

# SOCIAL THEORY & ASIAN DIALOGUES

CULTIVATING PLANETARY  
CONVERSATIONS

EDITED BY  
**Ananta Kumar Giri**



# Social Theory and Asian Dialogues

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Editor

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Cultivating Planetary Conversations

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*Editor*

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*For Raimundo Panikkar, Lu Xiabo, Upendra Baxi and Ganesh Dey*

## FOREWORD

In the last two decades there has been a surge of interest in the problem of de-colonizing the social sciences. This is not a new idea. As early as the 1930s, intellectuals from the colonized world such as C. L. R. James and Jomo Kenyatta were turning history and anthropology around as vehicles for a critique of colonial power. *The Black Jacobins* and *Facing Mount Kenya* are classics of world social science, still eminently worth reading. In the great period of independence struggles and political decolonization from the 1940s to the 1960s, intellectuals including Hussein Alatas, Al-e Ahmad, Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah offered strong critiques of intellectual and cultural dependence.

Yet the hegemony of the old imperial metropole persisted in new forms, as post-colonial states built university systems and installed social science in them. Wealthy US-based foundations (Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie) funded worldwide expansion of an Americanized version of social science, a choice given an extra edge by the Cold War. That was the context in which the social sciences, already existing in many forms around the world, became “globalized.” For instance the International Sociological Association, founded in 1949, rapidly became a vehicle for spreading European and North American models of social theory and social research. Much later it became a venue for post-colonial debate.

It was, understandably, anthropology—which had become the metropole’s intellectual vehicle for understanding the colonized world—that most immediately felt the heat of anti-colonial critique. By the 1970s a disciplinary debate about a post-colonial future was under way in anthropology and has continued. The other social sciences have gradually opened

their own debates, partly influenced by post-colonial theory in the humanities, partly by their own efforts. There are increasing challenges to the lopsided economy of knowledge so brilliantly analyzed by Paulin Hountondji in *Endogenous Knowledge*—the economy that constituted the global metropole as the center of authority where theory was produced and the global periphery acted as a vast data mine.

So we now have valuable post-colonial critiques of the mainstream disciplines in sociology, psychology, history, political science and criminology, and also of newer fields such as disability studies, gender studies, science and technology studies and urban studies. Though there are still struggles ahead before these critiques are widely known and accepted across the academic world, we can say that the key work of *criticizing* global-North dominance in social science has been done.

The job we now face is to do something about it. Given that mainstream social science as known in the past is flawed in a fundamental way, what should replace it? Part of the answer is suggested by the nature of that flaw. Since metropolitan intellectual dominance involved the exclusion of social theory from the colonized and post-colonial world, the remedy is to recover that theory. The colonized and post-colonial world is full of theory. It is not always in the same forms or genres as theoretical work in the global North, for good sociological reasons, but it is there. Colonized peoples tried to understand, conceptualize and debate what was happening to them under colonialism. The deep intellectual traditions around the world continue, giving a wealth of approaches to representing and reasoning about social relations. Post-colonial societies have the results of these histories and generate their own debates about current realities. To connect with these rich resources for social science is basically a matter of paying attention. That is what Farid Alatas has done in *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science*; it is what I tried to do in *Southern Theory*; it is what is done by the team of authors in Sujata Patel's *ISA Handbook of Diverse Sociological Traditions*.

“Paying attention” is not just a mental twitch; it is a social practice. When I have given lectures on worldwide social thought to students in the global North, the most common question they ask is “How do we find this material?” My answer is always “Go and look for it!” Initiative is needed. I also tell them that it will be hard work. If they look in the familiar scholarly places, such as the online Web of Science, they will basically find the global North's academic world reflected back at them. Much of what they need will be in languages they don't know, in genres they aren't

familiar with and in places a long way from their local library. This book, *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary Conversations*, is a place where students and scholars can find many of these resources. It brings to new audiences powerful traditions and complex experiences from the post-colonial world. The book is, in itself, a dramatic demonstration of the wealth of knowledge and ideas to be found in the planetary conversations that the subtitle invokes. It is an asset for the educational work that has to be done.

More than simply describing ideas and traditions in the post-colonial world, this book tries to create interactions with ideas and traditions in the Northern-centered knowledge economy. Sometimes this is a matter of presenting alternatives in an imagined dialogue. Sometimes it is a matter of showing how resources from one tradition might help solve acknowledged problems in another. And sometimes it is a matter of imagining the social science of the future, in which hierarchy is overcome and multiple perspectives can work together.

Before we reach that future, there are important problems to overcome. One concerns language. Knowledge is embedded and represented in many languages, in written and oral forms. A kind of translation can now be done by computers and the results are sometimes highly amusing. Good translation, concerned with depth of meaning as well as precision, is another matter. It is difficult and expensive, but it is tremendously valuable. To give one example, we only recently have a good English translation of the complete writings of Kartini, the Javanese author who is now recognized as an important figure in the global history of feminist thought. *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues* has illuminating discussions of concepts, their nuances and presuppositions in the context of translation.

Another problem to overcome is thinking about global difference through simplified cultural contrasts, for example between a “Western” and an “Eastern” view of the world, or a “European” and an “African” philosophy. These dichotomies grow from a style of thought that I call grand ethnography; it was very common in nineteenth-century European sociological texts, which contrasted “primitive” and “advanced” societies. Cultural essentialisms are very often invoked by conservative politicians in rhetoric about Asian values, Western civilization, African identity, Australian mateship and so on. Whenever we hear such rhetoric on the television, we can be fairly confident that a smoke-screen is being put up around some form of privilege. It is the job of social science to disperse the smoke and illuminate the situations people find themselves in.



That points to a third problem we face, that social science is itself affected by politics. As many chapters in this book show, social thought does not happen in a pure land isolated from social forces. It is impacted by revolutions, coups and wars; it is subject to pressures and inducements from power-holders, from New Order Indonesia to neo-liberal America and now of course from transnational corporate elites and their political allies. We can't avoid the effects of power and social struggle. We have to recognize them and engage with them in our theoretical work. In my view, de-colonizing social theory makes sense as a democratic project and only as a democratic project.

To learn from outside the dominant knowledge formation is not a light matter; it requires commitment and means serious work. It can be professionally unpopular, especially in a neo-liberal era where university managers are focused on climbing up the "league tables" and demand that their research workers publish only in the "top journals" (which, as anyone can see by inspecting the lists, are almost all in the global North). There are many academics who still believe there is only one legitimate form of theory and research and who still think the appalling Harvard is the ideal university. Those academics still hold a lot of power in the academic world.

So there will be struggles ahead. Yet I have no doubt that the kind of scholarship presented in *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues* is the true future of social science. This kind of work holds major possibilities for renewal and growth that will allow social science to function as the self-knowledge of world society. And a better collective knowledge of world society is something we desperately need.

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## PREFACE

Social theory at present, despite all talks of globalization, is still very much a Euro-American endeavor not only in its production but also in its presuppositions. This is as true of classical social theory as of contemporary critical turns. Classical social theory, as in the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, and critical social theory, as in the work of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, reflect a Eurocentric bias. The task here is to open these theories to varieties of transformational conversations from the positions and locations of where we belong. *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary Conversations* undertakes such a journey and exploration by critically exploring the presuppositions of contemporary social theory from a variety of starting points in Asia, for example Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Javanese reflections. It looks critically into the presuppositions in contemporary social theory about man, culture and society, and about important themes such as knowledge and power, and knowledge and liberation. It carries out dialogues along multiple trajectories between social theorists from the Euro-American world and the Asian universes, such as between Thirukkural and Confucian traditions, Gilles Deleuze and Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar and others. *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues* pleads for a festival of presuppositions and an interpenetration of perspectives in a spirit of mutual learning and transcendence of the self-certainties and partial truths of different traditions of thinking and being. It calls for critical and transformative border-crossing movements across traditions and fields of reflection and action.

Such movements call for courage and creativity in moving across borders and taking risks in the quest for truth and realization of beauty,

dignity and dialogues in self, culture and the world. Social theorizing is not just an isolated abstract intellectual activity; it is related to the pain and suffering of humanity as well as dreams, aspirations, *sadhana* and struggle to interrogate and transform such conditions with courage, care, love, labor, learning and *karuna*. Raimundo Panikkar, Lu Xiabo, Upendra Baxi and Ganesh Devy are courageous exemplars in such border-crossing acts and mediations of thinking and struggle. Panikkar was an exemplary border-crossing thinker who challenged us to move beyond settled foundations and practice dialogical dialogue (see Panikkar 2010). Panikkar also challenged us to practice diatopial hermeneutics where we put our feet not only in one culture but in two cultures of our moving lives and learning. This has inspired social thinkers such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos to explore alternative epistemologies beyond the hegemony of Northern Epistemology (Santos 2014). I myself have taken this forward in terms of exploring multi-topial hermeneutics where we explore and encounter new hermeneutics of self, society and the world by moving across multiple *topoi* and terrains of our world and not only between two cultures (Giri 2016). Lu Xiabo has been a courageous fighter for dignity, beauty and truth in China and the world and he was the recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize in 2010. Lu was imprisoned from 2008 for his continued work on free thinking and democracy in China. Lu challenges us to realize that his movement is not an uncritical imitation of Western thinking but is an effort to bring to the decadence of Western civilization the possibility of its spiritual regeneration by learning between traditions (see Lu 2008). Lu recently left his body and we deeply mourn his death and celebrate his immortal and eternal spirit.

Upendra Baxi has been an inspiring and courageous thinker and activist from India who has crossed many boundaries of thinking and closed walls and has continuously pursued adventures of critical and creative theorizing in thinking about law, society and the human condition. Baxi has been fighting for the equal discursive dignity of all cultures and civilizations, which is a must in being part of planetary conversations. In this context, what he writes in *Future of Human Rights* deserves our careful consideration:

The very notion of human rights (or the “rights of man”) is generally presented as the gift of the West to the rest. The non-Western traditions are usually considered bereft of notions of human rights. [...But] this disables

any intercultural, multi-civilizational discourse on the genealogy of human rights. The originary claims concerning the invention of “human rights” in the West lead to a continuing insistence on the oft-reiterated absence of human rights traditions in the “non-West.” From this it is but a short practical step for the “West” to impart, by coercive and “persuasive” means, to others the gift of human rights. This leads to a rank denial, even in a post-colonial and post-socialist age, of equal discursive dignity to other cultures and civilizations. It also imparts a loss of reflexivity, in terms of intercultural learning, for the Euro-American traditions of human rights. [...] The future of human rights is serviced only when theory and practice develop the narrative potential to pluralize the originary metanarratives of the past of human rights beyond the time and space of European Imagination, even in its critical postmodern incarnations. (Baxi 2002: 24–26)

Ganesh Devy is also a creative thinker and activist from India and, like Lu and Baxi, has been fighting for more tolerance and creative theorizing in India and the world. His book *After Amnesia* was important in theorizing beyond the dominant canons, which was a great inspiration in my humble journey two decades ago. Devy has given his life to documenting movements of cultural regeneration among the tribals of India and his love, courage, kindness and solidarity are inspiring well-springs of new theorizing beyond borders, giving birth to a new humanity. In dedicating our humble effort to these inspiring pioneers we express what we owe them not only as individuals but also collectively on behalf of our fragile but aspiring humanity.

Our book has been long in the making. It originates from a session on this theme that I co-organized with Professor Sang-Jin Han of Seoul National University, Seoul, at the World Congress of Sociology in Beijing in July 2004 and subsequent seed workshops on the topic held at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in December 2009; Humboldt University, Berlin, 2010; Aalborg University, Denmark, 2010; and an international conference on this theme at Acharya Institute of Management, Bangalore, 2011. I am grateful to all friends who have nurtured these dialogues and have joined with their contributions in this journey of ours. I am grateful to Raewyn Connell, Professor Emerita of Sociology, University of Sydney, and the author of *Southern Theory*, a noted work in this field, for her kind and challenging Foreword. I am in debt to Piet Strydom, a deep thinker of our times and my dear and respected friend and collaborator over the years, for his characteristically insightful

Afterword. I am grateful to our friends at Palgrave Macmillan, especially Alisa Pulver, Connie Li and Sarah Crowley Vigneau, for their kind consideration of this work and for their encouragement and support.

Navaratri, Festival of Nine Nights  
2 April 2017

Ananta Kumar Giri

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# CONTENTS

<b>Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: An Introduction and an Invitation</b>	1
Ananta Kumar Giri	
<b>Part I Theorizing as Dancing Transformations: Social Theory, Asian Dialogues and Beyond</b>	7
<b>Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary Conversations</b>	9
Ananta Kumar Giri	
<b>Theorizing Alternative Futures of Asia: Activating Enabling Traditions</b>	35
Marcus Bussey	
<b>Critical Theory After the Rise of the Global South</b>	49
Boike Rehbein	
<b>Beyond Ethnocentrism: Towards a Global Social Theory</b>	69
Hans-Herbert Kögler and Lubomír Dunaj	

<b>Part II Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Creative Engagement and Transformative Learning</b>	107
<b>Selfhood and Morality: East Asian and Western Dimensions</b> Geir Sigurðsson	109
<b>Iridescent Self in the Womb of the Wholly M(O)ther: A <i>Vajrayani</i> Meditation</b> Neela Bhattacharya Saxena	127
<b>The Taijitu, Western Dialectics and Brain Hemisphere Function: A Dialogue Facilitated by the Scholarship of Complex Integration</b> Gary P. Hampson	145
<b>A Middle Way of Emptying Dualism in Social Theory</b> Chou Ping	173
<b>Indo-Chinese Knowledge and Wisdom: A Cross-Cultural Dialogue Between Confucius and Tiruvalluvar</b> S. Panneerselvam	213
<b>Dancing East and West: Charting Intercultural Possibilities in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze and Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar</b> Marcus Bussey	233
<b>The Micropolitics and Metaphysics of Mobility and Nomadism: A Comparative Study of Rahul Sankrityayan's <i>Ghumakkara Śāstra</i> and Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari's "Nomadology"</b> Subir Rana	249

<b>From Ecological Ontology to Social Ecology: John Dewey, Radhakamal Mukerjee, and Interscalar Ethics</b>	271
Betsy Taylor and Herbert G. Reid	
<b>Part III Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Asia, Europe and the Call of Planetary Conversions</b>	287
<b>Nature, Culture and the Debate with Modernity: Critical Social Theory in Japan</b>	289
John Clammer	
<b>The Self-Description of Society in East Asia: If It Is Not Society, What Else Could It Be?</b>	317
Saburo Akahori	
<b>An Intercultural Perspective on Chinese Aesthetics</b>	329
Karl-Heinz Pohl	
<b>Making Sociology Universal: Revisiting the Contributions of Syed Hussein Alatas</b>	343
Habibul Haque Khondker	
<b>Political Intrusion in Social Science: The Elimination of Leftist Critical Thinking in Indonesia</b>	361
Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata	
<b>Social Welfare and Harmony in East Asia and the Nordic Region</b>	381
Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt	
<b>Critical Theory and Communicative Action: The Challenge of Legitimation in a World at Risk</b>	399
Elaine Desmond	



<b>The Gift of the Grain: Beyond Biopolitics?</b> Abhijeet Paul	423
<b>Democracy and Meritocracy: A New Intercivilizational Challenge</b> Vittorio Cotesta	437
<b>Afterword: Communication and the Consilience of Eastern and Western Ideas</b> Piet Strydom	457
<b>Index</b>	465

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*Indo-Judaic Studies*; “Color of God: Resplendent Clay of Hinduism as the Glow of the Ineffable” in *Living Our Religions*; and “Prodigy, Poet and Freedom Fighter: Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India—1879–1949” in *Marginalized: Indian Poetry in English*. She writes a blog called “Stand Under the Mother Principle.” <http://neelabsaxena.blogspot.com/> and is working on her next book project, *A Fakir Tarakhpea Sings of Kali: A Reading of Bengal’s Enigmatic Poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam*.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Theorizing Alternative Futures of Asia: Activating Enabling Traditions	
Fig. 1 From tunnel vision to futures for all	45
The Taijitu, Western Dialectics and Brain Hemisphere Function: A Dialogue Facilitated by the Scholarship of Complex Integration	
Fig. 1 The classic Daoist Taijitu	147
The Self-Description of Society in East Asia: If It Is Not Society, What Else Could It Be?	
Fig. 1 Introducing the concept of society (conventional view)	318
Fig. 2 <i>Shakai</i> as a residual area	319
Fig. 3 Selection process of <i>shakai</i>	321
Fig. 4 Literal meaning of <i>shakai</i>	323
Fig. 5 Society as self-description	325



# Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: An Introduction and an Invitation

*Ananta Kumar Giri*

Social theory is a rooted and transversal reflection on the human condition, but unfortunately most social theory in the modern world has been primarily Euro-American. Despite globalization and greater opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and co-learning, contemporary social theories contain the same blindness, ignorance and arrogance that characterized modernist social theory. This book embraces the theoretical and practical realities and future possibilities in a spirit of love, labour, learning, creativity, critique and transformations.

The book begins with Part I, “Theorizing as Dancing Transformations: Social Theory, Asian Dialogues and Beyond”. Giri’s introductory chapter, “Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary Conversations”, outlines some of the issues the book deals with. It looks at different approaches to dialogue between contemporary social theories and pathways of thinking in Asian traditions such as Indian and Chinese. It pleads for a new global comparative engagement involving multi-sited fieldwork, a multi-*topical* hermeneutics and rooted planetary conversations. The theorizing involves foot works and foot meditations across multiple terrains and *topoi* of thinking—a multi-*topical* hermeneutics of understanding,

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explanation and realization. This is followed by Marcus Bussey's chapter on theorizing alternative futures for Asia and why we need to activate our multiple traditions. Bussey's reflections point to the need for creative memory work in our theoretical engagement, an approach which is pursued by many subsequent contributions to the book as they engage with creative sources of alternative theorizing across traditions of thinking and reflection. In his chapter, Boike Rehbein describes the rise of new critical social theory in the wake of the rise of the Global South. Rehbein points to a need to theorize what he calls a configurational dialectics, which has a wider global significance today. It is enriching to bring together Giri's cultivation of multi-*topial* hermeneutics and Rehbein's configurational dialectics to suggest new pathways of cross-fertilization. In Hans-Herbert Kögler and Lubomír Dunaj's chapter, "Transcending Ethnocentrism: Towards a Global Social Theory", the authors engage with Western philosophical and social theoretical traditions, such as Gadamer's hermeneutics, and with Chinese philosophy and Confucian perspectives. This concluding chapter to Part I presents a first step towards a systematic non-ethnocentric social theory which unites a culturally sensitive account of self-reflexivity with a new emphasis on the subject's integration into social and cultural wholes.

Part II, "Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Creative Engagement and Transformative Learning", begins with Geir Sigurðsson's chapter "Ethics and Ego: East-West Perceptions of Morality" in which the author tells us how ethics in the Western tradition follow an egological trajectory, while those in East Asian cultures, especially in the Chinese, follow a non-egological one. This nuanced distinction is crucial to our comparative perspective as much of the time our notion of moral subjectivity in social theory and social engagement is based upon an uncritical individualist premise. The chapter by Neela Bhattacharya Saxena, "An Iridescent Self in the Womb of the Mother: A *Vajrayani* Meditation", also points us to the limit of ego as a foundation of life and theorizing, and draws upon Buddhism and *Tantra*. Gary Hampson's chapter shows us a new pathway in comparative theoretical engagement by bringing together Chinese *yin* and *yang* theorizing and Bhaskar's critical realism and theory of complex integration. In "Emptying Dualism in Social Theory", Chou Ping submits an application of Buddhist middle-way theory from Nagarjuna to offer a critique of "dualism, substantialism and nihilism in social theory". Philosopher S. Panneerselvam's chapter presents comparative Indo-Chinese reflections on our exploration by comparing Confucius with Thiruvalluvar from the

Tamil tradition in India. Marcus Bussey explores intercultural possibilities in “Dancing East and West: Charting Intercultural Possibilities in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze and Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar”. In the following chapter, “The Micropolitics and Metaphysics of Mobility and Nomadism: A Comparative Study of Rahul Sankrityayan’s *Ghumakkār Śāstra* and Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari’s *Nomadology*”, Subir Rana tries to grapple with the worlds of fluidity, flux and flow in general, and mobility and nomadism in particular. Rana views nomadism as acts of displacement, or deterritorialization and reterritorialization, against a backdrop of sedentarism, fixity and stasis as conceptualized in science, philosophy, religion, literature and governance. In this context, Rana tries to contrast, compare and bring out any differences or similarities between Eastern and Western traditions of nomadism by engaging with two seminal texts on the subject, Rahul Sankrityayan’s *Ghumakkār Śāstra* and Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari’s *Nomadology*. This is followed by an interesting comparative engagement with Radhakamal Mukherjee and John Dewey. In “From Ecological Ontology to Social Ecology: John Dewey, Radhakamal Mukherjee, and Interscalar Ethics”, Herbert Reid and Betsy Taylor discuss the works of Dewey and Mukherjee and the implications for rethinking and transforming social ecology, ethics and social theorizing.

In Part III, entitled “Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Asia, Europe and the Calling of Planetary Conversations”, we present further substantive explorations of these issues starting with John Clammer’s “Nature, Culture and the Debate with Modernity: Japanese Critical Theory”. Clammer helps us understand the way critical theory takes a particular turn in Japan by not being confined to either the Marxist or the Frankfurt School traditions but by drawing upon Japanese sources, such as Buddhism. This conceptualizes nature and culture differently compared with Western tradition by going beyond anthropocentrism. In “The Self-Description of Society in East Asia”, Saburo Akahori tells us how self-description in East Asian societies, such as Japan, differs from Western self-description. Here society incorporates nature and there is an inherent sacrality to this act of self-description and perception. Akahori tells us how the word for society in Japanese and other East Asian societies, such as Chinese and Vietnamese, is *shakai*, which contains “the nature or the integration by ‘the sacred’ in itself”. Saburo’s chapter is followed by Karl-Heinz Pohl’s “An Intercultural Perspective on Chinese Aesthetics”, in which the author urges us to understand the similarities of and differences between Chinese and Western aesthetics. He discusses how in Chinese painting an “inner reality” (*zhen*)

beyond “form” (*xing*) is depicted, which is supposed to have “suggestive, allusive, and finally poetic quality (with titles of paintings often being lines of poetry), leading to the well-known feature of Chinese painting that the empty space (*xu*) is more important, i.e., suggestively telling, than the painted substance (*shi*)”.

These chapters on comparative theoretical engagement are followed by further in-depth and cross-societal and inter-civilizational explorations. In “Making Sociology Universal: Examining the Contributions of Syed Hussein Alatas”, Habibul Haque Khondker discusses the contribution of Syed Hussein Alatas, a sociologist from Malaysia, and his seminal work *The Myth of the Lazy Native* and how it influenced critics such as Edward Said. This is followed by Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata’s chapter “Political Intrusion in Social Science: The Elimination of Leftist Critical Thinking in Indonesia” which tells us how political change in Indonesia and the replacement of the Sukarno regime by Suharto’s dictatorship led to the demise of critical theoretical thinking in Indonesia. Hadiwinata explains how critical democratic theorizing is slowly coming back to Indonesia after democratic transformations over the last twenty years. This is followed by Johannes D. Schmidt’s chapter “Social Welfare and Harmony in East Asia and the Nordic Region”, which is written from the perspective of a Scandinavian model of welfare and well-being to reflect upon East Asian practices of social provisioning. Schmidt also explores implications for realizing social harmony in both societies.

The final three chapters of the volume offer us rich dialogical insights that combine theoretical approaches and fieldwork. Elaine Desmond visits the theme of critical theory and the discourse of a risk society. She begins with a discussion of the seminal works of Ulrich Beck and Piet Strydom in this field using her work in India as a vantage point from which to broaden perspectives. She also discusses the work of transnational social movements and global dialogues, such as the Climate Change Summit in Paris in 2015, as a way of deepening and broadening the legitimation process in our inter-linked global society. In “Gift of the Brian: Beyond Biopolitics?”, Abhijeet Paul discusses the issue of seed sovereignty and challenges us to go beyond current discourses on biopolitics. Paul discusses the work in India of Navdanya and its leader Vandanan Shiva, as they struggle to recover the variety of seeds lost through commodification by seed companies such as Monsanto. Navdanya is trying to create a culture of gifting in seed exchange and Paul argues how to understand this means going beyond the dominant discourse of biopolitics. As he writes, “seed-sovereignty can be better

understood through the practices of seed cultures themselves which lie outside the scope of biopolitics as such". The concluding chapter, "Democracy and Meritocracy: A New Inter-Civilizational Challenge", by Vittoria Cotesta explores human rights and democracy in Western traditions and finds a resonance in Confucian traditions in China. Cotesta argues that Confucianism challenges us to go beyond the uncritical valorization of individualism in Western human rights discourse and to integrate the significance of community. She discusses how Confucianism and the neo-Confucian perspective want to build democracy by giving primacy to the virtue of individuals while challenging us to realize the limits of modern Western democracy's preoccupation with the external or the outside. Democracy, since it is based on individualism, projects aggressively towards the outside. In both ancient times and the contemporary Communist period, China has been trying to build a meritocratic society. Cotesta suggests that there needs to be creative learning between democracy and meritocracy, as well as experimentation with both, to create the new institutions needed for our global humanity.

In the Afterword, "Communication and Consilience of Eastern and Western Ideas", Piet Strydom tells us how this volume "does not simply announce, draw attention to and explore the topic of the relation between social theory and Far and Near Eastern thought in a timely manner, but at the same time more importantly also makes a meaningful contribution to the problem of diminishing and bridging the gap between the Western and Eastern sides as well as gaps among a variety of distinct traditions of thought within both these two rather rough-and-ready categories". Strydom tells us how this volume leads to communication and a consilience of ideas between East and West; how it needs to include both agreement and disagreement and a search for those common frames of understanding that are crucial for a connected humanity and the much-needed planetary conversations that will lead to a meaningful theorizing for healthy, creative and evolutionary living.



PART I

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Theorizing as Dancing  
Transformations: Social Theory, Asian  
Dialogues and Beyond



# Social Theory and Asian Dialogues: Cultivating Planetary Conversations

*Ananta Kumar Giri*

## INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

Asia is not a predefined fixity; it is a journey of co-realizations and pluralizations. Similarly, social theory is not unitary; it is a plural process of reflection on the dynamics of self, culture and society. But much of social theory as it rules in the academic corridors of Europe, Asia and the world is Eurocentric. But now there is an epochal need for realizing social theory as part of a planetary conversation. While some may look at it in terms of the rise of Asia and the decline of Euro-America, the challenge is not to replace one ethnocentrism and exclusivism with another but to make social theory a field of mutual learning and a dialogue of presuppositions. Dominant social theories from the West have their own presuppositions, for example, the presupposition about the centrality of power in Max Weber and Michel Foucault, and justification and application in varieties of critical theory, such as that of Jürgen Habermas. But these presuppositions are not universally shared as reigning presuppositions of self, culture and society. For example, in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, a text that expresses the spiritual traditions of India, it is written, “*Sradhbha Maya Ayam Purusha*

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*Jo Jat Sraddha Sa Ebasa*: This *Purusha* [the human person] is characterized by *sraddha*—capacity for love and reverence—; one is who one loves or reveres.” These lines also offer some presuppositions about self, culture and society and urge us to realize that it is not only power but also *sraddha* (reverence or love) that characterize being human in the fields of self, culture and society. For a fuller realization of social theory there needs to be a dialogue between presuppositions of power and *sraddha* as important elements in the dynamic of self, culture and society, rather than a one-sided assertion and exclusion.

### RETHINKING THEORY

Theory is not only a noun but also a multiplex verb and it is not only activist but also meditative. The practical turns in social theory—through terms such as linguistic, feminist and ecological—do help us realize that theory is both noun and verb. But they do not sufficiently cultivate the meditative side of such turns as their notion of practice is mostly activist and is not related to processes of meditative co-realizations (see Giri 2012). In Asian countries the majority still travel on foot and we can cultivate the notion of theory as walking meditation. Many in Asian societies, such as our indigenous peoples, have a propensity to dance, so we can also cultivate theory as dancing meditation. Theory is not just an unconditional system; it is a conditional journey. We are invited to reflect upon and realize theories as walking and dancing meditations starting from our own location and dialogue with insights from our home and world.

### SOCIAL THEORY AND ASIAN DIALOGUES: CULTIVATING PLANETARY CONVERSATIONS

We need to open classical and contemporary social theories which are predominantly Euro-American to multiple dialogues such as Asian dialogues, which then become part of planetary conversations (see Connell 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). In planetary conversations we take part in a dialogue without privileging our a priori ethnocentric point of view and open ourselves, our locational insights and presuppositions, to mutual interpenetration, sharing, questioning and transformation. While much East-West dialogue is still imprisoned within the existing logic of a priori fixation and an unconscious colonial constitution of our globe, planetary

conversations seek to transform these to conditions of mutual dialogue and an interpenetration of presuppositions.

Following this brief prelude, we will begin this dialogue with the concept of the self. In Asian countries there is a notion of self as a field that is not static but dynamic (Clammer 2008). It is a field of flows, of many rivers and streams. Our self is like the rice field. It is a field where *chi*, dynamic energy, flows. From both the Confucian and Kashmiri Saivism traditions we get a view of dynamic energy and consciousness. Recent social theory from scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu also emphasize the significance of field in understanding society. *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* also talks about the yoga of the field and the knower of the field. While Bourdieu's conception of field is primarily socio-political, in *Gita* the concepts of field and knower of the field are both socio-psychological and socio-spiritual. It is enriching to have mutually transforming dialogues between these conceptions of the field and thus deepen our conceptions and realizations of self, culture and society as fields (see Das 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Self is neither a peak nor a cliff.<sup>2</sup> In individualism self is looked upon as a cliff. But in Asian traditions and cultures there is a relational view of self which is, at the same time, ecological and transcendental. Self is the meeting point of the horizontal and the vertical.

Individualism is at the root of modern social theory and society. But a dialogue with Asian traditions helps us realize the transindividual dimension of individual and the transsocial dimension of society. In his discussion of the work of Thai social thinker and Buddhist social theorist Sulak Sivaraksha John Clammer (2008) tells us that Sivaraksha helps us in understanding that individuals have a transindividual dimension. In the words of Clammer: "In much the same way that Louis Dumont has argued that Western individualism has its roots in Christianity and that the consequences of this individualism are profound for the arrangement of society and assumptions about how relationships within it work, so Sulak is arguing for a 'trans-individualism' that arises from Buddhist roots, and which has profound implications for the ordering of society" (2008: 190).

In modern Western society and modern sociology both individuals and society are conceptualized and realized in isolation from Nature and transcendence, they are imprisoned in isolated black boxes that Dallmayr (1998) calls "Enlightenment black boxes." Dialogue with Asian traditions enables social theory to conceptualize and realize individuals and societies as at the same time part of Nature and transcendence. There are also streams in Western traditions that look at individuals and societies as in a

relationship with Nature and Transcendence but modern social theory has not nurtured itself with such streams of vision and practice. For example, in Goethe we find ways of going beyond the modern Enlightenment black box and realize self and society as part of Nature and transcendence, but modern sociology has followed Newton rather than Goethe (Uberoi 1984). But border-crossing dialogue can contribute, for example, dialogue between modern social theory and Asian traditions of practice and reflection can contribute to creative memory work and the retrieval of traditions of a non-dualistic relationship between individual/society and Nature and transcendence.

### SOCIAL THEORY AND ASIAN DIALOGUES: BEYOND THE TWO PREDICAMENTS OF SOCIO-CENTRISM AND SELF-CENTRISM

Daya Krishna, the pre-eminent Indian philosopher, tells us: “Society need not be considered the last term of human thought. The centrality may be restored to the human individual who, then, may be viewed as the nucleus of the social cell from whom all creativity emanates or originates. In this perspective, then, society would be conceived as a facilitating mechanism so that the individual may pursue his trans-social ends. Instead of art, or religion, friendship or love being seen as the lubricating oil for the functioning of the social machine, the machine itself would be seen as facilitating the emergence and pursuit of various values” (Krishna 1993: 11). In many cultures, including Indian, the social does not have the same ultimate status as it has in modern Western society and socio-religious thought. *The social in Indian thought does not have a primal significance and it is considered an intermediate field and an ideal society is one which facilitates our realization of potential as Atman, soul.* Daya Krishna calls it an *Atman*-centric approach and contrasts this with the socio-centric approach not only in the modern West but also in religious traditions such as Christianity. But one also finds a socio-centric approach in certain aspects of Confucianism, which accords primary significance to social relations and not, to the same extent, to processes of self-realization. Both approaches have their own limitations, what Daya Krishna calls the “two predicaments”—the *Atman*-centric predicament and the socio-centric predicament. The socio-centric predicament does not give enough space to self-realization, while “*Atman* centricity leads a people’s attention away from an active concern with society and its betterment” (ibid.: 23). To overcome the one-sidedness in these approaches Daya Krishna

links them to a new realization of freedom, while Sri Aurobindo (1962) links them to evolutionary transformations, transforming the very constitution of the individual and the social beyond their present-day dualistic constitutions.<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of this aspiration to overcome *Atman*-centeredness or self-centrality and socio-centeredness we can look at Asian traditions in new ways. Take, for example, the case of Buddhism and Confucianism, two major Asian traditions of discourse and practice. In its reflections on humanity Confucianism focuses on webs of relationships while Buddhism emphasizes the need to transcend the limits of social relationships, particularly anthropocentrism. But both traditions have gone through many inner debates and contestations between them, giving rise to movements such as Neo-Confucianism, which urges us to pay simultaneous attention to webs of relationships and a nurturance of self-realization in our quest for human realization (Dallmayr 2004: 152–171). According to Tu Wei-ming, Neo-Confucianism involves a “continuous deepening of one’s subjectivity and an uninterrupted broadening of one’s sensitivity” (quoted in *ibid.*). It also involves a “dynamic interplay between contextualization and decontextualization. Hence, the self as a ‘center of relationships’ finds itself simultaneously in the grip of an ongoing decentering or displacement [...] Just as self-cultivation requires self-overcoming, so cultivation of family and other relationships demands a transgression of parochial attachments such as ‘nepotism, racism and chauvinism’ and ultimately a transgression of narrow ‘anthropocentrism’ in the direction of the ‘mutuality of Heaven and man and the unity of all things’” (*ibid.*: 164).

Thus in neo-Confucianism there is a simultaneous attention to social relationships and a deepening of subjectivity, which helps us go beyond the one-sided emphasis on either society or self. We find a similar emphasis on emergent sociality and self-realizations in neo-Vedantins such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo who urge us to cultivate creative relationships between self and society with an additional cultivation of the divine along with and in between. We can also find the resonance of similar concerns in Gandhi and Tagore. So it is helpful to cultivate further dialogue between Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Vedanta. This, in turn, calls for dialogue between Confucianism and Vedanta and not only between Confucianism and Buddhism. The dialogue between Confucianism and Vedanta has not yet been undertaken and for the making of a new world order it is helpful for us to undertake this. For example, Confucianism is

concerned with harmony but in the conventional manifestation of harmony in traditional China this can be hierarchical and anthropocentric. In the conventional articulation of harmony in Confucianism there may not be enough realization of the challenge of establishing harmony between humans and non-humans, society and Nature. Vedanta, with its concern for the unity of all life, can help Confucianism to realize this as Confucianism's emphasis on proper social relationships and its vision and practice of *Tian-Xia*—All Under Heaven—can make help us make Vedanta more social. For example, the Vedantic concern with unity of life should be practiced in the realm of social relationships, which in the traditional social order are dominated by caste and gender exclusion. Both Confucian harmony and Vedantic unity face the challenge of transforming hierarchy, monological domination and the authoritarian construction of unity.

Harmony and unity help us to come together with and beyond the traps of domination and exclusion. This is suggested in the vision and practice of *lokasamgraha* from the Indic tradition, which has a Vedantic root in a very open and cosmopolitan sense. *Lokasamgraha* is spoken about in *Bhagavad Gita* as a challenge to us to realize the gathering of people as not only a public gathering but also a soulful gathering. In modern social and political thought and practice, we are used to the vision and practice of a public sphere and we can realize and transform this as a field and practice of *lokasamgraha*, simultaneously public and soulful. *Lokasamgraha* is a field of mutual care and responsibility and it is a challenge at all levels of human gathering—from dyadic associations, institutions and movements, to the triadic and beyond, such as family, community, nation and the global order. In our present phase of globalization and the challenges of global responsibility via such trials as climate change and terrorism, we need to talk about global *lokasamgraha*. This global *lokasamgraha* becomes a field of a new cosmopolitan realization in which to be cosmopolitan is not only to be a citizen of the world but also to be a member of the human family (Giri 2006). It is not only epistemological and political, as is the dominant discourse of cosmopolitanism, but it is also ontological and spiritual. Global *lokasamgraha* is also a way of realizing the Chinese vision and aspiration of All Under Heaven—*Tian-Xia*.<sup>4</sup> Coming back to Daya Krishna's two predicaments in terms of thinking of society, we need to realize that our mode of being in the world as participant in *lokasamgraha* and *Tian-Xia* requires both socio-centeredness and *Atman*-centered attention. It also requires

decentering in a spirit of *Anatta* or no-self as it comes from paths of Buddhist vision and practice. We can realize both self and society as not only social and *Atman* but also as no-self, which is not fixed and closed within itself. This can then help us realize webs of interdependence as suggested in another Buddhist vision and practice of *patipadasamucchaya*—dependent co-origination. For realizing self and society as fields and circles of *lokasamgraha* and *Tian-Xia* we need to realize them as simultaneously fields and circles of sociality, self-engagement and nurturance of no-self, helping us to realize them as webs of what Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn calls both interbeing and transbeing. In terms of sociological theory we can relate *lokasamgraha*, *Tian-Xia* and *patipadasamucchaya* to a creative systems thinking and chaos theory in which systems are not just reproductions of mechanical systems of a priori ordering but are also unfolding configurations of communication and co-ordination (Giri 2002).

### CONFUCIANISM AND THE CALLING OF PLANETARY CONVERSATIONS

Confucianism is a major influence in Asia, especially in China, Japan, Korea and many parts of South East Asia and has been used in various ways in histories and contemporary societies. Many a time it has been used to justify authoritarianism. But there is a new democratic consciousness brewing in South East Asia and China which calls for rethinking Confucianism beyond the prism of authoritarian justification (Han 1998). Another issue is that of pluralism. Confucianism has existed in societies that have not valued pluralism as a way of life. Most of the societies in which Confucianism is present are monological, characterized by the dominance of one ethnic group, for example that of the Han Chinese in China, Japanese in Japan and Koreans in Korea. In this context we have to link Confucianism to pluralism. This in turn calls for dialogues across borders and making Confucianism part of varieties of planetary conversations.<sup>5</sup>

Such planetary conversations can begin at home, for example, with the now, already noted, pluralities in China via some creative interpreters. For example, Tu Wei-ming talks about the five teachings of China—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. In Chinese histories and intellectual streams there have been visible and invisible dialogues between these teachings. During a visit to the Muslim town of Nagu in Yunnan province (in July 2009), I asked an interpreter what had



been the mutual influence between Islam and Confucianism. She said while Confucianism has made Islam much more worldly, Islam has given Confucianism a new understanding of the meaning of Heaven. Though scholars such as Tu Wei-ming have carried out a dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity and not with Islam there is now an urgent need for further dialogue in this field. Especially since the current Chinese Government is promoting Confucian Institutes all over the world. Such Institutes should give rise to mutually transforming dialogue between China, India, the Middle East and the rest of the world, rather than be centers to promote official Chinese nationalism.

### DYNAMIC HARMONY AND DYNAMIC EMPTINESS

Harmony is a key concern in Confucianism and many other Asian traditions. But usually this is taken as static and has been used to justify authoritarianism. We need to rethink harmony and build upon traditions such as dynamic harmony.<sup>6</sup> In his study of Japanese religion, where Buddhism has interacted with Shintoism and Confucianism, sociologist of religion Robert Bellah tells us that Japanese religion is concerned with a harmony—among persons and with nature—that is not static but dynamic. For Bellah (1985: 62–63),

What has been said about the unity of man, nature and divinity should not be interpreted as a static identity. Rather it is a harmony in tension. The gratitude one owes to superordinate benevolent entities is not an easy obligation but may involve the instant sacrifice of one's deepest interests or even of one's life. Union with the ground of being is not attained in a state of coma but very often as the result of some sudden shock in daily living. Something unexpected, some seeming disharmony, is more apt to reveal the Truth than any formal orderly teaching. Japanese art and aesthetic attitude toward nature are also concerned with the unexpected

Compassion here is not imprisoned in the logic status quo rather it is animated by a spirit to unsettle existing harmony and invite the unexpected in a spirit of dynamic harmony. The realization of dynamic harmony is also an animated aspiration in the paths of Kashmir Saivism. As Harish Deheja (2006: 422; emphasis added) writes:

Kashmir Saivism postulates that *Parama Shiva* contains the entire universe, pulsating within it, just as the seed of the mighty *nyagrodha* potentially

contains the entire tree. At the immanent level, the transcendent *prakashavi-marshamaya* splits into *prakasha* and *vimarsha*, Shiva and Shakti, *aham* and *idam*, I and this, subject and object, held together in pulsating, *dynamic harmony* [...] At every level there is differentiation into subject and object, *aham* and *idam*, but the differentiation is based in, and unified by the non-duality of consciousness.

Kashmir Saivism seeks to achieve dynamic harmony by realizing differentiation without dualism. The realization of non-duality is also an animated goal in the paths of Buddha and Kashmiri Saivism possibly has contributed the work of dynamic consciousness to this pursuit of non-duality. There is an occasion for mutual learning on the part of Buddhism and Kashmiri Saivism as all concerned can learn from experiments in these traditions.<sup>7</sup>

Dynamic harmony can be accompanied by dynamic emptiness. Emptiness is an important concern in Buddhism but this emptiness is not static but dynamic. Emptiness is not only there in the beginning, we are perpetually invited to realize emptiness in all our modes of thinking and being. As the Dalai Lama tells us: “Things and events are ‘empty’ in that they do not possess any immutable essence or absolute ‘being’” (The Dalai Lama 2005: 49).

Both dynamic harmony and dynamic emptiness are important contributions from Asian traditions to revitalize modern social theory and dialogue with modern Western social theory can help to make both these concepts more transformationally dynamic, as in Asian traditions there is a tendency to conserve the status quo in the name of either harmony or emptiness.

