Articles

Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification

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

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

I Introduction

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

In this paper I would like to show how belonging to different cultures does not impede intercultural philosophizing and instead favors it. To that end, I will first pinpoint what exactly intercultural philoso-

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

II What Is Intercultural Philosophy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III Philosophical Encounters Past and Present

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[5] J. Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

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

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

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

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

[6] L. Zea, *Signale aus dem Abseits*, Munich: Eberhard, 1989.

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

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

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

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

[7] M. Horkheimer, *Gesellschaft im Übergang: Aufsätze, Reden und Vorträge 1942–1970*, Frankfurt: Fischer, ²1981.

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[10] P. Ricoeur, *Geschichte und Wahrheit*, München: List, 1974.

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

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

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

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

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

[11] B. K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekantavada)*, Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1981.

V Comparative Philosophy: Then and Now

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

–Ram Adhar Mall, Jena, Germany

The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism and Its Legacy

Abstract
Racial essentialism or the idea of unchanging racial substances that support human social hierarchy, was introduced into philosophy by David Hume and expanded upon by Immanuel Kant. These strong influences continued into W. E. B. Du Bois' moral and spiritual idea of a black race, as a destiny to be fulfilled past a world of racism and inequality. In the twenty-first century, »the race debates« between »eliminativists« and »retentionists« swirl around the lack of independent biological scientific foundation for physical human races and the ongoing importance of race as a social ordering principle and source of identity. Analyses of the idea of race are of philosophical concern for historical and conceptual reasons, as well as ongoing issues of contemporary identity and social injustice.

Keywords
essentialism, race debates, racial retention, W. E. B. Du Bois, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, science and race, racial eliminativism.

I Introduction

Racial essentialism is widely repudiated by that name, but aspects of the concept nonetheless persist in contemporary ideas of racial identity and social justice. This is a paradox, if not an outright contradiction.

Racial essentialism is a bona fide philosophical subject, not only as a matter of »applied philosophy,« but insofar as Western philosophers helped to create the idea of racial essences, based on core metaphysical concepts in their tradition. The idea of racial essences, as the source of racial hierarchies, emerged in the intellectual communities of modernity during the early days of modern anthropology and biology. Dif-

ferent versions of that idea were promulgated by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, in ways that would be considered racist today.[1] The unchanging essence posit in the idea of racial essence goes back further to Aristotelian ideas of essence and can be found later on in analogies to metallurgical notions of purity in the nineteenth century.[2] A number of twenty-first century academic philosophers in the United States and United Kingdom (and perhaps more broadly) wrangle with ideas of racial essentialism in what are called »The Race Debates.«[3] The retention of essentialist ideas of race also has advocates committed to racial egalitarianism in contemporary political, moral, and legal contexts, who are often not aware of its philosophical lineage.

Part I of this paper is a discussion of racial essentialism of Hume and Kant. Part II is an interpretation of their influence through the opposition between the twentieth century heirs of W. E. B. Du Bois on the one hand and of Franz Boas (especially in the biological sciences) on the other. Part III concludes with a reflection on what may be an incommensurability in thought about the foundations of what we know as »race.«

II The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism

As a conceptual answer to the question of what race is, racial essentialism is a vague hybrid of racial taxonomy and Aristotelian ideas of biological essence. Biological essences, as determinative of both species and racial identities, have been supposed to be inherited, and unchan-

[1] See H. Kimmerle, ›Hegel's Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy,‹ pp. 99–117 in this journal.

[2] Nineteenth century metaphysical ideas of race used the analogy of metals to apply ideas of racial essences, such that mixed race individuals were instances of »amalgamation.« See: N. Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 78–85. Contemporary discussions of reference and natural kinds typically restrict notions of essences to chemistry, e. g. the discussion of »water« as literally referring to H_2O rather than something »in the head;« and indeed, chemistry is probably the best candidate for real scientific essentialism, although not in any way that has anything to do with human races. See H. Putnam's classic ›Meaning and Reference,‹ *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 70, No. 19, Seventieth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division, 1973, pp. 699–711.

[3] An April 2014 conference at the University of San Francisco bore this title: »The Race Debates: From Philosophy to Biomedical Research,« (URL: https://sites.google.com/site/theracedebates2014/, last accessed on 20 May 2014).

ging.[4] The core components of racial essentialism are at least the following: There are human races; each race is distinct from all other races in important ways; members of each distinct race have either a general trait that causes all of their other racial characteristics or a set of racial traits that is the »essence« of their racial identities. Racial essences may be limited to physical traits, or, as prevalent over much of modern western intellectual history, include cultural, moral, and aesthetic traits. Furthermore, racial essentialism can be understood as a type of thinking about human difference that labels people in ways that apply to whole persons. For instance, while shortness or thinness are traits understood to co-exist alongside other traits, an essentialist view of a white, black, or Asian person categorizes the entire human being.[5]

Historically, racial essentialism was a convenient tool for creating doctrines of white racial superiority and non-white inferiority during the Age of Discovery when Europeans began commercial projects of resource extraction, appropriation, domination, and slavery.[6] The lands and peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas were taken as the »raw materials« for these projects; and moral racial hierarchies rationalized the contradiction between Enlightenment egalitarian ideals and how non-whites were treated by whites. By the mid-eighteenth century, the existence of biological human races, ranked according to worth and status, could be taken for granted by philosophers and other intellectuals. Thus, in his 1754 edition of *Essays Moral, Political and Literary,* Hume wrote in a footnote:

[4] The unchanging nature of essences is an ontological presupposition and may not be reflected in the epistemology of categorizing living things. For recent experimental findings, see: J. Hampton, Z. Estes, and S. Simmons, ›Metamorphosis: Essence, Appearance, and Behavior in the Categorization of Natural Kinds,‹ *Memory & Cognition,* Vol. 35, No. 7, 2007, pp. 1785–1800.

[5] On the idea of totalistic labeling that is historically contingent, see I. Hacking, ›Making Up People,‹ *London Review of Books,* Vol. 28, No. 16, 2006.

[6] See, for instance »The American Anthropological Association's 1998 Statement on Race,« (URL: http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm; last accessed on 20 May 2014). For a discussion of the Statement's philosophical innocence, see N. Zack, ›Philosophical Aspects of the 1998 AAA [American Anthropological Association] Statement on Race,‹ *Anthropological Theory,* Vol. 1, No. 4, 2001, pp. 445–465.

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites […] There are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession.[7]

When Hume wrote, as now, species were viewed as the smallest group of a biological kind capable of reproducing fertile offspring and races were groups within species that could interbreed – a species difference was and is held to be greater than a racial difference.[8] However, Hume did not take care to distinguish between races and species, perhaps in keeping with his *polygenicism*, the doctrine that human races had evolved separately. When his contemporary James Beattie objected to his generalization because it lacked empirical support, Hume casually rewrote the footnote for the 1776 edition: »I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely was a civilized nation of that complexion, not even of individual eminent in action or speculation.«[9]

The shift in Hume's footnotes from a focus on individual aptitudes to group cultural taxonomy set the stage for Kant's more explicitly essentialist taxonomy of races. Kant, as a monogenicist, believed that all humans descended from the same *stem*. Anticipating Darwin, he insisted on an explanation of human difference in terms of heredity:

Among the deviations – i. e., the hereditary differences of animals belonging to a single stock – those which, when transplanted (displaced to other areas), maintain themselves over protracted generation, and which also generate hybrid young whenever they interbreed with other deviations of the same stock, are called *races* […] In this way Negroes and whites are not different species of humans (for they belong presumably to one stock), but they are different races, for each perpetuates itself in every area, and they generate between them children that are necessarily hybrid, or blendings (mulattoes).[10]

---

[7] D. Hume, »Of National Characters,« in T. H. Greene, and T. H. Grose (eds.), *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 2 vols., Essay XXI, p. 249.

[8] There are a number of different species concepts at this time and debate over whether the concept is useful or necessary in biology. See: R. A. Richards (ed.), *The Species Problem: A Philosophical Analysis*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Biology, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[9] For a discussion of this controversy between Hume and Beattie, see: R. H. Popkin, ›Hume's Racism,‹ *Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 9/2, Nos. 2–3, 1977–1978, pp. 211–226.

[10] I. Kant, »On the Different Races of Man,« in Earl W. Count (ed.), *This Is Race: An*

Kant included Hindustanis and Kalmuks in his taxonomy of races and simply asserted, »The reason for assuming the Negroes and Whites to be fundamental races is self-evident.«[11] Thus, Kant's monogenicism, as based on the knowledge that different races could interbreed, did not otherwise lead him to minimize differences among races.

According to Kant, the important characteristics distinguishing one race from another were moral, aesthetic, and intellectual: Man had a distinctive human essence that permitted him to develop civilization, but that ability varied among (what Kant referred to as) nations, because talent was unevenly distributed.[12] Race, for Kant, was conflated with nationality and geographic origin, with the result that the only race that could develop the arts and sciences were white Europeans. The differences in national characters resulting from »unseen formative causes« and geographical differences were evident in »the distinctive feeling of the beautiful and the sublime« – Germans were superior to all other Europeans, but the greatest difference was between Europe and Africa. In discussing Africans, Kant deferred to Hume as an authority, reiterating:

> The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the *trifling*. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents […] So fundamental is the difference [between Negroes and Whites] and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.[13]

Thus, Kant reasoned that there must be races because there were evident mixed-race individuals – ironic for us insofar as contemporary discussion of mixed race often zeroes in on how the existence of mixed-race individuals dispels notions of races.[14] And, Kant posited a human essence in an ability to develop civilization, but only among those humans who were racially white Europeans. His metaphysical speculations about formative causes and national characters were em-

---

Anthology Selected from the International Literature on the Races of Man, New York: Henry Shuman, 1950, p. 17.

[11] (*Ibid.*: 19).

[12] I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, H. H. Rudnick (ed.), V. Lyle Dowdell (trans.), Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996, p. 3.

[13] I. Kant, »On National Characters,« in E. C. Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pp. 55–56.

[14] See: Zack (1993); N. Zack, ›American Mixed Race: Theoretical and Legal Issues,‹ *Harvard Black Letter Law Journal*, Vol. 17, 2001, pp. 33–46.

pirically empty. The influence of Kant's views on race was carried along with the influence of the rest of German idealism until the early twentieth century, when the sciences of biological heredity and anthropology developed independent empirical criteria for theories of human difference.[15]

III Twentieth Century Essentialism versus Biological Science

In considering twentieth-century racial essentialism, it is important to start with Du Bois, because many contemporary theorists of race continue to give him the last word. W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) was a mixed-race African-American sociologist, historian, and activist, who founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 and edited its journal, *The Crisis*, for decades. As a deeply insightful proponent of the perspective of African-Americans, most famously in *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois remains well known for his idea of double consciousness, his combination of literary and analytic writing, and his lifelong dedication to progress against oppression for American blacks and racial »uplift« within the African-American community.[16] But here, the focus is on Du Bois's racial essentialism, insofar as he repudiated late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific thought that focused on physical studies of racial difference, often in fraudulent ways and from a white supremacist perspective.[17] However, it was not the white supremacist motivation behind such research that motivated Du Bois to repudiate it, but its failure to address cultural differences and »strivings.« In »The Conservation of Races,« his 1897 address to the American Negro Academy (an organization dedicated to higher education and achievement in the arts and sciences for African Americans, of which Du Bois was one of the founders), Du Bois specifically disagreed with the scientific attempt of his time to use anthropomorphic data to measure racial difference,

[15] Kant was not alone in constructing a philosophical metaphysics of race. For further discussion of his views and Hegel's, see N. Zack, *Philosophy of Science and Race* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 9–41.

[16] For a brief general discussion of Du Bois's importance for philosophy, see, ›William Edward Burghardt Du Bois,‹ *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (URL: http://www.iep.utm.edu/dubois/, last accessed on 26 May 2014).

[17] See S. J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, New York: Norton, 1996.

claiming that races »while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless are clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist.«[18] What he wanted race to mean for African-Americans was a combination of deference to the ascendance of Euro-American culture – that is, he accepted the achievements of white-dominated culture as human ideals – and aspirations for their collective future:

> We are Negroes, members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forests of its African fatherland […] It is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideas; as a race we must strive by race organizations, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities for development.[19]

Du Bois's idea of race is implicitly metaphysical in its moral and spiritual dimensions and dismissive of empirical biological science in that it is not social science. That is, Du Bois did not believe that the physical sciences could be the ultimate authority on what race was, because he viewed race as primarily a psychic matter, directly intuited or experienced, and perhaps best expressed in literature and art. And yet, Du Bois does not dismiss a physical aspect to what he means by race. The sense in which Du Bois echoes and appropriates for Africans and African Americans Kant's essentialist notion of race was buttressed by his studies with leading economists and political and cultural theorists at the University of Berlin in the early 1890s. At its core, Du Bois' idea of race was shot through with German romanticism, especially the legacy of Johann Gottfried Herder which imbued each nation with its own distinct spiritual life or soul.[20] Although his ideas about race changed through the years, he described his own life as »the autobiography of a race concept« and at no time did he relinquish a spiritual, lyrical, and aspirational idea of race that went beyond biology but was at the same time physically hereditary.[21]

---

[18] W. E. B. Du Bois, »The Conservation of Races,« reprinted in R. Bernasconi, and T. L. Lott (eds.), *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis: Hacket, 2000), p. 110.

[19] (*Ibid:* 114).

[20] For a recent account and discussion of Du Bois's intellectual history that emphasizes this period of his life, see K. A. Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014.

[21] (*Ibid.:* 8–9 ff.).

Long after Du Bois, African American thinkers have continued to appropriate the most essentialist and racialist Germanic thought (like the belief in the existence of races), together with struggles against racist oppression. Consider for instance the uncanny similarity between the pronouncements of chief Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, famous for holding that »soul means race seen from within« (and also that »[physical] race is the external side of a soul«)[22] and the importance of the trope of »soul« in the Black Power movement of the 1950s–70s.[23]

There was another twentieth-century approach to race and racial liberation, beginning with Franz Boas, the anthropologist who awakened Du Bois's own interest in black history with his 1906 *Commencement Address* at Atlanta University.[24] Boas both emphasized the value and importance of the culture and history of non-white racial groups and took care to separate them from essentialist ideas of biological determinism and contemporary scientific studies of physical race. With the publication of his 1911 *The Mind of Primitive Man*, a foundation was created for subsequent anthropologists to approach the cultures associated with distinct races as contingent historical developments. Boas' insistence that differences in mental aptitude were as great within races as between them was a telling blow to essentialist hereditary racial determinism.[25] Claude Lévi-Strauss went on in the following decades to argue that all cultures shared psychic similarities,

[22] See, »The Racial and Religious Theories of Alfred Rosenberg,« (URL: http://archive.org/stream/TheRacialAndReligiousTheoriesOfAlfredRosenberg/RacialAndReligiousTheoriesOfAlfredRosenberg, last accessed on 10 June 2014).

