modernist Muslim intellectuals, is interpreted then as epistemological turn in Islamic reform discourse.⁴¹

–Heydar Shadi, Sankt Georgen Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology, Frankfurt, Germany

⁴¹ This article is a part of the author's dissertation defended at the Faculty of Philosophy in Erfurt University (Germany), 2013. In the first section, the author draws on his previous publications, especially on his article »Toward a Historical-Critical Methodology in Islam: Abdolkarim Soroush's Historicist Religious Epistemology« (in *Transformation of Muslim World in 21st Century*, Istanbul: ILEM, 2013, pp. 247–260).

Conference Report

Asixoxe-Let's Talk!, 1st and 2nd May 2015, SOAS, University of London, UK

For the second year running, the *Asixoxe-Let's Talk!*, conference on African Philosophy has taken place at SOAS, University of London. Organised by Alena Rettova, Associate Head of the Department of the Languages and Cultures of Africa and Senior Lecturer in Swahili Literature and Culture, and Benedetta Lanfranchi, SOAS PhD candidate, *Asixoxe* spanned two days (1st and 2nd May 2015) and attracted participants from other UK universities as well as further afield. In its infancy, the conference has become a platform for students to present and develop their work in response to feedback. In her opening words, Rettova stressed that despite being a student-oriented conference, the quality of content remains high and the discussion stimulating. The relative inexperience of the students brought a unique energy and an approach symptomatic of a truly existential encounter. In the early stages of their careers, studying Philosophy is not merely an academic experience, but a formative and ontological one as the very foundations of students' conceptual schemes are challenged. In Rettová's words, »grappling with the diverse perspectives on how the world is conceptualized across disciplines and across cultures is a humbling experience; you are exposed to your naked self and left to recreate that self with the conceptual repertoire of other cultures«.

A range of philosophical traditions were represented, including ethics, political and analytic philosophy along with continental philosophies such as existentialism, structuralism and post-colonial theory. Transcending the boundaries of these schools of thought, insights from anthropology, literature, and linguistics highlighted the enriching potential of interdisciplinary approaches. Whilst the regional focus was predominantly African, with a variety of area-specific studies (South Africa, Senegal and Tanzania among others), the conference also included contributions on the cultures and philosophies of Asia (Chinese and Japanese) and Latin America (Bolivia). This gave the conference a universal relevance by examining Afrophone and Afri-

can philosophies by examining them outside of their geographical origin.

An explicit intercultural focus was present in Aleksandra Manikowska's (BA Chinese Studies) paper on the influence of Maoism on the political theories of Julius Nyerere, and in Katherine Furman's (PhD candidate, LSE) and Yola West-Dennis's (BSc Philosophy and Physics, Bristol) presentations on the applications of British analytical philosophy to, respectively, South African politics and Yorùbá epistemology. Interdisciplinary concerns were pervasive in the papers which highlighted the philosophical relevance of literature in African languages. Roberto Gaudio (PhD candidate, Bayreuth) analysed the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger on Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi's poetry. Livia Cossa (BA Politics and African Studies) studied the repercussions of Nyerere's thought in three genres of Swahili poetry. Katya Nell (BA Swahili and Development Studies) offered an original interpretation of William Mkufya's novel *Ziraili na Zirani* as an allegory for the revolution of the proletariat, and Christine Gibson (BA Swahili and Social Anthropology) elaborated the link between Said Ahmed Mohamed's novel *Dunia Yao* and theories of artistic *mimesis*, including the innovative reading of the concept by anthropologist Michael Taussig. Becca Stacey (BA African Studies) explored the existentialist perspectives embodied in four characters in the Swahili novels *Kichwamaji* and *Ua la Faraja*. The links between epistemology and African literature were considered in Alena Rettová's paper. The importance of language and multilingualism in philosophy was the topic of Ella Hiesmayr's (BA Philosophy, Vienna) paper. Ida Hadjivayanis's (Teaching Fellow in Swahili, SOAS) paper on initiation rituals in Luguru society combined gender theories and anthropology, and the role of anthropology in philosophy was theoretically discussed by Adam Rodgers Johns (BA African Studies and Social Anthropology). Estrella Sendra (Mphil/PhD candidate, SOAS) examined the influence of Negritude on cultural festivals in Senegal. Conflicting Euro-American, Far Eastern, and African theorizations of technology were compared by Aviv Milgram (MA Religion in Global Politics). Some presentations covered relatively little studied areas of African philosophy: the philosophy of the Mozambican thinker Severino Elias Ngoenha was reviewed by Anaïs Brémond (MA History, LSE). The two concluding papers offered in-depth critical readings of the Kenyan philosopher and theologian, John S. Mbiti. Claire Amaladoss (BA Swahili and Development Studies) compared Mbiti's pre-