## MEDITATIVE VERBS OF PLURALIZATIONS

Dialogues help us realize pluralities in our singularly conceptualized and constructed identities. There are pluralities in Europe as there are in Asia, and each of the countries, cultures and civilizations in both these spheres. We need to build our understanding upon these pluralities. But in order to understand we need to have a dynamic view of pluralism by contributing to the process of creating a more plural understanding and society. But our activities of pluralization need to be not only activist but also meditative in thinking about and realizing our identities and in reflecting upon themes in social theories.

SOCIAL THEORY AND ASIAN DIALOGUES:  
FROM JUDGMENTAL COMPARISON TO GENEROUS  
COMPARISON OF COMPARISONS

When we think about any two units together it is easy to be engaged in a judgmental comparison. This is much more so when thinking about valorized units, such as modernity and tradition in Asia and Europe, India and the West, East and West and so on. A challenge before us is to acknowledge our propensity for judgmental comparison and through labor and a love of learning move towards generous and more capacious understanding and realization. While we talk about Europe and India it is easy to state that Europe is material and India is spiritual but there are vibrant streams of spirituality in Europe and materialism in India. So a more worthwhile comparison is between materialism in Europe and India and between spiritualism in Europe and India.

Another aspect of this comparative engagement is that instead of comparing systems and units in a totalizing way we engage in partial comparisons. This builds upon a plural understanding of each of these systems, exploring partial connections between and across and being engaged in partial rather than wholesale comparisons of systems. We have to move beyond systemic comparisons and attend to the complexities that lie in between and beyond. As Beteille (1983) tells us, the wholesale comparison of civilizations such as India as *Homo Hierarchicus* and in the West as *Homo Equalis*—as happens in the comparative sociology of Louis Dumont—is not only unhelpful but perpetuates Western ethnocentrism (see also Giri 1998). Similarly, Touraine’s perspective argues that the distinction between modernity and tradition in terms of individualism and hierarchy—à la Louis Dumont—is not helpful in understanding either of them. As he writes (Touraine 2000: 86; emphasis added):

The distinction between social and non-social definitions of the individual seems to me to be even more important than that between the holistic societies of old and modern individualistic societies. *Both types of society are Janus-faced, because there is no fundamental difference between an individual who is trapped in the roles imposed on him by the community and an individual whose actions are determined by his social situation and the highly effective blandishments of the market. At the same time, there is a similarity between the renouncer and the modern individual who appeals to the universal rights of man and in particular the dissident or resister who risks his life by challenging a social order which, in his view, is an affront to human dignity.*

Thus we need a comparative global and even planetary engagement that is interested in exploring pathways of partial connections rather than a wholesale comparison of civilizations and systems: “Partial connections require images other than those taxonomies or configurations that compel one to look for overarching principles or for some core or central features” (Strathern 1991: xviii). Based on her work in New Guinea, Marilyn Strathern writes: “attempts to produce a typology of societies from the application of constant principles may also evaporate. For instance, principles of reciprocity as they affect the organization of transactions and the role of leaders as Great Men or Big Men may well appear to discriminate effectively between a handful of cases; but the discrimination cannot be necessarily sustained at that level—an expanded version reveals that principles radically distinguishing whole clusters of societies are also replicated within them” (Strathern 1994: xviii; also see Strathern 2002).<sup>8</sup>

### SOCIAL THEORY AND ASIAN DIALOGUES: GENEALOGY, GENEROSITY AND THE CALLING OF A POST-COLONIAL COSMOPOLIS

Many Asian societies were subjected to colonial domination and the struggle for liberation and freedom constitutes an important part of the historical experience of Asian societies. Social theories in Asia build upon such anti- and post-colonial struggles for freedom (Mohanty 1994). Post-colonialism has been an important intellectual movement in our recent past. Post-colonial critics and social theorists however very rarely take part in continued liberation struggles in their own societies. Most write only in English and teach in elite academic institutions in the Euro-American world. They very rarely write in the mother language of the people in a country such as India. Their theoretical discourse is very much part of global metropolitan discourse. These critics very rarely enter into dialogue with traditions of thinking and reflection in their cultures and societies. Though they operate in the Euro-American world they have a monolithic view of Europe and Asia. Moreover they very rarely pluralize the colonial experience itself. Post-colonial critics from Asia mostly work within the framework of British colonialism in India and there is very little work on comparisons between Japanese colonialism in Korea and China and British colonialism in India. Post-colonial criticism itself needs to be part of planetary conversations doing comparative historical work on varieties of colonialism and struggles for liberation under these conditions.

In this context it is enriching to think about Partha Chatterjee's genealogical investigation of modern normative political theory, what he calls "Lineages of Political Society" (2009). Chatterjee uses lineage as a method in Foucault's genealogical sense but, like Foucault, presents a unitary view of modern knowledge, in this case modern normative political theory, without exploring the plurality of streams of contestation within this constructed single field of normative theory. For example, in this normative space nobody justified colonialism as an exception to the norm of normative political theory. Chatterjee seems to have a singular notion of norm, such as representative democracy, but this single theme itself hides a plurality of streams, not to speak of a well-known tension between equality, liberty and fraternity. In modern Europe the Scandinavian experiments with people's enlightenment and democratic transformations were not just a variation of the Anglo-Saxon experience but gave more attention to education, participatory democracy and people's enlightenment (Das 2007). Chatterjee uses lineage as an approach supposedly to go beyond linearity, but this is deployed more to tell multiple stories from "most of the world" than multiple streams of normative struggle, social mobilization and contestation from the Euro-American world. The language of lineage is used to construct a linear and one-dimensional object of critique, in this case the "mythical space of" normative political theory, but the object of critique also has a lineage of plurality as the historical experience of "most of the world" from which such a critique is being launched. We probably need a new genealogical method that is equally generous to the lineages of plurality in all parts of the world and not only in colonized and post-colonial societies.

For Chatterjee, the challenge before "postcolonial political theory" is "to break the abstract homogeneity of the mythical time-space of Western normative theory [...] The second is the even greater challenge to redefine the normative standards of modern politics in the light of the considerable accumulation of new practices [from colonial and post-colonial societies as well as from the Euro-American world]" (2009: 23). But this project does not explicitly realize the need for cross-cultural dialogue. Furthermore, this does not include the challenge of understanding and learning the languages of normative thinking in traditions such as India. For example it is said that King Janaka, father of Sita, nurtured his people as a mother. Learning much more about such languages of governance would bring new enrichment and imagination to post-colonial political and social theorizing. But how is that possible when our post-colonial advocates mostly interact with knowledge emerging from the Euro-American world and

rarely go inside other traditions of thinking and realization? The possible significance of nurturing one's subjects as a mother is explored in the following poem:

King Janaka nurtured  
 His People as a mother  
 And Could not our Janakas—  
 Our fathers in politics, family and religion  
 Nurture us as mothers?  
 Could not God and His arrogant servants  
 Be a Manifestation of Creative Motherhood  
 And our state and society  
 A Flow of Motherhood. (a poem originally written by the author in Oriya)

#### THEORIZING AS WALKING AND DANCING MEDITATIONS: THE CALLING OF CULTIVATING NEW WORDS AND WORLDS

Cultivating social theory and Asian dialogue calls for us to be engaged in varieties of creative learning and memory work, going deeper into our multiple traditions and border-crossing conversations. It calls for us to learn across borders and create new fields of mutual learning and responsibility. We learn by walking and dancing together, not just sitting in libraries and looking at old manuscripts as documents of truth, or doing field work in an alienated way. Theorizing is not only an abstract, deductive and discursive activity; it is a multi-dimensional practice involving dancing and walking together, cultivating dialogue across borders and taking part in planetary conversations. Such practices of theorizing call for new languages of learning, inquiry and communities of seeking. We are invited to go beyond the available discourses and practices of theory in Asia, Europe, West, East, India and the world and contribute to new journeys of self, social and planetary realizations.

#### SOCIAL THEORY AND ASIAN DIALOGUES: WITH AND BEYOND EPISTEMOLOGIES FROM THE SOUTH

Theorizing as the cultivation of new words and worlds also challenges us to go beyond existing dominant epistemologies in what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls Northern Epistemologies. In his *Epistemologies From the*

*South: Justice*, Santos (2014) challenges us to realize the limits of dominant Eurocentric epistemologies. Social theory and Asian dialogues as planetary conversations thus share the critical epistemological task that Santos cultivates in his works. It resonates with Santos' exploration of alternative epistemologies from the South and with his interlinked visions and practices of the ecology of knowledge and intercultural translation as pathways in the present towards a different future of knowledge, human liberation and world transformations.

But Santos' engagement with epistemology does not explore the limits of the epistemic itself and in social theory and Asian dialogues we need to pursue this and go beyond the primacy of the epistemic in modernity and neglect of the ontological. The limits of the epistemological are not overcome by proliferating the epistemologies from North to South but by transforming them, which includes a simultaneously epistemic and ontological engagement I call the ontological epistemology of participation (Giri 2006, 2017). Here our exploration of alternative epistemology as part of alternative theorizing needs to be part of an ontological epistemology of participation which involves not only epistemic and ontological engagement but also cross-cultural and planetary realizations of these themes, modalities of being and understanding. While Santos challenges us to realize a new epistemology, a new politics and a new relationship between the two, we need to meet the challenge of a new ontology and spirituality and strive to cultivate a new relationship, not only between epistemology and politics but also between epistemology and ontology, epistemology and aesthetics,<sup>9</sup> epistemology and spirituality, and epistemology and deeper cross-cultural and philosophical dialogues, all part of what can be called planetary conversations and planetary realizations (Giri 2013). Planetary realizations challenge us to realize that we are children of Mother Earth and as children we have an inborn debt and responsibility to learn about each other and our cultures.

Planetary realizations challenge us to rethink the language and discourse of the South, which is a valorized category not only in Santos but also in Rawenn Connell's (2011) influential *Southern Theory*. Neither North nor South are mere geographical locations in Santos, nor are they fixed, impermeable boundaries. They are multi-dimensional complex interpenetrating realities in our world, historically and contemporaneously, and they raise important issues of fact and norms of life. To fully appreciate the limits of the valorized discourse of the Global South, which

has implications for our engagement with social theory and Asian dialogues, we need to understand the limits and transformation of an earlier mode of area studies. After the Second World War, the area studies approach continued the geopolitical division of the world. It became subservient to the geopolitical production of the world and an uncritical and oftentimes slavish bearer of Northern epistemologies and North Atlantic theoretical imperialism and universalism, while considering areas as *tabula rasa* (Dirks 2015; Trouillot 2003). But now we need to transform area studies into the study of creative global studies, in which areas are not empty plates for applying and testing so-called epistemologies and theories coming from the North, but are zones of thinking, being and becoming. Each of our areas, whether in North or South, Asia or Europe, are loci of thinking as well as regions of connection and disjunction with the world. These are pregnant cosmopolitan zones of thinking as they embody communication across boundaries in life worlds and worlds of thought (Bose and Manjapra 2010). Areas as locations of life and thinking are zones of inheritance, communication, emergence and divergence; they bore the brunt of colonization as well as the processes of resistance and transformation. Social theory and Asian dialogues carry this transformational conception of area, regional and global studies as part of planetary conversations and are not imprisoned within a valorized discourse of Global South, which still persists a bit in Santos and Connell.

### MULTI-TOPIAL HERMENEUTICS

Planetary conversations move across borders and go beyond closures of both Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism. This calls for a new hermeneutics of theorizing and moving across borders. It embodies not only what Santos, building upon Raimudo Panikkar, calls *diatopical* hermeneutics in which we stand in two cultures, but also what can be called *multi-topial* hermeneutics, in which we stand in multiple cultures, philosophies and theoretical traditions of humanity and theorize with our bare feet, seeking and praying with open palms.<sup>10</sup> Here putting our feet, mind, head and heart in multiple cultures and traditions, footwork and foot meditation in landscapes of self, culture and society is part of a trigonometry of creativity which involves footwork, open historical engagement and a philosophical quest (Giri 2012).<sup>11</sup> Hermeneutics does not only mean reading texts and cultures as texts but also foot-walking with texts and cultures as foot walks and foot works resonating with what Heidegger calls a hermeneutics of



facticity (Mehta 2004).<sup>12</sup> It also means walking and meditating with cultures and texts as foot-working meditation while, as Thoreau (1947) would suggest, we walk like camels and ruminate while walking. This involves a creative engagement with travel, truth and translation, where truth is not just discursive as part of an existing system of power but is also a challenge for us to realize Truth as a landscape of meaning, which calls us for to transcend our limited and determined views of self, society and social theory.<sup>13</sup> This transforms hermeneutics itself into a manifold act of democratic and spiritual transformation that involves related processes of root works, route walks, root meditations, route meditations, memory work and cultural work.<sup>14</sup>

Hermeneutics, as it involves travel, truth and translation, and as it is part of what Santos calls intercultural translation, is linked to creative foot work as part of a cross-cultural memory work. This is also a truth work and meditation where one walks and meditates with Truth. This truth work is an aspect of *satyagraha* and it has both an epistemic and ontological dimension. Translation as *satyagraha* is thus part of an alternative epistemology and ontology, which is a creative dynamic in the work of ontological epistemology of participation in our lives. Alternative social theorizing not only involves what Santos calls epistemological direct action but also *satyagraha*. *Sataygraha* as a *sadhana* and struggle for Truth is not confined to the political domain but touches our modes of knowing, understanding and theorizing.<sup>15</sup>

Multi-*topial* hermeneutics is accompanied by the cultivation of a new logic which can be called multi-valued logic and living. It goes beyond the binary logic of either or and cultivates a new logic of both and. This helps us in creative translation, communication and theorizing across borders. Philosopher J.N. Mohanty (2000) tells us how multi-valued logic can build upon creative dialogues across philosophical traditions such as the Jaina tradition of *Anekantavada*, which emphasizes many paths of Truth realization, the Gandhian tradition of non-violence and the Husserlian phenomenology of overlapping contents.<sup>16</sup> In the pregnant thought of Mohanty, which he crafts like a jewel:

The ethic of non-injury applied to philosophical thinking requires that one does not reject outright the other point of view without first recognizing the element of truth in it; it is based on the belief that every point of view is partly true, partly false, and partly undecidable. A simple two-valued logic requiring that a proposition must either be true or false is thereby rejected, and what the Jaina philosopher proposes is a multi-valued logic. To this

multi-valued logic, I add the Husserlian idea of overlapping contents. The different perspectives on a thing are not mutually exclusive, but share some contents with each other. The different “worlds” have shared contents, contrary to the total relativism. *If you represent them by circles, they are intersecting circles, not incommensurable, [and it is this model of] intersecting circles which can get us out of relativism on the one hand and absolutism on the other.* (Mohanty 2000: 24; emphasis added)

## CULTIVATING PLANETARY CONVERSATIONS

Theorizing is a multi-dimensional process of being and becoming as it involves multi-valued logic and transpositional dancing with reality and possibility. It is a movement with and beyond not only towards what Appadurai (2013) calls an ethics of possibility but also towards an aesthetics and spirituality of possibility as the unfoldment of potential. It involves meditative verbs of co-realization across borders going beyond the limits of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism and entrenched dualisms of various kinds, such as between the epistemic and ontological, the political and spiritual. Social theory and Asian dialogues strive to cultivate rooted planetary conversations across borders going beyond the violence of the existing exclusion of Eurocentric theorizing as well as ethnocentric certitude and absolutism.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1. Self is a process and it is possible to make a dialogue between semiotic and Buddhist traditions. As Bakker (2010) writes, “In the combined Peirce-Mead model of the ‘semiotic self’, the Neo-Darwinian ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead are synthesized to establish a kind of Global adaptation of the Buddhist notion of the flow of the self. The self is not a static thing. The self is not like an apple or a billiard ball. The self is a process. The process consists of one’s ‘mind’ continually sifting through experiences and making plans. At any one stage of our lives we are ‘me-I-thou’. Then, only a few seconds later, we are again a new ‘me-I-thou’.”
2. The following extract from a poem, written by the author originally in Odia, about peak and peak experience may be of interest:

I am a peak  
I am not only a peak

I am also a plane  
 A plane seeking embrace  
 Experience of the peak  
 Is not confined only to the peak  
 It is there in all planes of life  
 Circles of relationships.

3. For Sri Aurobindo: “In the relations between the individual and the group, this constant tendency of Nature appears as the strife between two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the State, on the other the distinctive freedom, perfection and development of individual man. The State idea, the small or the vast living machine, and the human idea, the more and more distinct and luminous Person, the increasing God, stand in perpetual opposition. The size of the State makes no difference to the essence of the struggle and need make none to its characteristic circumstances. It was the family, the tribe or the city, the *polis*; it became the clan, the caste and the class, the *kula*, the *gens*. It is now the nation. Tomorrow or day after it may be all mankind. But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between self-liberating Person and the engrossing collectivity” (1962: 272–273).
4. Fred Dallmayr brings together Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and the idea of *lokasamgraha* from *Bhagavad Gita* in a piece that deserves our careful consideration: “As an antidote to the spread of ‘worldlessness’ in our time, Hannah Arendt recommended the restoration of a ‘public realm’ in which people would actively participate and be mutually connected. Digging beneath this public forum, Heidegger unearthed the deeper source of connectedness in the experience of ‘care’ (*Sorge*, *cura*) in its different dimensions. From the angle of human ‘being-in-the world,’ care penetrates into all dimensions of this correlation—in the sense that existence is called upon to care about ‘world’ and its constituent features (fellow-beings, nature, cosmos). Differently put: There cannot be, for Heidegger, an isolated ‘self-care’ (*cura sui*) without care for the world—that includes care for world maintenance (without which *Dasein* cannot exist). In this latter concern, his work does not stand alone. In the Indian tradition, especially the *Bhagavad Gita*, we find an emphasis on a basic ethical and ontological obligation: the caring attention to ‘world maintenance’ or *loka-samgraha*. According to the *Gita*, such attention needs to be cultivated, nurtured and practiced in order for human life to be sustainable and meaningful” (Dallmayr 2016: 51–52).
5. In this context the work of Dallmayr is enriching. He tells us about the affinity among these different streams of thought and practice—pragmatism, Confucianism, Gandhi’s experiment with truth and paths of *Swaraj*.

First Dallmayr (2007) writes the following about Gandhi and pragmatists like William James and John Dewey: “In speaking of interconnectedness and the ‘play of mutual forces’ Gandhi displays an affinity with the spirit of Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatism. But the parallel can be carried further. Like William James and Dewey, and perhaps even more emphatically, Gandhi was an ethical and spiritual pragmatist, in the great tradition of Indian spirituality. [...] Gandhi deliberately chose the path of action or praxis (*karma yoga*) demanding continuous ethical engagement in the affairs of the world. Again like Dewey he did not assume that human beings are free and equal by nature (or in an original ‘state of nature’); rather freedom and equality for him were achievements requiring steady practice—a practice involving not only change of outward conditions but primarily self-transformation” (2007: 10).

Then Dallmayr writes the following about Confucius, Dewey and Gandhi: “Despite his deep modesty, Confucius himself can be seen and was seen, as an ‘exemplar’ or ‘exemplary person’ (*chun-tzu*) who taught the ‘way’ not through abstract doctrines but through the testimony of daily living. At this point, the affinity with the Deweyan philosophy comes clearly into view—a fact perhaps not surprising given Dewey’s extended visit to China after World War I. As in the case of Gandhian *swaraj*, leading a responsible life in society involves self-restraint and the abandonment of domineering impulses. In Confucius’ own words, humanness or to be properly human (*jen*) means to ‘conquer oneself (*ke-chi*) and to return to propriety (*fu-li*)’” (ibid.: 15). These reflections of Dallmayr’s can help us to probe further the affinities between the paths of Confucius, Gandhi and pragmatists like Dewey as part of planetary conversations.

6. Dynamic harmony has a dimension of harmonization: it is dynamic harmonization.
7. It must be noted here that differentiation and integration are perennial human concerns and have been key themes in social and political theory over the last 300–400 years. In our recent theoretical discourses, Niklas Luhman urges us to realize the need for distinction, for example, between system and environment; Derrida urges us to understand the work of difference, which is not just mere difference but has the capacity to resist temporal and spatial incorporation; Parsons and Habermas, in their own different ways, looked at the need for integration and communication. All these attempts can be enriched by the Kashmiri Saivism quest to realize differentiation without dualism, as can the Buddhist quest for non-duality (see Loy 1988). It can also help us to rethink identity and difference in contemporary social and political theory.
8. In their recent work following reflections on Tocqueville’s method, Parth Chatterjee and Ira Katznelson help us to understand how Tocqueville also followed a creative historical comparative method of partial comparisons:

“Tocqueville followed a method that strove for a theoretically grounded comparative analysis of political formations, but one in which each formation also had to be situated within deep and complex structures of their own historical evolution. He did not think of historically constituted political formations as mere cases of comparative theoretical types, or of variants within a type, as though one formation might just as easily be exchanged for another of the same type. Consequently his study of democratic institutions in the United States, as well as his comparative reflections on political institutions in France, is marked by detailed empirical observations that were drawn, as we would say today, from long and arduous fieldwork using a variety of textual and oral methods, followed by theoretical work seeking to draw sustainable formulations belonging to a general comparative order while respecting the historical specificities of each institutional form [...].

The great attraction of a Tocqueville-inspired method for us is that it offers the possibility of partial and contingent normative theories based on the configurative study of specific political institutions in two or more countries without resorting to totalizing notions of ‘stages of civilization’ or ‘levels of development.’ We believe it is possible to engage in comparisons of political formations that do not assume any particular form of democratic modernity, either existent or hypothetical, as the *telos* of development. Even if Tocqueville believed that democracy was being driven by an irresistible historical force, his analytical method makes it clear that its particular forms were the result of specific historical configurations of causes” (Chatterjee and Katznelson 2012: 2, 4).

9. This means realizing, as John Clammer (2017) argues, that aesthetics is a mode of knowing. I also argue how aesthetics helps us realize both threads of connections and dynamics of disjunctions across different domains of knowledge and life (Giri 2006). Gregory Bateson also helps us understand the link between epistemology and aesthetics as he writes: “Our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. [...] more serious than all those minor insanities that characterize older cosmologies which agreed upon fundamental unity” (1973: 19). For Bateson, “Mere purpose rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life.” Building upon Bateson and Plato’s idea of *paideia* William Ophuls argues how we now need to restore beauty not only to epistemology but in the “pantheon of human values” (Ophuls 2011: 101).
10. Building upon the seminal work of Raimundo Panikkar, Santos thus tells us:

The aim of *diatopical* hermeneutics is to maximize the awareness of the reciprocal incompleteness of cultures by engaging in a dialogue, as it were, with one foot in one culture and the other in another—hence its *diatopical* character. *Diatopical* hermeneutics is an exercise

in reciprocity among cultures that consists in transforming the premises of argumentation in a given culture into intelligible and credible arguments in another. (2014: 92)

11. Open historical engagement goes beyond a disciplinary view of history and resonates with Guha's challenge to explore history at the limits of world history (Guha 2002).
12. It is helpful to explore further the link between my proposed path of foot working and foot-meditating hermeneutics with Heidegger's pointer to a hermeneutics of facticity. Following J.L. Mehta's creative interpretation of Heidegger is helpful: "Even in his earliest lectures, long before *Being and Time*, Heidegger conceived the main task of phenomenology [as understanding] how our factual life as actually experienced hides a depth which its spontaneous self-explicating activity must bring to light [...] [For Heidegger, for this] a way must be found to eliminate the baggage of traditional ontology and to interpret factual life afresh by means of a 'hermeneutics of facticity,' as Heidegger called it" (Mehta 2004: 239–240).
13. This is explored in my poem

### Three T and More:

Travel, Truth and Translation  
 Travelling with Truth  
 Translating Truth in Travel  
 In Between the Relative and the Relational  
 Absolute and Approximate  
 Translating While Travelling  
 Self, Culture and Divine  
 Beyond the Annihilating Tyranny of the Singular  
 A New Trinity of Prayer  
 A New Multiple of *Sadhana* and Surrender

14. I explore this in the following poem of mine:

### Roots and Routes: Memory Work and Meditation

Roots and Routes  
 Routes within Roots  
 Roots with Routes  
 Multiple Roots and Multiple Routes  
 Crisscrossing with Love  
 Care and *Karuna*

Crisscrossing and Cross-firing  
 Root work and Route Work  
 Footwork and Memory Work  
 Weaving threads  
 Amidst threats  
 Dancing in front of terror  
 Dancing with terrorists  
 Meditating with threat  
 Meditating with threads  
 Meditating with Roots and Routes  
 Root Meditation  
 Route Meditation  
 Memory Work as Meditating with Earth  
 Dancing with Soul, Cultures and Cosmos  
 [UNPAR Guest House, Bandung Feb. 13 2015 9 AM]

15. There are many critiques of dominant politics of knowledge around the world but one wonders whether the epistemological direct action it involves embodies *Satyagraha*. For example, we can explore if both post-colonialism and post-modernism as critique of knowledge embody *Satyagraha*. Similarly we can explore if the critique of knowledge coming from such scholars as Ashish Nandy and Shiv Visvanathan who present themselves as intellectual street fighters involve a vision and practice of *Satyagraha*. Many a time their critique of science and West is self-certain and one-dimensional. As Connell writes: “There are some troubling limits to Nandy’s thought. In *The Intimate Enemy*, this cast list was almost entirely male, the only woman to play a significant role was the sneaky French woman” (Connell 2011: 190). Connell here refers to Nandy’s critique of Sri Aurobindo but Connell herself does not bother even to name the woman referred to here who is called The Mother whose original name is Mira Richards who is a spiritual co-traveler of Sri Aurobindo.
16. Jaina tradition refers to *Anekantavada*, multiple perspectives of Truth. Building on this, I talk about *Anekantapatha*, multiple paths of Truth.
17. We realize the normative challenge of overcoming violence as we walk and meditate with the following thoughts of Jurgen Habermas: “Only when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently close off the path to unconstrained communication does it further the process whose suppression it otherwise legitimates: mankind’s evolution toward autonomy and responsibility” (Habermas 1971: 315).

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# Theorizing Alternative Futures of Asia: Activating Enabling Traditions

*Marcus Bussey*

## SETTING THE SCENE

History and the future are powerfully connected in populist enthusiasms and in our theorizing. In the past lie our roots and in the future our hopes and our fears. We stand in the present, which is always an epiphenomenon of the past–future nexus. The present, as a result, is fragile, open, vulnerable, and utterly remarkable. In this fleeting present, activists—those of us who wish to engage with this fleeting present in an attempt to create optimal futures for whatever constituency or tribe we hold allegiance to—can be either reactive or proactive. Generally speaking, activists who *react* seek a withdrawal of some kind from present stresses, a return to an idealized past, a utopia, a time of order and the legitimacy of tradition (think Islamic State). This path leads to terror. On the other hand, activists who *proact* seek to reach out selectively to elements of the past, the present and the future. Such proactivism, while mindful of the realities of the present, draws on the riches of the past and the aspirations for the future to weave, dance and dream alternative futures into focus in an attempt to bring into people’s lives the possibility of transformation and expansion.

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This chapter suggests that, as activists and social theorists, we can be of the proactive variety. This is, of course, a question of temperament. How comfortable are we with disorder? With Chaosmos? Answers to such questions hinge on identity: how much we have invested of ourselves in the present Order? How attached are we to our titles and honours and thus complicit in current regimes of Truth? This also brings up the issue of how we understand ourselves, situate and ground ourselves in the structures that hold our reality, our context together? Furthermore, we should also ask: how much do we identify with the system? And such identification can be both positive and negative—to wish to overthrow the system is just a form of negative identification. It is quite possible to premise our identity as ‘social theorist’, ‘radical’, ‘activist’, ‘freedom fighter’ and even ‘terrorist’ on resistance to regimes of Truth while not recognizing that such regimes need our resistance to sustain their own identity. So, paradoxically, what terrorists fail to see is that they actually feed that which they attack.

All this is said to introduce a vulnerable, partial and open social theory that works with the kind of futures thinking that will create a forum for theorizing alternative futures for Asia. As was noted above, the whole point of any such enterprise is to optimize the possibilities for the people of Asia to achieve rich, meaningful and sustainable futures for themselves, their families and their communities. In a globalizing world, human scale is still the reality for most of us. So home, village, town and region are still valid units to acknowledge, even when using such a concept as ‘Asia’. The reality is that *Asian Futures means the futures of such human units*. And, shifting the lens again, it also means the futures of villages worldwide, and of the ecosystems that sustain them, because Asia is also part of a global experience in which separation and distance are collapsing as new socio-economic and technological realities keep driving our collective consciousnesses towards an integration and identification (whether we like it or not) with the Other in all its forms.

### ASIAN FUTURES

Some years ago a gathering at Tamkang University in Taiwan (3–5 November 2010) examined the topic of ‘Global Transitions and Asia 2060’. My friends and colleagues Professor Sohail Inayatullah and Dr Dada Shumbhushivananda both presented sets of scenarios for Asia 2060. Inayatullah proposed four scenarios: Asian Fusions, in which a robust Asian cultural identity continued to engage with global possibilities,

ultimately giving birth to some kind of Asian Union; the second he called “Divided ‘Asias’” in which he saw the nationalist tensions and entrenched interests that are rooted in narrow histories vying for power over the coming century; in the third he saw the ongoing effects of colonialism and the post-colonial malaise that many Asians bought into manifesting in what he called the “Used and Discarded Futures of the West”; which he felt would lead to the fourth scenario of “Snakes and Ladders”—the experience of anxious growth followed by periods of decline. He acknowledged that, while we might all wish for a resilient Asia to take charge of its own future, there were many factors playing out across the cultural, political and economic spheres.

Inayatullah, a self-declared optimist, pointed to the richness of Asia’s multiple traditions and argued that these would underpin the continued ascendancy of Asia on the global stage. This ascendancy he feels will not just be economic, but also cultural. However, he saw nationalism, authoritarianism, endemic corruption, baroque bureaucracy, gender disparity and the wounds of the past as significant hurdles to its realization. For him the way forward lay in the embracing of those rich traditions of Asia (Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Shinto, Christian and so on) that promote universal well-being, personal and social realization, deep governance, gender and social equity, and individual and social meaning for all.

Shambhushivananda, a monk of Ananda Marga, unsurprisingly took an unashamedly spiritual position. He saw the issue of an Asian renaissance hinging on the tension between materialist and spiritual worldviews. He offered three scenarios for Asia’s future. The first was matter-centred and would doom Asians to a diminished future in which cultural identity was eroded and the quality of life for many would decline. This he dubbed “The Tragedy of the Commons.” The second scenario was an Idealist vision he called “Utopias of the Enlightened and the Wise” in which deep governance would be sustained by Dharmic leaders who served the interests of all, both human and non-human, and challenged the vested interests of those who would exploit the planet and its people. The third scenario he called “The Middle Path: the only viable option for Asia.” This scenario draws on the Buddha’s description of the Middle Path (*madhyamā-pratipad*) in which the realities of the moment are negotiated both collectively and individually and on a daily basis as Asia moves towards not only coherence but also greater equity and a renewed confidence (hence renaissance) in its traditions. Thus Shambhushivananda concluded:

The core issue of Asia's social renaissance will be to establish and align with the Cosmic Ideal; place *Dharma* (universal welfare) as the guiding faculty behind knowledge; and, to act decisively to eliminate wide disparities prevalent in every walk of human life.

### THEORIZING ASIAN FUTURES THROUGH 'ENABLING TRADITIONS'

The work of both Inayatullah and Shambhushivananda points to the role of tradition in underwriting positive futures for Asia. Inayatullah's approach (Ramos 2003) is that of a political scientist whose work is a subtle combination of structuralist and post-structuralist thinking, while including his own lived experience as a post-colonial Pakistani whose father worked for the UN and whose education has largely been in the West (he holds a PhD from the University of Hawaii) (Inayatullah and Milojević 2015). Shambhushivananda, who also completed his higher degree work in the USA and has a PhD from the Wharton Business School University of Pennsylvania, is explicitly Tantric in his worldview and draws on this tradition, and related traditions such as Buddhism, to shape his scenarios. For him, social reality is the *Kurukshetra* (Battlefield of the Mahabharata) in which Krishna, as Higher Consciousness, is birthed into human social and individual forms (Shambhushivananda 2006). Both scholars have a deep connection with the work of Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar (1921–1990) and his understanding of social evolution and spiritual transformation and yet this connection takes markedly different forms in their work. In this way we can see the interplay of tradition with the filters of biography and context in which Inayatullah acts both as an academic and as a consultant to government and non-government agencies; while Shambhushivananda is *Kulapati* (Chancellor) of the Ananda Marga Gurukula University ([www.gurukul.edu/](http://www.gurukul.edu/)) and a trainer of novice monks and nuns at a seminary in Sweden.

This point finally brings me to the role of what Cornel West describes as 'enabling traditions' (West 1999, p. 171) in enriching the theoretical context. West is specifically pointing to religious as opposed to secular traditions, though I see no reason why secular traditions cannot be enabling.<sup>1</sup> Again, biography helps us understand West's position. He is an African American looking to leverage his deep commitment to his Christian faith in order to better understand and engage with his world, in which the suffering and disadvantage of his fellow African Americans stares him

in the face. For him faith and social critique do not simply go hand in hand, they are fundamental to his being.

I do not think it possible to put forward rational defenses of one's faith that verify its veracity or even persuade one's critics. Yet it is possible to convey to others the sense of deep emptiness and pervasive meaninglessness one feels if one is not critically aligned with an enabling tradition. One risks not logical inconsistency, but actual insanity; the issue is not reason or irrationality, but life or death. (ibid.)

West asserts this in the face of what he describes, in conversation with bell hooks<sup>2</sup>, as the 'pervasive impoverishment of the spirit' that marks contemporary society (hooks and West 1991, p. 51).

He sees this condition as notable of peoples who have been multiply marginalized, such as poor African Americans: far from the centre of the economy; bound by class/caste; racially discriminated against; and for (black) women, also subject to patriarchy. In such a context he develops a prophetic pragmatism to promote liberation from the spiritual bonds that underpin the psychic bondages that, in turn, underpin the economic bondages of materialist modernity. He develops this prophetic stance as a form of pragmatism and links it to the ontological roots of his thinking in his faith:

I believe that Christian stories and narratives provide insight into our very brief pilgrimage and sojourn on this globe. It provides us with a way to demand that service and sacrifice, care and love sit at the center of what it is to be human. It reaffirms that we are human to the degree that we love, and care and serve. (hooks and West 1991, p. 53)

For West, Christianity can be an enabling tradition—one that supplies categories and the epistemic coordinates for a revived ethics of engagement with civil society. By introducing a prophetic discourse into both analysis and action, West seeks to establish a basis for critical renewal at both social and personal levels. In education, for example, this means acknowledging the role tradition has in shaping education and directing its concerns. Prophetic imagination (Bussey 2015b) thus challenges current educational forms that seek to strip it of deeper meaning—the stories of becoming that have held earlier civilizational projects together. Yet, to avoid the hegemonic and colonizing aspirations of much unilateral civilizational discourse, West grounds his thinking intercivically in

his vision of the prophetic pragmatist who speaks beyond the dominant discourse while affirming local voice and democratic process. This intention he makes absolutely clear in his description of the prophetic pragmatist:

The distinctive hallmarks of a prophetic pragmatist are a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness and a critical consciousness that encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility. (1999, p. 170)

West is arguing for a broad and ethical engagement with the antidemocratic, parochial, ahistorical and limited populism of American culture. In this he is arguing for an engaged citizenship that is legible within the Christian and democratic context of American life. His theoretical spark is the combination of Christian ethics and moral purpose with a critical theoretical approach focused on practical (i.e. pragmatic) engagement with society and culture.

### RELENTLESS CRITIQUE

In West, Inayatullah and Shambhushivananda we find practical theorists who draw on deep traditions to reframe their contexts. Such traditions are embedded in their biography so they can be understood as sources of deep narrative, story and myth that create a meaning field that is spiritually and emotionally, as well as intellectually, sustaining. Yet, as we all know, traditions are not 'pure' or 'good', they are the result of cultural evolution and therefore are riddled with lacuna, contradiction and violence (Bussey 2013, 2014). They are the sum of the human condition and therefore reflect both the good and the bad.

It is for this reason that West includes in his profile of a prophetic pragmatist the commitment to 'relentless critique and self-criticism'. It is not enough to simply have a tradition and accept it passively, one must be an *activist within and on behalf of the tradition*, leveraging strengths and rooting out weaknesses. This is a clear process as a pragmatist, because the pragmatist judges the worth of something by its *effects*. Similarly Sarkar proposes to assess tradition and human action according to how much opportunity it offers humanity to realize their potential as spiritual, intel-



lectual and physical beings (Bussey 2010; Sarkar 1982). This pragmatic agenda, which also measures the worth of a tradition by its effects, offers a neohumanism based on a critical spirituality designed to enable activism within traditions (Bussey 2000). So a simple rule of thumb emerges: if something is good it maximizes the potential of all those in a situation without diminishing the potentiality of others or the environment; if it fails to do this, it is a cultural aberration that is inimical to those who practise it and should be dropped from the cultural script.

This is a dangerous task which requires strategy, foresight and courage. It is also a necessary task and has been part of the heroic human story since we left the jungles of Africa for the savannah a couple of million years ago. The intersection of critique with theory is the source of cultural innovation and renewal. It lies at the heart of what Shambhushivananda meant by renaissance—the taking of desired and valued elements of the past in a culture, those that maximize the good in a situation, and renewing them through the lens of contemporary need. Heritage and tradition become sources of futures thinking and anticipatory action (Bussey 2015a). Similarly, we find in the work of both Ziauddin Sardar (2005) and Ashis Nandy (2004) a critical traditionalism in which, like West, they seek to challenge the dominant theoretical framing of the future, as linear, developmental and a repeat of the past, and suggest diversity and meaning lie in the richness of culture rather than in its decimation, fragmentation and commodification.

Such a proactive creative cultural enterprise resets the scene for imagining alternative futures for Asia that affirm tradition as the source of the meaning in life. This, as Giri points out, is the essence of a lived critique in which life is linked to a striving, a longing for wholeness that though denied by the human condition still enlivens it:

Life means multiple webs of relationship and criticism is an enquiry into the quality of these relationships. Criticism also seeks to understand whether the modes of togetherness suggested in life's architecture of relationships genuinely holds together or not. Criticism begins with a description of the dynamics of relationships in life; observes and describes both coherence and incoherence, harmonies and contradictions at work in life; and seeks to move from incoherence to coherence, darkness to light, and from light to more light. An eternal desire to move from one summit of perfection to another is the objective of criticism, which is not a specialized attribute of life; it is life itself. (2006, p. 2)

## AN ASIAN/HUMAN RENAISSANCE

Sarkar also spoke of a human renaissance in which the parts (Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania, for instance) and the whole reaffirm the value and strength of tradition while casting aside defective culture, what he called pseudo-culture, in order to liberate human potentiality. This potential, he argued, is burdened by millennia of habit that masquerades as culture (1982). Like Giri, he argued that humanity has a need for wholeness that is expressed spiritually as a ‘longing for the Great’ (Sarkar 1997).

Such a longing is a source of cultural critique and renewal and is definitional of our humanity. Sarkar argued that offering a neohumanism premised on a critical spirituality, that to return to our potential as critical beings who use thought and tradition instead of being possessed by them, heralds *a renaissance of meaning and purpose*. In this we see a *neo-humanity* as the basis for a new renaissance. This renaissance has been described by Sarkar as a liberation of intellect, one which demands of humanity that they ‘wake up’ and ‘and do something in all the spheres of life’ (1982).

Renaissance of course, as I argue elsewhere (Bussey 2016), is a profoundly evocative, even provocative, term. It is used here precisely because it is such. An Asian renaissance may well be under way. But what is being reborn? Old imperialist aspirations? Tribal certitudes? Or a sense of awakened post-colonial promise? Are the traditions being looked to enabling of the majority or privileging a minority? Here we walk the fine edge between the open promise and the closed definitional moment (Bussey 2014). Critical spirituality, anchored in the awakened sense of cultural co-creativity seeks to harness tradition and release its potential while not foreclosing on the exciting developments born from the intercivilizational ferment that so troubles, but also so excites, many today.

A critical renaissance is concerned with unlocking the dynamic energy of this contradiction and heralds a rethinking of human agency beyond traditional conformity. This rethinking pushes us away from a unified singular worldview to one which is multiple and layered. In this recognition of the layered nature of reality in which ‘diverse movements of the infinite’ generate hybrid formulations, new critical expressions appear, such as West’s prophetic pragmatist. This movement also reinvigorated, via neohumanism, the humanism of the European Renaissance, which challenged humanity to see itself as one family rather than as tribal units.

As noted above, Sarkar offers a neohumanism to extend this task of humanism to the entire universe (1982). Neohumanism is one of the voices of *the emergent renaissance of critical consciousness* in which intellect expands to incorporate the prediscursive, the embodied and the spiritual, and human identity expands from tribal allegiance to species, the humanist project, to a universalist neohumanist recognition of Self as participant and co-creator in the universe of forms (Bussey 2006).

### TRADITIONS AT PLAY IN THE CULTURAL FIELD

Traditions are a rich source of story. They provide an aesthetic order for enabling social innovation. No change happens in a vacuum and when viewed historically can be seen to have been brewing, often unnoticed, for many generations. Timing is everything here, as is a sense of the collective potential within any situation combined with the desire to leap into unknown futures. The future, however, will not be a repeat of the past because something new is occurring. For the first time humanity is coming to understand that we are part of a dynamic web of interactions in which no one story can or should, from an ethical and pragmatic point of view, dominate. The human voice—as tribe, people, culture—lived for generations in isolation, but has now become a chorus in which hybrid forms are the norm rather than the exception.

This is a rich world of possibility in which the great faiths have a part to play along with the modern secular wisdoms of the humanities, the sciences and general human goodwill. Innovators abound: with David Loy (2002) reframing Buddhism in a dialogue with its Western shadow; the Dalai Lama leading a sense of renewed wonder in which Tibet is now part of everyone's soul; Giri, Shambhushivananda, Ziauddin Sardar (2005) and other savvy emissaries of the subcontinent activating Vedantic, Tantric, yogic and Islamic narratives, forms and aesthetics; Philip Wexler (2000) drawing on Judaism; and Cornel West (1999) on Christianity. And this is just the tip of an enormous iceberg. The work is going on everywhere and is also attracting people who represent a fusion of positions. Inayatullah has successfully integrated political science, history and a post-structural sensibility, with a rich spiritual narrative, and similarly the African American feminist scholar bell hooks has woven Buddhism with a deep Christianity (2000).