[23] W. L. Weber, ›Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure (review),‹ *Symploke*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1–2, 1998, pp. 207–208.

[24] F. Boas, »Commencement Address at Atlanta University, May 31, 1906,« *Atlanta University Leaflet*, No. 19 (S.l.: s.n.) (URL: http://www.webdubois.org/BoasAtlantaCommencement.html, last accessed on 10 June 2014). In his 1939 *Black Folk Now and Then*, Du Bois described his experience as an awakening. He recounted the history of the black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years, concluding, »I was too astonished to speak.« From W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 84.

[25] The question of racial difference and IQ nonetheless continued to haunt the twentieth century. For a discussion on IQ and environmental influences, see: N. Block, »How Heredity Misleads about Race,« in A. Montagu (ed.), *Race and IQ*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 444–481.

with the differences wholly accountable through the effects of historical events and material conditions.[26]

Not only did such distinctions between race and culture free twentieth-century biological scientists from a requirement to discover physical cultural determinants in racial distinctions, but first the idea of physical racial essences ceased to be useful to them, and then the idea of physical race itself was »retired.« A (very) short account of that scientific revision would highlight the following. Nothing has been found in human blood, physiology, or genes that can, independently of social ideas of race, support a scientific taxonomy of human races. Racial phenotypes are determined by genotypes that do not get inherited together but disperse and recombine at conception. There is more variation of those traits within social races, that is, the groups that are considered races within society, than between or among social races and it should perhaps be emphasized that this fact in itself precludes the possibility of scientific race, *a priori*. Some phenotypes are more frequent in some human populations than others, but populations are not well-defined groups and vary in number from under ten to hundreds of thousands, depending on the scientific interests of taxonomists. The geographical location of ancestors also fails to ground race because it bears no verified causal connection to those phenotypical traits considered racial in society. There is a consensus that all modern humans originated in Africa, but multiple-origin hypotheses assume too much travel and mixture among early populations to support the evolution of races. And finally, the mapping of the human genome yielded no information about general genetic material that is relevant to race. Of course, the traits considered racial in society, such as skin color or skeletal proportion are both physical and hereditary, but it adds no more information to physical scientific description and analysis of those traits, to consider them »racial« in physical biological terms.[27]

[26] See C. Lévi-Strauss, »Race and History,« in L. Kuper (ed.), *Race, Science, and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

[27] For extended discussion, analysis, and sources concerning this summary, see relevant chapters in Zack (2002).

IV Incommensurable Paradigms

One explanation for why racial essentialism is widely repudiated, but just as widely presumed, is a semantic difference. Those who repudiate racial essentialism in non-philosophical discourse are often opposing stereotypical racial thinking or the assumption that general racial identity determines specific racial traits. The racist stereotypical form of essentialism was evident in Kant's notorious remark, »This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.«[28] However, the kind of racial essentialism at issue in this paper has not been essentialism as associated with racial stereotypes – as important as that is – but essentialism as a subject of metaphysics and/or philosophy of science.

There are two competing paradigms in contemporary thought about the metaphysics and/or philosophy of science of race: Retentionism and Eliminativism.[29] Retentionists seek to retain ideas of race in one or both of two senses: (1) Distinct cultures associated with distinct races should be preserved – for cultural, moral, or political reasons[30] and (2) Social ideas of race have a foundation in the biological sciences. Eliminativists insist on a recognition of the factual independence of two things: (1) ideas of physical human races that are common within so-

[28] For a wider discussion of this remark and what we would call racist ideas of race in the Enlightenment, see E. C. Eze, »The Color of Reason: The Idea of ›Race‹ in Kant's Anthropology,« (in K. M. Faull, ed., *The Bucknell Review, Anthropology and the German Enlightenment*, London: Associated University Presses, 1995, pp. 201–241, [Special issue]), pp. 218 ff.

[29] To say that there are just two paradigms is very likely an over-simplification. For instance, some might believe that culture is separate from biological race as a matter of fact, but that culture should or should not be connected to it to preserve racial identities. Or, some may believe that the lack of a foundation in biology for race makes the preservation of cultures associated with ordinary ideas of race a low priority or a high priority. There are many possible logical combinations and nuances possible.

[30] The African-American pragmatist and chief intellectual sponsor of the Harlem Renaissance worked from the premise that regardless of its scientific underpinnings, »race« as a set of ideas and practices should be supported for American blacks, so as to preserve their culture. Leonard Harris sums up Alain Locke's position, thus: »The Negro race and the Negro culture were for Locke two distinct phenomena that by dint of history were identified as synonymous. Loyalty to the uplift of the race for Locke was thus, *mutatis mutandis*, loyalty to the uplift of the culture« (L. Harris (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alain Locke*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, p. 20).

ciety and may line up with how society is organized and (2) scientific accounts of human physical difference. Both sides agree that human society has been hierarchically organized into distinct human groups that are regarded as »races« – by the members of distinct racial groups with respect to their own racial groups and in the perceptions of race by other distinct racial groups. In other words, people view themselves as belonging to a race and they recognize that others belong to races different from their own.

The interesting philosophical difference between eliminativists and retentionists turns on whether or not races are biologically real, and also, perhaps, what such reality or its lack would normatively require, which is to say, how we *should* think and speak about that reality, what we *should* do about it, and what educational, social, and/or legal changes we *should* aim to bring about. The reality of race is philosophically important, not because of issues related to biological determinism, but because the ordinary concept of race in society carries with it some belief in the physical biological reality of race. That is, the average person may not be able to say exactly what it is in science that independently establishes physical racial reality, but she believes that the relevant scientists know what that is. We have noted that no racial essence has ever been empirically identified and that within the human biological sciences, those who study human difference no longer find the notion of race useful. Moreover, the widely acknowledged greater differences within, rather than between, social races of exactly those physical traits considered racial, precludes the possibility that a physical race concept will ever be scientifically useful. The eliminativist takes these facts as indicative of embedded falsehood in the ordinary concept of race. As the term »eliminativism« suggests, addressing that falsehood may support a normative conclusion that social racial distinctions ought to be eschewed or »eliminated.« The retentionist seeks to retain the ordinary concept of race on one or both of two grounds: those differences linked to human evolution on different continents are sufficient to serve as a physical foundation for the ordinary concept;[31] at least some minimal and non-racist form of the ordinary concept can be preserved if separate ideas of heredity and appearance are related to

[31] R. O. Andreason, ›The Meaning of »Race«: Folk Conceptions and the New Biology of Race,‹ *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 102, 2005, pp. 94–106.

biological studies of human difference that do not in themselves independently support an idea of race.[32]

The eliminativist is more willing than the retentionist to defer to the findings of biological science on physical matters – in this case, race – and may insist that all members of the educated community do the same. The retentionist will not allow science to have the last word in this way and in that sense retains a metaphysical notion of race, that very posit of biological race that does not require independent scientific confirmation, even when the very premise implies that there is a foundation for race in the biological sciences. Indeed, insofar as the human biological sciences no longer find a concept of human race useful or informative, the retentionist's position is more »metaphysical« – that is, in going beyond what is physical – than it was when biological scientists believed that their research did support ideas in society about racial differences and divisions. Now, as then, this position may shade into myth and allegory. If the retentionist seeks to retain social ideas of race only, and to give up even a minimal foundation in the biological sciences, then her position becomes indistinguishable from that of the eliminativist, in terms of acceptance of the conclusions of the biological sciences.

As a cognitive or intellectual matter, the endurance of racial metaphysics can probably best be understood as part of the legacy of racial essentialism – not in Kant's clearly flawed detailed analysis, but in Hume's comfort with what is obvious.[33] Moreover, the eliminativist would see no physical scientific grounds for using racial categories as labels applying to entire persons, while the retentionist, in retaining ordinary usage, would also be committed to the quasi-biological taxonomy that lingers in ordinary usage. However, the heart of the incommensurability between these views remains a yes or no answer to this question, »Should we accept the findings of the physical sciences as the ultimate authority for what is physically real?« This incommensurabil-

[32] M. O. Hardimon, ›The Ordinary Concept of Race,‹ *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 102, 2003, pp. 437–455.

[33] When the retentionist is engaged in a richer form of identity theory, cultural analysis, or liberatory inspiration than bare metaphysics or philosophy of science, he or she may be expressing loyalty to the cultural group mores of their racial group. Eliminativists who are not being disingenuous in seeking to eliminate racial categories while racial discrimination continues without redress would generally respect such affiliative expression, as a moral or ethical matter – or a form of recognition.

ity rests on each side having radically different ideas of what is meant by something being physical. For the retentionist, the ordinary idea of race refers to things that are fully physical in human experience, so that any scientific meaning of physicality would have to begin with that experience, making it perfectly reasonable to relax the demand for an independent scientific foundation for racial taxonomy. The eliminativist is likely to take the history of modern ideas of race into account and point to the fact that these ideas have always connoted a semantic deference to the biological sciences.

To conclude with a general question – Why should the concept of race be considered relevant in philosophy today? First, there is the historical interest in the concept within our discipline, although that is an issue of intellectual history, mainly. Second, the concept of race remains fraught with myriad confusions and continues to be discussed at cross-purposes, both within and without the academy. Philosophers have well-developed methods for analyzing how concepts are used, which can reconcile positions that are not incommensurable. Here are some examples: in US society, when people bring up what they call »race,« they are often talking about racism, prejudice, or discrimination based on beliefs about racial identities; throughout the world, racial categories are applied in different ways, such that someone from Southeast Asia may be considered white in the United States but black in the United Kingdom; sometimes, when people think the subject is racial difference, they are referring to ethnic or cultural differences. Moreover, insofar as race does not have the biological foundation it is presumed to have, racial distinctions can be analyzed as matters of history and culture. Also, new projects of »racialization« or designation of a group as »racial,« when it was not previously considered a race, can be studied as effects of differences in economic and political power. Finally, within wealthy nations and internationally, members of those groups identified as non-white are the majority of the poor and disadvantaged. That is more clearly an ethical issue, once released from a false (deterministic) biological foundation, and ethics is an important subfield of philosophy – although in the case of race, the force of its influence on political goals is somewhat weak. As well, and to return to the specific subject of this paper, clarification of what it means to say that race is real or not can ultimately only be accomplished with reference to whether or not race has the foundation in the biological sciences it purports to have in common sense. Persistence in assuming the reality

of race, based on beliefs that it has a biological scientific foundation that it is known to lack, is accurately termed »racial essentialism« and/or »racial retentionism,« whereas rejection of the reality of race given knowledge of that same lack of foundation is the referent of »racial eliminativism.« However, it should be understood that this last philosophical clarification has no direct implications for politics or public policy. Human groups to whom nonexistent biological causes are attributed for their differences from others may be in as much or greater need of social affirmation and assistance than groups without such attributions – in large part because of what people continue to believe about those groups. Nevertheless, the philosophical clarification may be of use in ameliorating exaggerated ideas of difference between human groups.

–Naomi Zack, University of Oregon, USA

Hegel's Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy[1]

Abstract
European-Western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche and to Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein has rightly claimed to represent a high standard. In ancient times and in the Middle Ages there were vivid exchanges with non-Western traditions, especially Egyptian and Arabic philosophies. But since the philosophy of European Enlightenment, a large part of European-Western philosophy maintains that philosophy of a high standard exists only here. This statement can be called Eurocentric and is highly contestable. The clearest and strictest foundation of philosophical Eurocentrism is given by Hegel. By analyzing and criticizing his concept of philosophy in Section II, I will discuss Eurocentrism in philosophy. In Section III, I will proceed to indicate the conditions necessary to overcome it.

Keywords
eurocentrism, Hegel, philosophy of religion, intercultural philosophy, sub-Saharan Africa, world history.

I Introduction

European-Western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche and to Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein has rightly claimed to represent a high standard. In ancient times and in the Middle Ages there were vivid ex-

[1] This article is based on my Dutch article »*Hegels eurocentrische filosofiebegrip,*« in: H. van Rappard, and M. Leezenberg (eds.), *Wereldfilosofie. Wijsgerig denken in verschillende culturen*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010, pp. 43–59.

changes with non-Western traditions, especially Egyptian and Arabic philosophies. But since the philosophy of European Enlightenment, a large part of European-Western philosophy maintains that philosophy of a high standard exists only here. This statement can be called Eurocentric and is highly contestable. The clearest and strictest foundation of philosophical Eurocentrism is given by Hegel.[2] By analyzing and criticizing his concept of philosophy in Section II, I will discuss Eurocentrism in philosophy. In Section III, I will proceed to indicate the conditions necessary to overcome it.

II What Is Eurocentrism in Philosophy?

Hegel worked out a concept of philosophy, which expresses in a clear and strict manner what philosophy means in the European tradition. At the same time he claimed that philosophy in this clear and strict sense exists only in Europe. This claim is characteristic for the thought of the European Enlightenment, to which Hegel at least partly belongs. Therefore one can say that in the thought of this period of history a Eurocentric concept of philosophy prevailed. To give approximate time limits, Eurocentrism in philosophy can be seen as having been founded in the period from 1750 to 1830. The manner in which Hegel founded Eurocentrism still holds sway in European-Western philosophy up to the present day.

Eurocentrism, as it prevailed during European Enlightenment, was advocated in England by John Locke and David Hume, in France by A. R. J. Turgot and Voltaire, and in Germany by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Immanuel Kant, to give some examples. This means that during this period it was in play all over Europe. For the origin and dissemination of Eurocentrism, the idea of progress is very important. This idea means that world history as a whole, with all of its relevant developments, comes to its absolute peak in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this way it is possible to frame a concept of history that covers the whole world. However, this possibility comes at a high price. Although certain periods of history are judged in a differentiated way, as for instance the high estimation of Greek and Roman

[2] Also see N. Zack, *The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism and its Comfortable Legacy*, pp. 85–98 in this journal.

antiquity, »Europe is the standard within which all the different phenomena in space and time get their place as historic stadia.«[3] Europe of this period of time understands itself as superior with regard to all other times and cultures, and – as will be shown later – Europe defines what philosophy or science is.