sent-oriented view of time with the phenomenological study of time by Edmund Husserl, while Hannah Simmons (BA African Language and Culture) contrasted Mbiti's and Cheikh Anta Diop's concepts of time as two distinct possibilities to project the future of African philosophy.

The success of the Asixoxe conference is testament to the significant growth and development in the area of Philosophy at SOAS in recent years and this will be further established by a new BA Programme in World Philosophies starting in 2016/17. This course will incorporate introductions to African, Buddhist and Latin American philosophies along with other regional and religious trends such as Islamic philosophy. There is no doubt the addition of this programme will ensure SOAS remains a fertile environment for flourishing philosophical thought.

–Hannah Simmons, and Claire Amaladoss, SOAS, University of London, UK

Institutional Programs on Comparative Philosophy

The Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy
(CEACOP), City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
(SAR)

The primary mission and aim of the Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy is to promote and enhance the global study of East Asian and Comparative Philosophy. Toward that end the center currently brings together core faculty members within the Department of Public Policy, who all have active research programs in East Asian and Comparative Ethics, Political Philosophy, Law, Religion, and Bio-ethics. In addition, we invite scholars outside of City University, from Hong Kong, East Asia, and around the world, with similar interests to campus in order to share their research and exchange ideas. The center hosts or supports several major research projects, workshops, and conferences and actively seeks additional projects and funding to continue to build and expand its ability to serve as a leading institution producing and supporting research in East Asian and Comparative Philosophy. A more complete account of past, current, and future events can be found on our web page (<http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ceacop/index.aspx>).

*–Philip Ivanhoe, City University of Hong Kong,
Hong Kong, China (SAR)*

Non-Western Philosophy, University of Reading, Reading, UK

The Department of Philosophy at the University of Reading is the first Philosophy department in the UK to introduce a programme dedicated to teaching ›Non-Western Philosophy‹ with the appointment of a lecturer expressly for this purpose. This programme will be introduced in September 2015 and will begin with lectures and modules in Indian Philosophy in all three years of undergraduate study. The core first-year BA philosophy module ›Human Nature‹, a history of philosophy course, will, in 2015–16, include three lectures in Indian Philosophy covering the Buddha, Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā, and Gandhi. This module, which is available to all first-year students in the university, attracts a wide student population with an annual enrolment of between 170 and 200 students.

Two dedicated courses in Indian Philosophy will also be offered to BA Philosophy students or those studying Philosophy as part of a joint-degree. The first, a second-year module, ›Indian Philosophy 1: Buddhists, Brahmins, and Yogins‹, will focus on philosophy as a practice from its beginnings in ancient India to classical traditions, and contemporary philosophers. Topics discussed in this module will include: the Upaniṣadic self; the Buddha and early Buddhists on suffering and freedom, and the ethics and metaphysics of no-self; ethics and emptiness in Madhyamaka; morals, metaphysics, and action in the Bhagavad Gītā; reason and ethics in Yoga; being, truth and the ethical life in Gandhi. The second course, a third-year module, ›Indian Philosophy 2: Dreams, Reflection, Reality‹ will look at topics in Buddhist and Brahmanical metaphysics and epistemology including: Abhidharma trope-dualism, Madhyamaka irrealism, Yogācāra idealism; the epistemology of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; Nyāya critiques of the Buddhist no-self view; self and consciousness in Advaita Vedānta and its critique of Yogācāra; the philosophical psychology of Yoga.

The Department hopes to introduce a first-year BA course in ›World Philosophies‹ in September 2016, subject to funding. The introduction of non-western philosophy at Reading is part of a university-wide attempt to widen curriculum offerings in an effort to meet the needs and demands of an increasingly diverse and multicultural student body.