As the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh so eloquently put it, we all *inter-are* (1988). And this *inter-being* is expressed in our encounters and

our conversations and given form in our actions—our activism. In this new condition power appears to be centralized but, in fact, is spread more equitably throughout the system in which such theorists and leaders act as authority hubs within a dynamic cultural field. Inter-being and the authority that stems from it is our dormant potentiality. The great Islamic historiographer Ibn Khaldun observed centuries ago that when power gets corrupt moral forces will be renewed and sweep it aside. In his worldview these forces always came from the desert, like a cleansing wind, to sweep away the decadence of an overly indulgent civilization. This was his *asabiyah* in which the needs of the collective are reaffirmed. He saw this as a pendulum process of rise and fall (Galtung and Inayatullah 1997). Asia is reclaiming the right of the collective to not simply the necessities of existence, but also to a rich and fulfilling life in which the spiritual, intellectual and physical potentialities of each individual are supported.

But as we inter-are this can no longer simply be an Asian issue. It is now a global process of deep relating in which traditions are meeting, dialoguing and hybridizing as a new sense of humanity emerges to frame personal and collective agency in unique, diverse and unexpected ways. The pressure of circumstances—environmental, social, economic, political and civilizational—all point to the emergence of relationship as a theme in any viable future. The great traditions act in this process as shelters and guides, forward-fostering hope, imagination and a sense of mission that can underpin our collective struggles towards a range of new identities and governance structures.

## CONCLUSION: THE HORIZON BECKONS

The horizon beckons but the kind of that future lies ahead depends on the extent we, as a global community, can reinvent ourselves in the light of the past but with an eye to the future. In this way we ensure a dynamic mix of tradition, continuity and change. As Fig. 1 illustrates, tunnel vision offers a closed future for all. When we expand the nature of the forward view through recourse to the metaphors and insights of tradition we deepen the possibilities before us.

It must be noted that traditions are powerful sources of inspiration and critical reflection that can deepen our thinking about Asian and global futures:



Fig. 1 From tunnel vision to futures for all

- Traditions offer new forms to dream by (i.e. imaginative resources).
- Traditions possess the critical tools needed to rethink and enable the human condition.
- Traditions are relevant social theory in action.
- Traditions are resilient social narratives that enable proactivism.
- Traditions, finally, also carry a sense of continuity in which identity still functions within a meaningful and secure context.

Yet traditions can also trap us in endgame and reductionist logic, in which the future is diminished and premised on reactive and violent scenarios, in which identity is brittle and fed on outmoded historical tropes. We find models of this in the evangelical Christian assurance of salvation to come and the jihadii dreams of heaven. The scenarios discussed earlier in this chapter flag up the fact that such a suite of conditions can lead to vastly different outcomes. A critical approach to our own traditions, in which substance is distilled from habit, can begin the cultural renewal discussed above in which the expansive logic of the greater good is applied to both collective and personal domains in an attempt to reaffirm our humanity.

## NOTES

1. West would no doubt agree and his approach to Marxism demonstrates this. He engages to transform both his own and Marxist praxis. Inayatullah can be seen to enrich the philosophical domain by also activating a Tantric worldview to enrich and problematize accepted categories and processes. His short article on CLA demonstrates this (S. Inayatullah 1998), see also (S. Inayatullah 1997); and the work by José Ramos who interviews him highlights the same (Ramos 2003).
2. hooks (Gloria Watson) deliberately writes her *nom de plume* in lower case.

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# Critical Theory After the Rise of the Global South

*Boike Rehbein*

We are beginning to acknowledge that the social world changed fundamentally between 1989 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> Two centuries of Euro-American domination have come to an end and have given way to a multicentric structure that has prevailed throughout most of history.<sup>2</sup> As the social sciences have emerged during two centuries of Euro-American domination and as our collective memory hardly knows a different world order, our view of the social world—in the social sciences as in everyday life—is based on an abnormal state of things. The rise of the global South that came to the fore after 1989 urges us to review the core assumptions of the social sciences, as they are neither apt to explain the present nor suitable to the remote past, nor acceptable to the postcolonial world.<sup>3</sup>

If it is true that the Euro-American experience does not entirely fit the experience of all other world regions at all times, the empirical basis of the social sciences has to be enlarged. Area studies, indigenous sociologies and global studies are in the process of doing this. On this basis, the social sciences will also have to review their theories that rely exclusively on the Euro-American experience because this has been the dominant reality and the supposed model for all other societies ever since the emergence of the

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social sciences. Finally, one has to reflect upon the epistemological foundations of the social sciences. This is what I propose to do in this chapter. I wish to outline how the social sciences could react to recent changes. I will restrict my argument to the tradition called critical theory because it relies on Eurocentric assumptions to an outstanding degree at the same time as it comprises epistemological ideas that are particularly suitable for a multicentric world. I first outline some of the Eurocentric foundations of critical theory and then confront them with the rise of the global South and its implications, the most important being an all-encompassing relativism. In the third section of the chapter, I wish to draw some conclusions for epistemology from the confrontation and its implications. Finally, I advance some considerations on post-Eurocentric ethics.

### CRITICAL THEORY

Critical Theory is based on Hegel's dialectical understanding of the world. In his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1970 [1807]), Hegel interpreted the human realm as an unfolding of knowledge, which presupposed the development of society and its understanding. According to Hegel, the historical development (or evolution) of social differentiation, language and science set the boundaries for practice and theory (1807: XXXI, 389, 451). Individual knowledge and action both had to draw on what was actually available in society. Any invention was a synthesis of already developed ideas and practices and of two antagonistic elements, which Hegel called a "contradiction" (1807: XLII, 16). The contradiction was, for Hegel, the motor of the history of society and of ideas, as everything was determined by its negation (or contradiction). Theory and practice, according to Hegel, thereby developed from the simple to the more complex and synthetic, while theory always remained within the boundaries of practice because it was merely its reflection.

Hegel claimed that, in his time, theory and practice had developed to such a degree that knowledge of the entire history of society and of ideas had become possible (1807: 12, 754). He was able to review the history of human society and the history of knowledge as a series of contradictions. Each contradiction was resolved in theory and practice. Hegel called this resolution "*Aufhebung*": One recognized that both sides of the contradiction depended on each other and therefore formed an identity (1807: 10). This led to a new level of knowledge—or a new perspective on the world—that again comprised a defining contradiction. Solving the

contradiction, lifting it to a new level and keeping it in mind is the triple meaning of *Aufhebung*. Hegel termed this way of thinking “dialectic”. The full understanding of history was for him as much a dialectic as the historical process itself (1807: XXIX, XLII). He claimed to understand the entire history because reality and knowledge had reached their fulfilment and final *Aufhebung* in the modern European nation state. Social structures and theory had developed to the degree that a full knowledge of human history was possible (1807: XX).

Marx followed Hegel’s theory in most regards. However, he insisted on the difference between theory and practice and also claimed that the real society did not have to be the best society, not even the society that was best under the given historical circumstances. This is why Marx called his version of Hegel’s dialectic a *critical* theory (Marx 1985 [1867]: 22). He demanded “to *topple all conditions*, under which the human being is a humiliated, an enslaved, a lonely and a despised being” (Marx 1976 [1845]: 385; my translation). This, for Marx, was an issue of practice that had to realize the best society in the future which was not realized in the present—whereas for Hegel, the present society had to be the best society because no other society was conceivable at the current time.

The foundations of critical theory were laid by Marx’s transformation of Hegel. They comprise at least the following claims: The human being is determined historically and socially, there is an historical evolution to the higher that finds its fulfilment in an ideal-typical Europe, the unit of analysis is the totality of the social world that is characterized by the contradiction, the social world has to be analyzed dialectically, and the totality has to be analyzed critically because and to the degree that it has not realized a good life (cf. Marx 1985 [1844]: 538ff.; 1969 [1857]).

In the mid-twentieth century, Hegel’s and Marx’s optimistic attitudes towards the development of history and knowledge had become questionable. Their theoretical claims were confronted with a reality that did not seem to be evolving towards the best society but towards an apocalypse. Adorno further elaborated critical theory against this background. He agreed with Hegel and Marx that the human being was determined by society and its history (Adorno 1996: 261). All theory and practice had to draw on the existing stock of ideas and actions: The boundaries of society therefore were the boundaries of the thinkable. If that is true, one wonders how reflection could ever transcend reality and conceive of a better life than the existing one. Hegel had chosen the obvious answer and said this was not possible and that the existing life was the best life; while Marx

had chosen to postpone the answer by saying that the existing contradictions would require resolution and drive reality towards a future better life.

As Adorno did not share this positive attitude towards the present or future, he had to show how the critique of a society was possible in a society that entirely determined any critique (as it was a totality). He tried to show this in a theory he termed *Negative Dialectic* (*Negative Dialektik*, 1975). It differed from Hegel's dialectic in its negative relation to the social totality (Adorno 1979 [1951]: 57). Adorno argued that this totality comprised elements that pointed beyond it. He called these elements "non-identical". Thinking in a non-identical manner means, for Adorno, starting any analysis with the totality in order to show that each phenomenon is determined by the totality but not entirely. He claimed that there was more to reality than the contradictions presented by Hegel and Marx. He looked for the "waste and blind spots that escaped the dialectic ... What transcends existing society is not only the potential developed by it but also that which did not really fit its historical laws" (Adorno 1979 [1951]: 200; my translation).

In Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1979 [1951]) the idea of a "redeemed" state of society opens up the possibility of intellectually transcending real society. Adorno bases the possibility on the epistemological argument that the universal does not entirely comprise and define the singular and on the empirical argument that one experiences moments of redemption and happiness which point towards a state of society that differs from the present one. These two arguments are combined in the fundamental claim of the *Negative Dialectic* (1975) that the totality is untrue because it promises a state of redemption—or the best life—which it has not realized.

Both these books and their basic arguments appeared after the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1984 [1944]), which Adorno had written with Horkheimer. They also draw on the philosophy of history presented in this early work. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* outlines a unilinear evolution of improved human power over nature, very much as Hegel and Marx had done before. However, this evolution does not culminate in the best life but in an untrue totality that not only destroys nature but also transforms society into a totalitarian system (1984 [1944]: 10, 32, 113). According to Adorno, "the most advanced consciousness" was capable of criticizing this untrue totality (1996: 249). However, he did not explain why the most advanced consciousness should discern the less advanced consciousness as untrue or even what that most advanced consciousness was.

The philosophy of history led Adorno into a self-contradiction, an aporetic impasse. It subsumed the singular under the universal, just as Hegel had done. And knowledge did not remain critical by pointing to unkept promises of real society but claimed to be able to transcend real society from a point within that society. Adorno at once demanded total (negative) critique and proposed a (positive) interpretation of history. This is because he claimed to know right from wrong in an objective, super-historical manner. Habermas (1988: 144) explained: “Adorno was fully aware of this performative contradiction of a totalizing critique”. He did not resolve the contradiction because he stuck to Hegel’s and Marx’s foundations of critical theory without sharing their optimism in history.

### THE RISE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The foundations of critical theory are linked to Europe’s dominant position in the world. They are Eurocentric and presuppose a homogeneous social world. In a way, the real world between Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and Adorno’s *Negative Dialectic* actually corresponded to this idea, as the globe basically consisted of Europe, Europeanized regions and European colonies. The world was an imperial totality whose components had no independent existence and no sustainable traditions but who had to follow the European model of society. The core dictated the criteria for development and knowledge. Europe was this core well into the twentieth century, to be overtaken by the USA for much of the “short twentieth century”. This world belongs to the past. The foundations of Eurocentrism are being shattered.

In this chapter I wish to take issue with four of these foundations. These four foundations were self-evident in a Euro-American world but they have become questionable after the rise of the global South. First, Euro-American modernity cannot be regarded as the goal of development any more, simply because Europe and the USA no longer lead development in some categories. Second, unilinear evolution is a misleading framework for the understanding of history because most historical phenomena are neither evolutionary nor teleological. Third, we have not found universal laws of history, yet. Fourth, no object of the social sciences is a totality, not even the globalized world, because any individual object relates to others.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 relations between First and Third Worlds have changed fundamentally. Cities, subregions and

entire countries of the Third World have entered the First World, while parts of the First World have to be, in all relevant categories, classified as Third World. The Third World is transforming into a complex mosaic of emerging nation states, global nodes and impoverished subregions. It can no longer be clearly delimited from the First World. It would certainly be ridiculous to classify South Korea or Malaysia, Iran or Venezuela as Third World at this point. Despite widespread poverty even the huge nation states of Brazil, China and India no longer fulfil the criteria of being a Third World country. They host some of the richest individuals, leading hi-tech centres and the largest middle classes in the world, while continuously achieving more than five per cent economic growth per year (as opposed to minus three to plus two per cent in the West).

If we apply the conventional categories of the media and the social sciences, we must acknowledge the rise of the global South as a fact, even if it meets all kinds of obstacles and setbacks. There is no doubt that the global South now plays an important role in the categories of industrialization, trade, finance, politics, education and demography. And the Southern economies have been growing at a much faster pace than the established ones for at least a decade. This is unlikely to change for many years to come. China will be awarded the gold medal in most economic disciplines in the near future.

It is well known that centres of manufacturing are growing in the global South, while de-industrialization is the main story in the North (Dicken 2003: 38). Nodes in Brazil, China and India that combine cheap labour with good infrastructure and decent education have become the global factories, while Europe's and North America's share in manufacturing have been decreasing in the last decade (Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 15). The global South also plays an increasing role in trade (Winters and Yusuf 2007). China has become the leading exporter to the world. At the same time, the growing importance of raw materials strengthens the position of raw material exporters, who have hitherto been regarded as the incarnation of dependency theory. The reorientation of manufacturing and trade flows is linked to a new financial geography. Global money reserves are now being stocked in Abu Dhabi, Beijing and Caracas, rather than London and Washington. Without access to these reserves, the global North is close to declaring bankruptcy (cf. Prestowitz 2005).

The global economic crisis illustrated the new economic structure of the world very clearly. The crisis was a financial crisis of the North. It had virtually no economic impact on the emerging Asian economies. However,

it had a huge symbolic impact. Trust in neoliberalism and the capacity of Western capitalism has been shattered. The international system run by the IMF and the World Bank (or, for that matter, by the United States) is not relevant to the twenty-first century. Regional agreements and South-South cooperation are beginning to replace that system, in spite of Wall Street's and Washington's persisting gravitational forces. The same holds true for a world politics that is no longer conceivable without the South's participation (Harris 2005). What is more, South-South cooperation increasingly circumvents the North, while international agreements need Beijing's and Delhi's consent, at least to the same degree as Washington's.

It is likely that the rise of the global South will continue. It may even accelerate. An increasing focus on education and R&D in countries such as India and China will gradually shift global centres of knowledge and hi-tech to the South. While American and European public universities are virtually broke, Chinese and Indian professors are receiving a yearly salary hike. Demography also speaks in favour of the global South. Almost 50 per cent of Northern populations consist of retired persons and do not expect any major change as fertility rates remain low. At the same time, half the population in most Southern countries is below 18 years of age. The North hopes to draw on immigration but as its economic conditions worsen (and are often coupled with xenophobia), young Indians prefer to stay at home, especially those working in hi-tech, even though cutting-edge businesses in the global North are eagerly chasing after them.

For the time being the states making up the global South are neither a real nor a unified counterweight to the states of the global North (Palat 2009). In particular, they are in no position to contest US military power. They also have to struggle with inequality, administrative inefficiency, rural crises, political fragmentation, weak financial institutions, environmental problems and energy scarcity. Finally, per capita incomes in the South are still only a small percentage of average Northern incomes. However, the historical tendency very clearly leads from Euro-American domination back to the multicentric world that has characterized most of human history (Abu-Lughod 1989; Frank 1998). Neither political institutions nor Western public spheres nor the social sciences have properly reacted to this new/old structure of the world.

Eurocentric theory could remain indifferent to the rise of the global South if the South still followed the model of European society and development. This assumption has become illogical since China now leads the way in several categories. This is simple logic: If the global South leads the

global North in at least one category, it cannot be lagging behind and cannot follow the Western model of society (any more). Obviously, Euro-American modernity is not the “end of history”, as Fukuyama (1992) claimed on similar grounds to Hegel’s. One might be tempted to predict that China might become the model for development. This is unlikely. In a multicentric world, developments overlap, intermingle and modify each other.

This intermingling probably characterized history much better than unilinear evolution because the world seemed to have been multicentric before the rise of Europe in the eighteenth century (Pomeranz 2000; Hobson 2004). In fact, from the Stone Age to early modernity, most historical periods and regions existed in a more or less multicentric configuration (Stein 1999; Abu-Lughod 1989; Hodgson 1993). Eurocentric theory seems to apply exactly to the period and the region in which it emerged. This is precisely the world in which Hegel, Marx and Adorno lived. More generally, it is the framework of our social sciences.

Critical theory now needs to revise the four foundations mentioned above since it has become increasingly difficult to understand the world beyond the short-lived European domination on that basis. No region has had a history of unilinear evolution. No universal historical laws have been discovered. And no object can be defined as a totality. Indians and Chinese will say that Hegel’s spirit or Adorno’s totality have been confined to Europe. They will add that Europe never defined all elements of Indian or Chinese societies and that it plays a decreasing role for them and for the world at large.

This is relevant not just for one specific theory. In a multicentric world no society can prescribe its order and ideas to other societies. Indians and Chinese advance similar claims to truth and virtue—and they begin to be able to underline these claims with economic and political power similar to that of Europe and the USA. No form of life can be taken for granted any more, even less as the best form of life. No foundation of theory, no epistemology, has universal validity at this point. This leads to relativism in epistemology and ethics. A host of “post” theories—such as poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism—have been calling for pluralism in epistemology and ethics for decades. The theory and practice one chooses is supposed to be a matter of choice or accident (Feyerabend 1975). After the rise of the global South, pluralism is not an idle academic issue but it has become a central problem in theory and practice. The question is: What can be considered a valid criterion for theory or practice

if incommensurable traditions are confronted with others that do not even share the foundations that had been self-evident to Hegel, Marx and Adorno?

### A KALEIDOSCOPIC DIALECTIC

To this question, I wish to propose an answer beyond relativism and universalism. The determination by society and history has to be strictly understood as a *hermeneutical* situation. This was the basis of Hegel's approach, and this is why I began the chapter with a discussion of his approach. The approach has been developed further by Gadamer (1960) for the humanities: Knowledge is only possible in an existing society on the basis of its history and can merely make use of the means it produces. However, in a post-Eurocentric world, the situation has to be interpreted in an entirely new way, as the history that contemporary hermeneutics would have to look at is no longer a homogeneous (Eurocentric) history with common foundations—if it ever was. Adorno's insistence on the impossibility of transcending society not only places a limit on knowledge but it also becomes a great opportunity under present conditions. If histories and societies actually differ fundamentally from each other, it becomes possible to transcend one's "own" society. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, one can merely interpret what was already given because there is only one tradition to interpret (the European tradition, of course), and this basically is also true for Hegel's dialectic. In a post-Eurocentric world, however, one can actually learn something new, something that has not been known before. This is a real hermeneutics that comprises the "non-identical" as a matter of principle, cannot be reduced to universal laws, does not aim at a totality and does not presuppose a unilinear evolution toward a certain goal.

Adorno provides us with an instrument for this hermeneutics, as he was looking for a method that would be neither purely descriptive nor universalizing and deductive. He did not fully develop this method but he used it in many of his analyses. He termed it "constellation" or "configuration". According to Adorno, the analysis of an object as configuration is based on the insight that the causal chains and relations of the object are endless as a matter of principle (1975: 263). Causal thinking implies the identity of the object and linear cause-effect relations, while the concept of configuration denies these two presuppositions (1975: 31). It has three main characteristics that oppose causal thinking: first, the search for (a



multitude of) relations of the object; second, the exploration of its history; and third, the *Aufhebung* of its apparent independence (1975: 164).

On the basis of Adorno's concept of configuration, I wish to outline a kaleidoscopic dialectic as the epistemological core of a post-Eurocentric critical theory.<sup>4</sup> Central to a kaleidoscopic dialectic, as for Adorno's configuration, is the relational approach—establishing relations and exploring history. The multitude of relations cannot be reduced to a series of contradictions. While classical dialectic knows only one type of relation, one should acknowledge that there are many different types, such as temporal succession, similarity, attraction, generation or domination. Hegel's philosophy of nature was already a bit ridiculous in trying to reduce all these relations to the contradiction and it is not easily understood why critical theory had such trouble moving beyond that reduction. Adorno's third characteristic, the *Aufhebung* of an apparent independence, follows from the multitude of relations. While Adorno related this *Aufhebung* to the totality, I merely point to relations. I claim that the notion of totality is one of the Eurocentric foundations of critical theory that have to be overcome.

Against this background I propose three characteristics that are central to a kaleidoscopic dialectic. First, the object has to be constructed as a configuration on the level of the *particular*. Second, it has to be linked to a clearly defined *empirical* field. Third, it has to be constructed historically, but without any teleology, out of an *origin*. In contrast to Hegel and Marx, Adorno has not distinguished between the singular, the particular or the universal. In my opinion, we do not grasp the universal or the singular, but the intermediate levels that Hegel and Marx termed the "particular". We tend to look for general statements and universal concepts. When we think we have found one, we feel we are standing on solid ground. We believe that we should and do find irrefutable truths. I also think we should strive toward the *more* universal—but any universal remains relative (or rather, relational) and therefore not universal but particular. The important thing seems to me to *start with the assumption* that we neither can nor should discover irrefutable truths. This would significantly alter the epistemology that has prevailed ever since Galilei and Descartes.

Deleuze has argued against Hegel that concepts are singularities (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 38). He is probably right in that each use of a concept is singular. But not all concepts are equal. They are not even equally relative but refer to a different number and type of objects. Deleuze

denies this difference. Universal terms and names are equally singular to him. I would counter that the singularity of the term “one” is not the same as the singularity of the term “Obama”. These concepts are located on different levels. And it is precisely this difference that makes science possible as a process of gaining knowledge—as opposed to merely accumulating information.

Laclau (1996) argues against Deleuze and postcolonialism that the singular always presupposed a social totality. The negation of the concept of totality therefore also negates the concept of singularity. Laclau bases his argument on Saussure’s theory of science that constructs a system of differences. In this system, each determination is a difference that presupposes the totality of differences in order to have a meaning. Laclau adds that this totality is not something to be known as subject or substance in Hegel’s sense but has to be presupposed as an empty or vacant space. Totality in this view is merely the totality of all differences. Laclau argues convincingly that our view of history implies the concept of totality because we presuppose an evolution out of a common origin, while our logic implies the concept of totality because one identical form is reckoned to fit any content. Laclau himself only retains the notion of an empty place from the concept of totality.

I wish to discard even this notion of an empty place. In an *ontological* sense, we do not know if all beings share a common origin. It is even doubtful if all human beings are descendants of a single species—that is, if all histories are rooted in one origin and are therefore branches of a single, common history. The reduction of histories to one history out of a common origin is a reminder of Einstein’s attempt to find the “world formula” or of current attempts to explain everything human from a cell or a genome. The reduction presupposes that all traits of the historically later are contained in the historically earlier. I regard this as a misconception. What invariably happens is that any explanation adds supporting information or marginal conditions that are *not* contained in the description of the antecedents or the historically earlier (cf. Hempel 1965). Therefore, we should start from the opposite assumption: No two objects can be reduced to a common origin, let alone deduced from it.

However, even Laclau’s *logical* argument for retaining the concept of totality is not convincing. Adorno wrote that relations and causal chains are endless. For this reason, there are a lot of possibilities to explain any given phenomenon on the basis of general statements or universal “laws”. Each level of explanation, each interest, each discipline, each method and

virtually each glance results in a different description of the phenomenon, even if it remains identical (which is not usually the case). This results in the pluralism that is characteristic in “post” theories. One can now choose between arbitrarily reducing the pluralism to some origin or universal law or just accepting it (Feyerabend 1975).

The kaleidoscopic dialectic is supposed to offer a third option by regarding law and marginal condition as an inseparable, or possibly even identical, unit. In the logic that Laclau points to, a law is independent of the phenomenon. I do not think so. One should regard laws as emerging historically together with phenomena. The abstraction from history and objects makes it seem as if they were universally applicable. But if a law is defined in a sufficiently precise manner, it only applies to the realm of the phenomenon with which it emerged. This is the “particular”. Some laws apply to many phenomena, some to few—but none to all and none to just one.

Each configuration implies universal statements and laws. But these apply only to the respective configuration. Therefore, it is essential to define the scope of each configuration or general statement. Each configuration remains open, as new relations appear and new relations are discovered (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1991). We use our universal concepts a bit naively, like children learning a language. They acquire the word “ball” with respect to a certain object that grown-ups call “ball”. We also believe in induction and think our limited insights hold true for an infinite number of cases we would actually never be able to explore. After being able to utter the word, children will first call everything (or all things they consider similar) a “ball”. In science, we should confine the term to the realm of objects where we learnt to use the term and then extend its use on an empirical basis, step by step. This is done by looking for further relations and by looking at the history of the object.

The idea of an origin, of a goal of evolution and knowledge and of a universal logic is supposed to reduce multitude and pluralism to something simple—in the last resort, a tautology or a contradiction. Some natural scientists may still be trying to reduce all perspectives to the one, overarching and correct perspective of a world formula. In the social sciences these attempts have become dubious because there are as many perspectives on society as there are perspectives in society. Hegel claimed this multitude did not matter for an explanation of the world and tried to reduce it to a few universal concepts and statements. However, this meant that most of what we know about the social world, and most of what exists

in the social world, was excluded from science. Hegel was perfectly aware of this. In the social sciences we know not too little but too much. The reduction of this multitude to a few statements is based on the ideal of a homogeneous society that realizes itself out of a common, single origin in the European universal.

The goal of a kaleidoscopic dialectic consists neither in finding universal laws nor in describing singularities nor in portraying the entire human history but in the knowledge of relations. There are many different kinds of relations. Contradiction is merely one type, which does not even contribute very much to our knowledge. Similarity is a more interesting and important relation than contradiction. Similarities in the social sciences are basically what Wittgenstein called “family resemblances”—a host of different, irreducible commonalities. It is not possible to reduce the objects of the social sciences to general laws and universal concepts because they are not defined by general laws and universal concepts. Wittgenstein uses a family as an example. All members of a given family have things in common but no two have exactly the same traits in common as any other two. “Different resemblances between the members of a family intermingle and criss-cross: stature, face, colour of the eyes, gait, temper ... We see a complex net of resemblances that intermingle and criss-cross. Big and small resemblances.” (Wittgenstein 1984 [1953]: 66; my translation) One can “explain” these resemblances by tracing their history but one cannot reduce them to universal laws. One family member’s face was altered by an accident, another’s stature was altered by his profession and yet another’s through the influence of hormones. The explanation of all these singularities not only involves an endless causal chain but also an explanation of the world—including all other singularities because it would have to comprise all families and all influences.

One could now reply that it is exactly this explanation of the world that science had to strive for, a Hegel without teleology out of an origin. Until this explanation was reached, we could not really know the singular and the universal except in a presumptuous, hypothetical manner. And this means, *not at all*. For there is no abduction that is located between the singular and the universal, between induction and deduction, and that comes ever closer to the truth (cf. Peirce 1958: 368). Knowledge is open and incomplete, not only in an empirical sense but also in an epistemological one. First, reality does not end in the moment of its full explanation, neither with Hegel nor anyone else. Second, as Adorno put it, causal chains are endless—one can always find new relations and family

resemblances, which means that there is no final explanation. All that we can come up with are configurations that are more general than others, as they comprise more objects and more relations.

To establish relations between heterogeneous configurations—to construct kaleidoscopes—seems to me an epistemological device that fits our multicentric world. Incommensurable systems of science and ethics now confront each other. Factually, they exist side by side. They have their scope, for which they retain a certain plausibility. As these realms increasingly intermingle and criss-cross, they cannot ignore each other any more. They cease to exist side by side and begin to establish relations. This leads to the problem of translation so prominent in “post” theories. A universalistic approach would claim that translation needs a standard, a “third language” to correctly convey meanings, while relativism would hold that translation in the strong sense is impossible. A kaleidoscopic approach would construct two configurations that bear a family resemblance but that are irreducible to each other or to a third. No common standard and no indifference but relations. In fact, the notion of translation itself is already misleading because in translation one of the configurations is lost. The goal is to be bilingual (or better yet, multilingual) rather than reducing one language to another. Each language has its own semantics and its own differentiations. Therefore, learning a new language opens up new perspectives and configurations. The same is true for any system of knowledge, for any scientific approach, for any form of life. In order to make use of them, one has to learn their perspectives and to put them into relation. A kaleidoscopic dialectic explores which system applies to which realm of objects by confronting them with each other without presupposing a general explanation or origin or even a common standard.

## UNDERSTANDING

The social world does not merely consist of different systems that are investigated from a different perspective because each perspective is part of the social world itself. This implies that all of these perspectives have to figure in any configuration and that the social world looks different from each perspective. These implications not only have an epistemological relevance but also an ethical one that leads back to the critical aspect of critical theory that has been developed further by the last major representative of Eurocentric critical theory, Habermas (1984).

Neither Wittgenstein nor Adorno really acknowledged the fact that other human beings are also knowing beings. This fact means that the object of the social sciences can criticize a scientific statement—which is not the case in the natural sciences. If science ascribes a human being certain characteristics, he or she may question this ascription. He or she may even question the underlying paradigm and propose a different one on a reflexive level. This is a point that has been made by postcolonialism and postmodernism.

However, the point does not imply that all interpretations and perspectives are equal or equally valid. Rather, it implies that social sciences need to include understanding—in a double sense. First, one has to understand the object and second one has to seek an understanding with others. To understand the object not only implies understanding its meaning—e.g. of a statement or action—but also understanding the other’s perspective. One cannot and need not put oneself into the other’s shoes or take their place Mead (1934) because this is not possible, but one has to simulate their perspective (Stein 1917). This is a hypothetical and conceptual construct just as in any other scientific endeavour. It differs from other scientific constructs in so far as it refers to a phenomenon that is not an object but a perspective, or rather “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1962). This form of understanding has to be coupled with a mutual understanding. One has to communicate with others—including the object—about the object and about its being-in-the-world. Neither type of understanding aims at a consensus. To understand calls for an empirical test and mutual understanding calls for an acceptance of other perspectives.

In the social sciences we have to understand meaning and to simulate how people involved in the realm of study are in the world. Only on this basis is one in a position to interpret and explain their actions appropriately. Interpretation and explanation may even teach the scientist something for his or her own life. Whoever does not methodologically include understanding in the study, runs the risk of fantasizing—and of interpreting a game of chess as a spirit calling and a spiritual healing as a game.<sup>5</sup> Understanding is possible because all forms of being-in-the-world bear a family resemblance. But they cannot be reduced to a common basic form or replaced by a one and only true perspective on the world.

Without an effort to understand, any mutual understanding implies symbolic violence. Spivak (1999) argued against Habermas’ ideal of a consensus that the oppressed do not have a language of their own and are therefore forced to agree with the oppressor when his language is used.

For this reason, one has to know why someone agrees in the process of mutual understanding. This is only possible on the basis of an effort to understand him or her (i.e. by simulating a being-in-the-world). One actually has to make an effort to understand in order to transcend provincialism and to reach a mutual understanding in a globalized world. In the same way that forms of life differ greatly in the world, perspectives, standards and actions diverge to a substantial degree. Perspectives have to be organized as a configuration with varying relations between elements. Any understanding opens up a new perspective and thereby new aspects of reality, even though any configuration in its entirety remains a limited kaleidoscope and not the totality of the social world.

To understand others and to reach an understanding with them is not only a necessary component of epistemology in the social sciences but it is also relevant in pursuit of the best—or rather, a better—life. Each perspective implies a different idea of the best life. Hegel, Marx, Adorno and Habermas presupposed *one* best life for all. And they did this without any effort to understand other human beings. The idea of a universal theory of society and a clear definition of the best society presupposes, just as in any other universalistic conception, that society can be fully known in its totality or at least be based on some evident, irrefutable truths. However, we can only imagine the best society on the basis and within the framework of the existing society, as Adorno has argued. Engels illustrated the point by saying that a dog's heaven was a pile of bones. For this reason, any idea of the best society will remain imperfect—and social technology a meaningless endeavour. Therefore, social theory has to be a critical theory whose only goal is to improve the existing society as a configuration and in relation to other societies.

A critical theory for a multicentric world is looking for empirically saturated, and in their extension clearly defined, configurations on the level of the particular by constructing and analyzing as many relations as possible. Each configuration has to imply understanding in both meanings explored above. As a critical theory, its rationale is a better life (or being-in-the-world). It has to ask with regard to each configuration: Is the life judged best by the respective society—or social configuration—realized here? The question has to be answered in relation to the respective society or configuration and through a hermeneutical circle of empirical research and (double) understanding. This approach is not relativistic because science is in a position to advance a critique of an existing society or configuration by confronting it with its own concept

of the best life (just as Adorno has proposed) and by confronting it with other societies and their concepts of the best life.

## CONCLUSION

While the best life was the ultimate criterion for Marx and Adorno, a joint search for a better life may be the criterion for the post-Eurocentric world. The best life is relative to a given configuration. The rise of the global South incites discussion about standards of theory and practice. In this discussion, the idea of the best life can be equivalent to a regulative idea. The discussion should be conceived as mutual learning. Learning is knowledge and experience at the same time, theory and ethics—if it aims at a better life. The application of critical theory thereby becomes an improvement of life, an ethical practice, itself. This is a hermeneutical interpretation of critical theory—but not in a Eurocentric and universalistic sense. When Hegel said philosophy was nothing but the time put into thought, he meant that the known had to be thought through—that one only learns what one already knows. Now, all of us can learn something that we do not know.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is based on lectures given at Humboldt-Universität Berlin and Clark University, Worcester (USA). I am grateful to the audiences for their comments.
2. In this chapter I do not use the terms Europe, Western Europe, North America, West or global North with any precise meaning or distinction. What is meant, is the world region that has dominated the world during the past two centuries.
3. I will speak of the global South, and at times couple it with the term global North, at times with the term West and at times with Europe and North America. This confusion of terminology perfectly reflects the point I want to make in the first two sections of the chapter.
4. I prefer the word kaleidoscope because the terms configuration and constellation already have rather developed meanings in other traditions. (I am also hesitant to confound a Greek and a Latin term.)
5. Of course, any explanation in the social sciences involves understanding—even if it is restricted to the meaning of the words used in the explanation. However, understanding has to be anchored in the methodology in order to include differing perspectives on the object and within the object and to be able to test one's own claims.



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# Beyond Ethnocentrism: Towards a Global Social Theory

*Hans-Herbert Kögler and Ľubomír Dunaj*

## CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL THEORY AFTER GLOBALIZATION

Under conditions of globalization, the project of developing a social theory has to be emancipated from the confines of sociology based on the nation-state concept (Beck 2007). The transformative forces of global flows of capital, knowledge, and people require new conceptual tools to understand how the self relates to society, how political power may be representative of the people, and how our cultural self-understanding is situated in the particular yet newly opened and changed traditions of our unique histories (Held 1995). While this requires new theoretical frameworks that mediate and resituate how agency partakes in the newly expanded horizons, it pushes another central issue to the fore, one hitherto conveniently hidden by the taken-for-granted assumption of one's own national society as the ultimate object of social analysis: How can we avoid an unduly partial, limited, and therefore biased view vis-à-vis the idea of a critical theory of the social, when the social

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itself has been constructed in terms of one's own particular history and evolution? Therefore, how is it possible to construct a truly global theory of society when the techniques and tools of one's social analysis are derived from a context in which the conceptual framework of the theory was modelled so as to capture, in Max Weber's words, the uniqueness of one's own occidental world? (Habermas 1983; Weber [1922] 1978)).

We thus face the formidable challenge of whether a tradition of social theory that emerged from a particular Western context of theory formation can successfully be transformed, or reconstructed, within a global context in which exist a multiplicity of cultural traditions and perspectives. The challenge presents itself with regard to two pressing dimensions. On the one hand, one's own theory construction may (inescapably?) be indebted to and defined by a Western cultural perspective, such that other traditions and perspectives are not sufficiently recognizable, and are thus not able to contribute to the discourse of how social life should be normatively constructed or how illegitimate power should be overcome. In this case, the theory construction would be necessarily ethnocentric and thus mis-recognize others and their perspectives from the start. On the other hand, the project of producing one over-arching global critical theory would entail capturing such a pluralization and diversity of cultures and traditions that it may no longer seem feasible. Since the cultural situatedness grounds social theory within a particular context, the empirical existence of vastly different contexts appears to undercut any reasonable aspiration for a universal viewpoint, ending thus in relativism.<sup>1</sup> The project of a global social theory may thus be caught between the Scylla of an inescapable ethnocentrism and the Charybdis of a self-destructive relativism.

In this chapter we present an approach that overcomes this paralyzing opposition between ethnocentrism and relativism by making *the cultural situatedness of theory construction* itself the basis of a global critical theory. If social theory is best understood as a cognitive mode of advanced reflexivity vis-à-vis the social world, and if the social world is inextricably bound up with particular cultural, historical, and social traditions and practices, then the construction of a new global social theory *must* address this indebtedness to an ever particular cultural background.<sup>2</sup> The question is, how are we to situate the project of a social theory within the global context of a necessarily pluralized field of cultures and traditions? Our suggestion is to define social theory as a reflexive thematization of precisely this cultural background in its diverse forms and

materializations, including the material social factors that constitute its objective resources and constraints. We are going to employ basic insights of hermeneutic thought to explain how cultural situatedness in a concrete tradition nevertheless enables us to develop the necessary resources for a critical reflexivity vis-à-vis our own context, as well as a grounded openness towards other traditions and perspectives. We can thereby theoretically integrate the (initially disquieting) fact of the (always pluralized) cultural contextuality, which we accomplish by strictly reconstructing the *critical project as reflexively thematizing the social constituents that define the cultural situation of the intentional agent*. Our approach thus overcomes the ethnocentric predicament without buying into a relativistic self-destruction of theory, and instead proposes the relational reconstruction of layers of social agency as a model which entails universal claims that will always be hermeneutically sensitive to the respective cultural and social contexts.

It should be emphasized that we pursue the project of a global social theory from the angle of *critical* theory. For us this means that the normative orientation towards the cognitive and experiential resources for individual agents vis-à-vis their social situatedness is central. Social contexts of practices and institutions are not merely, as in sociology and sociological theory, understood in their ontological and historical features *sui generis*; rather, questions of social order, the constitution of a social fact, or issues of change, inner composition, or boundaries of the social are only of interest inasmuch as they provide resources for a normative concept of self-realization. Accordingly, social contexts of practices and institutions interest inasmuch as they entail the issue of *social power*, that is, for whom and under which circumstances the social contexts provide resources for a socially situated individual agency. At stake is thus both an *ethico-normative* dimension (i.e., how to ideally define what the realization of those resources should entail), and a *socio-ontological* dimension (i.e., under what social and cultural conditions agents may be able to unfold their potential). The task of a critical social theory is to bring these two dimensions together, not just to posit normative goals or explain social facts but to analyze the extent to which social reality allows for the possible realization of normative goals.

What needs to be emphasized is that the pursuit of this project has to be undertaken in a particular way *within the context of globalization* (Kögler 2005). We see such a context not merely as an imposed necessity, but as a vastly superior opportunity for tapping into conceptual resources,

which should move towards a new account of the mediation of the normative and the social. But to fully unleash the potential of our approach, it needs to be distinguished from two other modes of theory making. We are neither aiming to construct the normative infrastructure as a necessary (teleological) process of *development* towards a conceptually articulated and clearly defined set of norms or values, nor do we believe in the *transcendental reconstruction* of a set of formal presuppositions of all human understanding or communication as suitable or sufficient for our project. The developmental approach assumes a teleological ordering of different cultural contexts, which catapults one's own socio-historical situation automatically into the position of the ultimate judge; all other forms of life, cultures, and epochs are assessed as to whether, and to what extent, they realize *our* given set of values. Yet the onto-theological premises of such a value-definition of this process are no longer sustainable in a global context of multiple sources of cultural value-orientation. Furthermore, the value-orientations that derive from one particular context would needlessly rule out other totally acceptable forms, by means of an accompanied, concrete, and institutionally predefined understanding of the value contexts.<sup>3</sup> The transcendental approach, in turn, is necessarily based on a formalization of the prevalent pre-understandings of *one's own context*, and thus potentially hypostatizes local standards into allegedly universally binding ones. Such "universal" features are abstracted from one's contexts through the method of formal reconstruction, and yet the (re-) application to specific contexts of experience would require a hermeneutically sensitive appropriation for each cultural and social context. This formalism does not solve or significantly guide this task, as it rather entails the risk of bias towards the implicit rich assumptions underlying one's formalized criteria.

We take it that the task therefore consists in avoiding the master narratives of a developmental or transcendental approach, and aim to reconstruct *the agentive resources that allow individual subjects to position themselves within social contexts of practices and institutions such that they can realize themselves*. The resources for self-realization based on social contexts of enablement are at stake, and the content of these self-realizing projects need to be attuned to concrete cultural and social contexts. Instead of leaping over these cultural and social contexts to provide some meta-grid of an (allegedly universal) judgment, the task is to develop the resources for reflective judgment, such that this critical reflexivity is (a) reconstructed in its general possibility, range, and focus, and (b) that its

concrete realization—its putting-the-self-into-reality-based-on-its-potential—is attributed to the agents themselves.

We take it, furthermore, that all this entails that global theory making is necessarily a dialogical project. This follows from our definition of this theory as a reflexive project. What we aim at is to reconstruct the resources that enable the agents themselves to define and realize their potential. Yet such resources will themselves acquire particular contours and a visible face, so to speak, through the act of interpretive self-understanding. Such a self-understanding will always—as we will show through our grounding in critical hermeneutics—proceed from a rich cultural and historical background. The agentive self-understanding is thereby both constrained and enabled by the concrete tradition or lifeworld within which the agent exists. The reflexive reconstruction of how to pursue one's life is thus concretely situated. Yet we define the role of a critical global theory as enabling a sort of *immanent transcendence*, amounting to a situated distancing from the pre-understood parameters of one's sociocultural life context. Critical theory thus reconstructs how, from within a social situatedness, a critical distancing would *in general* be possible, and it provides a formal framework for how such a critical and reflexive distancing can make sense of itself.