Before this period of prevailing Eurocentrism, during the years from 1689 until 1714, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz exchanged letters with Catholic missionaries, who lived and worked in China, about the culture and philosophy of this country.[4] He admired Chinese philosophy and wanted to learn from it. And already in the years 1780 and then on a bigger scale since the beginning of the nineteenth century, philosophical Eurocentrism has been interrupted by an interest in Indian philosophy. During this period, important philosophical texts of the Indian tradition were translated in England and in Germany. The first English translation of the *Bhagavadgita* by Charles Wilkins appeared in 1785. Henry Thomas Colebrooke translated parts from the *Vedas* and in 1805 he published an *Essay on the Vedas*. A translation of the *Bhagavadgita* into Latin by the German poet and philosopher August Wilhelm Schlegel appeared in 1823 and was accessible to the learned public throughout Europe.

These were first steps, which show the rise of an interest in Indian thought as genuine philosophy. A milestone in this history was the essay by Wilhelm von Humboldt from 1826, in which he interpreted the *Bhagavadgita* in the context of the great work *Mahabharata* from the early history of Indian philosophy. A year later, Hegel wrote a lengthy review of this essay. In this review he appraised Indian thought in detail, which he estimated highly, but which he did not recognize as philosophy or – precisely speaking – not as »proper« philosophy. I will explain that a little bit later.

The interest in Indian philosophy, the translations by the English orientalists, and the contributions of A. W. Schlegel and Humboldt did not change, however, Eurocentric thought in the general public's consciousness. Also the philosophy departments of the universities went

[3] J. Rohbeck, *Die Fortschrittstheorie der Aufklärung. Französische und englische Geschichtsphilosophie in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt: Campus, 1987, p. 87. This sentence, and all quotations from German texts in this essay, are translated by me.

[4] G. W. Leibniz, *Der Briefwechsel mit den Jesuiten in China (1689–1714)*, R. Widmaier (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 2007.

on to judge non-European thought in the same way as Hegel. Exceptions are Arthur Schopenhauer, who studied Buddhism, and Paul Deussen, who knew a lot about Indian culture and compared Indian and European philosophy. Also, in a certain period of his work, Nietzsche was a follower of Schopenhauer, as is well known. And he had friendly contacts with Deussen for quite a long time. In the second half of the twentieth century there is a remarkable interest by some European philosophers in non-Western philosophies, especially those of the Far East. This is true for the later Martin Heidegger starting from about 1950, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well for other European philosophers from this period who are still regarded as exceptions. I will come back to this later in Section III.

What does Hegel's Concept of Philosophy Mean for the Judgment of the Philosophies of Non-Western Cultures?

In a certain sense, the works of Schlegel and Humboldt mentioned here can be seen as the beginning of Comparative Philosophy, which in addition to European-Western philosophy also studies the philosophy of the Far East: India, China, and somewhat later also Japan. This philosophical work, which is similar to Comparative Religious Studies, has led to remarkable results. Here I will just mention the names of Nathan Søderblom, Rudolf Otto, Helmuth von Glasenapp, Gerard van der Leeuw, and Gustav Mensching. Comparative Philosophy, however, at that time and up to now is mainly not dealt with in the Philosophy departments of the European-Western universities, but in the rather small departments of Indology, Sinology, and Japanology or Comparative Religious Studies. This work does not penetrate the general public's consciousness either. Philosophy departments confine themselves to European-Western philosophy. Hegel's concept of philosophy is obviously still effective here, even if philosophers do not follow Hegel any more, as for instance is the case with Neo-Kantians. In this connection it should be mentioned that the judgments of non-Western cultures by Kant are radically negative in a way similar to those of Hegel (see below).

What, According to Hegel, is »Proper« or »True« Philosophy?

Hegel's Eurocentric concept of philosophy is expressed in the review of Humboldt's essay and also especially in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, in which he differentiates between »preforms« of philosophy and what he calls »proper« or »true« philosophy.

According to what he writes in his review of Humboldt's essay, Indian thought with its »sources of philosophy,« which reach back far in history, merely represents »preforms« of philosophy.[5] »Indian religion, cosmogony, theogony, mythology etc.« cannot be called philosophy, because therein you can find »many fine reflections,« which are, however, mostly combined with »arbitrariness of fantasy« and »superficial representations« (Hegel 1971: 203). That can be seen for instance in the fact that the »outer appearance (the *maja*)« of the highest God Brahman is manifold in an unclear way (*ibid.*: 198). The »many shapes which he [Brahman] adopts always get more in number and also more arbitrary« *(ibid.)*. Brahma, in whom Brahman emerges as subject »appears mainly in relation to Vishnu or Krishna and to Shiva in a more definite shape and as *one* figure of *Trimurti*, the Indian Holy Trinity« *(ibid.)*. That, for Hegel, is a really important idea. Examined in more detail it is a lesser form of Trinity, »which only in Christianity has developed to the true idea of God« (*ibid.*: 199). In the Indian representation it »has grown out to something wrong« *(ibid.)*.

In the Introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel deals with Indian thought and with Chinese thought as well. In Chinese thought he finds only very abstract »notions and oppositions« (Hegel 1959a: 214).[6] Here he is referring to the figures and lines seen so often in the Chinese tradition, where one is continuous and the other one interrupted. »The first figure is called Yang, and the second one Yin« *(ibid.)*. They are the »principles of all things« *(ibid.)*. They are combined with each other in many ways, so that sixty-four figures are created, which determine matter as a whole. From the different combinations, the sky, the water, the fire, the thunder, the wind, the

[5] G. W. F. Hegel, *»Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gita bekannte Episode des Mahabharata von Wilhelm von Humboldt*, Berlin 1826,« in G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, E. Moldenhauer, and K. M. Michel (eds.), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971, Vol. 11, pp. 131–204, see especially p. 131, p. 133, p. 203, and pp. 198–199.

[6] G. W. F. Hegel, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, J. Hoffmeister (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1959a.

mountains, and the earth are derived. »One can therefore say,« Hegel concludes, »that here from oneness and twoness all things have come forth« (*ibid.*: 215). The first continuous line, the Chinese »also call Tao, the origin of all things or nothingness« *(ibid.)*. In other texts of the Chinese tradition it is said »that from five elements the whole nature is made, namely from fire, wood, metal, water, and earth« *(ibid.)*. Statements of this kind are, however, according to Hegel, not philosophy, because they »depart too much from empirical observations« and not from thinking *(ibid.)*. A systematic order is missing, everything »stands there higgledly-piggledly.«[7]

In the field of ethics Hegel finds within Chinese thought »only poor morals« *(ibid.)*. He gives a low rank to the teachings of Confucius, as they contain »a lot of common sense« and a »mainly popular morality,« but no »speculative philosophy« *(ibid.)*. Therefore Confucius' thought cannot be regarded as »proper« philosophy. Although some of his ideas are »not without spirit,« they do not belong to »true« philosophy. Confucius was more »a practical political leader« than a philosopher *(ibid.)*.

With regard to ancient Indian texts, Hegel finds within them – similar to what is stated in the Humboldt review – quite »interesting general ideas« (*ibid.*: 216). Being is thought of as »originating and perishing« and as the »representation of a circulation« (*ibid.*: 217). The well known »metaphor of Phoenix,« which comes from the East, expresses »that death is part of life, that life passes into death and death passes into life, that being itself is already the negative and the negative is the positive, affirmative, and that the one turns over to the other, and that life in general exists only in this dialectical process« *(ibid.)*. On the other hand Hegel is critical of how these ideas »only occur incidentally« and in the context of Indian religion. They are »general, but totally abstract ideas« *(ibid.)*. They are not presented in a connected manner, which departs from thinking as such. Therefore this is not »proper« philosophy. Because these ideas are thoroughly intermixed with mythological representations they cannot be considered within the history of philosophy *(ibid.)*.

The »mythological forms of philosophy,« as he terms the efforts of the Indian tradition, are embedded by Hegel in the more general statement, that *»religion as such, like poetry, contains philosophical*

[7] »Wir sehen daran, wie Alles kunterbunt untereinandersteht« (*ibid.*: 215).

ideas« (*ibid*.: 216; my emphasis). For that statement he refers above all to ancient Greek religion, to Homer, and to the poets of the tragedies; but also Friedrich von Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are mentioned in this connection. These texts express, like Indian religion and poetry, »deep and general ideas« about »fate« and about »life and death, being and perishing, originating and dying« *(ibid.)*. This way of expressing ideas, however, will not be adopted in the history of philosophy. For this history limits itself to the systematic display of pure thinking *(ibid.)*.

The Authoritative Meaning of Hegel's Science of Logic

For Hegel there is only *one* measure when it comes to judging what thinking as pure thinking is.[8] What conforms to this measure is recognized as »true« or »proper« philosophy. This measure is his *Science of Logic*. Therein pure thinking is represented in its different forms. This representation is systematic and interconnected. It deals only with thinking itself and nothing else, and therefore with pure thought. Thinking carries out a reflective movement by directing itself on itself and thinking can thus represent what it finds in itself. By doing that, Hegel can be seen as going back to Aristotle's νοησις νοησεως, thinking of thinking, or to Kant's list of categories in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hegel starts with the thought of »pure being,« which he interprets as the immediate or the undetermined. »Pure being« can only be thought of by passing over to »pure nothingness.« Pure nothingness has to keep away all mediation and determination from pure being. The permanent movement of this process of thinking forms the dynamic unity of being and nothingness, and Hegel calls this »becoming.« As such, it forms the operational base of dialectical thought, which proceeds in many variations from a thesis via an antithesis to a synthesis.

Proceeding in ascending fashion, Hegel shows which steps from the immediate and undetermined lead to always more mediation and determination. Through this approach he derives the categories of quality, quantity, relation and modality, which are well known from

[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, G. Lasson (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1963, Vol. 1, p. 66–67; see for the following text Vols. 1 and 2.

Kant's list of categories.[9] Interestingly, Hegel does not start with the categories of quantity, like Kant did, but with those of quality. In addition to Kant's list, the theory of concept, sentence, and conclusion is dealt with, which shows how a probative argumentation has to proceed. By doing that, Hegel goes back to some central themes of formal logic which have been worked out in the history of logic since Aristotle, and he shows how they form part of his dialectical way of thought. In the end he comes to the »absolute idea,« in which all steps of mediation and determination are summed up. Every step is critically self-referential. Thus it becomes completely clear what, according to Hegel, »thinking« or »pure thinking« means.

Because pure thinking does not accept any authority outside of itself, it is at the same time the expression of absolute freedom. And the absolute freedom of pure thinking demands, in the social and political relations of the human world, the realization of freedom in the best possible way by a »free constitution« (Hegel 1959a: 227).

The *Science of Logic* forms the foundation of Hegel's »system of philosophy,« as he presented its blueprint in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.[10] Herein the theories of pure thinking and its applications are represented. This concept of pure thinking is used as a measure in order to judge where in European history and in other cultures particular ways of thought, which have this specific form, can be found and can be recognized as »proper« philosophy.

This position is in itself completely clear. Its Eurocentric character lies in the claim that Hegel's *Logic* and his »system of philosophy« are absolutely and universally valid and therefore can be used at any time and everywhere as a standard. With this claim it is forgotten, however, that Hegel's philosophy and his presentation of pure thinking in the *Science of Logic* are worked out in the German language of the beginning of the nineteenth century and that they make use of conceptual tools predominant in European philosophy in that period of history. Hegel is not aware of the cultural and historical dependence of his philosophy. This dependence is expressed in the whole development of thinking from the immediate and undetermined to absolute mediation

[9] I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B. Erdmann (ed.), in *Kants Werke. Akademie Textausgabe*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968, Vol. 4, p. 66.

[10] G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundriß (1831)*, F. Nicolin, and O. Pöggeler (eds.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1959b.

and determination. That means, thinking is from the very beginning directed to its end: thinking of mediation and determination. Outside of this way of thinking, no other ways are accepted. By means of *this* thinking, Hegel wrongly claims, *everything* can be thought of and known and can find its place in the totality of thought.

With this concept another one is directly connected: that everything capable of being thought of and known can also be made. For reality corresponds with this way of thought. Reality *is* only and can only be *thought of* in the way as it is explained in the *Science of Logic* and the »system of philosophy,« which is built thereupon. But the way of thought as it is represented in Hegel's philosophy is not really »pure thinking.« It does not exist independently from the language of its time and by the same token depends on the given social and historical situation.

For this reason, the foundation of Hegel's concept of »proper« or »true« philosophy is problematic. But this concept is obviously used when Hegel decides where philosophy can be found or not. He answers himself the question: »where do we have to begin with the history of philosophy?« by saying »It begins there where thinking as pure thinking emerges, where it is generally present, and where this purity, this generality is essential, truthful and absolute« (Hegel 1959a: 224). This is, according to Hegel, the case in ancient Greece and is connected with the fact that political freedom flourished there (*ibid*.: 234–235). This statement means at the same time: in the thought of »the Oriental world cannot be spoken of proper philosophy« and there the freedom of the person is not even in principle discussed (*ibid*.: 227). As for the beginning of philosophy with the ancient Greek people, Hegel states that they do have the *freedom of thought*, but that *real freedom* still is affected with a restriction, for, as we know, in Greece slavery still existed (*ibid*.: 235). The principle of political freedom is already there, but is only realized with a group of free citizens.

The Application of Hegel's Concept of Philosophy in Judging Non-Western Cultures

The difficulty that we have pointed out in connection with Hegel's notion of »proper« or »true« philosophy also has consequences for his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. In these *Lectures* it is a

decisive criterion whether a certain part of the world is dealt with in the history of the world, if »proper philosophy« can be found there. In the Introduction to the *Lectures* some general arguments are given why in the Far East, in both Americas and Australia before the colonization, and on the many islands between South America and Asia and first of all in sub-Saharan Africa no state, no highly developed religion and no philosophy, no mere »preforms« of philosophy have existed, and therefore no history has taken place.[11] History is for Hegel a history of states, which, according to his clearly falsified concept, did not exist in these parts of the world. Research in cultural anthropology has proved that, for instance in sub-Saharan Africa, different types of states have existed, which have changed and developed in the course of time.[12] The same is true for central Mexico and the Andes of South America.