–Shalini Sinha, University of Reading, Reading, UK

The Center for Comparative Philosophy (CCP), Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA

Our mission is to promote the interaction between Eastern and Western academic cultures. It is our belief that the traditions and cultures across the east and the west have valuable resources which can broaden one another's intellectual horizon. We aim not only to hold seminars, classes, and conferences centered on studies of comparative nature, but also to invite speakers who are renowned in such fields of studies. For more information about CCP, please visit our website: <https://sites.duke.edu/centerforcomparativephilosophy/>.

In 2014–15, CCP has accomplished or been trying to accomplish the following aims. One of our main achievements is that the experimental cross-continental course, *Eastern and Western Conceptions of Human Nature, Ethics, and Politics*, has been successfully completed. We also accommodated public lectures by renowned scholars such as P. J. Ivanhoe and Sungmoon Kim (both from City University of Hong Kong). The course is also being reported by the schools communication department.

Our plans for next year include applying for the big Templeton Foundation grant, and several mini-conference plans (Indian philosophy conference and possibly a Chinese philosophy conference) and inviting renowned scholars for lectures and meetings.

–Sungwoo Um, Duke University, North Carolina, USA

**Department of Philosophy, San Jose State University,
California, USA**

San Jose State University sits at the center of Silicon Valley in northern California, just 50 miles south of San Francisco, USA. The school has strong connections to the neighboring research program of Silicon Valley, as well as deep historical roots to social justice movements and civil rights both domestically and globally.

The Philosophy Department has a long tradition, since the 1970s, of embracing comparative philosophy broadly construed so as to include the east-west axis, the north-south axis, and feminist philosophy from around the globe. Both the BA and MA program embrace a decentered approach to comparing world philosophies according to which there are no center points of interaction, only engagements. Thus, while the program engages comparative issues (such as the relation between Analytic, Phenomenological, and Classical Indian epistemology, the relation between Chinese philosophy of language and metaphysics and contemporary Analytic philosophy of language) which cut cross the classic east-west axis, the program also engages in more novel exchanges, such as the relation between classical Indian philosophy and Aztec philosophy, Chinese political philosophy and Islamic political philosophy, or African oral traditions of critical thinking and standard European accounts of critical thinking. Moreover, while one may pursue more traditional forms of comparative philosophy, the program also encourages students to think through their own frameworks of comparison.

At present the department, based on faculty research interest, has a strong focus in the following areas: Feminist Philosophy; Buddhist Ethics, Metaphysics, and Epistemology, Classical Indian Philosophy; Mexican and Latin American Philosophy; Africana and African-American Philosophy; Phenomenology; Analytic Philosophy; Philosophy of Science (inclusive of social sciences such as anthropology, economics, and psychology); Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Mind; Chinese Philosophy (especially Metaphysics and Philosophy of Language); Philosophy of Technology, Computing, and Information; Critical Theory; Normative Ethics, Applied Ethics, Philosophy of Law; Aesthetics; the History of Philosophy (inclusive of a variety of cultures and traditions); Logic; Philosophy of Mathematics; and Social and Political Philosophy.

Although the MA program does not focus singularly on comparative philosophy (since students may find ample offerings in the core areas of analytic philosophy and continental philosophy), students may take a variety of undergraduate and graduate level classes in all of the areas above leading toward the MA degree. The MA program requires that students take at least one graduate level course in Metaphysics and Epistemology, Value Theory, Logical Theory, and some area of the History of Philosophy, in addition to other requirements. Some of the courses offered in these areas include: Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Classical Indian Logic and Buddhist Logic, Critical Theory, Panpsychism East and West, Gödel, Rawls, Sen, Critical Race Theory, Punishment and the Law, Philosophy of Economics, Philosophy of Education, Ortega y Gasset, Dreyfus & McDowell on Mind and Action, Social Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science. The program's ethos promotes and provides opportunities for interdisciplinary research into social justice in a variety of areas as well as inquiry into theoretical issues concerning the methodology of philosophy, the relevance of non-western philosophy to the western canon, theoretical issues concerning logic, computation, computers, and cognition, as well as novel ethical issues brought about through the advancement of technology.

*—Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, Director of the
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Notes on Contributors

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