To be sure, the actual work of self-understanding—a work of hermeneutic self-cultivation vis-à-vis one's socio-cultural contexts—requires that such a distancing is always undertaken by the agent herself. Yet the theoretical reconstructions of our global critical theory enable us to see how agents can, in culturally and socially highly diverse contexts, activate and pursue diverse modes of critical self-understanding. It thereby also serves as a kind of intermediary bridge towards such a self-realization, by inquiring how different cultural contexts enable different modes of reflexive distancing based on their particular ontological, social, and normative backgrounds. *The abandonment of a developmental or transcendental mode opens up existing cultural worlds as the inescapable horizons from within which any critical project has to emerge.* The particular challenge of our approach is to develop a formal indication of how the self may reflexively position itself within a cultural and social context, and thereby allow for and reconstruct diverging and multiple conceptions of the relation between self and context (or self and being) that all count as instantiations of critical reflexivity. The reconstruction of the particular constellations and presuppositions that the diverse cultural backgrounds provide therefore discloses a whole new field for a global critical theory that aims to

anchor its project in concrete social ontologies. This chapter sets out to make this project feasible by reconstructing how we can redefine critical theory as a hermeneutically situated project in which the “critique” is engendered by the reflexive agents from within their particular cultural contexts. This will occupy the next three sections. We will then open our analysis to potential resources for such a project within Chinese philosophy and thought. The claim of reconstructing the “critical project” from within concrete cultural contexts, which may vastly differ, is thus exemplified in a concrete case, and yet the universal aspiration to establish a formal framework for a critical reflexivity that enables critique and self-realization, while similarly being culturally sensitive and non-ethnocentric, is also validated.

### HERMENEUTICS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR A CRITIQUE OF POWER

Because the project is to reconstruct a global critical theory that avoids the ethnocentric predicament, we use Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a starting point. One reason is that “overcoming ethnocentrism” cannot mean ignoring one’s own cultural and historical situatedness, nor denying that one’s self-understanding derives from a rich background that is not simply “superseded” nor “sublated” by some philosophical method. The productive role of one’s cultural and historical background is a crucial feature of Gadamer’s position, in that the constitutive force of pre-judgments in any understanding is seen as a *sine qua non* of interpretation. Gadamer’s “hermeneutics of finitude” furthermore has the advantage of intrinsically combining insight into one’s own historical contingency with an openness towards other relevant views and perspectives: precisely because my own view cannot claim to be final or absolute, I must take seriously the other’s views on the shared subject matter, to be open to the fact “that the view of the other may well be right.” (Gadamer 1989).

Gadamer’s concept of intentional understanding involves that we are always “based” in a tradition from within which we approach any content or experience. The reflexive understanding of this process of “understanding content,” which he terms “hermeneutic experience,” means that the background understanding of the tradition always surpasses our conscious and reflexive control, and thereby induces us to accept that the theoretical and conceptual reconstructions will never be final nor fully completed. In addition, since the richness of the background tradition mediates all



understanding, and needs to be brought into play when we consciously grasp something as something, interpretation always involves the application, however implicit, of our pre-existing beliefs and assumptions. Because our understanding is oriented towards the texts, or whatever we plausibly take to be a symbolic expression of some intentional content, our understanding of the text depends on being able *to make sense of its subject matter*. Yet the subject matter is something that can only be grasped if it is related to our own understanding of it, thereby involving our preconceptions about the issue at stake. Given this content-relatedness of understanding, we construct interpretation as a quasi-dialogue about the subject matter, where we approach the text as having something *to say to us*, to speak to us. In order to thus understand the text's voice we cannot but approach the symbolic expression with an anticipation of rational coherence, assuming that we can indeed make sense of its claims.

Gadamer makes this claim in what could be called a phenomenology of the interpretive act. Assume you are confronted with a text you aim to understand. The interpretive access to its meaning entails coming to an understanding of what the text is about. This aboutness, the subject matter of the text (*die Sache selbst*), is thus the focus. Yet the subject matter can only be understood through the text itself. We have no direct access to the mind of its author. Indeed, the only way we can hope to unravel its meaning is by proceeding from our own understanding of what the text is all about. This means we have to relate the text's meaning to our preconceptions about its subject matter. Now, in our natural attitude we assume that the text will say something relevant and important, that it will make sense, that it speaks the truth. So to understand a text is to endorse its claim of saying something rationally acceptable by relating it to our own true preconceptions, and to thereby—via this “anticipation of rational coherence”—make it speak to us.

However, for our project of a global critical theory, Habermas' trenchant criticism of Gadamer's position is highly relevant.<sup>4</sup> This is so despite the fact that the intrinsic connection between meaning and validity in linguistic understanding is a crucial claim of his theory of communicative action.<sup>5</sup> It is instructive in our context to recall briefly the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, since we aim to develop a *critical social theory* that understands itself as situated, and not as abstractly opposed or transcendent to tradition (Gadamer 1989) or lifeworld (Habermas 1983). Habermas rightly senses that Gadamer emphasizes those features of a tradition that force the reflexive agent to acknowledge that she is always

dependent on an event of truth, on a happening that is “more being than consciousness,” that requires an “integration into the event of tradition,” and that is never to be methodologically controlled or constructed. Since Gadamer furthermore restricts the true disclosure of meaning to the dialogical-intentional orientation of content, the everyday competence of situated speakers is here hypostatized into a quasi-transcendental framework of all understanding, instead of equally paying attention to objective social forces that undermine or distort the agent’s intentional self-understanding.

While Gadamer can plausibly claim that all reflexive self-understanding is insurmountably mediated by one’s linguistically constructed pre-understanding, Habermas’ point is that such a pre-understanding may itself be shaped by more than communicative or “normative” relations, that is, it may also involve socio-economic and social power structures. Yet, if our traditions—a longstanding insight of critical theory since Benjamin—are always already the product of language and power, are co-primordially, as Habermas puts it, based on a “system including language, power, and labor alike,” we cannot be content to merely interpret ourselves *from within* the prevailing self-understanding of a tradition; what we now need is some way to confront, within the context within which we necessarily exist, the *external constitution* of meaning. It is the objective structuration of meaning that escapes the truth-oriented and tradition-based view. We thus cannot just focus on the reconstruction of the intrinsic values of the classics and their tradition (which Gadamer aims to retrieve through his value-oriented hermeneutics), but need to take into account the power and oppression that goes on in the background. We need *a methodological perspective* which reveals to us these external forms of meaning-constitution.

Gadamer plausibly replies to Habermas’ demand for a perspective *external* to the tradition-immanent view that any such view will also have to be understood and justified against the bedrock of our beliefs, assumptions, and practices (i.e., against the background of our tradition). Yet it is important in our current context that this plausible reply does *not* remove the need to figure out *how to analyze the socially caused construction of power-based immanent views*. In other words, what is at stake is *not* that we cannot attain a God’s eye view outside of any pre-understanding, a pure view from nowhere, but how we can manage *within our existing practices* to develop an account of how the immanent promise of our tradition can be mediated with the socially real fact of *its power-*

*defined destruction and distortion.* The hermeneutic ideal of a truth-oriented dialogue, which would result in a normative endorsement through a “fusion of horizons,” cannot yet be taken as the sufficient model for understanding if traditions themselves entail power and oppression to the extent that they do.<sup>6</sup>

We thus need a theoretically informed perspective that removes the arbitrary limitations of an idealized and solely truth-oriented view on understanding, and opens the process of hermeneutic interpretation to the full complexity that is entailed by its socially situated nature (i.e., that it entails power and meaning alike). Yet, if we now take seriously Gadamer’s apt reply about needing to relate any such insight back to the situated speaker and her socio-cultural lifeworld, we get a new normative model of how critical theory and hermeneutics may be fused for a global critical theory. On the one hand, the traditional background can now be seen as entailing not just normatively acceptable, but also power-induced modes of meaning that require analysis. Its unchecked influence on our pre-understanding may distort its results and obscure the true meaning of phenomena. It will be especially productive to think about our conceptions of self and nature from such a perspective, and to allow alternative conceptions that challenge our pre-assumptions to be articulated in this context. On the other hand, *the reconstruction of such power-infused modes of meaning can only be undertaken from an itself situated standpoint*, simply because there is no standpoint outside of the cultural and historical practices that we inhabit. So the answer and task for a hermeneutically transformed critical theory can be grasped thus: To show how *the reflexive powers operative in the situated agent herself* would allow a situated agent to not only orient herself at the truth-disclosed meaning at hand, but to also reflexively distance herself from essential preconceptions and pre-judgments so as to analyze their distorting and objectifying natures.

### TOWARDS A THEORY OF HERMENEUTIC SELF-REFLEXIVITY

What we need is a theory of reflexivity that does not presuppose a transcendental subject prior to the hermeneutics process, but that develops the conceptual, practical, and methodological resources for a *critical reflexivity* from within the agent’s cultural and historical situatedness. In order to set the stage for such a post-ethnocentric social theory, we present the following systematic steps as essential building blocks.

### *The Linguistic Mediation of Experience*

The background of all intentional understanding is defined by linguistic mediation. Linguistic understanding is itself defined by its complex structure which entails, among other things, the disclosure of the world in terms of propositional content. This means that we, as agents, are not merely thrown into situations that engulf and determine us, but that as human agents we are able to thematize them as such-and-such. One way to put it is to say that we are able to distanciate ourselves from our immediate situatedness, and thus have a self and world in the first place. Language gives us a world, and not merely an “environment,” because it relates to the “world” via a mediational form, the symbolic form defined by the sign entailing a signifier and a signified, for which something is defined as something. What Heidegger calls the “hermeneutic as” is due to language, with its internally disclosing structure that presents a thing as what it is in a medium which the thing is not, and thereby presents the world to us as world, or creates the closeness of the world through its distance.

### *The Dialogical Disclosure of Meaning*

It follows that the quasi-transcendental role of language has an insurmountable methodological consequence. To speak a language means to be able to relate to the world within a shared communicate context. Such a communicative context involves that at least two speakers relate via symbolic expressions to something that they both understand as something. To understand what another speaker says requires that I attribute a sensible conception of the signs used in phrases and understood as speech acts. The methodological consequence is thus that I have to *bring into play* my own beliefs and assumptions—as Gadamer showed, true dialogue has the character of a play event where we are carried on (or away) by the dynamic of the subject matter. But, as both Gadamer and Habermas clearly saw (and emphasized against objectivistic or positivistic models of interpretation), this puts the validity or truth issue at the center of interpretive understanding. The fact that I understand what makes sense about a subject matter, or that the meaning of a speech act is based on the (however implicit) background reasons that would make it rationally acceptable, means that I am oriented towards the truth of the other’s statements

in understanding. I therefore cannot but conceive hermeneutic understanding as the immanent reconstruction of reason-based valid perspectives, and have to exclude *as a foundation of understanding* any externalist approach, whether it be based on the psychological or sociological model of meaning constitution. The epistemic access to meaning can only be “dialogical” in that meaning is related to the reconstruction of plausible and defensible viewpoints.

### *The Constitutive Role of Conceptual Schemes*

The axiom of the linguistic mediation of understanding, however, also entails that one’s own pre-understanding is always situated within a holistic context of pre-assumptions and practices. This in turn means that the “hermeneutic universe” of understanding is not a monolithic context in which the same background assumptions pertain. Indeed, the hermeneutic problematic itself arises from the very fact that the orientation towards a shared subject matter emerges against a background of different pre-assumptions and practices. Interpretive understanding exists due to a dialectic between sharedness and strangeness, or similarity and difference. To have a problem understanding something, it cannot be altogether foreign or alien (i.e., I have to be able to identify *what* the other talks about), but it cannot also be just like my own, because then there wouldn’t even be an issue of *having* to understand through interpretation. The difference is here conceptualized as a difference in *how a subject matter is disclosed*. To that purpose, we use the concept of a *conceptual scheme*, while rejecting the definition as well as the consequences of Davidson’s critique of it. Conceptual schemes are not mini-Kantian a priori, but are deeply engrained symbolic and practical clusters of basic assumptions and background practices. The interpretive disclosure of these background constellations allows for the distancing disclosure of alternative ways to understand something as something. The hermeneutic understanding of a different conceptual scheme (which lies at the core of a tradition) travels necessarily through my own pre-identification of what the other is talking about, which then begins to reconstruct those background assumptions and practices that are necessary to making sense. The background assumptions are not necessarily shared or endorsed, but they do have to appear as human possibilities within the cultural imaginaries that define us.

### *The Distanciating Analysis of Meaning and Context*

The reconstruction of such alternative conceptual schemes achieves that distanciating effect at stake between Gadamer and Habermas. It is true, as Gadamer emphasized, that any such distanciation is one undertaken from within one's own tradition. (We will talk about the internal complexity and diversity within what is labelled *a* tradition.) But it is also true, as Habermas objected, that (a) traditions as such cannot be identified with the taken-to-be-true beliefs of internally situated agents, since their conceptual and linguistic schemes are shaped by more than truth-conducive beliefs, (b) the internal perspective of the situated agents is therefore not sufficient as a theory of meaning constitution and as a reconstruction of the meaning as such, and (c) it is possible to devise theoretical and methodological means that articulate the inherent reflexivity of one's relation to tradition, and thereby to create a space for critical intervention. It is this *critical space of a reflexive distance* that Gadamer himself occupies when he rejects the historicist objectification of previous epochs. The rejection of this alienating attitude is itself based on the knowledge of their distance and the need to rekindle the intrinsic validity of traditional texts and documents.<sup>7</sup> The critical distance can now be filled and developed with the methodological tools provided by the cultural and social sciences. Their methods will reveal an understanding of the constitutive layers of meaning that shape a given symbolic expression within its objective social context. Without predetermining here the precise methodological tools that may be used to analyze such social power configurations in the background of symbolic expressions—which may be political-economical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, post-structuralist, or systems-theoretic, for instance—it is crucial to mark the methodological location in which such models find their place, and to assert that they can indeed articulate the intrinsic hermeneutic distanciation in a new and productive way.

### *The Reflexivity of the Agent*

To conclude this reconstruction of critical reflexivity, only one more step is needed. The process of distanciation leads back to the self-understanding of the situated agent. This is a necessary move to allow for appropriation, without which all understanding remains an arcane and scholastic enterprise. Gadamer's hermeneutics presents application as an essential moment of interpretation. Application is also seen as trans-methodological because

it is always already accomplished due to the necessary reliance on pre-judgments in understanding. When interpretive understanding occurs, application has already co-occurred, because only by appropriating the other's perspective can I understand at all. The process of application, however, is more complicated if we introduce a *methodological break* within dialogical understanding. Now we have inserted an *objectifying step* that reconstructs the internally coherent background assumptions, pairs those with pre-existing symbolic frameworks, cultural practices, and social institutions, and thereby generates a more radical distancing effect of critical self-reflexivity. So now we need to emphasize that this is still self-reflexivity—that is, the self *recognizes herself* as the one that has been shaped and is situated within an objective symbolic and social power context. Only if we can show that the objectifying measures we undertake *within the situated process of understanding* can be applied back to our situated self-understanding, have we generated a *situated* critical theory. We need to break the spell of the unchallenged dominance of traditional beliefs and assumptions, and yet we need this process to be connected to the agent in his or her situated agency.

### BEYOND CARTESIANISM: THE UNIVERSAL CONTOURS OF CRITICAL SELF-REFLEXIVITY

We are now in a position to turn to our revised model of situated reflexivity that, as a hermeneutic grounding of critical reflexivity, is a valuable path to fulfill the promise of overcoming ethnocentrism (and without falling into the trap of relativism). The profile of a reflexive thematization of linguistically mediated background assumptions, which entails conceptual schemes and associated social practices and institutions, provides us with a model for reflexive agency that is capable of capturing basic intuitions of critique, and yet avoids entanglement in particular Western narratives. To be sure, if the idea of a self that is capable of critically reflecting on its cultural and social presuppositions is rejected and branded as Western, we may hit a wall. Yet our model not only avoids, but actively aims to overcome the particular Western tradition of a philosophy of mind, which is based on the opposition of a self-sustained, autonomous subject over against a world of material objects. The critique of such a Cartesian conception of subjectivity is a major topic of Western philosophical discourse, and it is in this context that the interest of non-Western thought attains a special significance.<sup>8</sup> Yet we

should be clear that we are aiming at an overcoming of Cartesianism that retains the concepts of a critical and reflexive agency as capable of thematizing its own social embeddedness in a significant way. This significance is both derived from some general features of how the self is able to thematize itself, and is open to cultural modifications that allow for a variety of forms of subjectivity and social organization. We shall see that in order to establish this goal certain basic features of the linguistic mediation of experience vis-à-vis social agency have to be emphasized. These features are meant to serve as guide posts for the critical reconstruction of alternative conceptions of social theory and ontology.<sup>9</sup>

We see as central the mediation of *subjective autonomy*, understood as the capacity to orient one's own beliefs and actions in a self-guided way so as to attain one's self-realization, and *social or ontological holism*, understood as the important contextual embeddedness of one's own existence in the trans-subjective and natural forces that define one's world always already. The goal of the conceptual framework is to develop a critical distance for the self with regard to its socio-ontological embeddedness, which allows one to unfold one's potential to go beyond the status quo, and yet which retains one's necessary reliance on its social conditions of possibility. There are three reflexive relations that the self is able to engage in, and that can be distinguished as universal features of situated agency.

### *The Relation of the Self Towards Itself*

Due to the linguistic mediation of experience, the self is situated within a context of communicative practices in which it acquires the capacity to refer (back) to itself. The self-referential identification may be reconstructed as taking the view of the other towards the self, which becomes identifiable as a self (Kögler 2012). The act of self-identification is enabled by symbolic means that refer to a self that maintains the ontological complex *and* ambiguous position to be both subject and object of this act of identification. Yet, because the first personal pronoun provides this unique symbolic relation, it is able to function as an anchor from which I construct what *belongs* to me. My *me*, as Mead suggested, is defined by the infinite cultural and social markers that are always already in play to define me, and that I am socialized to accept as such. And yet the capacity to relate to me by myself—the fact that I can thematize this me and make its constitution the object of my own intentional pursuit—now makes all the difference. In taking up this reflexive attitude towards me as a new object



of my own work on myself, I transform the socially given into a project of my own existential goals. Importantly in our context, I thereby realize the first mode of self-reflexivity, the relation to my self by myself.

It is this source that allows the hermeneutic self-understanding to take off towards an integration of methodological insights into how I conceive and conduct myself. Such an integration must include the next two modes of reflexivity, the normative recognition of the other and the holistic understanding of my world-embeddedness. But before we explicate those modes, we need to highlight that this conception of a self as interpretively defined in a self-reflexive process does not amount to a Cartesian split-off mind that is self-contained and self-sustained. Our self-conception creates a layer of reflexive distance, like a folding onto the shared meaning and practices within which my me is constituted, instead of suggesting an entirely different, “substantially” different mental sphere within which thoughts, volitions, and emotions are housed. Similarly, the self is not understood as entailing rigid maxims or concepts that impose their epistemic iron grid onto the otherwise unorganized sense data. The self here is a flexibly and openly integrated being that is defined by its contextual relations and situational surroundings. And finally, the self is not defined in its “autonomy” as beyond and above the realm of contingency and power; the self is rather seen as dependent, vulnerable, and relationally oriented inasmuch as it is ever capable of cognizing and conducting itself in a self-directed manner. So the idea of autonomy, which we would want to keep by radically redefining it, entails a fully situated, relational, and interdependent self that nevertheless has the capacity to make itself the object of its own understanding, and thereby achieve a sense of self-directedness vis-à-vis its self as the agent of its thoughts and actions.

### *The Relation of the Self Towards Others*

The self finds itself always already in social contexts, which are decisively defined by being communicatively structured. The self discloses the world amidst a network of discourses and associated practices and institutions, and in this context other selves appear. The encounter with the other is mediated by speech and thus defined as dialogical: I communicate by articulating some thoughts via a symbolic expression, the resources of which always already shaped the structure of my thoughts; my symbolic expressions as thoughts are always about something and address a subject matter to which the other is responding. Yet as a respondent capable of

responding to my “speech proposal,” I recognize the other as a human subject of equal status, as a rational self that is defined by all the features of understanding and reason that I would attribute to myself.

Even if I never reflected explicitly on my own status as speaker, the underlying assumptions entail my capacity to articulate propositional content in a variety of modes that allow me to communicate both a content and a type of utterance. However, the always established participation does allow me to reflect on the presuppositions of my own and everyone’s status as dialogue partners in this network of discourses. I reflexively now realize that I have always already accepted—merely by means of opening my mouth and saying something about something to someone else—the principle of rational reciprocity: I recognize the other as a rational co-subject just as much as the other is supposed to address me as a rational subject when I address her in speech. There is a normative infrastructure of mutual recognition built into the fabric of dialogical communication. It is this dimension that Gadamer and Habermas, and, in other ways, Buber, Rosenzweig, and even Levinas, have brought to bear on our normative reflexivity vis-à-vis our intersubjective existence. We realize reflexively that we are carried, even in our most mundane everyday activities, by a mutual trust in the other to be a reasonable and sensible being with regard to what we consider the world.

Now it would be indeed naïve to believe that this normative disclosure of the other, which we can reflexively unearth, is or must be identical with the full phenomenology of how we encounter the other in social life. Precisely because the other is encountered in a social world, which is always also our whole world because it is mediated by the social, the other is mostly and usually objectified, is defined in terms of implicit clusters of identifying markers: I always talk with a waitress, a banker, an African American youth, a homeless person, or a boss; I always thematize, however implicitly, whatever I talk about in anticipation of the other’s horizon that I intuitively pre-disclose in light of some pre-understanding, which itself reflects social status and thus power. The facticity of objectifying markers in our intersubjective dealings with the other do not diminish the normative force of the recognition of the other as such, as I could always unleash and articulate this normative force through dialogue; yet it does force us to take other steps and to include in our reflexive self-understanding the holistic disclosure of ourselves in the light of basic conceptual and practical assumptions.

*The Relation of the Self Towards the World as a Whole*

The self, we may say with philosophical anthropology, occupies an eccentric relationship to the world; embedded in it and yet never just “of” it, it is situated among others, things, and their surroundings, and yet never just one thing among them. Surely it is crucial to overcome the Cartesian/Kantian illusion of a need to “bridge the gap” between the internal, self-present, cognitive mind, and the external, extended, and material world. The self is always already, as Heidegger illustrated, embedded in the world and never needs first to “reach it.” And yet the world as a world is available to the self in its totality in thought, as a thought about the core parameters of the world, even though this totality itself can never be fully detailed, can only be captured in its basic structures and determinants, and further “fleshed out,” defined in more and more illustrative detail, either in the natural, social, or human sciences, or in the manifold arts. The world in its totality forms the background of the self’s self-understanding, and it is defined by deep ontological assumptions that themselves are related to social practices and institutions.

Accordingly, the core ontological semantics of the agents’ lifeworlds pre-structure how agents disclose their own selves, how they relate to others, and how they generally conceive of the material and social environments within which they think, act, and perceive. The capacity to reflexively thematize their own self-identities, the capacity to reconstruct the underlying dialogical recognition embedded in communication, need to be fully realized in a holistic self-reflexivity in which the self situates its other capacities in the world as it finds it organized. The order of things will be reconstructed, not despite but helped, by advanced scientific and aesthetic potentials. This holistic thinking will project conceptions of being onto its understanding of the world. For example, the metaphysical thought of Western philosophy in Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz did reconstruct the order of things—defined as substances with attributes and modes—in order to make it “fit” with the conception of God as a supreme and perfect being. The attributes of God allowed us to detail, in different ways, the concrete structuration of the worlds, which as monads in Leibniz’s case would allow for the highest possible level of integration between the experiential autonomy and perspectivalness of subjective selves (conscious souls) and the overall determination of the most perfect of all possible worlds, in terms of a pre-established harmony. Absolute holism and subjective individualism were thus married in a very particular way (Leibniz 1991).

We no longer endorse the metaphysical assumptions that defined the Enlightenment of the West. The Copernican revolution in thought triggered by Kant is itself a global phenomenon beyond which no contemporary thought can go. The Kantian turn, to be sure, only started a movement of thought the result of which, as a basic and insurmountable platform for all contemporary thought, has been reconstructed through its social-theoretical and linguistic-philosophical transformation, so that we derive the *symbolically mediated and socially situated self*. The self entails the capacities of existential self-reflexivity, normative other-reflexivity, and holistic world-reflexivity, which it may use to construct a picture of the world in which its own eccentric position can be related to a reconciliation of its normative dialogical insight with the realization of the world as a whole. The harmony of which Leibniz dreamed in his metaphysical radicality, by projecting an absolutely perfect world as a correlate of the perfect God, now needs to be built up from scratch by the situated agents who reconcile the normative equality of all with the complex inequality and difference that we all exemplify in our real world beings.

To achieve a more perfect and more harmonious reconciliation between normative utopia and existing inequality, the hermeneutic work of a global social theory—which understands itself as an enabler for a critical hermeneutics of self-cultivation vis-à-vis the existing world—has found its cause. As we laid out in the first section, the theoretical articulation of the specifics of this project have to be derived from the multiple and diverse cultural contexts that define our global situation. The parameters are to reconstruct the resources that would enable the three types of reflexivity such that the reconciliation between equality and difference may be achieved. It would inquire into whether, from each cultural horizon, an objective harmony would be normatively acceptable and existentially livable. It is with these admittedly preliminary remarks that we turn to Chinese philosophy and thought.

### NON-WESTERN INSPIRATION: THE CASE OF CHINESE THOUGHT AND ETHICS

There are several reasons why Western philosophers should begin to inquire into Chinese philosophy. For the sake of brevity, we would like to point out only that China is one of the, so called, axial civilizations, or rather Axial Age civilizations (Arnason 2014, p. 179), and that its philosophical heritage belongs to the oldest in world history. Consequently, it

offers many indigenous notions and ideas that retain their relevance today. To provide only a few examples, from an ontological point of view, “being as the Way (Dao)” (i.e., the vivid “One”), which is in the process of permanent metamorphosis, *yin-yang*: the complementary, interconnected and interdependent unity of opposite forces; or, from a philosophical-anthropological and ethical point of view, the concept of self-cultivation; the ethos of learning; the idea of doing by non-interference and non-obstruction of the functional activities of other people; and especially the idea of harmony—among people and with the world in general, strongly emphasized, especially by Neo-Confucian philosophers.

We can only speculate whether Leibniz took some inspiration for his concept of harmony from Chinese philosophy (Cook and Rosemont 1994, pp. 2–3). Nevertheless, research on the relevance of Chinese philosophy to the development not only of Leibniz’s philosophy, but also of modern European philosophy in general is still rather neglected (App 2010; Zempliner 1962a, 1966, 1970). Although there are some indications that even such important thinkers as Immanuel Kant could have been indirectly inspired by Confucius—through Christian Wolff—both in his concept of duty and in his concept of autonomous morality (Roetz 2006, p. 113, 2013a, p. 22; Zempliner 1962b, p. 765). With regard to the project of a global social theory as introduced above, that is, to avoid the Scylla of an inescapable ethnocentrism and the Charybdis of a self-destructive relativism, one feature of Confucian philosophy is inspirational, as emphasized by Heiner Roetz: “Confucians live in two worlds: the world of particular ethical duties with their detailed ritual prescriptions ... and the world of the moral interest of the whole, which transcends the first world, relativizing and yet not negating it. This dialectic of Confucianism, on which its development potential otherwise depends, has all too often been overlooked by means of its *prima facie* conventional appearance” (Roetz 2006, p. 22) [translation by Lubomír Dunaj, original in German].

Such a view of Confucianism as offered by Heiner Roetz is rare, even less common are critical theorists with any serious knowledge of Chinese Philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, for the most part popular knowledge of Chinese philosophy stems from sinologists, historians, or experts in cultural studies, or even from economists of recent decades trying to understand China’s remarkable economic growth, rather than from (Western) philosophers. Therefore, any discussion concerning the potential of Chinese philosophy cannot as of yet begin, due to this kind of prejudice or lack of interest, which is itself a sign of a certain ethnocentrism. This is a different

situation with regard to the serious deficit of resources that defined the times of Hegel, Karl Marx, or Max Weber, who continue to exert a considerable influence on philosophy and social sciences.<sup>11</sup> Although there are hundreds of books of and about Chinese philosophy translated into European languages (both from Western and non-Western authors, with the number of first-rate translations and interpretations gradually increasing), the interest in Chinese philosophy among critical theorists is only slowly catching up.<sup>12</sup> An inspiring exception is the Czech philosopher Egon Bondy (1930–2007) whose approach serves as a reflexive foil to explore Chinese thought for critical theory.<sup>13</sup> Bondy’s lifelong project was focused on “ontological clarity” as the key precondition for a fulfilling life, defined as a life in which an emancipated subject is able to find a free, creative, and responsible answer to the question of the purpose of human life, which in turn functions as an important precondition for the establishment of a just and harmonious society. In his opus magnum *The Consolation of Ontology: On the Substantial and Nonsubstantial Models* (Bondy 2001—originally in Czech 1967), Bondy attempts to recover the emancipatory project of Marxism, observing that every substantial model of reality, in both its theistic and mechanical-materialist versions, is problematic and logically untenable.<sup>14</sup> His search for an alternative, non-substantial model of being brought him to the study of non-Western ontological conceptions, especially those of Buddhism and Daoism, which, in his view, were more consistent than their Western counterparts. He wrote—as a non-sinologist—a comprehensive history of Chinese philosophy (Bondy 1992), which exemplifies his deep interest and knowledge of those philosophical traditions. He even translated—with the sinologist Marina Čarnogurská—the *Dao De Jing* into Slovak (Lao c’ 2005).<sup>15</sup>

It seems that the collaboration with Marina Čarnogurská changed Bondy’s approach to Chinese philosophy, in that he abandoned the strict materialist and rationalist reading of Chinese philosophical heritage and became more open to its spiritual aspects. This different perspective is presented in his last philosophical book *Příběh o příběhu* [Story after story] (Bondy 2009). Nevertheless, with regard to China in general, his position was always much more balanced, although in some very decisive points he is very close to Čarnogurská as we try to show below. Indeed, Bondy offers a moderate attitude to China, which may be productive for further discussion. He attempted to avoid the extreme positions of either some kind of “sino-romanticism,” or a radical rejection of almost everything connected to China, both past and present, that is so typical for many in the West today.

If the character of their main philosophical studies has to be described, it can be said that, although they disagreed on many specifics, Egon Bondy and Marina Čarnogurská attempted to combine “dialectics” with “ontology” in order to set ontology “into movement” for a non-dualist, holistic, and dynamic understanding of reality. They both believed not only that the *Dao De Jing* plays a key role in understanding the Classical Chinese world view and the “civilizational gene” (Hsu 2005), but also that it provides important resources for a modern ethics in a globalized era. They hoped to develop a specific kind of critical theory out of this holistic ontology that would not only be able to identify potential crises and misdevelopments, thereby contributing to a well-ordered, harmonious society, but also to identify and develop the abilities of the autonomous individual, so that he/she might be capable of harmoniously interacting with her social and natural environment and in this way finding the answer for a meaningful life.

Another reason that Egon Bondy attached importance to China is worth noting. In his search for a non-substantialist and non-dualistic interpretation of reality, he found that the holistic view on reality, which was typical for upper Palaeolithic people and for, so-called, primitive cultures today, was already present in China at the beginning of its written history (Bondy 2009, p. 106, 162, 328) and that texts such as the *Dao De Jing* provide its philosophical expression (Bondy 2005, p. 175). Although Bondy was neither anthropologist nor ethnologist—most sources employed in his analyses are drawn “secondhand,” especially from Claude Lévi-Strauss (Bondy 2009, pp. 315–317)—the question of whether it is possible to find such thinking in China is worth further investigation, especially with regard to attempts to heal the separation in Cartesian dualism between nature and thought. The way in which he worked with the thought of a “primitive” culture, is not to be understood as an attempt to dismiss modern rational thought in the way of post-modern relativism. On the contrary, he attempted to offer new perspectives for the critical self-examination of modern thought and tried to overcome the Cartesian dualism without losing the essential insights of the Enlightenment.

However, according to Bondy’s aforementioned book *Průběh o průběhu*, it seems that he—at least partially—shared a similar attitude as Marina Čarnogurská’s, that is, a very essentialist and in fact “static” understanding of Chinese spiritual tradition, history, and politics (Bondy 2009, pp. 261–262, 339). He therefore did not fully develop his inspiring intuitions. For example, Čarnogurská’s stresses that the heritage of ideas from

Classical China is an expression of a nature-oriented world view of an agrarian society. The world views and religious orientations of that society were based upon the idea of a holistically organized, unified universe. In this interpretation, being here expresses itself in an organic *yin-yang* process, which is both immanent and dialectical, thereby realizing the Way 道 (*Dao*). Čarnogurská emphasizes above all that the Chinese world view, since prehistoric times, has rejected any belief in a transcendent Subject or God-Creator as the fundamental origin and organizer of the Universe (Čarnogurská et al. 2006, p. 24; Čarnogurská-Ferancová 2015, 2016). She contrasts the Chinese perspective with value orientations such as individualism, anthropocentrism, and materialism, which she sees in ascendancy not only in the West, but also in other parts of the world (including China), and which she blames for global problems such as overconsumption, reification, lack of concern for future generations, reckless destruction of animal species and ecosystems, and so on. In opposition to this, in the Classical Chinese world view, the human is only a small interior microelement of the cosmos who cannot act arbitrarily because it would disrupt the holistic structure and equilibrium of society and universe, inevitably leading to their destruction (Čarnogurská et al. 2006, p. 25). Harmony with nature, as well as the intrinsic harmony of humans with the “way of natural being,” became the main Chinese credo in all domains of social and aesthetic life, and harmonious unity and mutual contentment were important ethical (personal) ideals (Čarnogurská et al. 2006, p. 240).

Let us now put aside any relevant reservations about such interpretations of the Classical Chinese world view (Elvin 2004; Roetz 2013b, 2016, pp. 300–301), as well as the question of whether such a view of reality still represents the predominant world view of Chinese society (the opposite seems to be true), and instead focus, in the context of intercultural dialogue, on the normative aspect of Bondy’s inquiries. We will see that it is possible to identify shared attitudes with the progressive proponents of secular values. The ideal of harmonious relationships (Hrubeč 2010, p. 197), if sufficiently attuned to the normative and theoretical requirements of a global social theory, could provide a basis for progressive development. The feeling and expression of solidarity towards one’s fellow citizens, and the absence of the polarization of power, which would only serve egoistic interests and aims, could prove highly relevant, especially because we need a framework within which our activities are also brought into harmony with the natural environment, as the elementary condition of our own existence.



The concept of harmony is of special interest to philosophers of Neo-Confucianism from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. Even today some so-called New Confucians (or the new Neo-Confucianism) try to develop the notion of harmony to make it more plausible for modern philosophy. The beginning of New Confucianism may be symbolically marked by the publishing of the New Confucian Manifesto in 1958 and, for well-known reasons, first further developed outside the People's Republic of China. While the contemporary situation in China is such that we can say that Marxism-Leninism is still the official state policy, a "renaissance" of Confucianism can be observed, as well as a growing interest in other Chinese Philosophers.<sup>16</sup> This may be indeed a good starting point to further develop the ideas and critical approaches suggested by Egon Bondy and Marina Čarnogurská, as well as for identifying some problems with their interpretations of Chinese philosophy and modern Western philosophy in the process.

#### TOWARDS A META-CRITIQUE OF WESTERN UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHINESE SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Problems appear when we absolutize the idea of harmony and embed the social order within a cosmological order without paying attention to the intrinsic differences between social normativity and ontological context. As is generally known—although there are necessary important additional specifications we cannot offer here—since the beginning of imperial China (after 221 BCE), Chinese society was organized around Legalist, and later also around Confucian, theses, which understood the state as a coherent and living organism, similar—metaphorically speaking—to an anthill or beehive. Every human being has her fixed place in the vertical state stratification and any change to liberate oneself from one's social position is therefore difficult.<sup>17</sup> Recall that this view on social reality was strongly connected with the agrarian roots of Classical Chinese culture, which meant that every citizen had some cyclical duties and tasks in the "metamorphosis of the transforming being."<sup>18</sup> The act of birth gives everyone the same opportunity, but only the best ones—even if they come from the lowest social layers—could become members of the state bureaucracy and part of the "control organ" in that living organism, provided they were able to educate themselves and successfully pass the civil service exam. On the other side of society were the workers, whose duties connected only to manual work, and who did not enjoy the liberties of "white-collar" workers.

This state of affairs was legitimated by the argument that manual workers missed their opportunity because they were not properly prepared to pass the civil service exam. Society is thus regulated by the *authority* of the upper state hierarchy, which the lower only has to follow and recognize without the *right* to rebel (except in very specific cases, see Angle 2012, pp. 37–41). The highest authority in that pyramidally organized living organism is the emperor, whose role is peculiar in that he does not have to do anything per se. He rules by *using* his authority—doing by non-doing (*wei wu wei*)—because everyone already knows what has to be done.

Since this social order appears to be fully cosmologically determined—if following Čarnogurská’s interpretation—and defined as a quasi-ontological structure without any alternative or internal mechanism of transformation and critique, the most important problem is Bondy’s and Čarnogurská’s neglect of an analysis of the relation between “self and being,” or more concretely between the subject and its various social environments, in Chinese thought.<sup>19</sup> While they focus on the relevance of ontological clarity, in terms of the quest to define a more adequate ontology of ourselves, they neglect to develop an ethics.<sup>20</sup> Because in the late phase of their career they worked with regard to Chinese philosophy almost exclusively on the *Dao De Jing*—even though, as mentioned above, Egon Bondy attempted to interpret the whole Chinese philosophical heritage in the earlier phase of his career—they ended up ignoring a huge part of the Chinese philosophical tradition and its potential resources, together with its development from the nineteenth century up to the present. This is especially true of Marina Čarnogurská’s “ahistorical” and “acontextual” approach to the interpretation of Chinese philosophy. Hence, an important problem with her interpretation is that she pays no attention to the issue of harmony in concrete historical circumstances in imperial China, which Egon Bondy did rigorously, but she rather preferred what we might call a utilitarian “funktionalist” interpretation of social reality, in which an autonomous or reflexive subject plays little to no role.<sup>21</sup> This neglect of the self-being relation—one which future social theory has to decisively avoid—constitutes an important reason why Bondy was unable to open his thinking about China to the processes which Chinese philosophers call “Western learning” (Angle 2012, p. 33).<sup>22</sup>

Another important problem with their late texts is that while both Bondy and Čarnogurska talk in several places about the concept of *wei wu wei* (doing by non-doing) as an inspiring way of the adequate interaction with reality, they considered only few examples of how it is possible to identify and develop such an ability to *do* so in our individual actions and

decisions. Although the interpretation of their positions regarding Chinese philosophy needs much more detailed and nuanced analysis, they seem to believe—more in Čarnogurská's than Bondy's case—that if we have an adequate ontology, we will find the way to do and apply it, while matters seem to us more complicated than that. An adequate ontology can only be the starting point, because discussions about concrete social, political, or ethical arrangements and justified procedures, have to follow immediately in order to see how the ontology prescribes the putting-in-place of certain ideals on the intersubjective-normative level. If this problem is ignored, the danger of totalitarianism lurks in any all-encompassing ontology. To alert us to this problematic absence in their project of comparing European and Chinese philosophy with the aim of offering a global critical philosophy by appealing to a Daoist and respectively Neo-Confucian totality, however, is path-breaking as it opens up the venue for following up how to situate such an holistic ontology within an approach that respects the normative level.<sup>23</sup> In the following paragraphs we outline several possible directions for developing their ideas.

First, in his conclusions on Neo-Confucian philosophy, Bondy himself briefly emphasizes the pre-eminent status of morality and ethics in Neo-Confucianism (Bondy 1992, p. 267). He points out that the Neo-Confucian approach is grounded in the classic Confucian concept of *ren* [仁], a concept difficult to translate into European languages, which Bondy translates as *humanness*.<sup>24</sup> He emphasizes, following Zhang Zai and the Cheng brothers, Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, that this humanness has been understood cosmically, that is, not only as a *social norm*, but also as the highest *ontological principle*, as the principle of natural regularity. Accordingly, the normative level of an ethically defined life is made the primary focus, from which ontological reflections later follow. According to Bondy, a proper understanding of this conception of *ren* would result in both (a) seeing the universe in a new light, and (b) impacting our way of life; if a person follows this *naturalness* as understood by the Neo-Confucians, that is, as a cosmic *ren*, he or she is poised to achieve a deep and enjoyable inner peace. This ethics therefore does not imply an ataraxia or yogic self-mortification with an emptying of consciousness into pure emptiness, which, according to Bondy, was an important objection of Neo-Confucians against Buddhism. Instead, it is a mode of existence that can be characterized in terms of a sympathetic, compassionate, and pleasant participation in all being as happening, in all processes in the universe, including one's own community. This ethics is then connected with the

belief that a human being is a part of an ontologically anchored humanness such that it can never “drop out” of the context of fraternity within the universe (Bondy 1992, pp. 267–268).

We now turn to additional authors who alert us to specific options for how to further develop such Neo-Confucian ideas. What we can only do here is to open the scope of such an analysis in the context of a global critical theory, and to identify scholars who can be understood as contributing to such an enterprise. So, for example, Stephen C. Angle’s project of a “rooted global philosophy” (Angle 2009, p. 6), in which he stresses the significance of Neo-Confucian philosophy for the present, is worthy of consideration. There is no simple way to introduce Angle’s complex and multifarious work on Neo-Confucianism, but a discussion of the concept *li* [理] may serve as a proper starting point. Angle believes that “without taking a stand on the meaning of *li*, one cannot hope to understand Neo-Confucianism” (Angle 2009, p. 31). This concept is rich in implications for further developing the critical ideas laid out by Egon Bondy, since Angle suggests translating *li* not as principle, pattern, or law, but as “Coherence,” since for him the core meaning of *li* defined it as “the valuable, intelligible way that things fit together” (Angle 2009, p. 32). Angle opens up a way to uncover the critical potential of this concept for a conception of agency, since such an understanding is not deterministically connected to any concrete ontological principles, but emphasizes the processual, embedded, and somewhat open-ended feature of coherence as a practical process, both holistically oriented and embedded.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to Fabian Heubel’s commentary on Jean François Billeter’s interpretation of *Zhuangzi* (Billeter 2002, 2010). With regard to the predicaments of an ontological holism, we find here the promising potential to avoid the danger of totalitarianism.<sup>25</sup> According to Heubel, Billeter’s studies break the rigid framework of a comparative work, which is all too often rigidly fixed on differences between the identity of national cultures or culture groups. Essentialist allegations, such as that Chinese thought had not developed subjectivity, are alien to Billeter. Instead, he opens up the possibility of grasping the challenges of a trans-cultural dynamic (Heubel 2016, p. 111), and is thus highly relevant to our assessment of Chinese society. Heubel’s analysis is concerned especially with the contemporary situation of the Chinese-speaking world, which, according to him, may be characterized by a hybrid modernization, a mixture of various ideological sources of domestic (Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, etc.), as well as foreign provenience

(Marxism, Liberalism, Christianity, etc.). It is obvious to extend the question and ask whether such a hybridity is becoming more and more typical for (almost) the whole world, as the impact of an accelerated globalization? There are many reasons to answer yes.