The kinds of religion present in these regions are »primitive« according to Hegel, because they do not know about a singular highest being, on whom everything is dependent and from whom everything gets its explanation, which is what could be expected in a community which is organized as a state. Also, in a state, one person is in the top position and makes the necessary decisions (this will be dealt with in more detail when the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* will be examined). Another step from religious representations to philosophical concepts, which is missing in those »primitive« religions, would be necessary, if one wants to get from a religious explanation of the world and of humanity to a philosophy which is based on pure thinking only.

The exclusion of non-Western parts of the world is here, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, somewhat less radical than in those on the *History of Philosophy*. In the »Oriental world« of China, India, Persia, the Near East and Egypt, Hegel not only finds »preforms« as in the history of philosophy, but already a »first stage« of world history. For in these areas there existed already functioning states. The idea is maintained, however, where world history only reaches its aim of realizing liberty by being secured by a »free constitution« is in the Greek and Roman world of ancient Europe. This reali-

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, E. Moldauer, and K. M. Michel (eds.), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989, pp. 111–132.

[12] M. Fortes, and E. E. Evans Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.

zation of liberty attains full definition in Europe north of the Alps – Hegel speaks of the »Christian Germanic world« – that is to say in the modern constitutional state.[13]

As for the states of the Oriental world, Hegel says that only *one* person is free, the despotic ruler. This person creates a certain stability of public life in the regions where he rules. Therefore, one can speak here about history and about a first stage of world history. Under the conditions of the aristocratic societies of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire *some* persons are free: the free citizens, besides whom we find half-free artisans and tradespeople as well as the totally un-free slaves, who have to work in the fields, etc. The free citizens devote their lives to politics and bear responsibility for their actions. This part of the population has time enough and is in the situation to do philosophy in the proper sense of the word. In the modern world of the constitutional states, as they have emerged in Europe north of the Alps, as a final stage of history, *all* persons are free. Strictly speaking, one has to say that – differing from his text – in Hegel's time this was only true for the adult male citizens. This freedom of the citizens, which is guaranteed by a constitution, is the precondition for the definite flourishing of philosophy.

Those parts of the world, where no state, no highly developed religion, and no philosophy exist, need not be treated in the philosophy of world history, not even in the sense of a first stage of world history, where »preforms« of philosophy are possible. In these regions no freedom does exist. That is most radically the case in sub-Saharan Africa. There, »slavery forms the basic relation of the law« (Hegel 1955: 225). What Hegel writes about Africa is not only extremely negative, it also shows – unlike most parts of his philosophy – that he is badly informed. Let me give just a few examples. He describes sub-Saharan Africa as »one highland as a whole,« which has a »very small coastal strip inhabited only at certain places« (*ibid.*: 215). That is, of course, a nearly absurd description of the geography of Africa. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century wild groups of warriors, Hegel writes, have attacked the people of the coastal strip and have driven them to the edge

[13] G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, J. Hoffmeister (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1955, pp. 198–213.

of the coast. These kinds of events, however, did not occur in the history of that region.[14]

The »religion of sorcery,« which is dealt with in more detail in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* is, according to Hegel, based on the primitive idea that man is the master of nature and gives commands to it. It is part of this religion that man »does not respect himself nor others« (*ibid.*: 224). Therefore it is permissible to the Europeans that they sell these people as slaves. Generally speaking, slavery is wrong, Hegel says, but in the African context he argues against its sudden abolition (*ibid.*: 226). In »all negro-states,« which are not really accepted as states, »the monarch has unconditional power over his subjects.« And this is »nearly the same« all over Africa south of the Sahara (*ibid.*: 231). This statement proves that Hegel has no idea about the different political systems in traditional African countries before the colonization by European countries. The »ethical life in the families,« which has been a main support of the African societies and still is till today, is judged by Hegel as »not strong« (*ibid.*: 228). If, from his dubious sources, he assumes the truth of the information that the king of Dahomey had 3333 wives (*ibid.*: 227), this says more about his preference for the number 3 than about the real situation in the area of what is now the state of Benin.

As mentioned above, Hegel's way of thought is Eurocentric in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* too. Compared to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* in which the Eurocentric concept of philosophy is expressed in the clearest way, and also to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History,* where it is already weakened to a certain extent, it is even less prominent in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. All religions in the world are dealt with in these lectures. Insofar as they are not in line with the »absolute religion« of Christianity, they are not recognized as »true religions,« but just as »determined religions.« Hegel construes things in terms of an ascending line that starts from the »religion of nature.« The »religion of sorcery« and the »Chinese religion of the state and the Tao« form parts of it. Also the Indian religion of »being within oneself and imagination,« the Persian »religion of light« and the Egyptian »religion of the riddle« belong to the »religion of nature.« The »religions of the spiritual individuality«

[14] (*Ibid.*: pp. 213–234); *cf.* J. Ki-Zerbo, *Die Geschichte Schwarz-Afrikas,* E. Hammer (transl.), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981.

form a stadium in between on the way to the »revealed religion« of Christianity. As religions of this stage Hegel deals with the Jewish »religion of the sublime,« in which everything depends from *one* God, »Mohammedanism« as the extension of worshipping one God to all nations, the ancient Greek »religion of fate and of beauty,« and finally the ancient Roman »religion of suitableness.« This whole development is orientated towards *one* aim: the »absolute religion« of Christianity, as it is practiced in the European world.[15]

A More In-Depth Example of Eurocentric Thought: Hegel's Treatment of Animism

In order to give an example of Hegel's Eurocentric way of thought, I will present here his treatment of the first form of the »religion of nature,« namely the »religion of sorcery,« in more detail. The general characteristic of this religion is, as I have already mentioned, the »power above nature,« which the »single self-consciousness« has or means to have. This idea is, according to Hegel, »primitive,« but already contains »something spiritual.« A first form of the presence of God, who is spirit, in the human world, is here at stake. However, in the »religion of sorcery« the spirit is only present in the most simple and abstract way. Therefore, this religion is religion in the wildest and roughest form.

For a more precise description of »direct sorcery,« Hegel uses reports of travelers from the year 1819 on the religion of the Esquimaux. These people call their sorcerers »angekoks.« They believe that the angekoks have the power to make storms or calm winds or to allow whales to come close to the human habitat. They do that by using certain words, making certain gestures, and performing dances until they fall into some kind of trance. But these people have »no picture, no human being, no animal, nothing of this kind« for worshipping. According to W. Jaeschke, the editor of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which I am using here, Hegel did not carefully read and correctly use the reports on dance, which had been given in connection

[15] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, W. Jaeschke (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1985a, Vol. 4a, p. IV-V.

with the description of general cultural habits and were not related to religious forms of sorcery.[16]

Hegel also finds the »religion of sorcery« in Mongolia, Africa, and China. For his detailed treatment of Africa, he uses reports of very early Christian missionaries, especially by the Italian Capuchin J. A. Cavazzi from the year 1687.[17] Hegel is aware of the fact that these reports are not very reliable, because the missionaries are biased in dealing with non-Christian ideas and habits. But he does not try to get more recent and more reliable sources, which were available during his time. He quotes Cavazzi's reports in detail and takes them over literally. The conjuring of spirits, the treatment of ill people with very cruel methods, and frequent forms of cannibalism are often mentioned in this context. Hegel writes about the practices and knowledge of rainmakers without giving any sources. They obviously have a great deal of knowledge about the changing situation of the weather, but they also use magical practices. Hegel talks in a similar way about medical men and women. They know a lot about medicinal herbs and they take into account the social and intersubjective relations of the patients when they try to cure them. Apart from that, they often apply magic practices.[18] Quite different and more adequate information about the behavior of rainmakers and traditional healers was available from the extant literature, which Hegel did not use.

It must be mentioned that the practices of the persons mentioned by Hegel, belong to a higher form of sorcery, according to him. Hegel speaks of »indirect« or »mediated sorcery.« The medicinal herbs are means to make the power of sorcery work. This is possible through some kind of reflection, which is a spiritual procedure that interrupts the power of sorcery. For Hegel it is important that in this connection some form of objectiveness takes place. The medicine is applied in a conscious manner. What is worshipped attains a certain independent status in this way. Hegel also deals with so called »fetishes,« which play an important role in African religions. Animals, plants, rocks, rivers,

[16] See (*ibid*.: pp. 176–179) and G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, Anhang*, W. Jaeschke (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1985b, Vol. 4b, p. 693.
[17] J. A. Cavacci, *Historische Beschreibung der im unteren Mohrenland liegenden drey Königreiche Congo, Matamba und Angola […] aus dem Welschen übersetzt*, Munich, 1694. (Original Italian edition 1687.)
[18] Hegel (1985a: pp. 179–185).

and also artefacts such as products of woodcarving are revered. They are used to protect places of residence or to mark holy spots, where religious practices are performed. In the context of the traditional African religions these elements also have their clear and generally accepted functions.

But according to Hegel, all those elements belong to the lowest and roughest form of religion. In China the religion of the state is developed one step further. The power of sorcery and all power over nature and human beings are attributed to *one* person, the emperor. By the way, the Chinese religion is not part of the lowest form of religion in all the different renditions of these lectures. In these cases Chinese religion belonged to the »religions of being within oneself and of imagination« (Hegel 1985a: p. 185–197), like the Indian religion.[19]

The Anchorage of Hegel's Eurocentric Concept of Philosophy in His »System of Philosophy«

In his 1821 book *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's Eurocentrism, as it is expressed in the above mentioned *Lectures*, is anchored in his »system of philosophy.« As is well known, in this book Hegel gives a more precise presentation of the passage on the »objective spirit« in the encyclopedic presentation of his system of philosophy, which he first had published in 1817. In the chapter »The Civil Society,« which follows after the presentation of right and morality and the philosophy of the family, and which precedes the treatment of the state, we find a justification of colonialism. This phenomenon has to be conceived of as a necessary and also a legitimate consequence of the inner dynamics of civil society. The civil society is, in Hegel's time, – and to a certain extent also today – »in an action without restraint«

[19] In another article I have shown that these presentations of Hegel, which are badly documented and which uncritically take over the biased views of Christian missionaries, can be confronted with texts of the younger Hegel from the years 1799–1801/02, when not the concept of »spirit« but the concept of »life« is in the center of his thinking. Departing from these texts, quite a different and much more adequate treatment of animistic religions is possible. See H. Kimmerle, »Religion of Nature,« in B. Laschagne, and T. Slootweg (eds.), *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 1–19.

(Hegel 1967: 200).[20] By that it »proceeds within itself in population and in industry« *(ibid.)*. The contradiction between luxurious life on the one hand, and dependence and misery on the other hand leads to a situation in which »wealth« is concentrated in relatively few hands and a big mass of poor mob is produced. Thus the specific problem of the civil society becomes obvious, that it is »despite of its excessive riches […] not rich enough« (*ibid.*: 201), that of the riches, which come forth from the industrial production with its division of labor, do not exist enough to prevent the excesses of poverty and the origin of poor mobs. On the level of the civil society there is no solution for this problem.

This problem leads to the phenomenon of *colonization*, among other things. Civil society is driven outside of itself by its inner dialectics, its inner and outside limits. The first step outside of its own limits is the »pressure to the sea.« By that it becomes clear that the sea does not only divide one from another, but also connects people and grows out to the »greatest medium […] of commerce« (*ibid.*: 202). After this first step a next one follows, namely the »means of colonization, to which the fully developed civil society is driven.« In this situation one part of the population, that is to say the colonizing people, goes back to work on the land, which they used to do before the industrialization of Europe. Another part finds in the colonized areas new markets to sell products or new treasures of soil (*ibid.*: 203). That people live in these areas, who own the land and who have their own ways of production, is not relevant for Hegel. For him, only the free citizens of the European states are human beings with rights. The colonized areas are, for him, something like the sea, an empty space, into which the dynamics of the civil society can penetrate. Therefore, Hegel's argumentation, coming from what he calls »proper philosophy,« can be regarded as an ideological justification of colonization. The broad influence of Hegel's philosophy, also beyond his followers, can be explained because it has »grasped its time in concepts.«[21]

[20] G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, J. Hoffmeister (ed.), Hamburg: Meiner, 1967, pp. 170–203 (§§190–248).
[21] Hegel (1967: 16).

III The Need for Intercultural Philosophy

Hegel's concept of philosophy can be regarded as a paradigm for what philosophy is in Europe and for Europe since the Enlightenment. Philosophy only exists in Europe and in the Western world. And, more than anything else, understanding philosophy in terms of »proper« or »true« philosophy gives Europe and the Western world its superiority in relation to the non-Western parts of the world. Differing from that view Intercultural Philosophy asserts that philosophy exists in all cultures of the world, not only in Europe and the Western world. This implies the thesis that philosophy belongs to the human condition and that it gives human beings dignity as well as many other things. This means at the same time that the philosophies of all cultures are of the same status and that they can communicate with each other on the same level.

With regard to the influence of Hegel's thought during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is important to note that Neo-Kantianism in this period was dominant in European-Western philosophy. Hegel's all-comprising »system of philosophy« is rejected and replaced by a critical justification of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless Eurocentric thought, as expressed by Hegel, still prevails – in philosophy and as a general perception. This can be explained because Kant himself was no less negative in his judgment of non-European cultures than Hegel. In his *Lectures on Physical Geography,* which he had given many times, a hierarchical view on the different parts of the world – with Europe on top – is formulated, and in an article from 1775 he develops a »Doctrine of Races,« in which he stresses the superiority of the white race.[22]

After World War I a Hegelian renaissance took place in European academic philosophy. Hegel's philosophy was then judged as the completion of lineage running from Kant via Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling to Hegel. Eurocentrism still was fully accepted in connection with this new topicality of Hegel's philosophy.[23]

---

[22] I. Kant, »Physische Geographie,« in F. T. Rink (ed.), *Kants Werke*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968, Vol. 9, pp. 151–436; »Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen,« in M. Frischeisen-Köhler (ed.), *Kants Werke*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 427–444.

[23] Also Edmund Husserl who departed from an own foundation of philosophy as phenomenology embraces a view equally as Eurocentric as Hegel. See his *Die Krisis der*

This was in accordance with the idea of the superiority of Europe and the Western world in the general consciousness of that time.