According to Heubel, Billeter does not shy away from talking about a new paradigm of subjectivity with reference to the book *Zhuangzi*. He uses it as a resource for the further development of subjectivity, in such a way that subjectivity is neither constricted by an overemphasized rationalism nor completely rejected with an anti-enlightenment impetus. Billeter opposes the politically disastrous consequences of the tendency to become “subjectless,” a problem that is commonly associated with Daoism, for which Zhuangzi and Laozi are the most important representatives. He argues against a combination of Daoism and subject-criticism as the supposed way to overcome modernity—which is typical of Čarnogurská’s interpretation. For Billeter, there is only one way to use the critical potential of *Zhuangzi*, overcome the “natural-philosophical and cosmological dimension” of transformation of energy, which focuses only on the “corporal and bodily dimension” (Heubel 2016, p. 121). Even today, there is still the danger that the East Asian holistic understanding of mind and body will be connected with a political tendency to totalitarianism, which was already ironically criticized by the philosopher Zhuangzi (Heubel 2016, p. 122) more than 2000 years ago.

We cannot deploy the whole of Fabian Heubel’s arguments for and against Billeter’s interpretation of the book *Zhuangzi*. Similarly, we cannot reconstruct the whole context in which he disagrees with Billeter, nor how to understand the current political developments in the People’s Republic of China. Yet we want to emphasize the importance of his agreement with Billeter, as he concurs that an adequate idea of the subject has to consider its experience in its entirety, including its paradoxes and discontinuities (ibid., p. 125). Nevertheless, Billeter falls short of the crucial question: “In which relationship stands the new paradigm of subjectivity to the paradox as a way of thinking and a way of life, and which consequences would such a perspective yield for reflexions on the development of the political regimes in ancient and modern China (ibid.) [translation by Lubomír Dunaj, original in German]?” Heubel thus brings home in his meta-critique of Billeter the crucial relation between self and being which for us must stand at the center of a critical comparison between different cultural contexts. Yet Billeter does not unleash the potential and complexity in this relation. For Heubel, Billeter still tends to reproduce the stereotype of

China as a place of radical immanence: “for China is said to have known neither the ‘Jewish break [*Bruch*]’ nor the ‘tragic vision’ of the Athenians, which he associates with the invention of political freedom (Heubel 2016, p. 126) [translation by Ľubomír Dunaj, original in German].” Yet such a one-sided conception of radical immanence, rather than portraying an adequate picture of the other world, may well reproduce the pre-assumption of that subjectless ontological order with which Chinese thought and society has so often been identified.<sup>26</sup>

### CONCLUSION: REFLEXIVITY, POWER, AND INTERPRETATION

We hope that the idea of a global critical theory which we introduced in the first part of this chapter may inspire Chinese philosophers to develop the critical potential of their own philosophical traditions, so as to emancipate subjects from improper social conditions. It might similarly make Chinese philosophical concepts and ideas (and those of other cultures) inspiring for Western critical theorists and so help to overcome their ethnocentrism. We assume that our claims have now received a sufficiently theoretical and cross-cultural exploration that they do not seem vastly overstated nor utopian, nor for that matter unconsciously ethnocentric. In this vein we may also recall that we coupled the issue *overcoming ethnocentrism* with the problem of *avoiding relativism*: merely opening oneself to other horizons, without the bite of a potentially radical critique of the political and social conditions affecting the self, is not worth the effort. When we thus draw on hermeneutics, we do not do so in the mode of the *Allesverstehender*, as a subject without any position and open to anything goes, incapable of formulating trenchant criticisms of the abuse of power. The trick is rather to see how a radical social critique is possible, without merely repeating worn-out cultural prejudices or pre-assumptions, without merely pointing the finger at the “less developed other” while foregoing the self-critical work to subject one’s own cultural and ontological premises to the same rigor of relentless analysis. As we see it, the preceding reflections suggest certain consequences for any future global theory, without assuming that it is there already, or that there may not be multiple versions. We may recall that the basic formal indications are developed such that their material fulfillment is invited to *be subject to particular social contexts and cultural traditions via their reflexive up-take*. So, to return from the Chinese encounter to our general inquiry into the presuppositions of a global social theory, we are apt to formulate three lessons.

First, we maintain the existence and self-reflexivity of the embodied social individual as an insurmountable reference point for our theory. The self as the site within which social reflexivity is situated, and the site onto which social power qua power and domination focuses, cannot be replaced by anything else. It is the value of the individual, as a reflexive agency that is deemed to entail the rights to develop its potential, that cuts across any cultural and social boundaries, and onto which we must anchor the most basic conditions of social development. However, it is now crucial to understand that this agentive grounding in no way commits one to a *Cartesian fallacy*, that is, to presuppose a mind/body split or to substantialize and essentialize the self into a category that is pre-given to one's bodily, social, and symbolic experience.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, retaining the self as a most basic source of social reality in no way limits the scope of the reflexive self-appropriation to things or phenomena that fall (a) within the utilitarian pursuit of the self as an intentional agent, nor seem (b) to be directly apparent as factors in the self's social lifeworld. When we are thus confronted with the project of a *hermeneutic cultivation of the self*, via self-centered practices, we have to resist any temptation to posit these projects as limited to one's own well-being. The critical-hermeneutic cultivation of a reflexive self is precisely centered on the normative and holistic embedding of the individual into the larger frameworks of dialogical and ontological existence.

Second, the relation between the normative orientation and the holistic re-embedding of one's self into larger ontological frameworks should be conceived in a manner that makes an ideological abuse of them impossible. Because in our model we have identified the recognition of the other as a genuine dimension built into the dialogical relation with the other, a *deep egalitarianism* grounds any transcendence that moves beyond the self and intersubjectivity towards a new encompassing being. Holism cannot therefore function as the denigration of the self, justified by its pre-assigned place in the overall order of things. By opening ourselves to a variety of grounding sources, via the core conceptions of self and being, in order to include non-modern/post-modern cultural traditions with their non-secular roots, does not mean that neo-totalitarian governments receive a free pass on the subordination of their citizens by allegedly rejecting the imposition of Western values. Oppression means oppression, and any government that needs to achieve a harmonious order by suppressing conflict, instead of reflexively overcoming it, should be subject to social critique. Similarly, any ordering of society, the structure of which can only be main-

tained by some form of violence—which can take more or less subtle forms—should raise suspicion, if not obvious rejection vis-à-vis their claim to represent an all-encompassing being. In other words, while power-defined forms of agency and social practices, as well as hierarchical and oppressive forms of status/definitions and social locations, are currently built into any existing social order, the need to address our holistic embeddedness in other (non-Western) ways cannot mean that those regimes of social differences are sacrosanct and beyond challenge.

Finally, the third basic grounding point of a “global social theory with critical intent” is the reflexive insight that the projection of a new holistic embedding, which overcomes a mere social-constructivist self-understanding of modernity and includes an ontological dimension of pre-determination and world-belonging, does not epistemologically revert to a naïve-realist or realist-metaphysical picture of the world. It is crucial to understand that the *self's reflexive work on itself*, within a normative infrastructure of dialogical relations, transcends its own self via the whole neither by directly accessing its truth nor by achieving some kind of renewed God's eye view. Bluntly put, the reflexive work that re-embeds the self into social relations (which are themselves holistically framed by an understanding of the social and natural structure) is an *interpretation* of these processes and structures. Such an interpretation will have to be grounded in the scholarly, most adequate, methodological frameworks, based on the best available evidence, and opened to the most challenging intercultural reviews. Precisely because of these processual features built into our conception of knowledge constitution, any understanding remains *mediated* by the particular background frameworks and dispositions that establish a shared situation for the enquiry. No existing understanding of the hermeneutic situation can thus claim to have exhausted all the possible angles, achieved a view from nowhere that may not be adjusted or transcended based on some further insight. The reflexive work of the self thus aims to transcend its merely social self-understanding; it aims towards an understanding of the whole, both in its social and its ontological structure; but the process to acquire access to this knowledge is nevertheless necessarily based on the available interpretive schemes that both embody and express particular linguistic and symbolic traditions. The moment of *experiential finitude* that lurks behind any (however all-encompassing) project of understanding does not thereby diminish the possibility of capturing essential aspects of the whole; but it does undermine any attempt to forget one's own position and forego the *epistemic*



*humility* that follows from the insight into one's own social situatedness. Without such a reflexive humility, a globalized critical theory aiming at the realization of every agent's potential could turn into its opposite.

## NOTES

1. If on that basis the prospects of relativism are not accepted, say because we generally hold on to our beliefs and assumptions even if they lack a universalist foundation (as, say, Rorty would argue), we could then return to an assertive ethnocentrism, in which we simply claim superiority of our values regardless of whether they are universal. Rorty termed this position "frank ethnocentrism." For reasons that will become clear, we aim to avoid such a conclusion to the dilemma between ethnocentrism and relativism.
2. To be clear: The uniqueness of such a background may not be construed so as to make impossible a shared understanding about basic issues. For arguments that have been well established in the philosophy of language and philosophical semantics, the idea of closed conceptual schemes that are nevertheless linguistically mediated and function as conceptual schemes, is untenable. Yet this essential openness does not devalue the idea of conceptually distinct background understandings that lead to vastly different conceptions of how something is to be understood. What does need to be taken into account is the reflexive awareness that the basic conceptions that define one's approach are tacitly informed by preconceptions and practices that are shared in the initial contexts of concept formation.
3. For a sophisticated approach that defends a reformed and enlightened developmental approach, one which is highly reflective of its historical affiliation with ethnocentric power-defined perspectives in a colonial/post-colonial setting, see Thomas McCarthy (2009). See Lorenzo Simpson (2014, 263) for an alternative approach, for whom the "resources for critique can be unearthed when careful attention is paid to the *autonomously* voiced preferences and concerns of those local agents who are affected by such practices—that is, how the critical potential of these resources can be redeemed independently of any one-sided imposition of 'Western' standards." Our project aims to prepare a general framework of global social theory that similarly avoids "one-sided" Western standards and yet allows for the unleashing of the resources for social (self-)critique.
4. For a good introduction to this criticism and the ensuing debate concerning "hermeneutics and the critique of ideology," see the essays by Habermas, Gadamer, and Ricoeur in Ormiston and Schrift (1990).
5. Gadamer's dialogical approach, whose conception of a necessary intertwinement of questions on meaning and validity, or of the sense of a text and its subject matter (*die Sache selbst*), are endorsed by Habermas as an

important step towards an intersubjective understanding of social research; Habermas' own later model of communicative action owes its informal structure of validity oriented discourse to no small degree to this core hermeneutic insight (Habermas 1983; Habermas 1988). Tradition, as the linguistically mediated and holistic background of understanding, becomes the lifeworld as the taken-for-granted background within which agents "always already" understand themselves, and against which they coordinate their action plans via either communicate or strategic actions. See also Kögler (1999).

6. For an inspiring and suggestive account of how this debate matters in a discussion of Neo-Confucianism and its relation to tradition, see Wright (2015).
7. A philosophical seminar where such texts are read shows that critical objections to a text are part of reinventing and reproducing the tradition, while internal coherence is provided by the issues and background assumptions that are articulated in the back and forth with the text. Yet having a text internally disclosed and discussed like this, also opens up the reconstruction of its basic assumptions vis-à-vis cultural and social environments. So the distance that requires our re-ignition of a text's (or context's) possible truth brings out the resources to objectify basic assumptions and pair them with culturally prevalent ideological premises, like the inferior ontological status of women and slaves, the lack of a universal conception of human identity, and so on.
8. Important examples of a hermeneutic critique of the Cartesian conception of mind and understanding are found in Heidegger's critique and deconstruction of Descartes (Heidegger [1927] 1962; Heidegger 1999); Gadamer's critique of Dilthey deals with the continued consequences of Cartesianism in terms of an objectivistic conception of the human sciences (Gadamer 1989); similarly Habermas' early attack on positivism in *Knowledge and Human Interest* (Habermas 1971) is a central document in this regard; more recently, see Dreyfus and Taylor (2015).
9. We will show how the situated reflexivity that we just sketched can be internally differentiated into several distinct ways of immanent social criticism, to distanciate ourselves from one's taken-for-granted traditional pre-assumptions. Going through these different options will present a systematic account of how *intercultural dialogue* about basic concepts and ideas figures within the conceptual profile of a global (and non-ethnocentric) critical theory. In the subsequent section we engage in a concrete intercultural interpretation offering up alternative visions of core concepts of situated agency, including the self and nature, in order to spur on such an interculturally mediated project of theory building. See also Kögler (1997).

10. Regarding the unfamiliarity with China among critical theorists belonging to the tradition of the Frankfurt School, see, for instance, Fabian Heubel's study "*Transkulturelle Kritik und die Chinesische Moderne. Zwischen Frankfurter Schule und Neokonfuzianismus*," which begins with the question: "What does Critical Theory know about China, traditional Chinese Culture, or even about modern Chinese thought? Almost nothing" (Heubel 2009, p. 43) [translation by Ľubomír Dunaj, original in German].
11. Cf. Roetz's critique of Hegel's and Weber's perception of China in his reconstruction of the Western reception of Chinese Ethics (Roetz 1993, pp. 1–22). For the Eurocentric feature of Hegel and Marx, see also, for instance, Johann P. Arnason. Cf. Arnason (2016, p. 26).
12. With regard to the issue of self in China, cf., for instance, Shun and Wong (2004). Cf., for example, some research activities of Melissa S. Williams or Marek Hrubec.
13. Although Egon Bondy never declared his inclination to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, if by critical theorist is meant anyone who attempts to contribute theoretically to a solution through a critique of undesirable developments that might help to avoid problematic future scenarios, then maybe Bondy added to this tradition of thinking. Not to mention that since members of the Institute for Social Research fled from Frankfurt, Germany, after Nazi persecution to the USA, there are many academic centers in which critical theory developed. According to the definition of critical theory in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Bondy belongs to critical theory in the broader sense, cf. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/>.
14. Cf. Benjamin B. Page's introduction to the English translation of *Consolation of Ontology* (2001, p. X), which is a very helpful way in to Bondy's philosophy.
15. *Dao De Jing* is a classical Chinese text that, along with the book *Zhuangzi*, serves as a fundamental resource for both philosophical and religious Daoism, which has strongly influenced other schools, such as Legalism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism.
16. Of course, we are aware of the ways in which the idea of social harmony can be misused in contemporary China, or has been misused in history, as we will clearly state in our conclusion. Stephen C. Angle reminds us that the word harmony can be also understood negatively today: "in current Chinese slang, to 'be harmonized' can mean to be disappeared by agents of the government" (Angle 2012, p. 147). Our aim is not the advocacy of contemporary Chinese state policy. We would like to stress, however, that the Chinese government is not completely lacking in legitimacy. As Yasauki Onuma points out, while some Asian regimes (including China) indeed suppress the voices of some intellectuals and citizens, who demand greater

respect for basic freedoms and liberties, this does not mean that human-rights activists in those countries represent the will of all citizens (Onuma 1999, 105). Moreover, he states that those regimes will slowly modify themselves in accordance with more “Western standards.” But it is necessary to understand all social and political movements in their proper historical context. Onuma concludes that one of the main arguments of East Asian residents against Western proponents of human rights is that contemporary Western countries, especially the USA, suffer from many social problems, such as criminality and drugs, as well as the general degradation of family and communities. They argue, with some plausibility, that these negative aspects of Western societies could be consequences of an exaggerated legalism and individualism, which are important components of the ideal of human rights (Onuma 1999, p. 107).

17. Cf. Fairbank and Goldman (2006, pp. 17–23).
18. Cf. Fairbank and Goldman (2006, pp. 14–17).
19. For a contemporary attempt at cosmological determinism cf. Qing (2013).
20. To their credit, they acknowledged this deficiency in relation to many points of their interpretations (Bondy 2009, p. 248).
21. This is similar, for instance, to François Jullien’s interpretation of *The Book of Changes* (Jullien 2011).
22. Another reason (beside his orthodox Marxist residues), is that until his death, he maintained a very strong skepticism of liberal democracy, especially after experiences with economic transformation in post-socialist countries after 1989, as well as experiences with US imperial politics after the end of Cold War. While Čarnogurská shared Bondy’s skepticism of democracy, it was also connected—rather paradoxically, since she attempts to develop a dynamical ontology—with a strong conservatism in political issues.
23. They do not always make the difference clear since they often translate the adjectives Daoist or Neo-Confucian simply with the adjective Chinese.
24. Cf. Zhang (2010) and Behr (2015).
25. Egon Bondy had stressed the potential of *Zhuangzi* for the development of a non-atomist individuality (1993, pp. 95–97). Indeed, Bondy saw one of the most promising aspects of the holistic feature of Chinese philosophy as a tool for overcoming the negative impacts of a hypertrophic subjectivity (2009, pp. 332–333).
26. We cannot enter into Heubel’s defence of contemporary Chinese research in *Zhuangzi*, where he states that interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* within contemporary Chinese philosophy seems to create such conditions, in which the teachings of cultivation and energetic transformation is referring to *Zhuangzi*, but at the same time with appreciation for *Zhuangzi*’s recognition of discontinuity and plurality (Heubel 2016, p. 127).

27. The self's ontological being is similarly not based on any autonomous sense of self, on a self-contained realm of meaning. Rather, the self is, prior to even developing a self as a distinct and reflectively self-objectifying phenomenon, entailed in trans-subjective meaning acts that always already disclose a meaning as such-and-such in the context of "my relation to that of the other." In immediate acts of emotional disclosure, in the recognition of an event as an action, and in the understanding of self-evident thoughts and expressions, I always find myself situated in a context of meaning (*Bedeutungszusammenhang*) that encompasses me and another vis-à-vis some shared meaning in some context. The self is capable of differentiating itself as an invaluable and insurmountable reference (*Bezugspunkt*) within such a context, but is never (and needlessly) there "before" or "apart from" such a context.

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PART II

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Social Theory and Asian Dialogues:  
Creative Engagement and  
Transformative Learning



# Selfhood and Morality: East Asian and Western Dimensions

*Geir Sigurðsson*

## INTRODUCTION

Regardless of how morality ought to be understood, few if any would deny that cultural perceptions of morality differ. These distinct perceptions determine to a significant extent how morality is approached, pondered and discussed in each culture. In other words, the diversity of ethics as it presents itself in various world philosophies depends largely on real and actual perceptions of morality.

This chapter is an attempt to formulate a general East Asian versus Euro-American comparison of such perceptions and the dominant tendencies in ethical thinking ensuing from them.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, such tendencies are far from absolute, and there are significant overlaps in the ethical approaches of East Asians and Westerners. One can certainly find important exceptions from those tendencies that characterize the traditions in question. But exceptions are exceptions precisely because they deviate from a rule, and the aim here is merely to identify the general rule, or, more appropriately as a purely descriptive term, a tendency. A generalization such as this is not meant to polarize the compared cultural traditions, but merely to identify and thus clarify some of their distinguishing

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features, to locate the specific cultural traits that keep them together as particular *traditions*. This requires generalizations. Without them, we merely heap together a collection of individual and disconnected features that are not easily assimilated into a meaningful and coherent whole. As Roger T. Ames (2011, 23) has observed, “the only thing more dangerous than striving to make responsible cultural generalizations is failing to make them.” To the extent that such identifications are possible, they may facilitate meaningful interaction between the traditions, reduce the possibility of misinterpretation and miscommunication, and help to indicate strengths and weaknesses in both tendencies that should be instructive to those working within either tradition.

The thesis from which this comparison proceeds is that the major differences between East Asian and Western ethical traditions emanate from divergent views of what role selfhood or ego should play in social human life. A comparison of these views, it is suggested, will be helpful in fleshing out the different perceptions of morality. It will be contended that Western thinking is characterized by a stronger focus on the self, and that while Western ethical thinkers and schools certainly seek to reduce self-centeredness, such endeavors generally proceed through an augmentation of the role of human reason and thus a more intense and even tormenting self-consciousness. A clear reflection of this tendency is detected in the ethical approach to moral issues *qua* issues associated with individual action and rational choice. The East Asian approach differs in that it seeks to balance excessive introspection with a cultivated sense of identification with the whole, be it society or the natural realm. While this approach, it seems, largely succeeds in preventing an existential kind of agony, it nevertheless suffers from other, somewhat disconcerting, weaknesses.

Hence, each tradition, it is argued, has something to offer the other, although the overall insinuation is that Euro-Americans have more to gain from East Asian traditions with regard to views on and valuations of selfhood than vice versa. Nevertheless, this discussion is merely intended as a pragmatic comparison of the consequences of the differing approaches to selfhood, and not as a direct philosophical argument against the existence of selfhood. Besides the entire corpus of Buddhist philosophy, some strong arguments have recently been presented against the existence of the individual self, against rational autonomy, and even against the claim that Western individualism is beneficial to human society (cf. Metzinger 2003; Ames 2011; Rosemont Jr. 2015). Overall, this chapter could perhaps be regarded as a modest contribution to the last of these themes.

## THE WESTERN ROAD TO EGOLOGY

Emily Dickinson composed the following adorable but melancholic poem toward the end of her life, or around 1882:

How happy is the little stone  
 That rambles on the road alone,  
 And doesn't care about careers,  
 And exigencies never fears;  
 Whose coat of elemental brown  
 A passing universe put on;  
 And independent as the sun,  
 Associates or glows alone  
 Fulfilling absolute decree  
 In casual simplicity.

What could possibly be desirable about being a rambling stone? Dickinson's rambling stone is free from the affliction of self-consciousness, of the reflexive but futile, and therefore unending and vicious, quest for its true essence and aim. Instead, it rambles without awareness of its own being and direction, free from human cares and worries. It simply goes. Dickinson's poem expresses the pain of selfhood, of consciousness, of self-awareness within a culture in which the individual self has become so paramount that it is stuck in its own self-reflexivity, isolated from communion with others. In Western literature, especially in and after the nineteenth century, this is a peculiarly common theme.

But perhaps it is not so peculiar. Since the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece the ego has played a central role in Western thinking. There may be different views on how the Delphic maxim "know thyself!" ought to be understood, but for Socrates it seems to have been an inquiry into himself for the sake of obtaining the moral wisdom of temperance (Plato 1961, 166c–e). The task of knowing oneself has since then been transmitted to Western students of philosophy, though today it indicates an endeavor to realize the uniqueness of one's *true self*. Who am I? What am I? While it is hard to imagine intelligible answers to such questions, at least in their current sense, they have an unmistakably rationalist foundation signifying the priority of epistemology to ethics: one first needs to know before being able to act. Plato's primary objective may have been to eliminate relativism, but he did so by locating the source of truth in an unchanging transcendental

realm accessible only through mind and reason. This inescapably directs philosophical activity, taking place in the self, to the self itself.

Socrates and Plato set the stage for “a long-developing process whereby an ethic of reason and reflection gains dominance over one of action and glory” (Taylor 1989, 117). The performance went on for hundreds of years. And while the dominance of Christian values may have reduced the introspective tendency during the Middle Ages, the emphasis on the ego was considerably intensified during the modern period.<sup>2</sup> To solve the epistemological problem of grounding certainty in his age of growing uncertainty, Descartes had to detach the ego from its container, the body, and provide a notion of the two entirely incompatible entities of spirit and matter. This had a number of radical implications. For one, it entrenched even further the dualistic view of body and soul that Plato and Christianity brought to Western culture. It further divided the gap between subject and object. The subject took over as prime value, while the mechanistic object became a mere means to reach the aims laid down by the free subject. The mind devoured the body while the human being was given free rein to consume nature.

Thirdly, Cartesian dualism produced an even stronger move to internalization than Plato had proposed with his rationalist turn. As Charles Taylor (1989, 143) observes, it was to “place the moral sources within us.” The “I” gradually began to encroach upon itself, culminating, at least symbolically, in the aged Kant’s posthumous notes. He had found himself compelled to dismiss his personal servant of many years, Martin Lampe, but it obviously caused him such distress that his memorandum books contain reminders scattered here and there where Kant wrote: “The name Lampe must now be completely forgotten” (Köller 2004, 584).

The glorification of self and reason, as it developed during the Renaissance and the modern period, manifests itself perhaps most clearly in modern individualism as expressed in Enlightenment philosophy. The belief in the autonomy of the rational subject is clear in Utilitarianism for instance, according to which the rational self is meant to be able to assess, even calculate, the most expedient consequences of one’s action to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which is thereby meant to constitute the ultimate standard of right and wrong (Mill 2006b, 213).<sup>3</sup> This belief in the self’s ability to determine in a most accurate manner the goodness or badness of actions was perhaps a logical consequence of the Euro-American’s increased self-confidence in the wake of new discoveries

and methods in science, and the felt power of the individual to be able to interpret, understand, and discover things of his own accord.

This, in many ways *positive*, step, encouraged by the Protestant movement, seems to have gradually brought us to a position of “absolute egoism” whereby we decide, as absolute subjects, the criteria with which the world should be handled and the rational defined. Max Stirner may seem a curious product of German Idealism, but in many ways he brought the ethical and political implications of the school to its most consistent conclusion by locating the world, or at least the conceptual standards by which the world can be recognized and evaluated, in the ego. Stirner (1927, 8) says:

Just as I find myself behind things as spirit, I must later also find myself *behind the thoughts*, i.e. as their creator and owner. During the spirit-time my thoughts grew till they overtopped my head, whose offspring they were after all; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies—a formidable power. The thoughts had become *corporeal* for themselves, were ghosts, e. g. God, Emperor, Pope, Fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: “I alone am corporeal.” And now I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property; I refer all to myself.

While generally considered a marginal and idiosyncratic thinker, Stirner epitomizes the general Western modern approach to the problem of selfhood, which is precisely to increase selfhood, to make us even more conscious of ourselves. The cure consists of spreading and intensifying the disease.

A good case in point is psychoanalysis, in which the object is to transfer as much as possible of the *id* (*das Es*), the irrational, repressed and disturbing unconscious part of the psyche, to the *ego* (*das Ich*), the rational and conscious part (Freud 1940, 252ff.). The aim is enhanced control, self-control. Psychoanalysis is, in this sense, a continuation of the Kantian epistemological project of empowering rationality.

Kant, in fact, explicitly says that we must subdue our natural side by subordinating it to the dominance of reason: “Human nature does not of itself harmonize with [the moral] good; it [can be made to harmonize with it] only through the dominance [*Gewalt*] that reason exerts over sensibility” (Kant 1968b, §29, 271). According to this view, reason, ostensibly leading to clear consciousness and self-understanding, is the

exclusive key to civilized human living, and the more we have of it, the more civilized, more human, we become. Curiously, however, the more we are aware of ourselves, Kant seems to say, the more capable we are of submitting ourselves to a generalized and *impersonal* law. So in this sense the possibility of ethics appears to be contingent upon the overcoming, or indeed bursting, of self as a consequence of its progressive expansion. Egoism is eliminated by enlarging the ego. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is among the causes for the agony that Western thinkers relate to increased self-awareness. Kant acknowledges this quite explicitly, but he sees it as a necessary evil associated with progress:

To feel one's life, to enjoy oneself, is merely to feel oneself continually being agitated to step out of the present situation (which must therefore to be an equally recurrent pain). This further explains the afflicting, distressing hardship of boredom for all those who are mindful of their life and of time (cultivated people). (Kant 1968a, §61, 233)

In a footnote to this passage, Kant adds:

Because of his innate lifelessness, the Caribbean is free from this hardship. He can sit with his fishing-rod for hours without catching anything; thoughtlessness is a lack of spur to activity, which always brings pain with itself, but from which he is free.

The ability to savor the moment in peace, quiet, and thoughtlessness is therefore not an ability, but a sign of primitiveness. But not everyone has considered the human surge to conscious awareness of self and world as a sign of progress. Max Scheler, for instance, says that thinking and human intelligence is in fact a response to the human handicap of not knowing instinctually what to do:

“Cogito ergo sum” says the proud and self-confident Descartes. But Descartes—*why* do you think; why do you want? You think, because neither instinct nor some kind of skill based on your natural tendencies whispers to you directly what you are or are not to do! And you do not think—as you yourself believe—in order to elevate yourself above the animals onto new levels of existence or value, but in order to become “more animalistic than other animals”! And what do you mean by “free choice”? This is what you call the fact that you live in constant uncertainty, i.e. you don't know where to and what for—which the animal always knows directly and instantly, which, in other words, it knows much better than you! (Scheler 1954, 80)

Scheler considers human intelligence to be a response to the human being's "biological weakness and feebleness" (Scheler 1954, 80).<sup>4</sup>

From this point of view, the hyperconscious human being, with all his intelligence and self-awareness, appears as a kind of sickness, sickness unto death, as Søren Kierkegaard so famously put it. As a matter of fact, consciousness has often been tackled as a kind of sickness. The modern affliction of selfhood is a common theme among Western authors. We find it virtually everywhere in modern philosophy and literature, in Hegel's "unhappy consciousness," in Giacomo Leopardi's *noia* or "boredom" (cf. Sigurðsson 2010), in the Romantic *Weltschmerz*, in Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's nihilism, in Robert Musil's "man without qualities," in Baudelaire's *ennui*, in Freud's psychoanalysis, in Emil Cioran who speaks of consciousness as "nature's nightmare" (Cioran 1995, 102), in the existentialist critique of the bourgeois way of life, in surrealism, and in countless other Western philosophies, psychologies, novels, poems, and artworks from the modern period to the present.<sup>5</sup>

The torture of the I, locked inside itself, seeking some kind of salvation or release from itself to become something else, or even become nothing at all, is a conspicuous characteristic of Euro-American, and now globalized, modernity. The seemingly ever-increasing attention given to celebrities and the super-rich may be an aspect of this complex, implying a popular desire to identify with them instead of with oneself. Other layers of contemporary culture, however, approach the issue in the customary paradoxical manner by suggesting that one can only escape oneself by *becoming* oneself, that is, one's *true* and *authentic* self, a common theme in popular self-help manuals.<sup>6</sup>

### EAST ASIAN EGOPHOBIA

Throughout history Asian philosophy has often been dismissed by Western thinkers as unproductive introspection. This view, possibly influenced by misconceptions of meditation, is particularly ironic considering that this tendency turns out, in fact, to be much more typical of Western thought. Ethical considerations largely revolve around the ego, as both the main cause of and the solution to moral predicaments. In this particular sense, and perhaps in some others, we have been, and still are, quite self-obsessed.

In those Chinese philosophical traditions that are taken as representative of East Asian cultures in this discussion, selfhood is certainly regarded



as problematic, but it is not accompanied by any kind of agony.<sup>7</sup> This intriguing indication of a more positive existential attitude to the relationship between human beings and their life-world is beyond the parameters of this chapter, but for those interested I have addressed this issue elsewhere (cf. Sigurðsson 2016).

A sketchy outline follows of the classical Chinese approach to selfhood with regard to morality. While we can, of course, find a plethora of similarities between the Chinese and Western approaches (after all, both Chinese and Westerners are human), the focus here is on the differences. In short, while Western philosophy generally tends to inflate the self, the general aim of Chinese philosophy is to diminish or overcome the self. The self is considered problematic in two senses that also reflect the different emphases of Confucianism and Daoism.

First, the ego's dominance symbolizes a primitive state, as it is virtually or literally the sole concern of the individual in his or her initial circumstances after birth. As the infant grows up, it develops a natural kind of affection for the people in its surroundings, usually the parents and other next of kin. This is the first step towards reducing the scope of the ego in the sense that one's concern embraces others as well. The Confucians call it "personal cultivation" (*xiu shen* 修身), indicating that becoming a genuine person means becoming a social being. Successful personal cultivation, or indeed *transformation*, means the successful expansion of our natural affection, certainly graded affection according to the closeness of relations. One treats one's grandmother differently to one's insurance agent, and so one should, but, believe it or not, a cultivated person will still have some affection for her insurance agent. For the Confucians, a petty person, *xiao ren* 小人, is someone who fails to overcome his infantile egocentrism. An exemplary person, a *jun zi* 君子, is one who succeeds (*Analects of Confucius* 1998, 4.11 and 4.16).

The other problem of self, notably represented by Daoism, is that self-consciousness obstructs the relationship with our surroundings or our tasks at hand. Many Daoist writings encourage us to let go of our self while proceeding in our daily activities, and see this as a most desirable achievement that will facilitate creative and efficacious engagement with our social and natural surroundings. It is creative and efficacious in the sense that it produces something of value, something that contributes to harmonious relations between those involved. It is therefore a *moral* achievement as well.

In the fourth-century BCE Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*, it is said that “the highest man is without self” (Chuang-tzu 1998, 1.1).<sup>8</sup> The term is *wu ji* 無己, or non-self as it literally means. But *wu* 無, indicating a negation, does not mean that what is being negated has thereby ceased to exist. This is more of a deconstruction, or *Aufhebung*, to speak in a Hegelian manner. It is not simply selflessness, but a temporary letting go of the self while one tends to the world and one’s tasks. It has been referred to as the “death of the ego” (Wohlfart 2005, 214f.), and it certainly is death in the Daoist sense of the ego immersing itself in the entire and incessant process of existence.

*Zhuangzi* continues by saying that “the spiritual person is without accomplishments, the sagely person is without name” (Chuang-tzu 1998, 1.1). But does this mean that they are good for nothing? Not at all. In the *Daodejing*, there is a clearer indication of what the negative *wu*-forms imply. In the *Daodejing*, *wu wei* 無為, literally non-action, is often endorsed. However, it also makes clear that non-action is not simply not doing anything: “By doing non-action, there is nothing that will not be ordered” (*wei wu wei, ze wu bu zhi* 為無為則無不治) (*Tao Te Ching* 1989, §3). Thus, *wu wei*, non-action, is in fact *wei wu wei* 為無為: it is active non-action. In this case, to *do* non-action will bring about that everything will be well ordered. Thus, instead of meaning that we do absolutely nothing, it means that we do it non-coercively, let things go without forcing them, follow natural inclinations. This comes through clearer in a later section: “Dao (the world-process) never does anything (coercively), and yet nothing is left undone” (*dao chang wu wei er wu bu wei* 道常無為而無不為) (*Tao Te Ching* 1989, §37).

Hence, we can now produce a more refined translation of the non-self passage in the *Zhuangzi* on the basis of this word play from the *Daodejing*: “The highest man is without self, and yet there is nothing of himself that is not there” (*wu ji er wu bu ji* 無己而無不己). He is entirely focused on his task. In this sense no self is a full self. Similarly, the spiritual person does not act out of a wish to effect great accomplishments, and yet this is precisely what he does; and the sage person does not act out of a desire to achieve fame, and yet she acquires fame. The conjunctive *er* 而, which I have translated as *and yet*, could also be understood semi-causally so that it is precisely because of their selfless motivations that they are so effective in their actions.

For Zhuangzi, an intriguing model of this self-forgetting is a person who is drunk:

If a drunk falls from a carriage, even if it is going very fast, he will not die. His bones and joints are the same as those of other people, but the injuries he receives are different. It's because his spirit is whole. He was not aware of getting into the carriage, nor was he aware of falling out of it. Life and death, alarm and fear do not enter his breast. Therefore, he confronts things without apprehension. If someone who has gotten his wholeness from wine is like this, how much more so would one be who gets his wholeness from heaven! (Chuang-Tzu 1998, 19.2)<sup>9</sup>

The integrity, fullness, or completeness of his spirit prevents the drunk from suffering serious harm. Consciousness, on the other hand, splits us up and distracts us. Zhuangzi is not suggesting a kind of Dionysian lifestyle of constant drunkenness, however tempting it may be to interpret him that way. The drunk is merely an indicative model. The Daoist classics are full of stories about skillful individuals, butchers, bell makers, and carpenters whose art consists in letting go of their self, though only after having received sufficient training. The ability to do something well depends significantly on the degree to which one can keep one's mind together, focus on the task at hand, and forget about everything else, not least about others and their judgment.

For the skill of fluency, of fulfilling the task, is also inhibited by concerns about the assessment of the audience, of others, of something outside of us. As it says in the *Liezi*, a work dating back to about the third century BCE:

Gamble for tiles, and you play skilfully; for the clasp of your belt, and you lose confidence; for gold, and you get flustered. You have not lost your skill; but if you hold yourself back, you give weight to something outside you; and whoever does that is inwardly clumsy. (Lieh-Tzu 1991, 43f.)

The inhibiting factor is consciousness. As A.C. Graham says in his introductory remarks to the *Liezi*, “it is especially dangerous to be conscious of oneself ... One whose mind is a pure mirror of his situation, unaware of himself and therefore making no distinction between advantage and danger, will act with absolute assurance, and nothing will stand in his way” (Lieh-Tzu 1991, 32).

The *Liezi* often speaks of a sage who has broken through the conventional analytical means of assessing the world: “his eyes became like his ears, his ears like his nose, his nose like his mouth.” The strict use of the various senses is bypassed, implying some kind of instinctual wisdom, perhaps a sixth sense, whose communication appears incommensurable to conventional logic.

Other models of emulation are animals, the infant, or even the fool, as described in the *Daodejing*:

The multitude are happy, happy ... I alone am impassive, revealing nothing at all, like a baby that has not yet learned to smile, so listless, as though nowhere to go; the multitude all have more than enough, I alone seem to be in want; I have the heart-and-mind of a fool—so vacant and dull. (*Tao Te Ching* 1989, §20)

Even Confucianism regards the highest cultivation as characterized by the absence of conscious thinking and the ability to respond spontaneously to circumstances in an appropriate manner. Selfhood, with all the concentration it requires, is overcome, as expressed by Confucius himself:

The Master said: “When I was fifteen, my heart was set on learning; at thirty, I took my stance; at forty, I was no longer perplexed; at fifty, I had realized the heavenly forces of circumstance; at sixty, my ear was attuned; at seventy, I could give my thoughts and feelings free rein without overstepping the boundaries.” (*Analects of Confucius* 1998, 2.4)

At the highest point of his personal development, Confucius could let go of his thoughts and feelings without any rational calculation. He simply knew instinctually, as it were, and not unlike animals, what is the best thing to do.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The point made by the Chinese thinkers is that a true self is most efficient in its absence. The more it has been overcome, the better it functions in the moral realm. In this sense the ancient Chinese approach to morality is comparable to Chinese medicine: the aim is to secure a harmonious situation for the whole, a situation that is precisely destroyed by egocentrism.

Consider this traditional Chinese story of Bian Que 扁鵲, a doctor in the Warring States period (fifth to third centuries BCE) who was renowned for his ability to heal even the deadliest disease. He was asked by the King of Wei why he was so much better than his two brothers, who also happened to be doctors. He responded:

My first brother heals sickness before it even develops, so his methods appear hidden, his science art and he is known only within our village.

My second brother deals with illnesses while they are minor, preventing sickness from getting worse and returning the body to health.

I deal with sicknesses when they have reached the level of disease and threaten to destroy the organism of which they are a part. This requires numerous medicines, and skill and knowledge in their use. For this reason my name has become famous throughout the kingdom and I have been asked to be physician to the king, yet my first brother has the knowledge to deal with sicknesses before they arise and my second brother is able to treat them at an early stage and prevent them getting worse. Though my fame has spread throughout the land, their knowledge is greater. (Galtung et al. 2000, 84)

In like manner, the most efficient *ethicist* in classical Chinese thought is one who does what she does without anyone noticing. She aims to secure harmony within a group, to prevent moral problems, and when she excels in her performance she manages to prevent difficulties before they even develop, and no one ever knows that they could have arisen:

It is easy to maintain a situation while it is still secure;  
 It is easy to deal with a situation before symptoms develop;  
 It is easy to break a thing when it is yet brittle;  
 It is easy to dissolve a thing when it is yet minute.  
 Deal with a thing while it is still nothing;  
 Keep a thing in order before disorder sets in. (*Tao Te Ching* 1989, §64)

By the same token, the best generals, according to Sunzi, are those who “subdue the enemy’s army without fighting at all” (Sun-tzu 1993, 111). But these excellent generals may be quite unknown, as they have never engaged in battle.

Western ethics, on the other hand, is parallel to Western medicine in the sense that it tends to wait until problems emerge, and only then aims to eliminate them. The strength of Western surgical medicine is the ability

to isolate the issue in question and carry out the rational, methodological procedure necessary to cut through it. Western ethics essentially does the same by focussing first and foremost on particular moral dilemmas and their correct or just resolution. It is an individualist, rights-based approach to morality that takes for granted an unequivocally *true* outcome of the issue, virtually as if it were a mathematical, or indeed a physiological, problem. For such an approach to be viable, self-consciousness, the enhancement of rational evaluation and in some cases calculation, is inescapable and necessary. Western ethics is not satisfied with merely *sensing* the situation, but demands a rational articulation of the moral issues in question, and their rigorous, logical, and conscious resolution.<sup>10</sup> “The focus is on the principles, or injunctions, or standards which guide *action*, while visions of the good are altogether neglected” (Taylor 1989, 84). Thus, it may miss the big picture, so that when it cuts off one head, two may grow in its stead. And this cultural requirement of enhanced focus on one’s ego comes with a price, and may be something of a vicious circle for it also produces psychological pain and existential issues that may lead to increased *immorality*, for harm done to others is quite often due to the agent’s own affliction and distress.

The strength of Western ethics, however, should certainly not be understated. It presides over the ability to identify, in a reasonably objective manner, who is in the wrong and who is in the right in each case, and hence is adept at protecting the rights and interests of an individual who is, at least in principle, regarded as being on an equal footing with everyone else. Certainly, cultural, political, and personal factors can, and often do, cloud the issue, but in this respect it is undeniably superior to the East Asian approach, which tends to be rather poor at protecting the particular interests of the individual, and may even be disposed to sacrifice them for the sake of social stability or, as it is often euphemistically called, harmony.