In the second half of the twentieth century the later Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty became interested in non-Western philosophies, as I have mentioned above. With Heidegger this was motivated by the growing discussions of his thought among Japanese, Korean and Chinese philosophers. Merleau-Ponty's thinking allowed for a connection with non-Western ways of thought through his study of leading literature in cultural anthropology, especially that of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. And Jacques Derrida formulated an explicit critique of the ethnocentrism of European-Western philosophy, particularly regarding the low estimation of cultures with primarily oral forms of communication and tradition. He points in this connection at the paradox where with many European thinkers at the same time there existed a higher estimation of the voice and of the spoken word than of written texts. As a French citizen who came from a Jewish Berber-family in Algeria, Derrida led an intercultural existence. And he gave his thought an intercultural turn. He went, however, not so far as to study non-Western philosophies in detail.[24] With the three philosophers mentioned here, their hesitant openness to non-Western thought is connected with their critique of René Descartes and the way of thought that he launched in European tradition, and by this token also of Hegel.

Comparative philosophy in Europe is still, with a few exceptions, pursued at the universities in the departments of Indology, Sinology and Japanology. But outside of universities, interest in the philosophies from the Far East is grown rapidly. By founding special »Schools for Comparative Philosophy« in Belgium (Antwerp) and in the Netherlands (Utrecht), Ulrich Libbrecht from the University of Leuven has done a lot to meet this interest. Intercultural philosophy does not restrict itself to dialogues between Western and Eastern philosophies, but studies the philosophies of all cultures. These are not just compared, but brought into dialogues with each other. Pioneers of intercultural philosophy are among many others: Ram Adhar Mall who has been

europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1936.

[24] See H. Kimmerle, *Jacques Derrida interkulturell gelesen*, Nordhausen: Bautz, 2005, pp. 9–18.

teaching at different German universities, Franz Martin Wimmer and Georg Stenger in Vienna, Jürgen Hengelbrock in Bochum, Claudia Bickmann in Cologne, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt in Aachen and in Bremen, Hamid Reza Yousefi in Trier and in Koblenz, and myself in Rotterdam. Nevertheless, some philosophers in favor of intercultural philosophy have great difficulties maintaining their position at universities.

The intercultural concept of philosophy has to be contrasted with the Hegelian Eurocentric concept. Insofar as Hegel's concept of philosophy can be regarded as typical of the European-Western philosophy as a whole, the horizon of that philosophy has to be transcended. An important starting point has to be the intercultural concept of philosophy covering what European-Western and non-Western philosophers recognize as philosophical. What is to be done is a deconstruction of the Hegelian European-Western concept of philosophy in order to come to a critical broadening and new precise determination of the concept of philosophy, taking into account the position of intercultural philosophy.

A more detailed description of this concept of philosophy cannot be given here. For that, another presentation would be necessary. That I have always been aware of this task is obvious from the subtitle of my first book on African philosophy from 1991: »Approaches to an intercultural concept of philosophy.«[25] Since then I have repeatedly written about this subject. More recently two shorter books have appeared, in which I go on to work on solving that problem.[26]

–Heinz Kimmerle, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands, Emeritus

[25] H. Kimmerle, *Philosophie in Afrika – afrikanische Philosophie. Annährungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff*, Frankfurt: Campus, 1991.

[26] H. Kimmerle, *Der Philosophiebegriff der interkulturellen Philosophie*, Nordhausen: Bautz, 2009a; H. Kimmerle, *Philosophie – Geschichte – Philosophiegeschichte. Ein Weg von Hegel zur interkulturellen Philosophie*, Nordhausen: Bautz, 2009b.

Philosophizing in Africa: Problems and Prospects

Abstract
There is a respectable body of literature that can legitimately claim to be about, on, or of, African philosophy. In this article, I briefly discuss some general problems in the literature on African philosophy. I will take on the problem of the language of philosophizing in Section II, the problem of the history of African philosophy in Section III, the trends, »schools« or approaches to African philosophy in Section IV, the problem of relativism in Section V, and the problem of uniqueness in Section VI. The last and concluding Section VII will round up the discussion with a relatively positive note on the prospects of African philosophy.

Keywords
African philosophy, philosophical justification, indigenous resources, Yoruba, Akan, inter-cultural understanding.

I Introduction

There is a respectable body of literature that can legitimately claim to be about, on, or of, African philosophy. This literature includes whole-length books, anthologies, monographs, articles, postgraduate theses and dissertations, and undergraduate essays and projects. The literature deals with a large variety of questions and issues, for example, the very question of African philosophy, the question of the history of African philosophy, and methodological problems in African philosophy. Other works include discussions of issues in the main areas of philosophy, namely, logic, not African logic, etc., epistemology, metaphysics, and value theory, including ethics, aesthetics, and social and political philosophy. I have deliberately not qualified logic, epistemology, metaphy-

sics, etc. as »African« because I hope the works would be adjudged good enough to be admitted into mainstream discussions in the disciplines.

So, what is African philosophy? A philosophy, by my understanding, may be qualified as African if it addresses an issue or problem that is of vital concern to an African people specifically, for example, the Yoruba (mainly of southwestern Nigeria), or the Akan (mainly of Ghana); or generally, to all Africans as a »race« (if the expression is not offensive), wherever they may be, that is, whether they are in the continent of Africa or in the African diaspora. For the avoidance of doubt, the person doing African philosophy does not have to be an African (by »race«); he may be an American, Indian or German. For example, I consider Barry Hallen an African philosopher or, if that is preferable, as doing African philosophy. This is because, though he is a US national and white, he has done considerable work on African philosophy generally, and specifically, by using data from Yoruba language and culture.

In this article, I briefly discuss some general problems in the literature on African philosophy. These include the problem of the language of philosophizing, the history of African philosophy, the trends, »schools« or approaches to African philosophy, the problem of relativism and the problem of uniqueness. It is not a survey article and I do not propound a particular thesis. I have only raised and briefly examined some problems that may crop up in discussing African philosophy. I have not attempted to raise all of them. The ones I have raised just happen to be the ones that interest me for now, and on which I have something to say.

II The Problem of Language

The problem of the language of philosophizing arises because there are myriads of indigenous languages in Africa, in which basic materials for philosophizing can be found. These languages include Yoruba, Akan, Kiswahili (mainly in East Africa), Zulu, Hausa (mainly in large parts of northern Nigeria and adjoining areas in Niger and Chad Republics), Igbo (mostly in eastern Nigeria) and Arabic (mainly in North Africa). The problem also arises because there are three or four »colonial« languages used in philosophizing in Africa, mainly, English, French, Portuguese, and possibly Spanish.

The problem of language arises at least at two levels in African philosophy. The first level is that of indigenous African languages or so-called vernaculars – and there is a large variety of them – in which can be found the original cultural sources that of necessity constitute the basic materials for philosophizing. These materials include proverbs, maxims, tales, myths, lyrics, poetry, art motifs and traditional cultural practices like worship, and traditional institutions like chieftaincy and kingship. All these materials are necessarily part of a culture and its language. So indigenous languages are absolutely necessary in some way to philosophizing in Africa.

One reason is that much of the work being done now using these source materials is what can be called »folk« philosophy, »communal« philosophy, or »cultural philosophy« (*cf.* Bello 2004).[1] Thus, to make any philosophical claim on behalf of a culture, the philosopher must provide justification for her claim. The justification for any such claim must be based directly or indirectly on some word, phrase, concept, proverb or usage in the culture. For example, Kwasi Wiredu, in canvassing consensus (as against majority opinion) meticulously reconstructs the political decision-making process among the Ashanti of Ghana, even if it is somehow idealized (Wiredu 1996: 185–186).[2]

Consensus, according to Wiredu, not only characterizes the choice of the chief or the »natural ruler,« it also describes the actual decisions made in running the affairs of the village, town or kingdom, headed by the »Asantehene,« the king of the Ashantis *(ibid.)*. Whatever reservations one may have about consensus, one cannot deny that Wiredu has shown that Ashanti decision-making processes are based on consensus.

To show that Wiredu's disquisition on consensus is based on his intimate knowledge of Ashanti culture and language, we must note that in making that claim, Wiredu cites Akan sayings and usage. Though he has rendered the sayings in English (see *ibid.*, esp., pp. 185–186), if he were challenged, he would have to give the original sayings in Akan, so that the person disputing his claim could see if she

[1] *cf.* A. G. A. Bello, »Some Methodological Controversies in African Philosophy,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 263–273.

[2] K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

agreed with him or not. So, there is no escaping the vernacular, at one point or another.

The point must also be made that in using the cultural materials cited above in philosophizing, there are two levels of justification. One level is where the philosopher is making a particular claim on behalf of a culture, say, the Yoruba culture. Thus, for example, if she claims that the Yoruba take *ori* (literally: head) as part of the human person, she must justify that claim using materials from the Yoruba language and culture. The second level is that of philosophical justification. This is because the investigation of Yoruba beliefs about *ori,* for example, and how the individual comes to be endowed with one, is not *per se* philosophical. Students of Yoruba mythology, religion or folk beliefs also make such claims. What is distinctively philosophical about the claim is to raise some questions and attempt to answer them. Such questions include: Is *ori* an entity? If it is, what sort of entity is it? If it is not an entity, what is its relation to the person whose *ori* it is? And at what level of explanation is the concept of *ori* invoked?

To seriously attempt to answer these and other questions requires more than perfunctory knowledge of the Yoruba language and culture. Relevant here are: the belief that the person receives her *ori* (literally: head) kneeling down; the fact that *ayanmo* (literally: that which is chosen for one), *akunleyan* (literally: that which is chosen while kneeling down), and *adamo* (literally: that which is created with one) are used as synonyms for *ori,* and the belief that a person's *ori* may be changed, modified or affected for better or for worse by sacrifices, incantations, or a (more) powerful person, etc. (*cf.* Bello 1991: 58).[3]

This means that any analysis of the thought or philosophical system of any language group must take very seriously the culture and language which is an indispensable part of it. Thus, in discussing the Yoruba concept of a person, the philosopher must take Yoruba culture and language seriously. Similarly, in discussing the Akan concept of democracy, the philosopher must take Akan culture and language seriously. Unfortunately, this places a severe limit on the number of philosophers who can meaningfully participate in any discussion using an indigenous language.

[3] A. G. A. Bello, ›Ultimate Reality and Meaning in Africa: Some Methodological Preliminaries. A Test Case: Sound as Ultimate Reality and Meaning,‹ *Ultimate Reality and Meaning (African Studies),* Vol. 14, No. 1, 1991, pp. 53–61.

This is because, as we have suggested above, the prospective participants must have more than a perfunctory knowledge of the culture and language of the Yoruba or the Akan, respectively. Otherwise, how would they determine if a word, phrase, or other cultural item has been correctly or incorrectly interpreted?

It can be said without any fear of contradiction that there is no African philosopher, living or dead, who has mastery over more than a few of extant or extinct African languages. The present writer, if he may be allowed to use himself as an example, has some competence in three or four: Yoruba, his mother-tongue; Twi, (the language of a section of the Akan) by virtue of having been born in Ghana and having lived there for part of his life; Hausa, having had the opportunity of living and attending Qur'anic or Arabic schools in neighborhoods in Bibiani, Kumasi, and Accra (all in Ghana), where he had Hausa-speaking teachers; and Arabic, because he attended Qur'anic or Arabic schools in his childhood. I daresay few contemporary African philosophers have these coincidences in their lives.

The second level at which the language problem arises in African philosophy is that of the languages in which mainstream philosophizing takes place. Most African philosophers, depending on which European power colonized their countries, use either English or French. There may be others who use Arabic, Portuguese, or Spanish. If we go back in history we would probably find others who used other languages, for example Greek, Latin, Amharic, or some old extinct language.

Obviously, for the benefit of those who do not know these languages, the philosophic texts written in those languages have to be made available in one of the contemporary languages that are widely used in Africa today. As an example, Paulin Hountondji's seminal book, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* would have remained inaccessible to English readers if it had not been translated from the French original.[4]

Therefore, the linguistic divisions in contemporary African philosophy go beyond the Anglophone and Francophone; it must include the Lusophone as well as the Arabic-speaking and probably the Spanish-

[4] P. J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, and *idem*., *Sur la philosophie africaine*, Paris: Francois Maspero, 1971.

speaking. As a general observation, there is a tendency for users or speakers of other languages than English to also speak/use English; a good example is Hountondji, though the reverse is not often the case. In other words, it is common to find contemporary philosophers from Francophone and Arabic-speaking African who also use English very well; it is less common to find Anglophone Africans who also use French or Arabic well. Again, this places some limitation of another (maybe less fundamental) kind on the interaction among African philosophers, though not as much as the one based on the indigenous languages. To put it provocatively: who says colonialism does not have any redeeming features?

The point being made is that it will serve a useful purpose if African philosophers have access to each other's writings. It is for the same reason that the books of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, etc. are translated from German into English, etc. for the benefit of non-German readers. It is also for the same reason that the books of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are translated from French into English, etc. for the benefit of non-French readers. African philosophers should not settle for less.

In this discussion, there need be no assumption that the various philosophic doctrines credited to the various peoples on the continent have anything in common. But it will be interesting if they do. Moreover, they should be interacting with one another because they are bound to have either common problems of a philosophical nature or social and political problems to whose solution philosophy can contribute. Moreover, a time may come when the philosophies of some African philosophers will be the common legacy of Africans (and, hopefully, of mankind) in the same way that Plato's philosophy as well as others' has become the common legacy of Europeans and mankind.

III Problem of the History of Philosophy

In my »Towards the History of African Philosophy,« I have discussed what I consider the tasks of a history of philosophy.[5] I argued that since a history of philosophy is an empirical inquiry into the lives, times,

[5] A. G. A. Bello, ›Towards the History of African Philosophy,‹ *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, No. 8, 1998, pp. 1–10.

influences and teachings of identifiable individual philosophers, or of schools, or of traditions of philosophy, a history of African philosophy must attempt to discover individual philosophers, their biographies, philosophical teachings, and influences on and by them.

A number of publications can easily pass as histories of African philosophy. These include Dismas A. Masolo's *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (1994), and Hallen's *A Short History of African Philosophy* (2002).[6] However, both of these books contain only a history of contemporary African philosophy. To take Masolo as an example, his earliest written source is E. W. Blyden's *A Voice from Bleeding Africa* published in the second half of the nineteenth century.[7]

Masolo has subsequently published an article entitled »African Philosophers in the Greco-Roman Era,« in which he attempted to find an earlier beginning for the history of African philosophy.[8] Theophile Obenga, in his article »Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy,« attempts to push back the beginning of African philosophy to ancient Egypt, that is, before the advent of the Semites, or before its Arabization or Islamization.[9]

More work, however, needs to be done to persuade a skeptic (like the present writer) of the history of African philosophy that ostensibly, according to Obenga, stretches from 3400 CE to 343 CE (in Egypt) and from 1000 CE to 625 CE (in Kush). The skeptic may ask: Is it an unbroken history to the present? Efforts must be made to explain the continuities and discontinuities. Students of African philosophy want to see a history complete with periods and how they are determined, with more information about the philosophers' lifetimes and work, and with a study of philosophical traditions and how they developed and thrived. In the matter of the history of African philosophy, as it is with the history of Western philosophy or others, it is not enough to recite

[6] D. A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994; B. Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002.

[7] E. W. Blyden, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa on Behalf of Her Exiled Children*, Liberia: G. Killian, 1856.

[8] D. A. Masolo, »African Philosophy in the Greco-Roman Era,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 50–65.

[9] T. Obenga, »Egypt: Ancient History of Africa Philosophy,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 31–49.

the ideas of individual philosophers; it is also important to trace influence on and by them.

For one thing, this will make the history more interesting. No man is an island, and it is unlikely that a philosopher will be completely uninfluenced by anything or anybody. Even great Western philosophers admitted influences on them. Kant, for example, credited David Hume with wakening him up from his »dogmatic slumbers.« Similarly, a discontinuous history may still be a history but it would not be interesting. In fact, it would have only archival value. It can be compared to the history of a human settlement which is completely destroyed: the history of the settlement terminates with its destruction.

Attempts have also been made to write »regional« histories of African philosophy, such as Hallen's »Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy: A Survey« and Mourad Wahba's »Philosophy in North Africa.«[10] It is also desirable to have articles or monographs on »Contemporary Francophone African Philosophy« and »Contemporary Lusophone African Philosophy.« Such efforts are welcome in the face of the language problem highlighted above, to wit, that there is hardly an African philosopher who is proficient in all the contemporary European languages being used across Africa as lingua francas.

IV Trends, »Schools,« or Approaches to African Philosophy

In his seminal article »Four Trends in African Philosophy,« Odera Oruka identifies ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, national-ideological philosophy and professional philosophy.[11] He later added the hermeneutic, and the artistic or literary trends (see Hallen 2004: 124). From the way the »trends« have been discussed, they are not mutually exclusive. For example, professional (academic) philosophers who have employed the tools of (philosophical, linguistic or conceptual) analysis

[10] B. Hallen, »Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy: A Survey,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 99–148; M. Wahba, »Philosophy in North Africa,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 161–171.

[11] H. Odera Oruka, »Four Trends in African Philosophy,« in A. Diemer (ed.), *Symposium on Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981, pp. 1–7.

to cultural, linguistic or traditional materials, may also be said to be doing »ethnophilosophy,« in some sense.

Similarly, a professional philosopher, like Oruka, who interviewed some philosophic sages, can be said to have contributed to the tradition of philosophic sagacity. In the same vein, a professional philosopher who evaluates the writings of our national-ideological thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1909–1972; President 1960–1966), Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (1922–1999; President, 1964–1985), Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria (1904–1996; President, 1963–1966), Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria (1909–1987; Premier of Western Region, 1954–1960) and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (born 1924; President, 1964–1991), can be said to contribute to national-ideological philosophy.

The same may be said of the other »trends.« This means that Oruka's trends can actually be said to define traditions that are in the making in African philosophy. Contributors to these traditions will consist of professional philosophers and others with philosophical ability, including politicians, sages, and creative writers of different categories, for example, poets, dramatists and novelists, social scientists and journalists.

V The Problem of Relativism

The problem of relativism may arise because many an African philosopher interrogates her own cultural tradition. Thus, a Yoruba-speaking philosopher, for example, Segun Gbadegesin, in discussing the Yoruba concept of a person, interrogates Yoruba culture. Similarly, Wiredu, in discussing the Akan concept of mind, interrogates Akan culture. So, their philosophical claims will be »relative« (in the ordinary sense) to their culture. Now, since cultural traditions may differ, does it not follow that many African philosophers must be »relativists,« simply because their philosophical cogitations are »relative« to a cultural tradition? The danger here is that this innocuous or »benign« relativism may be mistaken to be equivalent to philosophical or »pernicious« relativism.

What I have called pernicious relativism can be described, in the words of Wiredu (2004: 12) as »the view that the soundness, or even intelligibility, of any set of categories of thought is relative to its time, place or context of origin.« This form of relativism, according to Wir-

edu *(ibid.)*, can be challenged on the basis of »the empirically verifiable biological unity of the human species,« as well as »the actual fact of cross-cultural communication among the peoples of the world, in spite of the well-known difficulties of inter-cultural translation.«

This form of relativism is pernicious, in my view, because, if it were true, it would make inter-cultural understanding impossible. Such understanding is crucial for world peace and cooperation among nations. Luckily, we do understand each other. Thus, for example, Africans understand Western conceptions, just as Westerners understand African conceptions. That is why both groups are able to discuss and argue, agree and disagree with each other.

What I have called benign relativism, which is simply due to the fact that some philosophical cogitations are relative to a cultural tradition, can be easily granted. This is because cultural traditions may actually differ in the way they conceive some items of interest. An example of this is the concept of a person. The various ways in which a human person is conceived in Akan and Yoruba thoughts are enough to illustrate this point.

The discussions of the concept of a person in African philosophy are normally related to the mind-body problem in Western philosophy, where there are monistic and dualistic theories. Monistic theories include materialism, idealism, identity theory, double-aspect theory and neutral monism. Dualistic theories include interactionism, occasionalism, parallelism, and epiphenomenalism.

The Akan word for a person is *onipa*. In his article »The Akan Concept of Mind,« Wiredu identifies the following as constituents for a person: *nipadua* (body), *okra* (a life-giving entity), *sunsum* (that which gives a person's personality its force), *mogya* (literally: blood), and *ntoro* (that which is responsible for the cast of his personality).[12] It is to be noted here that, according to Wiredu, *adwene* (thought) is not one of the constituents of the human person, since the mind is not construed as an entity.

The Yoruba word for a human person is *eniyan*. The person's constituents include *ara* (body), *emi* (soul), and *ori* (literally: head; also destiny). The body further consists of *okan* (heart), *eje* (blood), *iye* (rationality, mind), *opolo* (brain), *ifun* (intestines), *ikun* or *inu* (sto-

[12] K. Wiredu, ›The Akan Concept of Mind,‹ *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, No. 3, 1983, p. 119.

mach, inner part), *edo* (liver), *owo* (hand), and *ese* (foot or leg). All these human parts serve different psychical, physical, and spiritual functions (*cf.* Omolafe 1997).[13]

From these different analyses, it is clear that the human person is credited with some physical and mental, psychical or spiritual functions. In a way, the comparison of African conceptions of a person with Western philosophies of mind is inappropriate for the simple reason that whereas in the West there are identifiable philosophers of mind, African conceptions are part of what can be called »folk philosophy,« which is philosophy only in a generous sense.

My own ideal of a philosophy, if I may be permitted to say so, is the written work of a live, flesh-and-blood person that contains assertions, explanations and justifications (Bello 2004: 265–266). This is a person, in the words of Bertrand Russell, in whom are crystallized and concentrated thoughts and feelings which, in a vague and diffused form, are common to the community of which he is a part (Russell 1963: 629).[14] I am ready to concede that my own ideal of a philosophy may not be met in every case, but that is the nature of all ideals. Others may be satisfied with less.

In order to ameliorate even this benign relativism, the African philosopher must embrace comparative philosophizing. She must be ready to compare the findings in respect of her own cultural tradition with findings from other cultural traditions, African or other. In this comparison, no cultural tradition needs to be assumed to be advantaged, or, for that matter, disadvantaged. In other words, comparison should assume a level playing ground for all cultures.

The reason for this is that though it is not untenable to suggest that no major natural language or culture is intrinsically superior or inferior to any other, it can, however, not be denied that one language may be more or less developed in some specific respect, for example, science, philosophy or literature, than another language. But languages can be developed in any respect by adopting, adapting, and borrowing from other languages.

---

[13] J. A. Omolafe, »Yoruba Conception of a Person: Functional Implications,« Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1997, pp. 106–173.

[14] B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin Limited, 1963.

Comparison may yield the result that similar claims can be made in different languages. For example, Wiredu has shown that the opposite of *nokware* (truth) in Akan is *nkontompo* (lies), not falsehood, thus, in his view (though this has been contested by a fellow Akan-speaking philosopher), giving primacy to the moral as opposed to the cognitive. A similar claim can be made in Yoruba, where the opposite of *otito* or *ooto* (truth) is *iro* (lies). Therefore, similar implications may be drawn in both languages.

VI The Problem of Uniqueness

What about uniqueness? Is every cultural tradition not unique, complete with its epistemology, metaphysics, morality and even logic? There is a straightforward answer to this question. To the extent that different cultures have different languages, histories, usages, taboos and beliefs, every tradition is indeed unique. But that is not the end of the matter. This is because we may work with specific concepts and show that parallel or equivalent concepts may be generated in many cultures.

Before illustrating this point, I must express my worry that, as with relativism, a strong claim to uniqueness may pose problems for cross-cultural understanding. My hope is that no culture is so unique that it does not share concepts, conceptions, and ideals with other cultures.

Now, for example, the concept of God as ultimate reality (with capital »G«) in English has its equivalents or parallels in Yoruba, »Olodumare,« in Akan, »Onyankupon,« in Hausa, »Ubangidi,« in Arabic, »Allah,« etc. There may be differences within each conception or concept that are not admitted in the others. For example, the word »God« in English has a complement, »god« (with small letter »g«), has a feminine form, »goddess,« has a plural, »gods.« None of the other concepts is susceptible to those modifications or changes, though it may be argued with some plausibility that these modifications actually represent different concepts or conceptions.

As for morality, while there may be differences between various conceptions of what is moral, it is obvious that our common humanity will not allow a radical difference between such conceptions. To start with the differences, is it moral to kill children of multiple birth, for

example, twins, triplets or quadruplets? The correct answer, in my view, is that it is not, but in some cultures such children are killed, since they are ignorantly or superstitiously regarded as bad omens. (Note that in some cultures, like the Yoruba, children of multiple birth are idolized). This must be taken as an example of a situation where »metaphysical« or superstitious beliefs interfere with morality.

In general, however, there is hardly any culture where truthfulness, sincerity, honesty, kindness, generosity and bravery are not morally commended and their opposites, lying, insincerity, dishonesty, unkindness, miserliness and cowardice are not morally condemned. This is the case whether we adopt virtue ethics, deontologist, or teleological ethics. The possible exceptions may be in times of a prolonged war or famine, or where people are marooned in the desert or the sea. The survival instinct predominates in such extreme conditions.

As to logic, two of the so-called laws of thought, namely, the law of identity and the law of (non-) contradiction, appear to have universal application. Classification, and there is no culture where it is not done, is based on the law of identity. There is no culture, for example, where there is no distinction between foods and poisons; such distinctions are based on the law of identity.

In his »Logic in the Acholi Language,« Victor Ocaya shows how the Acholi language supports the law of (non-) contradiction.[15] The present writer has attempted to do a similar exercise using the Yoruba language (Bello 2002).[16] According to Ocaya, the Acholi language also disputes the »law« of excluded middle, though this is not new in itself or unique to the Acholi language, since the law has been disputed almost from the beginning of its formulation by Aristotle.

As to epistemology, it is difficult to see how uniqueness can be claimed on behalf of any culture. This is because as human beings, we all have the same senses to work with, though we may disagree as to how to evaluate the evidence available to us. That, I believe, is why philosophers have espoused different epistemological doctrines, such as empiricism and rationalism. The other sources of knowledge that

[15] V. Ocaya, »Logic in the Acholi Language,« in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 285–295.

[16] A. G. A. Bello, »On the Concepts of Rationality and Communalism in African Scholarship,« in O. Oladipo, *The Third Way in African Philosophy*, Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd., 2002, pp. 235–251.

are claimed: divination, dreams, vision, numerology, prophecy, etc. occur in different cultures, though in different forms.

VII Prospects

The prospects for African philosophy are exciting. It has definitely come of age. More and more work is being done on the elucidation of concepts, either in comparison with cognate concepts in Western philosophy, or with cognate concepts in other African cultures. African philosophers have moved away from the monolithic characterization of African experience. It is now generally accepted that there are notable differences among African cultures and traditions and therefore philosophies.

African philosophers and other scholars must rise to the occasion. There are departments or institutes of philosophy in many of our universities. More centers are, however, needed to carry out in-depth and collaborative research into all areas of philosophy at the national, regional, and continental levels. Research into African philosophy has been greatly facilitated by the availability of the works of eminent contemporary Africa philosophers and scholars in both English and French.

These centers may also attempt to solve the language problems discussed by translating the available literature in English and French, that is, English into French and vice versa. The centers may also compile bilingual or even trilingual dictionaries of philosophical terms in major African languages. Thus, we may have an Akan-English or English-Akan dictionary, or an Akan-English-French dictionary. The exercise may start by compiling the philosophical metalanguage of the major African languages, for example, Akan, Bantu, Hausa, Igbo, Kiswahili, Yoruba, and Zulu.

Such centers of learning may, furthermore, endeavor to produce monographs on specific philosophical problems, or on the philosophies of major African philosophers from antiquity to the present. The assemblage of such monographs may eventually pave the way for the writing of a credible and comprehensive history of African philosophy from the beginning to the present. It may also lead to the compilation of an encyclopedia of African philosophy. The task of compiling such an

encyclopedia will best be carried out by philosophers, or persons who have considerable training in philosophy.