Another weakness of the East Asian model regards the main issue of this chapter: the tendency to selflessness. In certain circumstances such a disposition may be quite unhelpful, even harmful, and could be compared to Hannah Arendt’s well-known notion of the “banality of evil.” Adolf Eichmann was, one could argue, a *selfless* individual. He simply followed orders. But his selflessness involved a lack of thinking, of empathy, of humanness. Perhaps the same applies to the Japanese occupying forces in China, Korea, and other Asian countries during World War II, who treated the peoples of these areas with inhumane brutality. And perhaps it applies

to Mao Zedong's provincial cadres during the Great Leap Forward, 1958–1960, who did nothing to prevent a famine in which up to 30 million people died. And it may even apply to those who assisted the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia during the 1970s. We may also turn the issue around, as Arendt did in her time, and find fault with the selflessness of all those victims themselves, who arguably could have done more to resist the injustices inflicted on them.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, while a more analytical focus on the self and individual actions may be needed in the East Asian model, the Western approach could also do with more holistic and preventive considerations, which could serve to expand the rather myopic individual vision still dominant today. Considering the spread of Western ethical approaches in East Asian academia, it seems that the former process is already taking place, perhaps even going too far. The question, then, is whether contemporary Euro-Americans are ready to take steps towards the latter. In the near future the potentially catastrophic consequences of our economic models, based upon an increasingly extreme kind of individualism, may compel us to take such steps.

## NOTES

1. An earlier and slightly less developed version of this chapter was published in 2014 in a special issue of the international online journal *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* as “Ethics and Ego: East-West Perceptions of Morality.”
2. Though this is not altogether certain. As applies to probably all religions (and ethical philosophies), Christian teachings certainly seek to reduce self-centered behaviour. But this is not the point. The practical effects of worship and the strict emphasis on personal sin are quite capable of internalizing the believer's vision in such a way that later cultural manifestations display an intensified accentuation on self-interest and even egoism. This is, for instance, argued by Friedrich Nietzsche in many of his writings, perhaps most notably in *The Genealogy of Morality*, and by Max Weber in his classic and compelling analysis of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. These complex cases of civilizational analysis cannot be addressed here, but one may also point to Charles Taylor's cogent thesis that the combination of Christian thinking and modern rational scientific approaches actually served to underscore the (European) human being's self-love (Taylor 1989, 234ff.).
3. It is true that Mill criticized his predecessor and founder of Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, for a simplified view of nature and for “supposing that the business part of human affairs was the whole of them; all at least that

the legislator and the moralist had to do with.” (Mill 2006a, 100) Mill himself had a more complex and pluralist view. However, the approach of Mill’s Utilitarianism is still one in which the subject’s rational calculation is first and foremost intended to establish the goodness and badness of isolated, individual actions (cf. Taylor 1989, 83–86).

4. An intriguingly similar view is expressed in the Daoist classic *Liezi*: “Yang Zhu said: Man resembles the other species between heaven and earth, and like them owes his nature to the Five Elements. He is the most intelligent of living things. But in man, nails and teeth are not strong enough to provide defence, skin and flesh are too soft for protection; he cannot run fast enough to escape danger, and he lacks fur and feathers to ward off heat and cold. He must depend on other things in order to tend his nature, must trust in knowledge and not rely on force. Hence the most valuable use of knowledge is for self-preservation, while the most ignoble use of force is to attack others” (Lieh-Tzu 1991, 153).
5. Thus, the rationalizing focus on self with all its agony is largely a modern manifestation. In ancient Greek thought, notably in Aristotle’s social philosophy, it is mostly absent. However, a strong indication of the Platonic heritage is present in Aristotle’s ambivalence as to whether the good life ought to be pursued in social activities or in individual contemplation.
6. Some recent titles suffice to illustrate this: *In the Meantime: Finding Yourself and the Love You Want* (1999); *Bliss: Writing to Find Your True Self* (1999); *Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self* (2000); *The Courage to Be Yourself: A Woman’s Guide to Emotional Strength and Self-Esteem* (2001); *Heal Your Wounds and Find Your True Self: Finally a Book that Explains Why it’s so Hard Being Yourself* (2002); *Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out* (2003); *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (2006); *A Weekend to Change Your Life: Find Your Authentic Self after a Lifetime of Being All Things to All People* (2007); *Heal Your Self—A Journey to Find YOU* (2008); *Open the Door: A Journey to the True Self* (2008); *Coming Home to Your True Self: Leaving the Emptiness of False Attractions* (2008); *True Self* (2010); *The Shadow Effect: Illuminating the Hidden Power of Your True Self* (2011); *Soul Coaching: 28 Days to Discover Your Authentic Self* (2011); *Know Thyself* (2011); *Know Thyself—A Guided Journey to Self and Unlocking the Powers Within* (2012); *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (2013); *The Enneagram for Teens: Discover Your Personality Type and Celebrate Your True Self* (2014); *Recovering and Healing After the Narcissist: Discovering Your True Self* (2016).
7. This is certainly not meant to imply that the Chinese philosophical traditions, let alone Chinese culture, are identical or even interchangeable in this or any other respect with the traditions found in, say, Korea, Japan, or Vietnam. But while Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese societies certainly



have their own particular national and cultural characters, they received considerable philosophical, religious, and cultural influences from China, in many cases developing the original sources of these influences much further than the Chinese did. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the classical Chinese philosophical insights presented in this discussion are, to a greater or lesser extent, shared by other East Asian and some Southeast Asian cultures.

8. For the convenience of readers, all references to Chinese philosophical classics are to available and authoritative English translations.
9. The same reflection appears in Lieh-Tzu (1991, 38).
10. This may be changing. Some recent strands of Western ethics, such as the ethics of care, emphasize the use of emotions and feelings rather than rationality and logical analysis. And it is true that through the ages many Western thinkers have proposed a more feeling-based alternative to the classic rational orientation. But, as throughout this chapter, I am describing the mainstream tendency.
11. While Arendt's coinage of the "banality of evil" is, without doubt, the most significant outcome of her analysis of the Holocaust, her most controversial claim at the time was that the widespread cooperation of Jewish leadership with the Nazis in the occupied areas of Europe may have aggravated the situation and served to increase the Jewish death toll. She makes no attempt to explain why this was the case, and simply states briefly that it took place "in one way or another, for one reason or another" (Arendt 1963, 61). However, she combines this issue with the question, which she claims is of "greater import": "Why did [the Jews] go to their death like lambs to the slaughter?" (Arendt 1963, 7). Though she does not say it explicitly, Arendt seems to indicate that a selfless tendency to make the best of the (miserable) situation instead of overturning it may have been involved. The same could probably be said of many of the horrors experienced by Eastern and Southeastern Asians in the twentieth century and beyond.

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# Iridescent Self in the Womb of the Wholly M(O)ther: A *Vajrayani* Meditation

*Neela Bhattacharya Saxena*

## INTRODUCTION

Let us eavesdrop on a dialogue between Jacob Needleman and a Tibetan Buddhist scholar speaking about the rarity of achieving a human life. The scholar describes the story of the turtle who emerges once in a hundred years for air and an ox yoke floating randomly on the waves. The scholar asks: “What are the chances that when the turtle surfaces, his head will happen to emerge precisely through the center of the ox yoke? That is how rare it is to be born as a human being!” Perplexed at first, as Needleman looked at the throngs around them on the streets of San Francisco, he suddenly understood and said, “Most of the people I was seeing, in the inner state they were in at that moment, were not really people at all. Most were what the Tibetans call ‘hungry ghosts.’ They did not really exist. They were not really ‘there.’ They were ‘busy’, they were ‘in a hurry’.”

It is curious that our extreme self-consciousness has turned us into unconscious “*pretas*” who are devouring “others” at breakneck speed and yet remain dissatisfied with all that the grasping leads to. It is time we awaken from our dogmatic slumber and claim our full humanity. For “technologies” that help us do that we have to turn to Gynocentric tantric

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ways of old, especially *Vajrayana* or Buddhist Tantra, but first we need to examine the self/other dynamic from an Indic perspective.<sup>1</sup>

In the Indic perspective the notion of the self operates very differently from the understanding of individuality that exoteric monotheisms and modernist ideologies propose. Examining the self/other dynamic within various philosophical debates, one recognizes how an encounter with a radical alterity saves us from an inflated ego leading to *mahakaruna* or great compassion. In this chapter I look at both Indic and western articulations of the concepts of self and other to point to the self-annihilating Mother Principle, in whose womb an iridescent and insubstantial self can sojourn and thrive during one's brief foray into the world, without annihilating, what Levinas calls, the "Face of the Other."<sup>2</sup>

Ever since human beings accumulated surplus food and found time to think, we have used our intellect to understand the world around us. In the process we have contemplated the self that is trying to understand what s/he considers the other/object. Human beings everywhere have articulated such explorations in various forms. However, self and other, subject and object seem to play out very differently in different cultural contexts. Is it possible that at this juncture of our evolutionary journey and our globalized modernity, our analytical and dissecting faculties have taken up more than their legitimate space, reducing everything to objects that are simultaneously analyzed and consumed?<sup>3</sup>

At this period of an existential crisis of planetary proportions, we need to take a sober look at the ideologies that seem to have contributed to that predicament. Our academic dialogues about self and other have now reached a precipice, and whatever differences we may have in our eastern and western ways, a globalized world requires that we pull all our resources together so that we can emerge out of our dominating and "hungry ghost" existence and finally recognize our humanity as simply another point of consciousness in the vast, interdependent, and seamlessly woven cosmos. We need to integrate our immense collective knowledge systems to chart a new path, so that our neurotic and accumulative urges, often enhanced by powerful technologies and a taken for granted exploitative economic system, can be quieted.

It seems a collective human self that sees itself as solid master of its surroundings has "othered" and "objectified" every creature on earth, and the planet itself, in its insatiable lust for knowledge and stuff to consume. We have literally become what Tibetan Buddhists call "hungry ghosts" (Sanskrit *preta*), with bloated stomachs, and necks too thin for food to pass down, so that we ceaselessly desire. Or we are like the characters in

the show *Walking Dead*. Nothing but unconscious zombies who want to devour everything in our path, not realizing that we are an integral part of the cosmos and are devouring ourselves in the process.

We must now awaken our deep intelligence, uncovered by Indic Gynocentric tantric paths, and recognize our iridescent selves in the womb of the Mother, not as masters of the universe but as her awakened children. To do that we must revisit analytically our self/other dialogue from an Indic perspective. Indic systems of gnosis, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Sikh, have invested a huge amount of time, energy, and skill in understanding the mystery of our interiority. They have also perfected techniques of plumbing the depths of our internal horizons in search of gems that have been given various names by the adepts.

What may seem like a religious quest to outsiders is actually serious experimentation with what the Dalai Lama calls “mindscience.” This practice, or *sadhana*, means “the endeavour and method of intentional existential praxis.”<sup>4</sup> Through this methodology thousands of *sadhakas* have explored the notion, theory, and experience of what has been called the “Self.” This was done simultaneously with efforts to understand the so-called “objective” world, or what can be called the nature of physically experienced reality, the world of our sensory perceptions.

Both self and other are a part of our experience in the world, a world that is created by the mind. These terms themselves are part of polarities or dualities that have been posited or experienced by human beings in all parts of the world but with different emphases. Depending on the perspective of the person, we can put the marker of self or the other on any number of words; so *east* or *west* can be self or the other, although at this point all cultures have interpenetrated each other. Traditionally though, the notion of an “other” in the sense of a threatening being has been downplayed, if not completely ignored, in Indic philosophical discourses, but in practice, different groups of people, gendered or not, have been “othered,” so to speak. Understanding these from both eastern and western articulations can help us become aware of the trappings of the self as an imperial being, although it is nothing but a mirage.

### WESTERN SELF AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE OTHER

Let us turn to the history of extreme self-consciousness that Iain McGilchrist speaks of. He argues that “conscious awareness of the self is a surprising late development in evolution,” and his scientific study shows that “The self is a complex concept, but, in brief, the self as intrinsically,

empathically inseparable from the world in which it stands in relation to others, and the continuous sense of self, are more dependent on the right hemisphere, whereas the objectified self, and the self as an expression of will is generally more dependent on the left hemisphere” (87). If we follow his argument that the modern world is heavily left brained, it is clear how we have objectified/othered the entire world and have been imposing our human will and exceptionalism onto the planet, ignoring our relationality and turning ourselves into “hungry ghosts.”

Philosophically speaking the advent of western modernity also saw the revolt of the “other.” The idea of a self was discovered, or perhaps invented, in the Axial age around the sixth century BCE, and more speculative cultures around the world have responded to the concept and that self’s relation to the world in strikingly different ways; however, the notion of an other has found prominence in more recent western philosophical and postmodern discourses. These terms are broad ways of understanding relationships between dualities that are experienced by people across ages and cultures.

Values added to or deducted from the idea of a self or other make the concept either oppressive or enchanting. Self as a distinct entity envisioned in many western philosophical and religious notions is different from the self in many Indian paths, where it only has a relative existence, and ultimately does not exist as a separate entity. Metaphorically speaking east and west could be the two hemispheres of our global brain that now need to speak in harmony and redress the imbalance.

The root of the English word other is Sanskrit *antara*, which means both difference and in between. It is fascinating that this otherness is also connected with a Tibetan word, *bardo*, that translates into Sanskrit as *antarbhava*. Otherness as a concept and an experience is complex and multifaceted, as it includes religious notions of the “Wholly Other,” as articulated by Martin Buber (1970), as well as gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, and caste. But the idea is rooted in a certain kind of philosophical dualism in both eastern and western traditions. While social and psychological aspects of what has been called othering have been quite problematic, it is important to recognize their religious/philosophical roots and wider implications. I am looking at both the joyous enchantment of the other as a partner in what I call dancing dualities, and the destructive binary opposition that hierarchically organizes difference in an unending power struggle between polarities.

If the Axial age was the time when the idea of the self was discovered then twentieth century must be the time when the other was truly recognized. Twentieth-century Jewish philosophers raised questions about alterity in ways that are radically different. They emphasized the Otherness of the other, which is irreducible to the imperial self posited by Greek “rationalist” philosophy and its European counterparts. But first let us consider that there are at least two ways of organizing difference. A vertically organized dualism that has characterized what is known as western metaphysical ontotheologies, in which we can see the seeds of sexism, racism, colonialism, and other tyrannies. Some eastern ascetic and hierarchical traditions also subscribe to a variation of this organizational approach. Male, spirit, mind, light, soul, white, heaven, good, west in this system of organization have been seen as the dominant and superior elements; while everything that is characterized as female, flesh, matter, darkness, body, black, hell, evil, east are the ones to be feared and dominated.

Another, and from my perspective more liberating, organizational pattern is seen in the intermingling and interpenetrating or dancing dualities—in Chinese yin/yang, in Indian shiva/shakti, in Tibetan yub/yum. These model dualities of self and other are seen more as partners and complementary, rather than as watertight compartments that do not touch each other and end up dueling rather than dancing together.

The concept of the other came to the forefront of philosophical dialogue as a result of what can be called the Jewish challenge to ontotheologies in the postmodern world. This challenge called upon the problematic inherent in the very concept of the self that remains solipsistic and imperial in its certainty about knowledge; “know thyself” can be interpreted as a dictum whose focus has been wholly self-centered at the expense of whatever has been named as the other. Thomas Docherty proclaimed in his book: “as a result of the prioritization of praxis over gnosis there is a corresponding attack upon the philosophy of identity (Know thyself) and its replacement with a philosophy of alterity (‘Acknowledge the unknowability of the Other’).”<sup>5</sup>

Let us quickly see how “Know Thyself” in practice turned into *conquer the other*. The outward movement of the west has been historically recorded as the conquest of the other, which is a hyper-masculine project that continues even today in its extreme form of the conquest of the feminized earth herself. In the history of western metaphysics the self often incorporates the other as its negative and returns to “his” pristine and splendid

isolation, having overcome the elements within him that drag him down. It is quite fascinating to note that Jewish philosophers come to the forefront of this challenge to ontology.

Emmanuel Levinas, a Lithuanian Jew whose family was killed in the Holocaust, is followed by Jacques Derrida, a Sephardic Algerian Jew who deconstructs this hegemonic history. It is no accident that the Jew who remained the most intimate other of the Christian west that resists assimilation thinks the other into existence in western philosophical history. The tyrannous consequences of a sweeping and objectifying self are quite well known. Wes Avram clarifies how the philosophy and spirituality of the west, according to Levinas “equates the relationship between knowing subjectivity and comprehensive reason with synoptic vision” which reduces “the Other to the categories of the Same.”<sup>6</sup>

Emmanuel Levinas’ ideas about the “Face of the Other” and “Ethics as first philosophy” radically challenge the idea that the self is an autonomous concept, which in turn inaugurated a move away from Athens toward Jerusalem. Levinas challenges the Greek origin of western philosophy by calling his thought meontology (me-on, no-being, which is similar to the Buddhist not-self). In his thought the other is not accessible to reason and is beyond its power of assimilation and the dialectical movement of being/spirit. Levinas questions the notion of the wise man contemplating by himself in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. The radical alterity of the other is imaged in Levinas’ thought as the Face calls the self into question and demands an ethical responsibility.

Levinas recognizes the dangers inherent in a knowing being that grasps and appropriates the known. Hence for Levinas, ethics, not metaphysics, is *archai*, first philosophy. This call is inaugurated by the “Wholly Other,” the Hebraic God, through his commandment “thou shalt not kill.” A close look at postmodern thought shows how it begins to dismantle western hegemony from within. Since the Nazi Holocaust has been seen as the marker of when the imperial self revealed itself at its most monstrous, it is no wonder that, as Adorno famously said, “Alongside the Jews Enlightenment rationalism also perished in the Holocaust.”

The trace of the “Wholly Other”, God of Judaism, must be recognized in these formulations as one who cannot be rationally comprehended by man’s faculty of reason, and this is at the heart of this call to alterity. Unlike the abstract master/slave relationship that at least one reading of Hegel imagines in his dialectical march of spirit that engulfs all others in



its sweeping move, the other of Levinas posits the concrete reality of the face and the body. They not only resist assimilation but ask for an ethical response and thus halt the march of the free self as a pure mind toward totality. Levinas prioritizes the human bond with the other over a freedom of the self that requires humanity to respond to the “stranger, the widow and the orphan.” His insight is profound that “the Wisdom of first philosophy is reduced to self-consciousness. Identical and non-identical are identified. The labour of thought wins out over the otherness of things and men” (126).<sup>7</sup> This is a startling turn within western metaphysics, even when the questioning and dismantling began some time before, with Nietzsche, and later Heidegger whom Levinas challenged.

Now let us move to the next set of challenges that came from, perhaps humanity’s most beloved or in some cases most despised other, the woman. As soon as the concrete body is introduced by Levinas, which traditionally has been identified with the negative pole of the female who must be controlled within hierarchical dualisms and patriarchal religions, feminist thinkers raise pointed questions about the radical alterity of woman who refuses to play the “second sex” and cannot be assimilated in the male imaginary. Luce Irigaray is one of the major philosophers who challenged Levinas and posed a different question, a question about the ethics of sexual difference.

In traditional philosophy, including Levinas’, Irigaray points out the obvious, yet ignored, fact that the subject is always male. In “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love” Irigaray asks: “To go beyond the face of metaphysics would mean precisely to leave the woman her face, and even to assist her to discover it and to keep it. Levinas scarcely unveils the disfigurements brought about by ontotheology” (184).<sup>8</sup> Irigaray points out the glaring problem within western traditions across the board, including the “Wholly Other” of Judaism.

After all, the God of monotheisms in his exoteric aspects is deeply gendered, and the “Name of the Father” dictates all power relations and erases the feminine from the space of the divine as well as all discourse because she remains locked in the negative pole. This imprisons her within images of hyper-sexualized Eve as the root of evil, and within an irrational pole of negativity where she cannot aspire to any rational philosophy. From Aristotle to Augustine, the saga continues as the woman becomes the stranger and the orphan to philosophical and religious thought. I have examined this in detail in my recent book, *Absent Mother God of the West*.<sup>9</sup>

Now that we have laid out the central issues regarding otherness or alterity, we can examine the notion of the self that posits an *other*, not in Levinasian terms but as an inferior, albeit assimilable, being who must be dominated. Here self and the other come under the hierarchical pole mentioned before, where the self must assimilate, deny, or simply engulf the other. Often the *I* in *his* attempt to define *himself* projects what *he* perceives as negative traits *he* fears onto an other and then proceeds to control *her*, not always successfully but with disastrous consequences for the powerless other. If we take a postcolonial perspective, we can see how such a formulation spawns ideologies of oppression in the name of enlightenment, civilizing/proselytizing missions, and other such colonial projects.

Problematics of the polarity of east and west have been endlessly discussed under the critical apparatus of Orientalism that we will not repeat here. However, Samuel Huntington professed in an influential book that “We know who we are only when we know who we are not and only when we know whom we are against.” If such is the construction of a self, no wonder this only leads to the clash of civilizations that, the now deceased, Huntington so zealously espoused and prepared to win. He was honest enough to admit, though that “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion (to which few members of other civilizations were converted) but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do” (51).<sup>10</sup> Needing an enemy or an “other” to define oneself is the paranoid model of the self, and challenges came from broadly non-western positions and roots.

While some of the, so-called, eastern or non-western models can also be oppressive depending on who is talking, I argue that ideas represented by Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate economist and also a Harvard colleague of Huntington, can be presented as an eastern challenge to the self-same ideology of the imperial west. He argues that the world is not neatly divided, and that singular identities literally construct an enemy where there may not be one leading to dangerous clashes. His perspective is deeply rooted in a *concept* of the self that has been defined differently in eastern traditions. The dissolution of the individual ego that is at the heart of an imperial concept of the self has been at the core of all spiritual practices, eastern or western, but in philosophical and psychological formulations, eastern paths, including Indian and Chinese, have always been suspicious of an autonomous and bounded self.

## SELF/OTHER IN INDIC TRADITIONS

I now turn to Indic traditions specifically what I have described as a Gynocentric perspective in my other works, to examine ideas that lead to dancing dualities of an enchanted self and other within an ultimately non-dual perception. This is informed by powerful visions of an irreducible Divine Feminine (Wholly [M]Other) who exalts in the dancing dualities and multiplicities that she creates, but who remains inaccessible to thought. There is no self-same, monopolizing, and monomaniacal Name of the Father standing behind this philosophical formulation of the self and hence it escapes andro-phallogocentric *phallacies* (pun intended).

Indic traditions that historically began with Indus Valley Civilizations and matured through Vedic/Brahminic, Shaiva/Shakta, Buddhist, Jaina, and many other dharmic traditions, are too numerous to be represented adequately here. But we can give a short sketch, beginning with Samkhya, one of the six darshanas of India whose legendary thinker is known as Kapila. Vedantic paths can be characterized provisionally as ontological.<sup>11</sup> Vedic Nigama (transcendental) ways are challenged by what I have called a Samkhya/Yoga/Tantra continuum and the Buddhist Agamic (return to samsara as awakened Shiva/Buddha) paths.

Samkhya is perhaps the most ancient Indic philosophical system and is known for its dualism. It is interesting to recall Walter Kaufman's words from his translation of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*: "The wise emphasize two principles" (15).<sup>12</sup> Samkhya imagines multiple selves, or *Purushas*, while the other pole of this dualism, *Prakriti* remains single. This has created confusion, but tantric teachers point out that there are many realizers, but only one to be realized. In later thought this originally unconscious but complex *Prakriti* metamorphoses into the Great Mother creating dancing dualities of Shiva and Shakti, primarily through the maturation of tantric thought in many different paths.<sup>13</sup>

Samkhya formulations have been misunderstood and gendered in their application, where, at least on the surface, it appears that *Purusha* (male) as a supreme loner engulfs, separates from, or denies *Prakriti* (female) to come to his splendid isolation. Lack of adequate information about Samkhya darshana, except for one extant acceptable text, makes the problem more complicated, but a closer scrutiny of the *Samkhyakarika* shows a more complex relationship between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* that later thought clarifies and expands into tantric models.<sup>14</sup>

Like the Buddha, who was perhaps influenced by Samkhya, Kapila accepts discontent or *dukkha* as a human condition, and non-knowledge as the cause of suffering. Samkhya posits an active but unconscious *Prakriti* (Nature) and a passive but conscious *Purusha* (Witness), who recognizes himself as a free non-actor when he actually sees *Prakriti*. It is possible to hierarchize *Purusha* as self and *Prakriti* as other in gendered terms, which has led to Indic misogyny and asceticism. Samsara can also be gendered as female, while Moksha as the unity with neutral Brahman is masculinized. As always, whether Indic or not, things are more complicated than they appear, and people without the experience of *sadhana* can misread the language of the realizer. A contemporary tantric master, Kulavadhuta Satpurananda describes one form of the Great Goddess and *Prakriti*:

The Goddess is known as *Tripura Sundari*. *Tripura* means The One Consciousness that pervades all the three worlds of Existential Happening. The three worlds or houses are Creation, Operation and Assimilation. She is called *Sundari* which means The Beauty or Aesthetics. She is the Aesthetics of Cosmic Life. She is The Personified Cosmic set of rules that when realized, brings Bliss and the right sense of Beauty there of. She is *Prakriti* or The Supreme Deed.

From Samkhya we come to Patanjali's *Yogasutra* that compellingly recognizes the source of suffering, and the complicated relationship between self and other in the "monkey mind". It codifies the yogic path which perhaps was first invented by the Indus Civilization if archeological evidence of a meditating proto Shiva is to be accepted. There is a connection between Samkhya and Yoga and their provisional dualism. After all, duality has to be posited before reaching the non-dual, otherwise we are left with a monist homogeneity that erases all difference in a flat sameness. I argue that the notion of the other implicitly appears in what I call the first commandment of Indic thought—*ahimsa*—which comes before *satya*, or truth, in Patanjali's eightfold path.

*Ahimsa* presupposes others to whom "thou shalt do no harm." The knowing self that comprehends truth must come after s/he has understood suffering and *ahimsa*.

*Ahimsa* as a foundational notion is very ancient in India, especially in its Jaina roots where it takes a contradictory mode in its extreme path that idealizes self-destruction (violence against the self) rather than harm even vegetation in the act of eating. Then the Buddha appears on the Indic horizon; whose brilliant insights into the human condition challenge and

extend both the Upanishadic path; and who ameliorates the excesses of Jainism through his middle path. The Buddhist challenge to Vedantic ontology has received a lot of recent attention in western academia because of similarities between Buddhist and deconstructionist/postmodernist philosophies. We will focus on Buddhism a little bit later.

Upanishadic and Vedantic non-dual discourses, as supremely upheld by Shankara, challenge Samkhya formulations in a sweeping Advaita that dissolves any notion of self and other. Advaita Vedanta was the reigning king of Indian philosophy up until recently, when Kashmir Shaivism and other tantric paths began to receive more scholarly attention. It is a spectacular system that attempts to come to terms with dualities and the problem of One and the Many in vast literatures of philosophical and spiritual import. However, its most impressive recognition is the identity of Atman and Brahman. The shortest of the Upanishads, *Isha*, has a proclamation known as a *mahavakya*, or great saying, “So ham asmi”—although this might be translated as I am that, there is neither a self nor an other here that can be bounded by any convention.<sup>15</sup> *Isha* says: “those who see all creatures in themselves/And themselves in all creatures know no fear ... no grief./How can the multiplicity of life/Delude the one who sees its unity” (verses 6–7, p. 209).

It has been argued that *mahavakyas* such as *So ham*, *Aham Bramhasmi* and *Tat tvam asi* appear to assimilate differences in *tat* and *tvam*. But *aham* and self are different in Advaita; a self that utters a *mahavakya* while realizing his unity with all that is cannot be a bounded egoistic self or a mere *aham* but is an *atman* that cannot have any borders. It must be said that much confusion has arisen in equating *advaita* with idealistic monism. We may say Indic non-dual paths generally emphasize unity without totalizing the other although Shankara’s Vedanta did create a misplaced illusionism about the world.

In this formulation I and that are one. Without denying the reality of *that* or trying to swallow it up, here the *I* dissolves into *that*, awakening the witness consciousness or *Sakshi Chaitanya*. Such consciousness is solar, as this prayer to the sun in *Isha*, verse 15, shows: “The face of truth is hidden by your orb/Of gold, O sun. May you remove your orb/So that I, who adore the true, may see/The glory of truth. O nourishing sun,/Solitary traveler, controller,/Source of life for all creatures, spread your light/and subdue your dazzling splendor/So that I may see your blessed Self/Even that very Self am I.” This profound identification with all that is the light of consciousness has been the hallmark of Vedic Brahminism.

Sanskrit includes many words for the illusive self. *Atman*, *aham* and *asmi* denote different stages of recognition and different kinds of being. *Aham*, or self-consciousness, although necessary, becomes a bounded ego if it remains unconscious. *Asmi* is simply being-ness. And *atman* is the expanded consciousness that sees its unity with the manifested cosmos. In the development of the human being the appearance of an *aham* is important; however, if one gets stuck in that phase, then unnecessary conflicts arise between competing egos. In addition, extreme identification with even an expanded *asmi* may deny the existence of others, and lead to a misplaced *mayavad* in the Indic scene. Upanishads themselves however, are more complex. Jonardon Ganeri's sweeping study shows the reluctance of the sages to speak of "a self that lies 'hidden in the cave' (*nihito gubayam*)" (20).<sup>16</sup>

## THE BUDDHA

However, according to the Buddha, who spoke of *anatta*, this identity of the *atman* with Brahman is not the ultimate stage.<sup>17</sup> *Atman* in the Vedantic utterances dissolves in the Buddhist experience of the Void, or *Shunya*, where Mother Prajna Paramita's *mahakaruna* reigns. It is only when the expanded consciousness is dissolved into the womb of the Great Mother that an awakened being emerges into the world to act in compassion to alleviate the suffering of all beings. The Buddha calls it *advaya*. At this stage a *sadhaka*'s intellect or *buddhi* transforms itself into *bodha*, taking her into the Bodhisattva path toward full awakening to Buddhahood. Without this return journey (*agama*), the self remains in his splendid isolation, of cleansed (*moksha*) but aloof existence and simply watches (witness or *sakshi/purusha*) the ceaseless comings and goings of the world (*samsara*).

It seems the discovery of the self/Self in the Axial Age was almost immediately recognized as potentially problematic in the Indic horizon. Expanded consciousness that identifies with the Brahman and becomes a witness to the drama of life can potentially become solipsistic. Examining Buddhism's continuous dialogue with many Indic darshanas, we see that it posed a serious challenge to Vedantic *mayavad* that reductively sees the world as illusion. It can be argued, as the Buddhist challenge did, that a focus on the self could, in practice, lead to an ontology of a self-centered philosophy. Not-self of the Buddhist tradition challenges that self-same ontology of Vedanta. The Buddha negates the substantiality of the human

self as all is impermanent, even *atman*. He recognized that, as in his deeper teachings that later appear in Mahayana and Vajrayana or tantric texts, the dissolution of even *Sakshi Chaitanya* as *atman* is necessary.

Vedic and tantric paths spell out distinct stages in the awakening of our being to full realization and the emergence of, perhaps, an evolutionary paradigm of human rights as Buddhahood. What is fascinating in these two paths is that the second one, rooted in Buddhist Vajrayana Tantra is profoundly Gynocentric.<sup>18</sup> The realization of not-self makes the sadhaka supple like a baby who can exult in her luminosity because s/he returns to the womb of the Mother, awake and truly alive in the best sense of the word. This frame of reference leads to the experience of the self as a temporary and merely straw signifier. Yet this very recognition creates an iridescent self that acts but does not take itself too seriously.

Recognizing the danger of remaining in a solipsistic splendid isolation of the nigama path, or in a virtual reality so to speak, the Buddha did what Satpurananda describes as *karuna sadhana*. The awakened Buddha indicated through his *bhumi sparsha* (earth touching) *mudra* at the moment of his enlightenment that we are grounded on Mother Earth and no amount of wandering in the vast mindspace ought to distract us from that fact. By the time we come to the eighth century, under the great tantric master Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche—also known as the second Buddha—Indic tantric ways reach their most spectacular apogee as many masters of *mahamudra* and *mahasandhi* (Dzogchen) challenge the world-denying ascetic ways through their profound Gynocentric meditation on the Mother Principle.

Tantra as a philosophy, practice, and a volume of texts, marks the culmination of many divergent philosophies. If the Indus Civilization marked by a Proto Shiva yogi figure with dancing Mother Goddesses is the core ideation of India, the dancing dualities are the fundamental units that capture our imagination. *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of Samkhya merge into *Adyashakti* or Prajnaparamita who gives birth to the dualities. In Shakta texts we see the Great Mother creating both Shiva and Shakti who dance the dance of creation. All paired deities in India, Shiva/Shakti, Vishnu/Lakshmi, Radha/Krishna symbolize this dancing duality. Mahashakti as Mahamaya is at once *sat*, (truth) *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss) in Shakta tradition as a whole and in Shakta tantra in particular. Dancing dualities of tantra solve the hierarchically understood *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the problem of an unconscious and active *Prakriti*, and of conscious but inactive *Purushas*.

Tantric paths create what I have described as a Gynocentric matrix that informs all Indic ways, whether elite or folk. Since India was the only country where the Mother God not only remained intact but also became more and more central and powerful—despite all the efforts of extreme patriarchal monotheisms to destroy her—the texture of its ideas is different. No extreme masculinist rationality was ever given central stage; consequently, self and the other were imagined in more relational terms, like the Taoist Yin/Yang, and not in rigid hierarchical terms. Although some extreme ascetic and world-denying paths did remain powerful sources of oppressive ideologies that casteist and sexist social mores still hang on to, I posit that, despite them, the culture as a whole did not fall into the trap of an imperial self that wants to establish its homogenizing hegemony over the world, as monotheistic and proselytizing religions and, in Hegelian garb, some philosophies have been trying to do.

Yet problems remain and resistance to them always seem to come from Gynocentric paths. The Bhakti movement that challenged extreme knowledge paths is an example that was dominated by women and lower caste saint poets such as Mirabai and Kabir. While the philosophical realm has been deeply involved in looking at both metaphysical alterity and a socio-psychological experience of otherness and has attempted to resolve them, the Brahminical social structuring of caste resulted in an otherness in untouchability and women's oppression. A return to the Buddhist paths and a resurgence of Tantra may rectify that imbalance in India. We may unearth the history and revolt of the 84 Mahasiddhas and resurrect the most scientific and effective tantric paths for the benefit of the entire planet that itself has been turned into an other under the hegemony of modernity.

## CONCLUSION

This is not the space to go into the homogenizing impulses of certain kinds of globalization under the relentless march of a capitalistic economy that has turned the earth into a mere resource. We have been consuming ourselves and the planet pretty much at the speed of light and have brought the world to the brink of disaster. Modern humans have othered the planet as nothing but a resource, and we have become perpetually dissatisfied “hungry ghosts” who cannot ever be satisfied. We have been engaged in a neurotic accumulation of both stuff and information in a frantic effort to ward off our fear of existence itself.



However, climate change, global warming, pollution, species extinction, and all such disasters have woken up at least a segment of the population and many have turned to a Buddhist understanding of our dependent origination. While certain monotheistic perspectives and Cartesian science saw humans as separate from the earth, new science and philosophies are waking up to our interconnectedness and our insubstantial identities. Echoing Vedantic thought, scientist Robert Lanza speaks of biocentrism and sees consciousness creating the cosmos. Whitney Bauman evokes scientists like Karan Barad who refuse “to separate the human from the natural, the cultural from the biological, or the imaginative from the material” (1006).<sup>19</sup> Gayatri Spivak recognizes the problem with the self-same and homogenizing modernity inherent in globalization and writes: “I propose the planet to underwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere ... The planet is the species of alterity.”<sup>20</sup>

With the word alterity we return to Levinas in the western tradition, Ishopanishad, the Buddha, and the tantric masters. To find an answer to the call of the other, we must first recognize the irreducibility of the other to the same. As I have shown, dancing dualities produced under Gynocentric non-dual traditions do not devalue the body, nature, or the world. They give us relatively less oppressive models and are of tremendous import in the crisis of today’s environmental destruction, which has been a result of the othering and conquest of nature by a supremely imperial self. There is an openness in the self that the Indic idea proposes, as it is not a bounded concept of an individual but the self in community or a relational self. Strategic Bhakti and tantric duality that retain the otherness of the other in a great *ananda* of dance give us wonderful models to extend the philosophy of Vedanta. And in its foundational emphasis on *ahimsa* as a first principle, eastern paths allow the primacy of the other, and we must reiterate that principle if we want to reduce the violence perpetrated by self-centered ideologies of both east and west.

It is very interesting that B. Allan Wallace, a Dzogchen master, has begun to connect the quantum world of cutting-edge science with Buddhist tantric ways. He also speaks of conative intelligence, intelligence we are born with—as the Latin root of the word conate indicates. This is a truth we are born with (*Saha-ja*) and tantric practices awaken that depth intelligence of spontaneity. In Indic cosmic understanding Maitreya Buddha is supposed to inaugurate Sahajayana, or the path of spontaneity.

Kulavadhuta Satpurananda, a direct descendant of ancient Indian Vajrayana but who does not belong to any religion or dharma, defines Tantra as the structure or mechanics.<sup>21</sup> “Tantra is the Cosmic Mechanics that holds every aspect of human life in all its dimensions as a final state of Being in Becoming but Nothing in the flow of Spontaneity known as Sahaja. Sahaja is the natural balance of polarity which reflects in human spiritual perfection as synchronicity.”

It is time that we reclaim these structures and “technologies” of the mind, and dissolve our imperial self into the womb of the Mother to discover an iridescent self that only has a provisional existence. Keith Dowman, who wrote about the Buddhist Masters of *Mahamudra*, says “These tantric formulae embody the accumulated wisdom of two millennia of Indian experiment in the laboratory of the mind” (11). Vedantic, Yogic and Buddhist thought are more than philosophies; their meditation techniques reveal the vast expanse of our cosmic consciousness and attune us to a living and vibrating cosmos. The Buddha shows how a grasping human ego grips at things in an attempt to possess what is evanescent, leading to inevitable suffering and violence. As opposed to the conflict model of the self and other, Buddhism posits compassion as the core essence of humanity. Vajrayana presents the concrete and entwined image of compassion and wisdom to meditate upon so that we realize the empty nature of our constructed world leading to a luminous mind, free of all conditioning. Only then will we awaken from our unconscious identification with the “hungry ghosts” of our being and recognize our true human evolutionary potential.

## NOTES

1. I use Gynocentric with a capital G to denote Mother-centered Indic tantric paths of liberation.
2. In my book, *In the Beginning is Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature*, New Delhi: Indialog, 2004, I called the fierce goddess Kali “pregnant-nothingness” to capture the paradox of the Mother Principle.
3. See Iain McGilchrist’s *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* 2009, New Haven: Yale UP, where he argues against “an excessive and misplaced rationalism” and “a relentless growth of self-consciousness, leading to increasing difficulties in cooperation,” which has shifted the balance of power dangerously toward the left brain (6–7).

4. See Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of Eighty-four Buddhist Siddhas*, Albany: SUNY, 1985, p. xii.
5. Thomas Docherty, *Postmodernism: A Reader*, NY: Columbia UP, 1993.
6. See Wes Avram, "On the priority of 'ethics' in the works of Levinas," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 24.2 (1996) 261–284.
7. See "Ethics as First Philosophy" in *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater, London: Routledge, 1996.
8. See "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas" in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
9. See Neela Bhattacharya Saxena, *Absent Mother God of the West: A Kali Lover's Journey into Christianity and Judaism*, Lanham: Lexington, 1216.
10. Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*.
11. For a comprehensive reading of Indic traditions and thinkers see Nataliya Isayeva's, *From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism: Gaudapada, Bhartrihari and Abhinavagupta*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.
12. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, in a new Translation with prologue and notes by Walter Kaufman, NY: Touchstone, 1970.
13. In an ongoing commentary on the Saundaryalahari and its erotic mysticism that many Indian traditions believe was written by Advaita Vedantin Shankaracharya, Swami Vyasaprasad argues that "Religious doctrines that discredit the value of nature do a great disservice to the dialectical relationship between man and woman. When nature is somehow considered 'inferior' to god, who is in turn thought of as male, the relationship between man and woman becomes lopsided." In the Indic path though there is an "inclusive dialectic of 'this and that' rather than 'this or that' which 'stems from deep understanding of the dialectical interdependence of the apparently polarized nature experienced as the world phenomena'" (<http://vyasaprasad.blogspot.com/>).
14. See an interesting reading by Alfred Collins, "Dancing with Prakriti: The Samkhyan Goddess as *Pativrata* and *Guru*" in *Is the Goddess a Feminist: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, eds. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen Erndl, NY: NYU Press, 2000.
15. Eknath Easwaran calls Isha (which can be translated as God) as the Inner Ruler and therefore is a distinctly different notion from the exoteric reading of the Wholly Other of the Judaic tradition. In his commentary Eswaran writes: "no duality, not even that of non-being and being, death and life, is more fundamental than Reality, which is beyond all categories" (206).
16. See *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*, Oxford: OUP, 2007.
17. I am deeply indebted to my Guru Kulavadhuta Satpurananda for clarifying the difference.

18. “The philosophy of Vajrayana Tantra is basically nature, science and truth codified; it reveals the secrets of existence in relation to the mind, body and spirit. Vajrayana Tantra teaches one how to be a natural human being in accordance with the cosmic rules of existence, it accentuates how to reach your full potential as a highly evolved being” (Satpurananda—teaching text).
19. See “Religion, Ecology, and the Planetary Other: Opening Spaces for Difference,” *JAAR* Dec 15.
20. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (2004), *The Death of a Discipline*, p. 72.
21. There is a danger of seeing tantra as nothing but technology as these Dzogchen masters point out: “Outside of the womb-space of view and transmission, the dynamic and organic process of skillful means suffers a deadly reductionism into mechanical technique at the hands of constricting intellectualisms” (xiii). See Ngakpa Chogyam and Khandro Dechen’s *Roaring Silence: Discovering the Mind of Dzogchen*, Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

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# The Taijitu, Western Dialectics and Brain Hemisphere Function: A Dialogue Facilitated by the Scholarship of Complex Integration

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter empowers a dialogue between the East Asian Taijitu—related to yin-yang theory—and Western dialectics while enriching the notion of dialogue itself. Applications or resonances, such as those found in quantum physics, are also identified; with a focus on exploring brain hemispheric function (McGilchrist 2009)—an inquiry which has far-reaching consequences for social theory and global academia. The Taijitu can be interpreted in a reductive (inferring cyclical stasis) or a rich (involving complex evolution) fashion and this chapter adopts the latter interpretation, indicating its aptness. The topic aspires to the betterment of humanity and the planet through identifying the critical underuse of such semiotic patterns as the Taijitu in academia and—at least in a formal way—in Western society at large. A general import for social theory comprises the empowerment of adequately *complex* articulations of understanding, in contrast to more reductive theorisations involving *flat ontologies in conjunction with strong bias toward one half of apparent dichotomies*, such as

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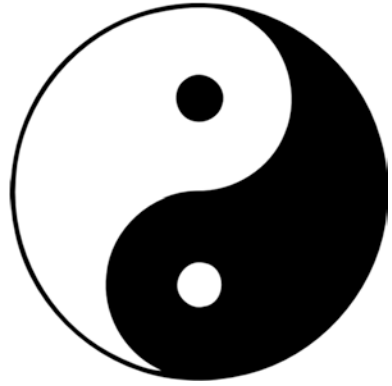
that of ‘agency versus structure’.<sup>1</sup> The chapter indicates the usefulness of both Bhaskar’s (2008) philosophy of dialectical critical realism in ‘underlabouring’ such apt social science, and that of the notion of ‘the scholarship of complex integration’ (after Boyer 1990). An additional contextualising triangulation via postformal reasoning (Hampson 2007) further enhances the significance of the work. The chapter ends by offering a key conceptual formulation for understanding the underlying logic of the Taijitu and postformal dialectics as part of Gödel’s (1931/1992) incompleteness theorem(s).