–A. G. A. Bello, formerly at Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria

Ground, Being, and Evil: From *Conspiration* to Dialectics of Love

Abstract
This paper is an attempt to read some of the key concepts of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling in a cosmical and intercultural context. First, Schelling's relation to the Vedas is discussed. Here we introduce a triadic model, based on the Upanishadic ritual structure (microcosm-mesocosm-macrocosm) and cosmology. The structural logic of this model enables us to relate ancient Indian thought to the basic cosmological and ontological concepts (Unground, Ground, God) of Schelling. On this basis, we approach the problem of good and evil in Schelling from his reading of the *Bhagavadgita* and discuss some recent interpretations of this difficult question (Amartya Sen and Angelika Malinar), including a critical note on Martin Heidegger's dealings with the problem of evil. Finally, we introduce the term conspiracy/co-breathing from Schelling's *Freedom* essay. Here, this constellation is presented in a comparative reading with the *Nasadiya Sukta* hymn from the Vedas. The paper ends with the testimony for a dialectical process (of co-breathing and emerging love) at the very core of Schelling's philosophy.

Keywords
F. W. J. Schelling, Vedas, intercultural philosophy, cosmology, breath, mesocosm, conspiration.

Deep
in Time's crevasse
by
the alveolate ice
waits, a crystal of breath,
your irreversible
witness.
Paul Celan, *Etched away*

I Introduction

This essay is an attempt to read some of the key concepts of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling in an intercultural and comparative context, in particular as related to ancient Indian Vedic thought. Jason Wirth, for example, has already proposed a reading of Schelling's thought as compared to the early philosophy of Nishida Kitaro and proposed some interpretative keys toward greater affinity between Buddhist philosophy *(dependent origination)*, the *Bhagavadgita*, and Schelling's economy of nature.[1] In this essay, the principal task will be to relate some of the central topics from Schelling's philosophy and cosmology (Ground, evil, love) to the Vedic philosophy of the beginning, or, better, Vedic cosmology. This comparison with its analysis will thus delve into some salient elements of two – in my opinion – deeply related ontological events in the history of philosophical thought: early Vedic cosmological thought as presented in the Rigvedic cosmogonic hymn (*Rig Veda* 10.121) and Schelling's philosophy from *Philosophical Inquiries Into the Nature of Human Freedom* and *Ages of the World*. I will thus try to pursue a comparative study, based on some typological and structural similarities and analogies.

II A Technical Note

First a short technical note on Schelling and the Vedas is needed: there is no direct textual evidence in Schelling's writings that he carefully read or analyzed Vedic hymns, in particular the Creation hymn (»Nasadiya Sukta,« *Rig-Veda* 10.129) which I will use for my comparison. There are indeed numerous references to the *Vedas* (and, more specifically, to the *Upanishads*) in the first part of his *Philosophy of Mythology (Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie)* but without the exegetical analysis of any particular hymn. In his mythological analysis on Indian religions Schelling pays no attention to early Indian myths or the religion of Veda. According to Sedlar (1982: 130–131), besides many of Schelling's »errors on the subject of India,« due to his insufficient knowledge of the early religiosity of the Vedas, Schelling »declined to accept Vedas as ›Indian‹ in character at all; instead he as-

[1] J. M. Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*, New York: SUNY Press, 2003, chapter 4.

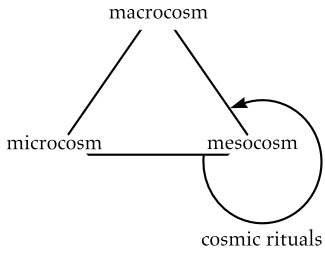
signed them to the period when the ancestors of the Indians were ›included in universal humanity.‹« More importantly, he felt that the Vedas did not contain the »explanation or the actual secret of the mythology itself.« Halbfass (1988: 78) also rightly observes that from Schelling's early positive views and general openness towards India, his later works turn towards a more critical and anti-Romantic approach.[2] As we will see, due to his personal contacts and friendship with the Schlegel brothers, August Wilhelm and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, the later Schelling was far more interested in the *Bhagavadgita* and other post-Brahmanical sources and was thus not able to correct his false views on Vedic literature and religiosity – which would have been possible due to emerging new translations and other newly available scholarly literature.

I will first present an original triadic cosmological model that will later enable me to compare Schelling with the Vedas. I will also add a note on the role of breathing in the Vedas in order to be able to understand the role of breath in my elaboration of Schelling. In his introduction to a translation of early *Upanishads*, Patrick Olivelle (1996) describes the triadic relation between the human body/person, the ritual, and the cosmic realities. The ritual sphere includes different ritual actions (such as formulas, prayers, songs), while the other two realms represent what we understand as microcosm and macrocosm. For the Vedic seers the central concern was to discover the connections between the three realms of the cosmos. They were said to be in possession of a secret knowledge of these cosmic relations (like *bandhu*) or, as later known by the Upanishadic philosophers, *upanishads*.[3] But it is Michael Witzel who for the first time, surprisingly late, introduced the name for the middle term of this triad, namely *mesocosm*, a name given to the ritual sphere in order to understand the relation between macro-

[2] See J. W. Sedlar, *India in the Mind of Germany: Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Their Times*, Washington: University Press of America, 1982; see also W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, New York: SUNY Press, 1988. Sedlar rightly observes that for Schelling ancient Indian texts (Vedas) were »very unsatisfactory reading« (1982: 44). See also chapter 8 in J. M. Wirth, *The Conspiracy of life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time*, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2003.

[3] See P. Olivelle, *Upanishads*, trans. and introd. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. liii): »The central concern of all vedic thinkers, including the authors of the Upanisads, is to discover the connections that bind elements of these three spheres to each other. The assumption then is that the universe constitutes a web of relations, that things that appear to stand alone and apart are, in fact, connected to other things.«

cosm and microcosm. *Mesocosm* is thus a *copula*, a third part of the triangle structure *the ritual – the cosmic realities – the human body/person* in the Vedic-Upanishadic context.[4] We will see the importance of this structure for Schelling's cosmological thinking. The Vedic triad I wish to propose is as follows:



The model stems from the reasoning and understanding of the connection *(bandhu* or *upanishad)* within the tripartite scheme, which could offer a novel approach to the new circular and processual structure of ontologico-ethical cohabitation and cooperation. In ancient cosmological thinking of the Vedic India, which was still closely related to the natural topography of the world of being, the place of this cosmic cooperation was in ritual (mesocosm) as a mediator between the world of nature and gods (macrocosm) and the world of humans (microcosm). The structural logic of this triadic thought could also be explained by

[4] M. Witzel, *Katha Aranyaka: Critical Edition With a Translation into German and an Introduction*, Harvard, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. See n. 129 on p. xl of the Introduction for the history of the usage of »mesocosm.« Witzel wrote how curious it was that »the term has not been used in this context before.« He refers to its first usage in a book on Newar religion authored by R. I. Levy and K. R. Rājopādhyāya titled *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City of Nepal*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Witzel argues for the reconstruction of the term »mesocosm« within the Vedic magical interpretation of the world, where we face different analogies or magical »identifications« between the macrocosmic and microcosmic realities or gods (for example sun-eye, wind-breath, earth-body, water-semen, fire-speech, etc.). This ancient way of thinking uses different »mystic« correlations and equivalents, some obvious (such as between sun and the eye or wind and breath) and some more hidden and esoteric (between moon and mind). But there always exists a nexus or a connection between two beings (in Sanskrit it is called *bandhu* and *upanishad*). See also M. Witzel, ›Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm: The Persistent Nature of »Hindu« Beliefs and Symbolic Forms,‹ *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1997, pp. 501–539.

what Josiah Royce offered with his lucid observations on C. S. Peirce's semiotics or his triadic scheme (interpreter – interpretant – interpretee). On an ethical level, the progress from dyadic to triadic relations means that

> [o]nce we enter into relations with others, others that are more than a pair, that is, we have entered relations that command our loyalty. Triadic relations are correlated with loyalty and peacefulness, whereas dyadic relations entail hostility and conflict.[5]

This is what happens on ethical and socio-political levels. But fundamentally, this scheme points to cosmic relations, and ultimately to ontology, where the line connecting microcosm with the macrocosm is radically weakened due to a necessity of another dialectics of the two (cosmic realities, sexes, persons), which incarnates in the circle with an arrow head and points towards the macrocosm as a copula and as a threshold: mesocosmic connections (or rituals) are now signs of a new dialectics, emerging out of a primordial constellation between the two primordial cosmic realities, two sexes, or two persons. Ontologically, this is what Schelling designated with the term *Conspiration* – a dialectical process in a sense of a co-breathing of Ground towards love.

We have to outline another important characteristic of Vedic thought: the role of breath and breathing. This will be important for understanding Schelling's concept of a primeval act of *conspiration* or two concepts – of *co-breathing* and *breath of love (der Hauch der Liebe)* in God. For the Vedic philosophers, or the tradition of Vedism/Brahmanism, there existed five originary elements of the world: earth, water, fire, air, and ether (*Aitareya Upanishad* III). We find references to wind and breath in the *Samhitas* (the oldest parts of Vedic collections), but the most ancient testimony and elaboration for the so-called »Wind-Breath-doctrine« (»Wind-Atem-Lehre«) can be found in the philosophy of nature of *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana* 3.2.2. and 4 (JUB). This teaching is an example of a typical Vedic macro-microcosmic analogy between the macrocosmic Wind *(vayu)* and microcosmic breath *(prana)*. From the cosmological point of view, the wind is the

[5] J. Royce, *War and Insurance: An Address*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1914. Part II of the address is called »The Neighbor: Love and Hate.« I owe this reading to Eduardo Mendieta's insightful interpretation of Royce's thought in E. Mendieta, *Mediterranean Lectures in Philosophy*, L. Škof and T. Grušovnik (eds.), Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2008, p. 34.

only »complete« deity since all other deities/gods/elements/phenomena (sun, moon, stars, fire, day, night, waters, etc.) return to him during the enigmatic stillness of the night, while he never stops blowing. But at the most abstract level, it is the difference between the perishable (day, night) and imperishable or »eternal« (Wind) that led to the so-called Wind-Breath doctrine. Analogously, then, breath in (wo)man is the most important of the five vital powers (breathing, thinking, speech, sight, hearing) since it is only breath that is present during deep sleep. Of course, in the moment of death, breath returns to its macrocosmic eternal origin, the Wind. Breathing as the most important vital power is thus equated with life itself, with the cosmic Wind, and later with person's self *(atman)*.[6]

III Good and Evil in Schelling's *Ages of the World*

Now it is time to approach Schelling's philosophy. Let me first outline Jason Wirth's interpretation of good and evil in his chapter on Schelling and India, entitled »Purushottama.« The chapter closes his important book *The Conspiracy of Life*. In his interpretation of good and evil Wirth focuses on the *Bhagavadgita*, and among the Indian sources he follows Sri Aurobindo Ghose's reading of this sacred text. I already mentioned the Vedic triad. Wirth thinks of another triad, as visible in the ancient caves of Shiva at the Elephanta Island, namely figures of *trimurti* or threefaced Shiva. The phrase »I am the one who was, who is, who will be« from *The Ages of the World* is revealed to Schelling as representing both Shiva and the potencies from his thought.[7] But more important for our understanding of this dichotomoy between the *trimurti* on the one and »our« Vedic triad on the other side, is what Schelling saw in the *Bhagavadgita*. In Schelling's understanding of Arjuna's famous battlefield dilemma (to fight or not to fight against his relatives) and in Wirth's reading of Schelling we have to forget about Kantian deontology or dilemmas of utilitarianism and, as it were, with Schelling and his understanding of the *Bhagavadgita*, »fare forward.«[8]

[6] For the Wind-Breath doctrine, see M. Boland, *Die Wind-Atem-Lehre in den älteren Upanisaden*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997.
[7] Wirth (2003: 220–221).
[8] As also understood by T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets* (cited after A. Sen, *The Argu-*

The question of evil is of course extremely difficult to deal with. Wirth asks himself whether this thinking does not »make all things good and therefore also all evil things good?« or even »imply evil in the very heart of the divine.«[9] The answer, of course, is no. But there are different strategies leading to this answer. Aurobindo argues, says Wirth, that it is only in Indian religion that the enigmatic World-Power is one Trinity, or triad. Schelling, it seems, already wishes to think like Nietzsche, and Aurobindo later did: going beyond good and evil. Now, for Wirth, good and evil are only understood from the *third*, a copula, or *Being (Wesen)*, without reconciliation or sublimation *(Aufhebung)*. In this reading Schelling argues:

> Good and evil are equally *wesentlich* [or essential], without evil in any way ceasing to be evil and the good ceasing to be good. There is no development without the force that holds back and inhabits development and therefore at the same time resists it.[10]

But we can go even further, both with Schelling and his commentator, and find in Tantric religious practices the ultimate proof for this theory of good and evil.[11] Being scandalous in many respects, Tantric practices now testify for this insistence of both evil and good in the person, or God. The abject side of a human life needs to be known, and somehow approached, we all know. Schelling knew Tantric practices and referred to them indirectly: »The Good can only express itself as what is not itself, as what is not Good.«[12]

But I would like to propose another reading of Schelling's *The Ages of the World*. Two lines of arguments will be used: firstly, I will refer to Amartya Sen and his criticism of some interpretations of the

---

mentative Indian, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005, p. 4, n. 4). Krishna's argument »And do not think of the fruit of action. / Fare forward.« is thus translated by Eliot into »Not fare well, / But fare forward, voyagers.«

[9] Wirth (2003: 226).

[10] *Cf.* (*Ibid.:* 228).

[11] Tantrism refers to a spectrum of soteriological and magical religious practices derived from Tantric texts. The body (microcosm) is homologized to the deity or cosmos (macrocosm) in order to attain supernormal powers *(siddhi)* which transgress »ordinary« or dual (subject-object, good-evil etc.) models of knowledge. See W. J. Johnson, »Tantra(s),« *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 320–322.

[12] (*Ibid.*: 229).

Bhagavadgita (also with the help of another more precise indological interpretation, namely of Angelika Malinar), and secondly, I will focus my attention on earlier testimonies – found in Vedic hymns and in early Greek sources *(cháos)*. Schelling is right only when his understading of *Bhagavadgita* is right, or plausible. The same holds for Wirth, of course. Secondly, Schelling's cosmology, or primordial ontology of good and evil, can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the triadic model I proposed (and not by the later model of *trimurti*).