An introduction to Taijitu scholarship is followed by an identification of Western dialectics, focusing on Bhaskar’s dialectical critical realism as a nuanced sublation of the dialectical approaches of both Hegel and Marx, thence opening up a dialogue between it and the Taijitu. After a brief review of Taijitu applications in academia, including that pertaining to quantum physics, there is an exploratory inquiry into the relationship between the Taijitu and brain hemispheric function via the scholarship of McGilchrist (2009). A useful global academic context then follows, namely, that of the scholarship of complex integration—an adaptation of Boyer’s (1990) scholarship of integration. This is enriched by addressing the lens of postformal reasoning. Finally, an ‘ends-in-view’ (Dewey 1919/2004) section presents a summary of the chapter and indicates avenues for further exploration.<sup>2</sup>

## THE TAIJITU

The Taijitu or yin-yang symbol—indicating yin-yang theory (see Fig. 1)—can be interpreted in a variety of ways, some of which can be categorised as contractive or reductive, and others expansive or rich. Whilst the chapter adopts the latter, it is worth giving an example of the reductive interpretation, such as that of Bell and Bell (2008) on why the Taijitu is unsuitable for use in the field of environmental sociology: ‘from the perspective of ecological dialogue, the Taijitu represents the world as overly unified, static, and finished’ (Bell and Bell 2008, p. 6). This contrasts with a more complex interpretation such as Choi’s (2013), regarding the ‘ecological promise’ of the Taijitu, which he explores via the insights of Thomas Berry. In terms of the symbol itself, one perspective on how a reductive interpretation might be seen by some as merely cyclical and static involves the under-regarding of not only possible consequences arising from the aspect of dynamism but also the potential significance of the complex identity of the ‘seeds’ of yin within yang, and yang within yin as elaborate

Fig. 1 The classic  
Daoist Taijitu



fractal subtotalities. But first, let us consider the historical context of the Taijitu.

### *Historical Context of the Taijitu*

Yin-yang theory has formed part of the dominant worldview of eastern Asia for millennia. For example, ‘the Han thinker, Dong Zhongshu (Tung Chung-shu, 179–104 BCE), commonly regarded as the founder of Imperial Confucianism, explored the relationship between *yinyang* theory and Confucian morality’ (Wang 2005, p. 308, original italics), thus infusing a type of yin-yang orientation into the authoritarian mindset of early Confucianism. It was not until a millennium or so later, however, that a Taijitu was formed in relation to a *philosophical* perspective on yin and yang.<sup>3</sup> Following on from a drawing of the Great Void by Daoist hermit Chen Tuan (906–989 CE), Zhou Dunyi (Chou Tun-i, 1017–1073 CE) wrote the *Taijitu Shuo*, a philosophical account of the Taijitu that first introduced the notion of non-being into East Asian thinking (Wang 2005). Via a particular infusion of Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, Zhou Dunyi heralded *Neo-Confucianism*, which lasted as a dominant cultural style in China until the early twentieth century. This realisation is relayed in the *Daodejing* (study 42—as quoted in Stalling 2010—as):

*Dao engenders One;  
One engenders Two;  
Two engenders Three;  
Three engenders the ten thousand things*

In terms of the first line, Stalling (2010) comments:

Here, we begin with the undifferentiated ‘Source,’ variously referred to as *taiyi* [Great One], *taiji* [Great Ultimate], *hundun* [Primordial Chaos], or *qiantian* [Primordial Heavens]—or even *xu* [the Void], which is often figured as pure undifferentiated potentiality that is the foundation of being, its origin and its destination. (Stalling 2010, p. 167)

Beyond the ‘one’, the ‘two’ of yin and yang are formed. The ‘three’ can be understood as involving their complex relationship. This relationship thence leads to ‘the ten thousand things’, that is, the myriad phenomena we witness in the universe.

The complex relationship and its consequences are traditionally explored through the notion of trigrams (combinations involving three units, each unit being either yin or yang: a total of eight possibilities), and thence hexagrams (combinations of two trigrams: a total of sixty-four possibilities). These form the core elements of the *I Ching* (see Walls 1995, for example, regarding the *I Ching* in systems thinking). Closely associated with this context is that of the five elements (see Mišić 2011, for example, regarding the five elements with respect to systems biology). The perspective taken in the current chapter, however, is an exploration of the Taijitu *without focusing* on the level of trigrams (or beyond), and *without substantive association* to the five elements.

### *Taijitu Semiotics*

In Fig. 1 the Taijitu can be identified as involving four aspects: (a) a circular sense of totality; (b) a contrast between a yin (black) half and yang (white) half; (c) an S-like curve between the yin and yang halves; and (d) a yin ‘seed’ within the yang half, and a yang ‘seed’ within the yin half.

The first aspect refers to the ‘one’ discussed above. The second aspect is a contrasting binary involving an apparent opposition, dichotomy, dualism or complementarity. In relation to such possibilities Brons (2009) notes that ‘while strict oppositional variants are more common in the West (and perhaps in Indian thought as well), the yin-yang model is more common in East-Asian thought’ (Brons 2009, p. 294).<sup>4</sup> He is referring to the interpretation that the Taijitu offers yin and yang as a *complementary* pair rather than a pair in opposition. This understanding can be identified as the first level of insight. However, it is interesting to observe Yoke’s (2000) more nuanced—(meta-)dialectical—interpretation that yin and yang can



be understood as *both* complementary *and* oppositional: this can be identified as a second level of insight.<sup>5</sup>

A more nuanced understanding of the yin-yang pairing also indicates the possibility of asymmetry-within-symmetry.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, at the initial level of understanding, yin and yang are symmetrical; yet particular contexts also highlight the asymmetry not only between the characters of yin and yang but also with respect to their systemic structure. From the traditional historical context, for example, the relationship between Heaven and Earth is described asymmetrically, specifically that Heaven (yang) begets Earth (yin), that Heaven/Source is primary, whilst receptive/reflective Earth is secondary. So, at the level of abstract complementarity, yin and yang can be understood as symmetrical, but in a more nuanced way, structural asymmetries can also be identified at different levels of understanding in various contexts.<sup>7</sup>

The third aspect indicates change, movement, dynamism—the type of which is dependent on the interpretation of the fourth aspect. The fourth aspect offers at least two possible readings. The first imaginary would be that the seeds merely indicate that yin becomes yang and yang becomes yin in a mechanical cyclical motion. But such an idea could surely be adequately represented by a diagram involving either the third aspect or the fourth aspect but not both (note that both would infer a redundancy—something unlikely in such a tight semiotic form). So even from the symbol itself, a *richer* reading would appear to be more apt. Firstly, it can be seen that the *very identity* of yin does not solely consist of yin but also of a little yang—and vice versa. In other words, each half of the Taijitu is already a complex identity, one which acknowledges the Other in its midst. Resonating with both Lacan (1988) (regarding the omnipresence of the Other in identity) and Derrida (1967/2001) (regarding what one might say as the omnipresence of the Other in the identity of the text<sup>8</sup>), one could specify such a complex identity as of a type of *dialectical* identity.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the positioning of the seed, namely, in the fullness of its Other, gives rise to the type of ‘movement’ found in the *I Ching* in relation to the varying strengths of yin (i.e. full versus moderate) and the two corresponding strengths of yang.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, and perhaps most generatively, the seeds can be interpreted as elaborate fractals, recursions or holographs of the whole: given that the seed itself can/will grow through time, it will surely become similar-but-not-identical to the major half of the Taijitu with which it shares its colour—and therefore have already implicit within itself the seeds of *its* own opposite or complement. In this explanation, I use the term *elaborate* (after Davis and Sumara 2006), to indicate that this process is not mechanical but organic,

so that—analogue to the procession of different generations of a biological family—the later iterations will be similar but never identical to the preceding ones. The combination of this aspect with the third aspect of dynamics thus indicates the prospect of evolution. Moreover, the path of evolution is very likely to be non-linear (i.e. does not form a neat geometrical helix<sup>11</sup>), as Robinet (1992/1997) indicates (through her discussion of the Taijitu in the context of an alchemical spiritual path):

The cyclical process occurs in stages and, in a time quite apart from linear time, a cyclical and achronic time during which the materials on which the adept works ... are progressively deepened, purified, exalted, in an upward moving, widening spiral that culminates in the universal and the ultimate truth and finally permits escape from the cycle of life and death.

All explanations of the alchemical task follow this spiraling movement. Progress is never linear but always truncated, punctuated by movements backward. Like the task itself, these explanations do not proceed in a straight line but in a labyrinthine fashion, with repetitions and returns to earlier points, circularity, repetitively, dialectically. The perpetual reiterations are never identical, thus suggesting a constant labor or renewal and enlarging of understanding. (Robinet 1992/1997 quoted in Staling 2010, p. 234)

Here, Robinet's identification of evolution as a spiral (or helix<sup>12</sup>) involving a labyrinth of repetitions, regressions, truncations, punctuations, dialecticisations and so on is perhaps reminiscent of the philosopher Mary Midgley's (1985) identification of the character of evolution, in which she postulates the concept of the *bush* as offering an apt metaphor to indicate the degree and type of evolutionary complexity.<sup>13</sup>

But what of the Taijitu's relationship with the notion of dialectics?

## WESTERN DIALECTICS

The Taijitu has been identified as a form of dialectics, as Brons (2009) indicates:

There are several forms such dialectics can take, and most of these forms can be found around the world. The famous *yin-yang* circle (*taijitu*) is a surprisingly good graphical representation of one of these forms—yin and yang are entangled, in perpetual flux, and contain each other's 'seeds'. (Brons 2009, p. 293, original italics)

Despite Brons' identification, it is mostly the case that dialectics has primarily been identified with respect to *Western* philosophy, involving such figures as Socrates, Hegel, Marx and Bhaskar. It is likely that Bhaskar's *dialectical critical realism* (Bhaskar 2008; Norrie 2010) provides the most nuanced approach to dialectics with respect to the Western tradition. It addresses the salient details of both Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and then moves dialectical understanding beyond each of these in a detailed and rigorous fashion. In its realist and emancipatory commitments, dialectical critical realism can be linked more closely to Marx, yet in its systematic philosophical rigour, it can be linked more closely to Hegel. Analogous to this, Norrie indicates that, 'Bhaskar's [theory of dialectics] is a partially preservative sublation of Hegel ... via the insights of Marx' (Norrie 2010, p. 85). The term 'preservative sublation' indicates the aforementioned manoeuvre of nuancing—in this instance signifying the differentiation of the Hegelian concept of *aufheben* or dialectical sublation (the process involved in achieving a new level of dialectical synthesis resulting from the apparent resolution of 'thesis' and 'antithesis') such that sublation may not only ('preservatively') involve *transcending and including* but also ('non-preservatively') involve *transcending and excluding*. As Bhaskar indicates, 'sublations involve the 'determinate transformative negation' of an existing state of affairs, and, as such, 'may be totally, essentially, or partially preservative'' (Bhaskar 2008, quoted in Norrie 2010, p. 82).

A relationship to poststructuralism and process philosophy—via Deleuze—can also be identified through observing differing interpretations of Heraclitus. Specifically, whilst Deleuze and some other process philosophers characterise Heraclitus as a philosopher of flux or flow, Norrie indicates that Bhaskar interprets Heraclitus as essentially offering a dialectical perspective—one specifically regarding the dialectical unit (or 'dual' in critical realist terms) between flow and structure (thus implicating Heraclitus in the fruitful identification of a *dialectic to process*).<sup>14</sup>

Given this heritage and substantive address of Hegel and Marx (with additional insights regarding Deleuze), dialectical critical realism can be used as an appropriate voice to represent Western dialectics as we bring this into dialogue with the Eastern Taijitu.

### *Dialogue with the Taijitu*

The first thing to note is that neither Bhaskar's (2008) volume on dialectics nor Norrie's (2010) synergistic volume mention the Taijitu. Nonetheless, the degree of Bhaskar's enrichment of dialectical understanding adequately

facilitates a conceptual landscape within which dialogue can generatively occur. Indeed, the overall relationship can perhaps best be described as a philosophical embrace in which the Taijitu can be understood as forming a particular subset of the general landscape formed by dialectical critical realism. In other words, dialectical critical realism can be identified as a ‘philosophical underlabourer’ (Bhaskar 2008) for the Taijitu.<sup>15</sup> The following represents the detailing of this by referring back to the section on the semiotics of the Taijitu:

1. The wholeness aspect of the Taijitu is valorised by dialectical critical realism through the concept of *totality*; specifically, the Taijitu can be identified as a totality;
2. The complementary(-opposite) aspect of the Taijitu is identified in dialectical critical realism as a *dual*, which can be understood as a subset of the concept of constellation—noting that:
  - (a) ‘Constellationality involves an overall co-relation, emergent from its parts and containing them, which depends on the real relation of the individual terms, together with the relative autonomy between them, making mediation possible. Mutual intra-action and co-mediation in a constellational state, rather than subsumption of one term within another, are stressed’ (Norrie 2010, p. 100);
  - (b) ‘Linked to [constellationality] is the figure of the dual, which also sustains the independence of linked terms, whilst insisting on their interdependence’ (Norrie 2010, p. 100);
  - (c) Thus, in dialectical critical realist terms, the Taijitu can be understood as a dual (or constellational dual);
3. The dynamic aspect of the Taijitu is identified in dialectical critical realism in a complex way, one which draws together particular identifications from:
  - (a) Plotinus and Schiller—*dialectical process* (unity to differentiation to differentiated unity);
  - (b) Hegel—*dialectical intelligibility* (involving teleology);
  - (c) Marx—*dialectical praxis* (involving a unity of theory and praxis);

4. Whilst the ‘seeds’ aspect of the Taijitu is facilitated by the concepts of:
- (a) *Heterology*—‘Something is heterologous where it has a relationship of difference with another entity, or contains elements of difference in itself’ (Norrie 2010, p. 96). The Taijitu involves heterology because yin is not entirely itself but rather contains the seed of yang and vice versa. Through dialectical critical realism, yin and yang are identified as heterologous;
  - (b) *Levels*—‘A totality can be made up of distinct, yet interconnected, levels, with each enjoying both a *sui generis* importance and being linked to other levels in the whole’ (Norrie 2010, p. 97). In the Taijitu, the *seeds* of yin and yang can be identified as operating at a different level to the main identity of yin and yang;
  - (c) *Subtotalities* (totalities within totalities)—The seeds of yin and yang can be identified as subtotalities, indicating the holistic complexity of character not only at the main level of the Taijitu but also at the level of the Taijitu seeds (as indicated above).

Dialectical critical realism further points to the contextual pertinence of such features as the dual, indicating the Taijitu’s usefulness in philosophy and social theory. For example, the Taijitu dual indicates the default significance of both agency and structure in social theory. This enables certain commonly held theoretical viewpoints to be identified as partial; for example: ‘deconstructive semiotics (Derrida) and reconstructive hermeneutics (Habermas) represent one-sided, complicit antagonists’ (Norrie 2010, p. 103).<sup>16</sup> At a more encompassing level, the dialectic between Apollonian and Dionysian approaches (Norrie 2010) could even contextualise the usefulness or comprehensiveness of (Apollonian) academic/scientific theorisation itself.<sup>17</sup>

### BRIEF REVIEW OF TAIJITU APPLICATIONS

The academic use of the Taijitu can involve different degrees of depth. At the shallower end are applications such as Beatty and Torbert’s (2013) use of yin-yang theory in leisure studies, in which yang represents the world of work and yin the world of leisure (through which yin-yang theory enables a better appreciation of the value of leisure); also Hillson’s (2011) ‘success-failure ecocycle’ (through which yin-yang theory enables

a better appreciation of the role of failure); and Chen's (2009) use of yin-yang theory as a novel methodology in biomolecular science. Whilst the possible import of Corpo's and Vannini's (2012) 'new theory of thermodynamics'—involving yang as visible, causal entropy (the divergent energy of physical systems) complementing yin as invisible and retrocausal syn-tropy (the convergent energy of living systems)—has merit, there are a number of questions about the details of their conception. Similarly, Bell's and Bell's (2008) reference to yin and yang with respect to the material and the ideal in philosophy appears to remain under-explored.

In terms of a deeper engagement with the Taijitu, the following vectors are indicative. Bock-Mobius (2012) indicates the usefulness of addressing the Taijitu in relation to methods of insight, exploring the idea that the scientific method (yang) can be complemented by mystic approaches (yin), where the former involves the objective and reproducible whilst the latter allows for the subjective and the non-reproducible.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, she suggests that quantum entanglement analogises to the unity of the Dao beyond polarities.

From within the realm of science, one notable context for its application is in physics, particularly quantum physics. Specifically, the 'complementarity principle', which was introduced by Niels Bohr in 1927 to account for the, so-called, wave-particle duality (and other mutually exclusive yet collectively required descriptors of quanta).<sup>19</sup> The principle has since received a steady interest from a small number of scientists and philosophers seeking to explore its transdisciplinary applicability in other subject matters (see von Stillfried 2010). This includes the possibility of a complementarity between:

- relativity theory and quantum theory (von Stillfried 2010),

as well as between:

- determinism–indeterminism (regarding a quantum event);
- physical–mental (regarding human individuals);
- structure–function (regarding systems);
- substance–process (regarding systems);
- science–spirituality (regarding reality as a whole); and
- individual–connectedness (regarding human being/humanity) (Walach and von Stillfried 2011).

In view of the potential of a generalised notion of complementarity, Stillfried and Walach (2006) even go as far as hypothesising that complementarity might well be an intrinsic property in all kinds of systems under certain conditions. In addition, at a paradigmatic level, Walach and von Stillfried (2011) identify possible challenges to the dominant philosophy of science following on from serious consideration of such complementarity. Such contested paradigmatic dominations include (a) science's undue privileging of reductionist and atomistic modalities; (b) the notion that 'all causes can be reduced to efficient causes in Aristotelean terms', (p. 190); and (c) the logic of the excluded middle.

Another aspect of quantum physics—namely that of the spontaneous, near-instantaneous creation and destruction of 'virtual' particles and antiparticles in a(n otherwise) vacuum—is explicitly brought into relation with the Taijitu by Schöter (2011) with respect to *wuji* (as apparent vacuum), *yin* (as virtual particle) and *yang* (as virtual antiparticle). Schöter (2011) additionally addresses the Taijitu with respect to Bohm's (1980) implicate (*yang*) and explicate (*yin*) orders.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the author makes a parallel between this relational picture and the structure given in the *Yijing* based on the traditional realms of *tian* (Heaven), *di* (earth) and *ren* (humanity):

The trigram associated with Heaven is *qian*, the Creative; this is pure *yang*, the source of all movement, and generates the patterns which events follow. In contrast, the trigram associated with Earth is *kun*, the Receptive, pure *yin*; this provides a material substrate in which the unfolding of the Creative patterns can actually take form. The parallels between the implicate order as *tian* and the explicate order as *di* are clear. Further, in the traditional metaphysics Humanity, *ren*, arises between, and serves to connect, Heaven and Earth, which is exactly how consciousness functions in Bohm's picture, connecting the implicate and explicate. (Schöter 2011, p. 417)

Here, Schöter indicates a type of asymmetry between a *primary* yang (as Heaven) and a *secondary* yin (as Earth)—interestingly concurring with the asymmetry of spiritual ontologies often reported as part of rich near death experiences, such as those of Danison (2007) and Alexander (2012), in which the spiritual realm is identified as *more real* (i.e. the primary reality) than that we conventionally identify as real (i.e. our normal phenomenological experience as humans within this manifested universe of space and time). This asymmetry can be understood with respect to Taijitu

semiotics as discussed above; it can also be connected to insights arising from scholarship on brain hemispheric function, as indicated in the following section.

### BRAIN HEMISPHERIC FUNCTION

An application not yet identified in the literature but one which appears to have great promise pertains to the qualities and differences regarding the functioning of brain hemispheres—as richly exemplified in the human animal.<sup>21</sup>

The most scholarly integrative mention in the brain hemisphere literature to date appears to be by McGilchrist in his seminal tome, *The Master and his Emissary* (2009). This section presents a reading of McGilchrist's account of the character of the two hemispheres; followed by an exploration of the relationship between brain hemispheric function and the Taijitu based on McGilchrist's scholarship.

Firstly, the context of a *shared hemispheric involvement in one brain* (similar to the variously entwined involvements of *yin and yang as a totality* in lifeworld contexts) can be identified when McGilchrist notes that, 'both hemispheres take part in virtually all 'functions' to some extent, and in reality both are always engaged' (p. 93). McGilchrist notes that the hemispheres operate in many ways as two separate brains engaging the world in decidedly contrasting ways. Within such a context, major types of Taijitu-like complementarity(/opposition)—one might say, complex complementarity—can be identified. In general, the aspect of complex *co-involvement* between the hemispheres can be understood in relation to (although not necessarily conterminous with) the seed vector where the Other is included in Identity (e.g. yin within yang). A more specific aspect that may arise in certain contexts is that of structural asymmetries between the hemispheres, such as is indicated by McGilchrist's primary metaphor for the hemispheres comprising 'master and emissary'.

A complex complementarity which could be explored as being useful as a key overarching category with which to frame other dialectical categories involved in brain hemisphere function is that of '*presentation*' v '*re-presentation*'.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, it is the right brain hemisphere that has a strong tendency to directly present living reality to us, whilst the left has a strong tendency to *re-present* (i.e. *represent*) the information which comes from the right hemisphere; here one might note that the left thus has a



more indirect or secondary relationship to living reality.<sup>23</sup> We will first address the right hemisphere.<sup>24</sup>

Given that each moment of living reality involves a significant intensity of possible information encompassing myriad types of phenomena arriving through multiple outer sensory inputs—in addition to inner sensations, emotions, thoughts and so on—and given that one moment is followed almost instantaneously (as it were) by the next (which involves some change to the previous moment), then for the right hemisphere to capture the whole of the moment (in its unique flavour) for it to be sufficiently ‘presented’ to us, it needs to be oriented by the following particular type of operation and sensibility:

- that of prioritising *process* (i.e. regarding the movement of moments) over static structures;
- that of prioritising a necessarily *soft focus* or *fuzzy felt sensing* of the whole rather than prioritising (more distinct) focusing on any particular part (note that the latter would distract it from being able to take in a sense of comprehensiveness or Gestalt); and
- that of an *intimate connection with the body* and its sensory abilities.

With respect to the first characteristic, given that the present moment is ever-changing into the new, the right hemisphere incorporates a corresponding interest in *openness to novelty* or to the Other (in relation to that which is already known). Additionally, as each moment presents a slightly different context to the previous one, the right hemisphere prioritises *context-dependent* knowing (over abstract or context-independent knowledge).

With regard to the second characteristic, given the multifarious (complex, living) nature of phenomenological reality, the right hemisphere carries a competence regarding ‘complex pattern recognition’ (McGilchrist 2009, p. 93), a type of integration or coherence which can be signified as ‘heteromodal’ or ‘complex’ (p. 93). Such complex integration involves a *prioritisation of ‘broad connectivity’* rather than the prioritising of more ‘local’ connections. The manoeuvre of *analogising* can be understood as one example of broad connectivity; the notions of ‘family resemblances’ (after Wittgenstein—as noted by McGilchrist) and ‘clustering’ (Hampson 2013) can be used as additional framing here. Resonantly, the analogising ‘organic’ quality of our living reality inclines the right hemisphere to prefer more *poetic or aesthetic communication modalities* over more linear

media such as prose. Furthermore, given the complexity of connectivity, the right brain has a meta-interest, so to speak, in *connectivity* itself (i.e. it has an explicit interest in the relationship between things and not only in the things themselves).

In terms of the third characteristic, the right hemisphere prioritises connection to the body. It thus has stronger connectivity with the lower brain and the nervous system.

Additionally, given that living reality involves we humans, and given that we have an intimate knowledge of our interest in being cared for and for caring, the right hemisphere prioritises an attitude of *care*. This can be understood as involving prioritising a recognition of the *inherent value* in all things. Such an orientation can be understood with respect to another right hemisphere orientation, namely, that of prioritising the *how* (i.e. with careful manner) over the *what*.

Shifting our attention now to the left hemisphere, a general understanding is that it complements (or opposes, or sits in dynamic tension/generativity with) the right in all the above ways, through its operations and sensibilities of *re-presenting* the right hemisphere's presentations. The left hemisphere thus prioritises:

- static structures over process;
- a decidedly *focused* address of *parts* of the whole (rather than fuzzily 'grokking' the whole);
- an intimate connection *with itself* (rather than with outer reality), thus enabling depths of abstract thought;
- internal logical (*closed system*) consistencies within any particular item of address (rather than more open-ended coherences arising from the overall *open system* of the living whole);
- context-independent (universal or invariant) types of knowledge over context-dependent knowing;
- atomistic, digital, monomodal thinking—which may include *complicated* atomistic (technological) forms (see Hampson 2010)—rather than thinking in terms of *complex-integrative patterns*;
- prose over poetics;
- identifying things-in-themselves rather than things-in-relationship;
- an interest in the *what*—synergising with an interest in *control* (rather than care) and *extrinsic* value (necessitating *instrumental reasoning*) over inherent worth.

### *Dialogue with the Taijitu*

An initial exploratory comparative reading between the general semiotics of the Taijitu and that of brain hemispheric function suggests—via McGilchrist’s (2009) insights—significant similarities, as follows:

- The wholeness aspect of the Taijitu corresponds to the totality of brain function as a whole;
- The complex complementary (dual) aspect of the Taijitu corresponds to the hemispheric differentiation of brain function;
- The dynamic or developmental aspect of the Taijitu corresponds to the intricate, ‘conversations’ (at a spectrum of speeds from neuron-firing to those regarding the human life cycle)—and parallel-processing ‘non-conversations’—that occur between hemispheres;<sup>25</sup>
- The seeds, or complex-identity, aspect of the Taijitu corresponds to the ways in which each hemisphere holds the other; specifically, the left hemisphere can have conceptual understandings regarding the right (such as enables the current inquiry!), whilst the right hemisphere directly knows or ‘feels’ its neighbor—it has this knowing inside itself such that it has the ability to choose to enact left brain modalities itself if the context indicates the pertinence of such a manoeuvre. As identified at the beginning of the section, it is also the case that the more general co-involvement of both hemispheres in virtually all contexts indicates something of a mixed identity for each.

The *asymmetrical* character of the hemispheres is already apparent in this fourth point in that the seed of the left-in-right has a decidedly different nature to the seed of the right-in-left. Moreover, the aforementioned descriptions of the hemispheric functions indicates a more fundamental asymmetry, namely, that the right holds the big picture of reality (including a sufficiently accurate, intimate knowing of the two hemispheres) whilst the left does not have such direct access to immediate knowing and consequently has the ability to distort, marginalise or otherwise misinterpret reality, including the nature and systemic significance of itself and its hemispheric neighbour (McGilchrist 2009). In McGilchrist’s terms (calling upon a parable by Nietzsche), the right is the ‘master’ and the left is (merely) the ‘emissary’, even if the emissary has the ability to (inaccurately) imagine itself to be the master (due to its

ability to prioritise addressing *partialities* with consequent possibilities regarding degrees of misrepresentation conveyed as denial of *that which does not pertain to this part*.

The following question arises: Is it possible to compare not only the structural relationship of yin and yang with that of left and right hemispheric cognition, but also to compare the characteristics of the poles that enter into these relations? For example, we might ask which hemisphere maps on to yin and which on to yang? At first, it might be assumed that the left hemisphere maps on to yang due to the left's 'loud' interest in focus, directionality and particularisation (perhaps corresponding to *particle* in the quantum complementarity of *wave-particle*), in contrast to the right's 'quiet' interest in embracing, allowing and yielding (yin); and indeed, there is much to be said about this correspondence at this level of content or sensibility (see McGilchrist, 2009). Yet, at a subtler or more structural level, our exploratory lens might inquire (calling upon Bohm, 1980) into the relationship between the right hemisphere as corresponding to the 'implicate order' of Heaven (as *yang*) and the left hemisphere as corresponding to the receptive 'explicate order' of the Earth (as *yin*), through noting that the left hemisphere *receives, complexly echoes* and works with information from the right hemisphere analogous to the way in which the Earth realm receives, complexly echoes and works with the Heaven realm, according to the Daoist understanding relayed above (in which Heaven 'begets' Earth). The yin-type receptivity here is that the left hemisphere receives direction from the right. From the left hemisphere (Earthly) perspective, the right hemisphere (Heaven) looks 'quiet' or hidden—even if it is in reality *that which initiates*; from the left hemisphere (Earthly) perspective, the left hemisphere (Earth) looks 'loud' or even self-evidently causally efficacious—even if in reality it is *that which reflects, resonates and responds*.

So, in this regard, it seems that a *vertical* understanding of the relationship between brain hemispheres and yin-yang—one involving at least two *levels* of understanding—might well be in order.

### CONTEXT: THE SCHOLARSHIP OF COMPLEX INTEGRATION

At this juncture, it might be useful to introduce an overarching academic context which can help valorise the current chapter's interest in such a global, integratively complex dialogue—potentially operating at three levels, namely: (a) intra-dialogue (e.g. within an Identity such as the Taijitu); (b) inter-dialogue or simply dialogue (e.g. between the Taijitu and Western

dialectics); and (c) extra-dialogue or dialogue between Identity and context (e.g. regarding the scholarship of complex integration as per the current section). Specifically, the chapter can be contextualised as taking place within the general notion of Boyer's (1990) 'scholarship of integration'—a framing which (*inter alia*) seeks to increase *meaning-making* through pertinently drawing together otherwise unrelated items. A slight adaptation to Boyer's signifier can be made: the preferred term could become 'the scholarship of *complex* integration'.<sup>26</sup> Such a move attempts to ensure that the type of integration intended is not taken to mean *reductive* integration (of a flat, assimilative, overly hierarchical, mono-discursive nature), but rather one which pays homage to such philosophical understandings of complexity as that offered by Morin (2007)—complexity as paradigm—or one, perhaps, offering a *creative transdisciplinary* orientation (Giri 2002). There are numerous implications of complexity. The following two default structural imaginaries are indicative. The first involves *more ecosystemic patterns than atomistic* expectations. The second problematises the privileging of *closed system thought* in favour of *open system thinking*. The radicality of open system thinking is indicated by Gödel's (1931/1992) mathematical *incompleteness theorems*, which point to the logical impossibility of a system being both comprehensive and internally consistent. Such an idea can be used (*inter alia*) to underscore the notion of eternal change implied by the Taijitu.

Complex integration not only allows for the complex integration of atomistic parts, but more radically enables an elaborate holography of complex integrative fractals such that the very 'units' of integration are already complexly integrative (see Hampson 2013). An example of a complex integrative semiotic language is Tim Winton's 'pattern dynamics', which potentially offers various further generative perspectives on the Taijitu through such patterns as linguistically signified by 'source', 'pattern', 'enantiodromia', 'polarity', 'holarchy', 'seed', 'evolution', 'elegance', 'iteration' and 'harmony'—see Winton (n.d.).<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, through the valorisation of this form of scholarship, the concept and practice of *dialogue* becomes foregrounded. This occurs both within and beyond the identity of the system in question—in this instance, the Taijitu. Firstly, complex integration necessitates *intra*-dialogical manoeuvres. Regarding the Taijitu, the above exploration indicates a complex 'conversation' between yin and yang involving complex identities (intra-dialogue within these two subtotalities), a complex conversational character of a dynamic or context-dependent dialectic between comple-

mentarity and opposition ('contrast' being an additional useful signifier in such a cluster or constellation), a dynamic element in which the conversation changes through time (with the prospect of developing or evolving, albeit in a non-linear fashion in all probability), and various symmetries and asymmetries. Such a type of integration additionally involves *extra*-dialogical manoeuvres due to its identity as an open system and consequent commitment to identifying pertinent contexts. In this regard, the current chapter brings the East Asian Taijitu into dialogue with items (apparently or initially) beyond itself, such as Western dialectics (as part of *planetary* complex integration) and brain hemispheric function (as a form of complex integration *between domains*).

Such a multilevel analysis regarding dialogue in this chapter hopefully contributes to enhancing dialogical consciousness in general. Specifically, dialogue is valorised as a key intellectual tool. This can readily be seen to have implications for practice, too, such as the empowerment of a new prioritisation of dialogical spaces within the academy (in addition to other organisational types such as corporations) to better enable complex integrations—spaces which would no doubt necessitate considerable 'social innovations' in the social practices and structures of such organisations, involving the facilitation of deep dialogue among members/workers/faculty, as well as in inter-domain contexts such as between faculty and other 'stakeholders' in the (creative) transdisciplinary system (where 'stakeholders' is defined in very broad terms allowing for not only governmental, community and corporate players, but also the inclusion of such 'actors' as future human generations, other sentient beings, and ecosystems). Such structural innovations obviously have implications for both the interior (e.g. communication paradigms and sensibilities—see, e.g. Kantor 2012 and Isaacs 1999) and exterior of organisations, namely, a heralding of transformations in both (sub)cultural norms and structural–institutional forms. In short, the scholarship of complex integration requires a transformation of worldviews (in both ideational and exteriorised forms) for 'optimal' operation.<sup>28</sup> (Of course, there is a Morin-type feedback loop here in that it is the new worldview which is most likely to be able to identify the pertinence of this scholarship in the first place, and thus to seek to empower it).<sup>29</sup>

### *A Festal Ecosystem of Postformal Modalities*

To deepen coherence regarding complex integrative scholarship, it would be useful to indicate the value of postformal reasoning. Postformal discourse arises from the interrelationship between postformal operations

addressed in positive adult developmental psychology (specifically, psychological operations beyond Piaget's identification of 'formal operations'—see Hampson 2007) and postformal approaches to education arising within critical educational discourse (see Kincheloe and Steinberg 1993). A contextualisation of the current chapter with respect to the potential dialogical 'festival' of postformal modalities might offer the following indications at the first level of analysis (i.e. without strongly focusing on implications arising from the possible interactions of postformal modalities):<sup>30</sup>

- *Critical contextualisations.*<sup>31</sup> These include the following four vectors that help rectify an under-regard for: (a) non-Western approaches; (b) various pre-modern insights; (c) the significance of brain hemisphere function—particularly with respect to appropriately valorising right hemispheric function (in contrast to much conventional scholarship—see McGilchrist 2009); and (d) the scholarship of integration, with its consequential rectification (through the above argument) of the under-enactment of deep dialogue;
- *Dialectical operations.* The substantive content of this chapter can be identified as comprising dialectics;
- *Complex integration.* The postformal interest in unitive consciousness coupled with its interest in complexity—particularly as represented by Morin's (2007) paradigmatic interpretation of complexity—enables this chapter's advocacy of complex integration;
- *Complex sublation.* This indicates that various pre-formal (pre-modern) and formal (modern) aspects might be identified as worthy of inclusion, and others of exclusion. The current chapter includes the formal (modern) interest of enabling the Taijitu to be employed as a 'conceptual technology'; unlike a mere formal-modern viewpoint, however, it also honours particular mythic understandings as aptly contributing to rich understanding; the chapter further prioritises types of nuancing, reflexivity and contextualisation characteristic of specifically *postformal* reasoning modalities;
- *Context-dependency.* This vector indicates that the Taijitu should be employed *judiciously* (i.e. depending on context) rather than universally (fundamentalistically). This synergises with reflexively employing dialectical operations upon itself;
- *Discernment and creative agility.* The degree of judgement involved in many of the above vectors should indicate that a necessary ingredient in postformal reasoning is the use of discernment or creative agility (adaptive intelligence) in service of purpose;

- *Reflexivity*. In what way can or does this chapter address itself through its own terms? This is a complex question, but it is hoped that by at least explicating the vector of reflexivity, an ongoing inquiry can be conducted in this regard beyond the following two initial thoughts as indicative: (a) a dialectic of the Taijitu (as yang) is indicated through context dependency in theorising in the possible usefulness of non-usage (yin) in particular contexts; and (b) I acknowledge the intuitive or ‘Gestalt felt-senses’ I have that fuel my motivation to address such topics as those in the current chapter that can be understood as arising from an explicit empowerment of right hemispheric functions;
- *Construct awareness*. An attempt has been made in to indicate transparencies regarding terms used. The complex integrative manoeuvre of semantic clustering (Nietzsche’s family resemblances) forms part of this quest.

#### ENDS-IN-VIEW

*Thought as process, reasoning or ‘thinking’, and the role of more complex or abstract concepts in (such) thought tend to be mostly ignored in psychology and philosophy. Conceptual and intellectual history, on the other hand, cannot be accused of such neglect, but the common lack of a comparative perspective in those fields precludes any generalized inference. (Brons 2009, p. 293)*

It is hoped that the current chapter has helped rectify some of the imbalances identified in the above quotation as problematic within the dominant form of contemporary academia, both with regard to addressing complex conceptual patterns and with respect to indicating the facilitation of conceptual landscapes and lifeworld contexts which enable apt conversations to take place. Specifically, the inquiry has opened up (or furthered) dialogical spaces between the Taijitu, Western dialectics, brain hemispheric function and other possible similar patterns, such as those identified in quantum physics. It has additionally offered meta-frameworks and understandings that empower the facilitation of such work. The exploratory nature of these early understandings clearly beckons for further scholarship to delve more deeply into this integrative territory, to unpack its nuances, to identify its complexities and implications more



strongly and to act as a generative springboard in this regard. The following indications can hopefully add appropriate strength and flavour to this prospect:

- The Western philosophy of science of dialectical critical realism can adequately act as philosophical ‘underlabourer’ in general support of the East Asian Taijitu construct;
- The (Western) notion of the scholarship of integration valorises addressing the Taijitu as topic; in addition, it specifically enables an *integrative* address of the topic; through so doing, it valorises (at a meta-level) the concept and practice of (sufficiently deep) dialogue—in terms of: (a) dialogue *as* topic (here, between the Taijitu and Western dialectics); (b) dialogue *within* features of the topic (here, between yin and yang, for example); and (c) dialogue between topic and context (here, where context includes the scholarship of complex integration). Obversely, the Taijitu valorises the significance of the scholarship of integration. Furthermore, postformal reasoning can be used as an appropriate ecosystem of modalities to enhance the expression and evaluation of such an integrative address;
- The Taijitu might well be a useful construct in addressing the topic of quantum complementarity;
- A generative horizon of understanding opens up when the Taijitu is brought into dialogue with brain hemispheric function, suggesting substantive implications for social theory, for academia in general and, indeed, for society as a whole as it manifests through myriad organisational forms (including those pertaining to business and government) at different scales. For example, regarding academia, it might be identified that conventional orientations to (or interpretations of) science unduly privilege left hemispheric function. If so, a matrix of questions would arise, including: *What meanings might be given to this realisation?* and *What might happen if science adopted a more hemispherically balanced approach to understanding itself and the world? What new ‘world dance’ might unfold?*

Such a summary indicates the fruitfulness of a kaleidoscope of directions regarding further thought and research. It is thus perhaps best to understand the current juncture not as offering a conclusion but rather as

comprising (a more dialectical notion of) ‘ends-in-view’ (Dewey 1919/2004), ones which might nevertheless benefit from the following generic wish:

*Toward the way of way-and-no-way-and-both-and-neither-and-all-and-none-and-some-and-other-and ...*  
 (... and yet the Dao ...)  
 ... in service of pertinence.

## NOTES

1. Example of *complex* is postformal dialectical.
2. ‘Ends-in-view’ is a dialectical identification advancing the notion of ‘conclusion’ through recognising that further dialogue is always possible.
3. From an iconographic perspective, *identical* designs of the classic Daoist symbol (as per Fig. 1) appeared in the West in Roman times—around 430 CE—and in *similar* forms in Celtic times several centuries BCE. However, these Western examples do not appear to have had any philosophical or cosmological significance—notwithstanding possible inferences regarding the caduceus or ouroboros (see Di Giovanni Monastra 1996/2000).
4. Two more nuanced cross-cultural identifications in this regard are: (a) dichotomisation ‘*may* reveal a different kind of relationship hiding behind the strict opposition—they may overlap or even coincide (as in the Medieval Christian *coincidentia contradictorium*), they may both be illusory (as in Nagarjuna’s or Sextus Empiricus’s skeptical dialectics), or there may be some kind of interrelatedness and/or flux (as in Heraclitus and/or some aspects of Hegelian dialectics). Cultural differences, especially East–West differences, are often phrased in absolute terms, but generally the ‘absolutes’ are mere tendencies, or modal forms of thought. All forms of dialectical relationships can be found in both ‘East’ and ‘West’. However, while strict oppositional variants are more common in the West (and perhaps in Indian thought as well), the yin-yang model is more common in East-Asian thought. Nevertheless, Heraclitus, Hegel, and a few others occasionally seemed to get close to the yin-yang model’ (Brons 2009, p. 294–295); (b) the *reason–passion dialectic* ‘while being foundational for much of Western thought, does not have a clear equivalent in Chinese or Japanese thought. And conversely, there is no Western equivalent for the Neo-Confucian dialectic of ‘reason/principle’ (Brons 2009, p. 294).
5. Further dialectical operations can be performed upon the Taijitu to produce further levels of insight.