In his *Argumentative Indian*, Amartya Sen pointed to different lines of arguments regarding Arjuna's doubts before going to the fight against his relatives. Arjuna doubts whether it is right to fight against his relatives. This happens on the eve of the great war between Kauravas and Pandavas, being the central event of the *Mahabharata*. Now, Sen refers to Bimal Matilal's book *Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata* (1989). According to Sen, and despite the compulsion to »fare forward,« namely beyond good and evil, as *Gita* suggests (and also in Schelling's sense), there is also another argument to »fare well,« or to retreat from the duty. According to Sen, »the univocal ›message of the Gita‹ requires supplementation by the broader argumentative wisdom of the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is only one small part.«[13] Angelika Malinar, in her extensive reading of *Bhagavadgita, Rajavidya: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht*, proposes another series of arguments both pro and contra Krishna's famous instruction – that Arjuna cannot retreat from his obligations and thus has to wage the war, no matter what the consequences are.[14] Malinar compares *Udyogaparvan* (the fifth book of the *Mahabharata*) with the *Bhagavadgita* (the sixth book of the *Mahabharata*). As there are many proofs for a »peaceful resolution« argumentation in the former (when Kauravas and Pandavas are preparing for the coming battle), this clearly means that the problem of good and evil is far from being resolved in this sense.

[13] Sen (2005: 6).

[14] A. Malinar, *Rajavidya: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996. See p. 94 for arguments for a peaceful resolution.

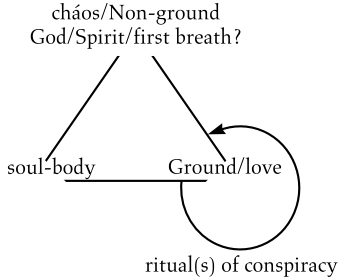
IV Schelling's Cosmology in *Freedom*

Now, approaching Schelling's cosmology from the angle of earlier testimonies in the *Vedas* will enable us to outline what I think is one of the key elements of the cosmologico-ontological interpretation of the good-evil problem. Thereupon we will be able to proceed towards the very core of the Schellingian *dialectics of love*.

For Schelling, in his *Freedom* essay, despite all seemingly paradoxical and extremely deep understandings of the nature of God or Ground, the highest of all beings/entities is ultimately the spirit: spirit is called the breath of love.[15] In the same text there is also an obscure reference to a »concept« called *Conspiration* (from Latin *conspīro*, literally: »to breathe together«). Why did Schelling choose this term for the explanation of his cosmology? For Schelling, »conspiration« is a sign of the primeval unity within the triadic circle of God-Ground-human being. From this circle, the dialectics of love (and evil) emerges. Schelling assumed through his deep intuitions that the human being, the Ground, and God are in a relationship, which can be represented by the signifiers, *spirit/love/breath*. This enigmatic, dynamic, and also synchronous inter-relationship of the human being, Ground, and God, initiates the possibility of thinking beyond binaries, such as transcendence and immanence, inside and outside, life and death, and love and evil. To this ontological *and* cognitive power Schelling gave the name *conspiration*. The triple structure – God/Ground/human being – is identified with the co-breathing of the original or ontological gesture of oneness of *conspiration*, which already means both exhaling the will of God into the Ground and into death/evil and an accompanying inhalation of this will of the primeval source or Nature on the part of the Ground/the human Being into life and love. Schelling is also aware that fire or warmth (radiance, flare, or *tapas* in the *Vedas*, as an element

[15] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries Into the Nature of Human Freedom*, J. Gutmann (trans.), (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 86. About God as/and Ground – clearly, for Schelling »there is nothing before or outside of God« and God also »must contain within himself the ground of his existence« (*ibid.*: 32). But also, there is another aspect, a »processual« one, as it were, when »God contains himself in an inner basis of his existence, which, to this extent, precedes him as to his existence, but similarly God is prior to the basis as this basis, as such, and could not be if God did not exist in actuality« (*ibid.*: 33).

which accompanies knowledge)[16] is the principle which *warms* human beings with the warmth/heat/fire of the beginning, while also removing his being of its original breath or inspiration – as an eternal oneness of co-breathing. Fire and air, thus, are the most important elements of this constellation. As Wirth states as well, this process, originating in the Ground and at the same moment from the Ground, is the conspiration of life, the movement of life from within, a life, being on the boundary and beyond the boundary of its own being. Here this process is represented in the next triad, as I would propose:



The triad, in my view, represents the cosmological movement within and from the Ground to the human. I understand this dialectical and synchronous movement in the mesocosmic sense as an ontological event – thus as »rituals of conspiration.« But why did Schelling choose breath and co-breathing? This brings us to the *Vedas*, more exactly, to the Creation hymn. I will now relate the obscure emergence of evil from the Un/Ground in Schelling and relate it to the Vedic hymn *Nasadiya Sukta* (RV 10.129) and its famous cosmology/philosophy of the *Beginning*. Firstly, I believe we can read Vedic philosophy through Schelling's concept of the abyss *(der Ungrund; cf.* Greek *cháos* in Hesiodus, and Sanskrit *tad ekam)*. According to Raimundo Panikkar, in this primeval Openness (*cháos* in Greek sense) both Evil and Good are embraced.[17] How is this to be thought? We have seen that for Schelling, as

[16] In early Indian philosophy, *tapas* as heat is the very essence of ascetic fervor (religious austerity) and thus forms the very core of our cognitive powers, gathered *(yoga)* in order to attain what Schelling would call *conspiration*.

[17] R. Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977, pp. 56–57: »Evil and good, the positive and the negative, both are embraced in the One, that encompasses everything […] Nothingness is not previous, but coextensive with Being […] The pro-

for the Vedic seers, it is fervor *(tapas)* as an ontologico-cognitive power that forms the b/Being out of the primeval unity of conspiration. But in its original meaning, »conspiration« is related to *breathing* and air, and not to fire. This is what is now interesting: for Schelling, as for the Vedic philosophy, Ground/the One *(tad ekam) breathed* in the beginning. From It the first Being emerges. Here are the lines of the Vedic hymn:

1. Then was not non-existent nor existent:
then was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.
What covered it?, and where? and what gave shelter?
Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?

2. Death was not then, nor was there naught immortal;
no sign was there, the day's and night's divider.
That One thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature:
apart from it was nothing whatsoever.

3. Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness
this All was indiscriminated chaos.
All that existed then was void and formless:
by the great power of Warmth was born that Unit.

4. Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning,
Desire, the primal seed and germ of Spirit.
Sages who searched with their heart's thought
Discovered the existent's kinship in the non-existent.[18]

The Vedic hymn on creation is among the most important philosophical hymns of the *Rksamhita*. The hymn is an account given by the Vedic poet and seer about the primordial stage or obscure »ground« *(abhu*, the Void, the Opening, *cháos)* of all existence. There was neither being *(sat)* nor non-being *(asat)*, in the beginning. There »existed« only »That One« *(tad ekam;* Greek *to hen)*, which, being beyond »life«

cess, according to the intuition of the Vedic *rsi*, is one of concentration, of condensation, of an emergence *by the power of love*« (my emphasis).

[18] *The Hymns of the Rgveda,* R. T. H. Griffith (trans.), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995, pp. 633–634.

and »death« proper, *breathed and lived from itself*. The third and fourth stanza offer an explanation of the actual beginning of the world from the first two stanzas: if »That One« is the obscure un/ground, being *alive* (breath) even before there was a life and a death, then the primeval Warmth or fervor *(tapas)* is the actual force of creation. Later, in the fourth stanza, Desire *(kama)* is the germ of Spirit and as such the first sign of life. »That One« is in a neuter case and as such precedes any »personal« identification, except for the breathing. The fourth stanza is crucial for our explanation: *kama*, »the Desire to live,« therefore comes before mind *(manas)*, even Spirit. We can say that for the Spirit to arise in its supreme divine nature, there must be longing of That One for life. But in this eternal longing, according to Schelling, evil reveals, or manifests in humans.

I would like to wind up my analyses with the question about the nature of *cháos*/*abhu*, or the primeval opening/the Void of Being and within Being of love and evil. A word on Martin Heidegger is needed here. We can position Heidegger's ontology in closest vicinity to the mythologico-cosmical thinking of the pre-Socratics, Schelling, and also the Vedas. In my opinion, Heidegger was the most careful reader of Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries Into the Nature of Human Freeedom*. For Heidegger, it is from the Ground/Chaos/*das Heilige* that Being grows. In this constellation, Being (in one of Its incarnations) is capable both of good and evil. But Being, for Heidegger, is *das Bosärtige* in itself, as we will see. On the other hand, Schelling thought consequently: if God is the Ground of everything, and if there is Evil in the world, then there is something other than God in the Ground – the Unground. But this duality in God is kept as One, *co-breathing* (the same we find in the Vedic hymn) with itself, in Love/Heat/*Tapas*. We can understand love to be longing, which is born for the ground out of the ground. The ground conceals within itself the possibility of the first corporeality, which is born of it. This is the primeval dialectics of love, and not only some mode of love, as proposed by Wirth. If we wish to resolve this cosmogonical question, we have to search at the beginning, not at the end (and proceed towards natality instead of mortality; which is true both for *Bhagavadgita* and Heidegger). Now, in us this primeval unity of co-breathing is already broken. Evil has to be revealed, and this is why God needs humans and humans need God. God and humans are *mesocosmically* connected/related through the Ground, and love. Schelling thinks: God has to become man for man to be able to return

to God. With Schelling we know that it is from Love in the Ground that love can be preserved and hoped for. Schelling gives us the sacred soteriology of love. This is the eternal dialectics of love, which never sublates evil (as Hegel proposed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[19] and which repeats itself in Heidegger). *Being* is now the place where sacred wounds of evil can be cured. Heidegger, by contrast, was already too far from Christianity to be able to resolve this difficult question and to think about love in this way. For him, ultimately, *Seyn* or Being stayed broken within itself. *Das bosärtige Seyn* from the *Feldweg-Gespräche (Country Path Conversations)*[20] was not able to cure Heidegger's ethical loss and this, in my opinion, is why he was never able to apologize publicly for his traumatic episode with the Nazis. Namely, for Heidegger, the ground is that place from which Being grows, which is capable of both good and evil alike. This Being itself is, in its essence, ambiguous; maliciousness remains one of its fundamental characteristic. It can manifest itself as devastation to which we bear witness throughout history and of which one of its expressions is the German Nazism adventure – as Heidegger responds to Marcuse in a famous letter to his question concerning concentration camps.[21] To return to *Country Path Conversations:* in this conversation, the *bosärtige*, or what is evil within *Seyn* or Being, remains part of a radically fractured and essentially divided and thus obscure Being.[22] But this Being is not what brings

[19] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, see section »Absolute Freedom and Terror,« p. 360 (§590).

[20] M. Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, B. W. Davis (trans.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, see pp. 138–139.

[21] Heidegger states: »To the serious legitimate charges that you express ›about a regime that murdered millions of Jews, that made terror into an everyday phenomenon and that turned everything that pertains to the ideas of spirit, freedom and truth into its bloody opposite,‹ I can merely add that if instead of ›Jews‹ you had written ›East Germans‹ [Germans of the eastern territories], than the same holds true for one of the allies, with the difference that everything that has occurred since 1945 has become public knowledge, while the bloody terror of the Nazis in point of fact had been kept a secret from the German people« (*The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, R. Wolin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993, p. 163).

[22] See Heidegger (2010: 138). Slovenian philosopher Tine Hribar comments on this: »This Being […] is malevolent. Nothing can be done. Evil is evil, of whatever form it is. From the view of this malevolent Being, there were no crimes neither evildoers« (*Ena je groza* [*One is Fury*], Ljubljana, Študentska založba, 2010, p. 397). This malevolent Being – beyond good, but not beyond evil – and not man, is thus »responsible« for centuries of wars, genocides, ultimately the Holocaust. Whatever we attempt to do,

happiness, or hope; it wishes to go beyond good, yet it has never deserted evil. This is why another dialectics is needed, one more attuned to what Schelling,[23] or in our times Luce Irigaray, another post-Schellingian thinker, proposes. Like Heidegger, Irigaray did not specify the triadic structure in her thought. But still, in a beautiful and pregnant passage from her *The Way of Love*, this dialectics is explained as follows:

> Macrocosm and microcosm in this way remain dialectically linked with the spiritual becoming of each one. Moreover, they are present in the relation with the other, leading to elevation toward the sky and return toward the earth, a rising of energy toward the summit of the body and a descent toward its base. The heart being the place where energy most continuously finds its impulse and its repose? The heart remaining what most constantly links sky and earth, sustaining itself on the lowest and the highest, on the real in what is most elemental and most sublime in it?[24]

V Conclusion

In this essay, I have approached the cosmico-ontological constellation of what could be designated by the secrecy of transition or disentangling connections of ontological event of creation and life, of its internal dynamics of »Nature« and »Spirit,« and ultimately evil and love as they appear in this process. For this purpose I have comparatively read Schelling with the *Vedas*. In this essay, I proposed to introduce into philosophical thought the Vedic or Upanishadic triadic structure (the cosmic triad) of microcosm ⟷ mesocosm ⟷ macrocosm and related it to its Schellingian version qua human being ⟷ ground/love/ ⟷ God/breath. As we have seen, Schelling posited the human being, the ground and God into the *triadic* relation, one that can be represented with the signifiers, *spirit/love/breath*. The name he gave to this enig-

---

intervene, morally condemn, there is an ultimate Being that is inaccessible to us and essentially stays *within* the regime of evil. See also A. J. Mitchell, ›Heidegger and Terrorism‹, *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 35, 2005, pp. 181–218.

[23] Schelling mentions »dialectics« in *Philosophical Inquiries Into the Nature of Human Freedom*, more precisely he relates it to the inner logic, as already explained above, of the groundless ground (see 1989: 88–89). He describes this process with the beautiful and enigmatic words »secret of love« *(ibid.)*.

[24] L. Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, London: Continuum, 2002, p. 148.

matic, dynamic and synchronous interrelation was *conspiration*. This experience, for Schelling, is part of the enigmatic and dynamic or *ritual* interrelationship between humans (our inner core), Ground and God, as exemplified also in the *Vedas*. In its own way, this cosmico-ontological logic is present also in thinkers, which were in the closest vicinity of Schelling – namely Heidegger and Irigaray. Finally, this essay argues, that cosmico-ontological conflicts can be resolved only with the introduction of the triadic relations into philosophy: this gesture, perhaps, will be able to secure us the path towards peace. It is from conspiracy as a process of co-breathing of transcendence and immanence, the inner and the outer worlds, life and death and, lastly, love and evil, that new dialectics of love can be imagined, nurtured, and hoped for.

–Lenart Škof, University of Primorska, Slovenia