6. Thanks to Nikolaus von Stillfried for our generative conversations regarding this topic and helping to emphasise the identification of asymmetry in complementarity/postformal dialectical units.
7. Further dialectical operations upon this situation would reveal further complexities involving relations between symmetry and asymmetry.
8. Hence Derridean deconstruction.
9. Applying dialectical operations to such poststructural approaches indicates the context-dependence of the Other whereby ‘the Other of the Other’ offers the possibility of *that which is not the Other*; this might include a return to singular identity or might infer something more complex; regardless, the possibility of a reconstructive postmodernism (see Griffin 2002) is surely born from othering a fundamentalist or essentialising interpretation of deconstructive postmodernism on the understanding that a nuanced reconstructive postmodernism sits in positive relation with its deconstructive complement (see Hampson 2007).
10. The spatial positioning of the seed in each is such that the seed is identified as occurring in the fullness or extreme aspect (rather than partial, moderate or developing aspects) of the other. This locational significance plays a part in the *I Ching*’s differentiation between ‘moving’ yang (one about to transform to stationery yin) and ‘stationery’ yang (and vice versa regarding moving yin and stationery yin).
11. Note that a helix is formed by the combination of a circular motion (horizontally)—the yin-yang cycle—with a linear motion (vertically)—the evolution of the yin-yang seeds.
12. See endnote 11.
13. Such an understanding should certainly take account of cetaceans (Hampson 2005).
14. One may additionally, lightly, ironically or otherwise note that—at a more meta-level—this *difference* in interpretation could possibly be allowed for by a meta-Deleuzian approach which explicates difference at this level.
15. From a dialectical critical realist perspective, it might also be that various questions arise about the use of the Taijitu in the manner of ‘why should there be a focus on this particular formation (against possible others)?’ and ‘what might be the benefits and dangers of such a focus?’ Additional questions might also arise with respect to the relationship(s) between the Taijitu and the real (i.e. inquiries addressing the epistemic fallacy). Whilst such questions form part of a potential dialogue between dialectical critical realism and the Taijitu, space does not permit here a detailed engagement in this regard, please note that this chapter’s intention is merely to empower such dialogue rather than to fully explicate it.
16. See endnote 9.

17. Such critical contextualisation of conventional academic norms is given further weight in the discussion on brain hemispheric function below.
18. This exploration resonates both with the aforementioned dialectic between Apollo and Dionysius and with the following section on brain hemispheric function.
19. Complementarity can be identified as a pattern comprising a ‘dual’, or dialectical binary, each half of which is apparently ontologically incompatible with the other, where such incompatibility is understood through conventional logic. Here it may be of particular interest to mention that, when asked to design a coat of arms in the context of being honored by the Danish King for his achievements, Bohr chose the Taijitu—thus implicitly acknowledging that this symbol best represented the physical principle of complementarity which he identified as the most fundamental feature of physical reality known to humanity so far (von Stillfried 2010).
20. He further relates this to Sheldrake’s (1987) morphic fields and Jung’s (1973) synchronicity.
21. Given the probable approximately-equivalent intelligence of many cetacean species, research regarding cetaceans and brain hemisphere function with respect to the Taijitu seems yet more promising, given its current under-regard.
22. In this context I use ‘v’—abbreviation of ‘versus’—as shorthand for ‘complex complementarity’ or ‘the dialectic between complementarity and opposition’ as indicated above.
23. The direct reception of sensory information from the right half of the body by the left hemisphere should be noted as an aspect of the counter-tendency.
24. Whilst the degree of simplification inferred below should suffice for the current context, please note the yet-more inherent complexities regarding the character of the hemispheres.
25. Note the few physical connections between the hemispheres and that many of these primarily function as dampeners of connection!
26. Other possibilities for adaptive signification include ‘the scholarship of ecosystemic integration’ (or ‘eco-logics’—Hampson 2012) or ‘the scholarship of postformal integration’. Like *the scholarship of complex integration*, these similarly imply a more ecosystemic, multi-layered approach to integration than reductive integration. In the current instance, one implication of this sensibility is that there is not *necessarily* any requirement to establish a singular essentialising perspective on the connections identified in the chapter: the territory may be left with a multiple of signifiers, it may be pragmatically cohered through the context in question (the Taijitu in the current instance), or it might be that a grounded approach may eventually identify a singular key perspective, i.e. signification is context-dependent.

27. It is beyond the scope of the current chapter to explore this further at this juncture.
28. To use a ‘modern’ metaphor.
29. For the new worldview: my preferred academic or ‘logical’ signifier is ‘reconstructive postmodern’—see Griffin (2002) and Hampson (2013); my preferred ‘public-friendly’ signifier is ‘planetary’; I would also note the potential usefulness of the notion of ‘eco-logics’ (Hampson 2010, 2012), which calls upon the concept of ecosystem across the three domains of the ‘environment’, human society, and the realm of thought(-feeling)—see Bateson’s (2000) *ecology of mind* and Guattari’s (1989/2000) *three ecologies* (in relation to Naess’s et al. 2005 *ecosophy*).
30. With gratitude to Ananta Giri for empowering the festival metaphor.
31. Context in relation to the host book on ‘social theory’: relations to ‘social theory’ are postformal in combining two contrasting but harmonising perspectives. The first is that the topic *adds content* to social theory by exploring underlying patterns which might empower social theories of an aptly Asian-inclusive nature, ones which normatively seek to move us into a collectively preferred future (here signified as moving beyond modernism to reconstructive postmodernism). The second is that the construct ‘social theory’ is held lightly to enable its *partial deconstruction and reconstruction* in two ways: firstly, there is an interest in expanding ‘social’ integratively to include the planet as a whole (i.e. whilst it is only in the social sphere that we can create social theories, they nonetheless often have impact upon other species, ecosystems, and future human generations); secondly, the construct ‘theory’ from a postformal perspective might in some contexts be useful, but in others it might be generative to use the more accurate construct ‘poetics’ which, roughly understood, is the consequence of a conversation between theory and aesthetics through employing such approaches as construct awareness used in the generic process of theorising; specifically, conceptual metaphor theory indicates that language (including that of theory) can never be totally innocent, value-neutral or without metaphoric or aesthetic inference (even if relatively slight). So it could be said that the study contributes to ‘planetary poetics’ (or similar)—a context which is sufficiently/aply preservative of the notion of ‘social theory.’

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# A Middle Way of Emptying Dualism in Social Theory

*Chou Ping*

## WHAT WENT WRONG IN SOCIAL THEORY?

A variety of theories in social science, as profound as they may seem, cannot break away from an “either-or” dualism in which many of them assume dualistic substantialisms in terms of either-or dichotomies such as methodological individualism versus methodological collectivism; positivistic sociology versus interpretivist sociology; agency versus structure. There is another kind of dualistic dichotomy, that is, universalism versus relativism, or nihilism. Many sociological theories are ensnared in one of these views and cling to it as the only right one. What I try to articulate in this chapter is the application of a Buddhist middle-way perspective to the critique of such dualism in social theory.

Through the demolition of two extreme views, Buddhist *Madhyamika* (middle-way perspective) polemics are presented to unfold a non-dualistic, non-substantialist, and non-nihilistic viewpoint. According to the middle-way perspective, based on the notion of emptiness, dependent co-arising, and nominal designation, phenomena exist in a relative and nominal way, that is, they are empty of any kind of inherent and independent existence.

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173

In other words, phenomena dependently arise in relation to the dependent arising of other phenomena. Phenomena are regarded as dependent events existing relationally and processually, rather than as permanent things with their own entity. Besides, phenomena are non-substantial and nominally true. To be true in this sense is to be true by virtue of a particular linguistic convention. Thus, the extreme of substantialism should be refuted. By the same token, dependent co-arising is something more than just none, or non-existent. Because if a thing is non-existent, how could it have a condition? Without condition how can we talk about something like non-existent? Therefore, nihilism is also unacceptable. The insights on emptiness, dependent co-arising, and nominality are therefore central to *Madhyamika*.

Inspired by Nagarjuna's non-dualistic, non-substantialist, and non-nihilistic middle-way perspective, this chapter attempts to form a critical response to the either-or dichotomization in sociological methodologies and theories in social science by subjecting them to a critical scrutiny. Nagarjuna's middle-way perspective emerges as a relational-processual approach, based on the insights of emptiness, dependent co-arising, and nominal designation, which can transcend the dualisms of methodological individualism and collectivism, positivistic and interpretist sociology, universalism and relativism or nihilism, and the agency/structure dichotomization.

### *Problematizing Methodological Individualism*

Social science today is obliged to overcome the fundamental delusion of assuming the individual is an inherently and independently self-existent substance and affirming the individual on the assumption of "methodological individualism" that asserts social phenomena can be adequately explained by showing that they are the outcome of individual behaviors. The individual conceived by methodological individualism is often seen as an absolutely rational, inherently disengaged subject, which assumes a Cartesian maxim, "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito, ergo sum*).<sup>1</sup> This is seen as Descartes' "Archimedean Fulcrum," the single fixed point of certainty by which he believed he could move out of his world of doubt. The self is perceived as a thinking interior—*res cogitans*—without extension (such as its relatedness to others) or materiality (which is the attributes of a body). Descartes declared that he existed as a mind distinct from an extended body—*res extensa*. And with this distinction—the infamous "Cartesian

mind–body dualism” and its derived subject–object dualism—sociology originated as mostly dualistic and substantialist and parts became methodologically individualistic, asserting a conscious self as an indubitable point of certainty in the explanation of social phenomena.

Alternatively, some thinkers on methodological individualism propose the assumption of *homo oeconomicus*, which postulates the individual as a rational maximizer of self-interest that attributes the causal precedence of all human actions.<sup>2</sup> For example, most, if not all, rational-choice theories are based on the *homo oeconomicus* model, which is becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences due to its simple mathematical structure.

Some social theorists see *homo psychologicus* as the bearer of volition, in which variables such as the individual’s perception or sensation are considered the primal cause of social phenomena. This approach implies the introduction of a subjective (and, therefore, strictly psychological) component into sociology. Various kinds of methodological individualism share at least one thing in common, namely, their excessively voluntaristic view of human social life in terms of active decision-making and strategizing by the individual with free will. According to the middle-way perspective, this view tends to substantialize the individual and its actions and is thus unable to explain changing social conditions and the consequences of the individual’s existence. Unless we can move beyond the view of the individual’s substantiality and recognize its emptiness we be unable to understand the dependent co-arising of the social world and individuals.

### *Problematizing Methodological Collectivism*

On the other hand, some social theories postulate so-called methodological collectivism by asserting “social facts” as things (or entities, essences, systems) in which a reality *sui generis* exists that is completely external to and coercive of the individual and cannot be reduced to individual psychological attributes.<sup>3</sup> According to this perspective, social phenomena can be explained by invoking the properties of social entities that are irreducible to the individual. Closely connected to the objectivism of the scientific approach, methodological collectivism treats wholes like society, the economy, or a particular institution as definitely given entities about which we can discern social logics by observing their structural operations as wholes. While the individualist approach of sociology starts from our knowledge of the inside of an individual’s actions to construct “the social,” methodological collectivism tries to view social phenomena from the outside. It

treats social phenomena not as something of which the individual action is an active part, but as if they were entities solidly alleged by us as wholes.

For collectivists, entities such as the social, nations, classes all have, in some sense, a real existence over and above the lives and minds of individuals. This substantialist view of the social” tends to become anthropomorphism, which assumes social entities with human characteristics and a life of their own. As Durkheim stated:

If society is to be considered as the normal goal of moral conduct, then it must be possible to see in it something other than a sum of individuals; it must constitute a being *sui generis*, which has its own special character distinct from that of its members and its own individuality different from that of its constituent individuals. In a word, there must exist, in the full meaning of the word, a social being. On this condition only is society able to perform the moral function that the individual cannot.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, methodological collectivism also refers to modern social theories—structuralism, structural functionalism, structuralist Marxism, statistical “variable” analyses, and so forth—that give ontological status to structures or systems and thus grants them an explanatory primacy. According to the middle-way perspective, methodological collectivism is also flawed by its substantialized and fixated view of the social.

### *Problematizing Positivistic Sociology*

Furthermore, positivistic sociology, using the method developed in natural science, engages an even more radicalized realist and objectivist sociology. Thus, the belief in the correspondence between sociology and social reality became deeply ingrained in the social imaginary of many sociologists. While quantified method and its application enthrall most of sociology, practitioners believe they are undertaking a natural science of society. However, while natural science creates statistics from universes of millions of units, social science develops with universes of symbolically mediated and meaning-embedded people. While the methods of statistical analysis have become more and more sophisticated, and have gone from the descriptive to the inferential, the scientific quest for certainty or truth, proclaimed by positivistic sociology has turned out to be self-contradictory, uncertain, and arbitrary. The credibility of its truth-claim has become lost, mutated, and shaky. Nevertheless, quantitative analysis is still rigorous in

most sociology departments, in spite of the huge amount of work it produces with the deplorable follow-through of a payoff. In other words, positivistic sociologists' understanding of the social and of humanity has not improved "proportionally" to their output. What has happened is that the processing of data on the human units from which they stem is basically disengaged and disconnected from their social practice, which is supposed to be relational, processual, and hermeneutical.

Positivistic sociologists hold that the external social world is what it is, inherently real, independent of people's consciousness, knowledge, judgment, beliefs, hopes, wishes, or fears—that social facts are facts. That nominal A is real A, that the socials are what they are. They suppose that the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses is completely reliable and fully competent to know the facts of the social. Some even believe that since "what is" is true, it can be applied to the practical world and be the basis of a value judgment, that is, "what ought to be." In addition, just as scientific logic is the only guide to knowledge, so it is also the solitary cone-shaped tool to the logic of practice. According to the middle-way perspective, so called "absolutely inherent," "independent," and "external" social reality is untenable and thereby unidentifiable. There is no such thing as fixated fact that exists "out there" and can be perceived by our "transparent" sense faculties. Besides, our sense faculties are not as transparent as positivists thought, we have horizons, traditions, social involvements, values, beliefs, desires, and fears that always come prior to, in time with, or subsequent to our sense experience. In this sense positivistic sociology is problematic.

### *Problematizing Interpretist Sociology*

To overcome the fallacy of positivistic sociology, some sociologists emphasize the importance of the subjective consciousness to the understanding of social phenomena. Interpretist sociology presumably rejects any notion of a positivistic approach to human enquiry. It holds that an interpretive understanding (or *verstehen*) is the only proper means to "grasp" the subjective meaning of an individual's action, which is taken by interpretists to be the only "real" cause of social phenomena. Whether it is the interpretation of an historical event, a text, or a contemporary social occurrence, interpretists reply upon empathetic understanding and intuitive grasping of the meaning of actions, beliefs, and epochs that come from a total immersion in an attempt to "re-present" the original intentions of the

individuals. Sociological interpretism does make a significant contribution to the understanding of social phenomena. For example, Schützian phenomenology, inspired by Weberian insight, tries to reinterpret Weber's ideal type methodology to make a more objective analysis of meaning of a commonsensical social world. It utilizes the concept of "typification" to describe the true meaning of people's actions. The Schützian interpretation, however, is still obsessed with an objectifying attitude that assumes there is something to be grasped. To capture a more objective outer meaning, Schützian phenomenology attempts to offer theoretical techniques and methods (typification) to better illuminate the human meanings of social life with a detached "objectifying" attitude to its context. This is fairly similar to the externalist point of view proposed by positivists. According to the middle-way perspective, this ambiguous combination of subjectivism and objectivism is still obsessed by its substantialist assumption of the social world and human experience. It still imagines a graspable "thing" in the social world and human experience. However, both social world and human experience are empty of any graspable essence. They arise co-dependently, thus their existences are relational and processual, and thereby ungraspable.

### *Problematizing Relativism and Nihilism*

Overall, methodological individualism, methodological collectivism, positivistic sociology, and interpretist sociology are substantialist in different respects. They all assume something exists inherently and independently and, as a result, can be captured by the right method from the correct epistemological position. By contrast, in opposition to the substantialist view of the self and "the social," a relativist or nihilistic trend emerges by abandoning the possibility of unity of the self and the validity of socially constructed reality. In a relativist tone, all points of view are equally valid, this means all values are equally right, and all beliefs and worldviews are equally true. According to the middle-way perspective, this view is incoherent because it will destroy its own claim by accepting another's: "that relativism is wrong." Besides, relativism also abandons the possibility of dynamic mutual influence and mutual understanding between relatively different views. It also undermines people's learning capacity and their trying to learn and embrace the other's views and traditions.

Relativism, like substantialism, ignores the possibility of social change that involves interchange and interdependency between different social

conditions. In other words, relativism is still dualistic, non-relational, and non-processual. Moreover, a nihilistic tendency in social sciences attempts to claim the death of subjectivity as well as “the end of the social.” Indeed, by criticizing the power effect of substantialist theories, some thinkers leap to a totally opposite propaganda, that is, the nihilistic view of the world, which falsifies any perspective that affirms a foundation, or a structural property, of society or individual. For example, Baudrillard, one of the postmodernists, in his 1978 text *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, proclaimed “the end of the social” by saying that “the energy of the social is reversed, its specificity is lost, its historical quality and its ideality vanish in favor of a configuration where not only the political becomes volatilised, but where the social itself no longer has any name.”<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Bauman (1989), provide examples of a sociological approach without a subject, and try to drain the subjectivity of any possible meaning, content, or responsibility.<sup>6</sup> However, despite their anti-substantialist views, such a nihilistic approach, whether at the social or the individual level, is still unacceptable for their total refutation of the conventionally and practically meaningful social construction of reality, the co-arising and co-ceasing of all kinds of social relations and structures, and the formation of the disposition (*habitus*) of individuals. The nihilistic break with solidified substantialism seems to be an insightful moment of de-reified thinking. But it also abandons the belief in the existence of both ultimate and conventional truth. It proclaims non-existence. This move is even more problematic simply because nihilism is still trapped negatively in the reified and fixated view of reality, by seeing the world as non-existent, as completely void, which ignores the dynamic becoming of the phenomenal world. But they fail to carry out a second and more difficult break from their own rigidified nihilism. Sociologically speaking, just as in substantialism, the nihilistic discourse becomes part of social reality, or the power/knowledge complex, which inevitably incurs a power effect, another (anti-)theory intervention of the social world so to speak. That is why Habermas saw some postmodernists as young or as neo-conservatives, and not as constructive but as destructive. Thus, I strongly believe, sociology, as a self-reflexive discipline, should include a reflexive sociology that examines the intellectual construction of the socially constructed reality in which it contributes to the construction, or destruction, of this world. Sociologists, including relativists and nihilists, therefore should be aware of their possible detriment to social life in terms of their knowledge production.

*Overcoming Dualism*

To overcome the essentialized dualism between methodological collectivism and individualism, positivism and interpretism, and to transcend the extreme polarization between substantialism and nihilism, social theories should find a middle path within two extremes and propose a non-substantialist and non-nihilistic approach, or a relational-processual perspective, so to speak. Presupposing the right method and the correct epistemological position in the quest for certainty, or, by contrast, presupposing the non-existence of any right method or correct epistemological position, are symptoms of what Richard Bernstein calls “Cartesian Anxiety.” This is based on a dualistic way of thinking, which assumes that only two options are available for those who inquire into matters of knowledge and action:

Either some ultimate ground of knowledge and action exists, some objective and ahistorical foundation against which claims to know can be measured and the utility of actions ascertained, or we are beset by relativistic skepticism and are unable to speak of knowledge or “justified” action in any meaningful sense. We are enveloped, in the latter case, by moral and intellectual chaos that form an ever-expanding plurality of positions. This opposition, states Bernstein, includes a “variety of other contrasts that indicate the same underlying anxiety: rational versus irrationality, objective versus subjective, realism versus antirealism.”<sup>7</sup>

From the middle-way perspective, these approaches and their methodological and epistemological presuppositions are problematic due to their dualistic, non-relational, and non-processual way of thinking. The dualistic way of thinking at either extreme asserts the absoluteness of one view and simultaneously excludes the other extreme. In fact, dualism must presuppose duality, or relativity, and any extreme therefore arises dependently and relatively in relation to the other, even if no one consciously acknowledges that. In this sense, the absolutism of each end is self-contradictory. Besides, the absolutist attitude of relativism and nihilism in antagonism to the absolutist attitude of absolutism is itself self-contradictory. Relativism and nihilism should not be absolute. Therefore, every view, taken as exclusively irreplaceable, ultimately turns into self-contradiction. Clinging to the aforementioned two extremes, one is necessarily led to contradictions and dead ends. If sociology accepts such a dichotomous division, then we either swing from one extreme (say, substantialism) to another extreme



(nihilism), or reject the validity of the whole enterprise of thought altogether, or subject ourselves to self-exile in an intellectual wasteland. According to the middle-way perspective, this is unacceptable. Thus, in order to transcend this either-or situation, we must deconstruct the symptomatic assumption of both extremes for their fallacy of thinking dualistically, non-relationally, and non-processually. It is therefore important for us to gain knowledge of the insight of the Buddhist middle-way philosophy to better contemplate a more inclusive sociological way of seeing social reality.

### IMPLICATIONS OF A MIDDLE-WAY PERSPECTIVE FOR SOCIAL THEORY

*Madhyamika* (middle way) is one of the philosophical schools of Mahayana Buddhism, founded by Nagarjuna in the second century CE.<sup>8</sup> Nagarjuna came from southern India to the Buddhist university of Nalanda, where he engaged in a fundamental debate with other schools in Indian philosophy. He accepted neither the belief in eternal existence (either the self or Brahman), nor the attachment to the view of non-existence. To transcend these two extremist viewpoints asserted by different schools of Indian thought, and inspired by Buddha's teaching that everything is impermanent and devoid of self-nature, and his doctrine of dependent co-arising, Nagarjuna proposed his *Madhyamika*, a middle-way perspective. The emergence of the *Madhyamika* was a far-reaching turning point in the progression of Buddhist thought, in terms of which the untenability of the substantialism of early Buddhism is established. Henceforth, *Madhyamika* Buddhism gave a new direction to Indian philosophy.

The perspective of the middle way rejects both extremes of substantialism and nihilism, and espouses the middle way as the true attitude of practice and contemplation, which implies a balanced view and approach to life. However, while the word "middle" denotes balance, the middle way should not be confused with passivity, nihilism, or a kind of middle-of-the-road compromise. Indeed, the "middleness" of the middle way does not propose a mere compromise of a middle point between two extremes, as the Aristotelian notion of *mean* might suggest. Rather, the middle way overcomes the two extremes by transcending the dualistic standpoint, and engages an ongoing practice of non-attachment to any kind of either-or dualistic thinking.<sup>9</sup>

Nagarjuna's middle-way perspective is an approach based on the insight of emptiness (*sunyata*), dependent co-arising (*pratityasamutpada*) and nominal-verbal designation (*praj-napti*). The middle-way perspective shows us a path whereby we can go beyond the ignorance (*avidya*) of substantialism and nihilism of various kinds. In short, the middle-way perspective should say of the dependent co-arising of things that: neither is nor is not, nor both is and is not, and nor nothing without any condition. In other words, the purpose of this line of thought is spelled out: "those who take the middle way attitude will gain detachment from the views of own-being (*svabhava*), self-nature (*atman*), other-nature and nihility." In this chapter, I claim that the ancient perspective of Nagarjuna provides a fundamental insight into the resolution of the substantialistic/nihilistic, individualist/collectivist, and positivist/interpretist dilemmas in sociology.

The following exposition of the middle-way perspective focusses on a few of the most crucial themes of the *karika* to avoid unnecessary prolixity. Let me start with verse 18 of chapter XXV of the *karika*:

Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way. (pp. 69, 93, 304)

According to Garfield's interpretation, emptiness, as dependently co-arisen, is termed a nominal designation. In other words, Nagarjuna asserts three fundamental characteristics in this passage as in harmony with one another and thereby inseparable: (1) emptiness, or the ultimate truth; (2) the dependently originated, that is, the phenomenal world; and (3) verbal convention, or dependent designation. (pp. 93–94) Therefore, whatever is dependently co-arisen is nominally established and is empty. Nagarjuna explains emptiness as something that arises dependently. Emptiness lacks (and is empty of) essence, or independent existence. And emptiness itself is also assumed to be a dependent designation and is thereby asserted to be merely nominal. Something that is empty depends upon verbal reference, or conventional characterization, for its existence (Garfield 1995:305). Emptiness and the conventional world are, Nagarjuna suggests, two different interpretations of the same thing; something from the conventional standpoint is empty from the ultimate viewpoint. When we characterize a thing we give it conventional existence with a verbal designation, but it retains its fundamental emptiness. Let me articulate these three characteristics of *Madhyamika* in a more systematic way, as follows.

### Sunyata (*Emptiness*)

The *Madhyamika* school of Mahayana Buddhism propounded by Nagarjuna is also known as *Sunyavada* (theory of emptiness). The whole philosophy, in fact, can be construed as different aspects of *sunyata*. One of the central themes of *karika* is therefore *sunyata* (emptiness)—the Buddhist technical term for the lack of independent existence, inherent existence, or essence in things. *Sunyata*, as emptiness, means that the conventional world, the socially constructed reality for instance, is not, as some stubbornly think, composed of substance inherently and independently existent; in *Madhyamika*, these entities are devoid of inherent existence—they are empty. *Sunyata* is the skillful means (*upaya*) by which one unravels oneself from unsatisfactory attachment and clinging. In other words, emptiness discloses the non-substantiality of phenomena and hence frees one from fundamental unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*).

*Sunyata* is a refutation of the possibility that any phenomenal object can have own-being (*svabhava*), independent of its conditions and consequences, and isolated from our nominal imputation by which it is named and conceptualized. *Sunyavada* is contrary to the common substantialist view that regards all phenomena as having individual separate identities. To the *Madhyamika* nothing exists “inherently” or “from its own side.” All phenomena are radically empty of any defining essence. Consequently all have no fixed entity and are in a state of impermanence—change and flux—constantly arising and ceasing. Not only are all things constantly changing, if we examine any phenomenon in fine detail we are unlikely to find anything identifiable and thereby definable by our unfixated and non-substantial mind.

What the *Madhyamika* view of emptiness does for our critical thinking is that our intellectual concept of phenomena does not encapsulate any underlying essence, and each social fact in a substantialist sense is found to be without basis. Emptiness also implies the condition of the possibility of existents. Qualities such as freedom, action, interaction, creativity, social movement, institutionalization, and social change are realizable only because of the empty nature in which substantial elements are lashed out at, and negated in the on-going process.

On the other hand, one should never take the understanding of the emptiness of things as itself absolute, this again would be an act of clinging: clinging to *sunyata*. As Nagarjuna argues in chapter XXII of *karika*:

Empty should not be asserted. Nonempty should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. They are only used nominally.

It is therefore important not to confuse emptiness with total nothingness because everything is *sunya* in the potential openness for change and transformation. In fact, a major portion of the chapter on “The Examination of the Noble Truths” (*Aryasatyaparikā*) is devoted to a refutation of the view that “emptiness” is “nothingness” or “nihilism” (*nastitva*). *Sunyata* does not imply a dead void, it must in turn empty itself and so cannot itself be an object of attachment, dynamic *sunyata* therefore empties itself out as just the things-in-themselves. Emptiness should not damage the foundation of dependent arising, only nihilism does. Thus, the self-emptying of *sunyata* can also be stated as the *sunyata* of *sunyata*, or the emptiness of emptiness, that is, in the ultimate sense even *sunyata* is empty of absolute-ness, or nihilistic quietism. Instead, *sunyata* is the foundation of all things, and it is the basic principle of all phenomena. In other words, if the world was neither empty nor impermanent, then all resulting phenomena could not have arisen or ceased due to the substantial existence of various essences. The nature of emptiness, from this perspective, is of positive significance. Thus emptiness implies the negation of unchanged, fixed substance, and thereby the possibility for relational existence and change. This insight is important to the observation and contemplation of social phenomena.

### *The Sociological Implication of Emptiness*

The Buddhist middle way regards the persistent delusion of “inherent existence” as a major obstacle to awakening, and the root of many other consequential delusions. One of these delusions is the realist belief in an objective reality existing independently of human experience. For instance, by asserting that the social reality exists inherently as brute facts external to and coercive of actors, it denies that human experience has any relevance to or influence on the social reality, or even any existence at all.<sup>10</sup> The delusion of inherent existence is deeply ingrained in our intellectual world and daily practices. It has also been embedded in the dominant stream of the social sciences since their beginning.

Sociologically speaking, it is important to point out that what *Madhyamika* negates is not the socially constructed reality but our clinging to it as substantially real. Thus, it is not the views or practices of social conventions that are refuted by *sunyata* but our attachment to them, our misconceptions with respect to them. *Sunyata* does not denounce the conditioned, relative

social world; it only denies our mistaking it as absolute. All social phenomena do not exist as things in themselves or cease as annihilation in itself due to their being ultimately empty of inherent existence and non-existence. All social phenomena arise and cease relationally in dependence on other phenomena, which are themselves empty of essence and dependently related to other phenomena, and so on. Therefore, as in social research, no matter how thoroughly or empirically we search and observe, no phenomenon will ever be found that is substantial as a “thing-in-itself.”

From this perspective, we can say that social phenomena are empty of self-essence and do not exist independently, and thereby are interdependent and interweaving. And unless we can recognize the ongoing arising and ceasing of all social phenomena, manifestly or latently, we can never truly understand the reality of the self, the social, and their historical change. Apparently, this viewpoint implies another important notion in *Madhyamika*, which is known as *Pratityasamutpada* (Dependent co-arising), conditioned relations and process.

### **Pratityasamutpada (*Dependent Co-arising*)**

Something that is not dependently arisen, such a thing does not exist. Therefore a non-empty thing does not exist. (XXIV. 19)

Those who see dependent arising will see the dharma; those who see the dharma will see dependent arising.<sup>11</sup>

The root *i* means motion; the preposition *prati* means the arrival or attainment. But the addition of a preposition alters the meaning of the root. So, in this case, the word *pratitya*, as gerund, means the “attained” in the sense of relying, depending, and meeting conditionally or relatively. The verbal root *pad* (to go) is preceded by the preposition *samut* (*out of*) means arising or becoming manifest. Hence, the full meaning of the *pratityasamutpada* is that which arises, or becomes manifest in reliance upon conditions, in dependence upon conditions, meeting through the force of causal conditions (*pratyayas*).<sup>12</sup> *Pratityasamutpada* has been translated in such various ways as, “causal chain,” “chain of causation,” “causal genesis,” “dependent origination,” “theory of twelve causes,” “relational origination,” “conditioned origination,” “dependently coordinated origination,” and “dependent co-arising”. In this chapter I have chosen to use the last translation.

If emptiness is said to be the mode of subsistence of all phenomena, it is because of the working of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising is seen as the supporting condition for emptiness. In comparison with *Sunyata*, the notion of *Pratityasamutpada* is a relatively more positive aspect in *Madhyamika*. If emptiness was the latent condition of possibility of phenomena, then dependent co-arising is the manifest description of the condition. They are like the ontic as well as the epistemic condition of universe, humankind, social formations, and individuals. Therefore, dependent co-arising is, without a doubt, of supreme importance for Nagarjuna, no wonder he started his *karika* with a dedicatory verse that took dependent co-arising at the center of his homage to the Buddha.<sup>13</sup> Nagarjuna explicitly equates *sunyata* and dependence in the form of *pratityasamutpada* not to argue that dependent things are non-existent and therefore empty, but to argue that emptiness expresses the dependent nature of all things. Thus, everything exists insofar as it is dependent. In other words, nothing is independently existent. The conditions and consequences of occurring things are sustained by their own interdependence.

### *The Sociological Implication of Dependent Co-arising*

Sociologically speaking, neither individual nor society can have independent existence. Nor can society be a transcendental force external to and coercive of individuals, and vice versa. Society and individuals arise through relations and conditions, and are said not to exist from their own side in some separate way. Since no thing exists on its own, no thing is sufficient in itself. Also, society and individuals, as verbally imputed concepts by social sciences, find no correspondence between them (their concepts) and their assumed substantiality. Similarly, causal relationships between them (cause and effect in a substantialist sense), starting from either direction, are also illusory. They are, rather, dependent on each other.

Some social theories are not immune from reifying and clinging to what is, by nature, empty of inherent and independent existence. Their theoretical assumptions are thereby flawed by substantialistic and metaphysical fallacies. The perspective of dependent co-arising can therefore help to overcome all metaphysical fallacies in the social sciences, particularly the problem concerning causality. For example, Marx deterministically reduces social phenomena to the general causal law of material production: "religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only particular modes

of production, and fall under its general law” (1867).<sup>14</sup> Marx’s quest for the “ultimate” cause presupposes the materialistic stance: “The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their beings, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (1978:4).<sup>15</sup>

However, if we try to detect substantially what a causal relation really is, we will be perplexed. Nagarjuna contends that it is impossible to explain the relationship between a cause and an effect, and to relate entities. A view of causation leads to inconsistencies and absurdities. Historically speaking, according to the principle of *pratityasamutpada* the pursuit of origins, or *telos*, is substantialist and thereby perplexed. Foucault also expressed this insight while articulating his genealogy through the elaboration of why Nietzsche challenges the pursuit of origin (*Ursprung*). For Foucault the quest for the historical origin is essentialist:

because it is an attempt to capture the exact, and pure, [transhistorical, immanent] essence of things, it assumes a world of forms preexisting the world of accident and succession i.e., history ... But he who listens to history finds that things have no pre-existing essence, or an essence fabricated piecemeal from alien forms.<sup>16</sup>

In actuality, it is not the “inviolable identity of their origin” (ibid.) but the emptiness and the dependent co-arising of beginninglessness of things that counts. The middle-way perspective would agree with Foucault’s criticism of the pursuit of origin. As he stated:

The “origin” makes possible a field of knowledge whose end is to recover the origin, but as a thing lost, fleetingly to be glimpsed, and creating a sense that truth and truthful discourse can coincide. But history reveals “origins” in a proliferation of errors. What truth is “is the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it has hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history. (ibid.: 79)

A middle-way perspective, like genealogy of Foucault’s, will never confuse itself with a quest for historical origins or *telos* but will cultivate the understanding of contingencies and openness that accompany every moment of dependent co-arising. In contrast to the essentialist concern with detecting prime causes against which effects could be arbitrarily anticipated, *pratityasamutpada* stresses the recognition of circuits of contingency.

Does it mean that we can never conduct any kind of causal explanation? Is not this methodologically too nihilistic? In actuality, one of sociology's main thrusts, in addition to interpretative understanding and critical reflection, is the causal explanation of the conditions and consequences of social events. I would argue that sociological causal explanation is possible only if we take into account the *pratityasamutpada* of things. Generally speaking, *pratityasamutpada* is not a strict causality principle or a simple causation theory. It is not a universal law or a formula that governs the order or the structure of the world or the individual. In actuality, it only depicts the multifaceted dependent or relational arising of ordinary experiential process, that is, how events come and go, or arise and subside. Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* is useful in reminding social scientists that all propositions regarding a subject or object in the substantialistic sense are not essentially real. The supposed persistent existence of things depends not on some property of substantiality, but entirely on the social contingency of reality. They are dependently real and related to numerous conditions and consequences in continual flux.

### **Praj-napti (*Nominal Designation*)**

As quoted above: "Empty should not be asserted. Non-empty should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. They are only used nominally." Indeed, according to the middle-way perspective, *sunyata* is used nominally as *praj-napti*. If we investigate the core of all things, we will realize that everything is conditioned and has empirical names. Those empirical names are provisional concepts as our thought looks to describe the dependent arising of reality. Actually, the word reality is derived from the roots thing (*res*) and think (*revi*). Reality means whatever you can think about and thereby assign a name to. This is not "that-which-is." No thought construct can capture reality in the sense of that-which-is. Things have no permanent identity and are empty of inherent and independent existence, and are dependently arisen in relation to our culturally effected knowing and naming. Unless we notice them and identify them perceptually or conceptually, out of our cognitive continuum, we cannot get to know the existence of things. In other words, the condition of possibility of the existence of things is dependent on this noticing in the first place and naming accordingly. The concept of verbal designation (*praj-napti*) provides a way of handling cognitive abstracts without concretizing them, or assigning substantial value to them. This understanding



of the process of nominal abstraction is perhaps the greatest achievement of the middle-way perspective. It transcends the substantialist belief that all parts of a true statement must be true knowledge corresponding to existent objects.

The principles of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* are not limited to the observation of objective phenomena, they must also fall back on verbal designation. The constituents of discourse, no different than other phenomena, are brought into manifestation in the same way—they have neither ontological nor empirical independence, but can only arise and be defined in relation to other constituents. If all concepts or words are dependently arisen, then they have not arisen independently, on their own. If not arisen on their own, then they cannot be asserted to exist on their own. They must, rather, arise in a relational-processual context, through which the conceptual binary opposites are related and interdependent. If any one of them becomes independently existent without relative context, it will immediately become unrealizable by our cognition and thereby become non-existent at once. The paradox is unsolvable unless we abandon the possibility of both extremes (existence and non-existence) immediately and accept the relatedness and conditionality of concepts and words.

### *The Sociological Implication of Nominal Designation*

Immanuel Kant, in the Western context, introduced the idea that what we experience as reality is actually conditioned by our concepts and categories. However, Kant's notion of these conceptions and categories is understood as stable and transcendent. From the middle-way perspective, there are no grounding conceptions or categories such as those Kant held to be a priori. Nagarjuna's idea of *praj-napti* (verbal designation), or mental conception and category, is changeable and empty of any transcendental fixation, and driven by the conditions of dependent co-arising.

Likewise, the conceptualization and categorization of social phenomena by social scientists are shaped and driven by conditions we are embedded with and within, conditions we feel are significant and meaningful. In other words, our conceptualization and categorization are socially constructed and full of context-bound value relevance. As Weber contends with regard to the formation of meaningful knowledge: "Without the investigator's value-ideas, there would be no principle of selection of subject-matter and no meaningful knowledge of the concrete reality"

(1949:82).<sup>17</sup> The conceptualization of social facts is influenced by the researcher's value-laden background. Every conception has been mentally imputed and symbolically designated according to its researcher's contextual value-orientation. The assumption that social facts exist independently is therefore self-deception: "If the notion that those standpoints [cultural values] can be derived from the facts themselves continually recurs, it is due to the naïve self-deception of the specialist who is unaware that it is due to the value-ideas" (1949:82).<sup>18</sup>

The existence of social facts is actually a conceptualization, and the nature of that conceptualization changes through temporal process. This would seem to say that there is no reality, which serves as a variable holding the name of some object to be. What it really means is that if social scientists try to find and grasp something substantial, they will work in vain. There is no substance that can be found in the basis of nominal designation, none outside of the basis of nominal designation.

It is not the "actual" interconnections of "things" but the conceptual interconnections of problems which define the scope of the various sciences. A new "science" emerges where new problems are pursued with new methods and truths are thereby discovered which open up significant new points of view.<sup>19</sup>

For Weber, the social world of human beings is divided into analytical slices; economic, political, or religious motivations, or ideals in general, are equally detectable in the behavior of individuals, while the disciplinary question is no more than a strategic tool useful to scientific activity and empty of any claim to ontological or substantial precedence. Every conceptual interconnection of problems and analytical slices cannot escape from its nominal presumption. Even a simple extract from of a historical document reflects the presumption of the document's writer. There is thus no description without presumption. As Weber pointed out, it is unacceptable to assume that "the knowledge of historical reality can or should be a presuppositionless copy of objective facts" (1949:92). "All knowledge of cultural reality, as may be seen, is always knowledge from particular points of view" (1949:81). This view tackles the self-deception of the advocate of objectivism who "unconsciously approaches his subject matter, that he has selected from an absolute infinity a tiny portion with the study of which he concerns himself" (Weber 1949:82).<sup>20</sup> Yet the objectivist insists that the existence of objects does not depend on human

knowledge. Ontology is thus utterly non-contingent on social epistemology in objectivism. In fact, this presumption strains our ability to practice interpretative understanding. According to the notion of *sunyata* there is no existence that is absolutely non-contingent.

The pursuit of correctness or precision in social research is basically delusory. The dynamic spiral between social occurring (praxis) and knowledge formation (theory) must be empty of inherent and independent existence, and arise co-dependently. The conventional truth in terms of conceptual scheme must be fundamentally non-substantial. That is why any kind of own-being view or metaphysical presence is a hindrance. We are thus in the position of always making conventional knowledge a provision of the particular tradition, or horizon, in which reality is perceived.

In general, there is no unmediated knowledge of reality. Knowledge is a social-mental construction mediated by symbols. What we know are signs, which are empty of any inner or transcendental essence, which are dependently arisen. Therefore, there is neither the knowledge of essence, nor the essence of knowledge, but only of a mentally imputed and symbolically mediated knowledge of reality. Even our knowing of our mental experience is empty and dependently arisen, and is thus mediated knowing. There is no "pure" knowledge of reality except, as Nagarjuna suggests, a conventionally symbolized and mentally designated knowledge of reality, which arises dependently from our interrelated and processual world. It is therefore important to understand empirical sociological knowledge as theory ordering, that is, as the conceptual construct of empirical reality. The theoretical ordering of social reality is only possible from certain evaluative frameworks, by which the researcher is motivated. However, they are not substantially real, for there is no substance within our mental functioning and behind empirical appearances. Social sciences' treatment of, or viewpoint concerning, any social facts or aspects of social reality should not be verbally definitive, or even metaphysical. Knowledge constitution in terms of verbal designation and nominal convention is, for Nagarjuna, the provisional means of conventional truth in order to understand the ultimate truth. Without relying upon convention, the ultimate truth is not understandable. Without understanding the ultimate truth, human freedom is not attained. Thus, the interdependency between conventional truth and ultimate truth makes our efforts to understand ultimate truth promising, and yet the fundamental truth of *sunyata* also highlights the openness and flexibility of our conventional knowledge that undermines any insistence on closure within a given conceptual scheme.

FROM *MADHYAMIKA* TOWARDS A NON-DUALISTIC,  
RELATIONAL AND PROCESSUAL WAY  
OF SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING

*Non-dualistic Thinking*

Suzuki writes: “The power of dichotomizing has made us forgetful of the source in which it preserves its creative potentialities.”<sup>21</sup>

The dualistic way of thinking has been misconstrued by many as the only right view since early human civilization. In Plato’s thought there is an ultimate dualism of being and becoming, of ideas and matter. Aristotle criticized Plato’s attachment to the transcendence of ideas, but he was unable to surpass the dualism of form and matter, and in later metaphysics this dualism takes many forms. For example, in Immanuel Kant there is an epistemological dualism between the passivity of sensation and the spontaneity of understanding, and an ontological dualism between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. Therefore, we can define dualism as: “the use of two irreducible, heterogeneous principles (sometimes in conflict, sometimes complementary) to analyze the knowing process (epistemological dualism) or to explain all of reality or some broad aspect of it (ontological dualism).”

As analyzed previously, the middle-way perspective is neither substantialist nor nihilistic, or holds up neither existent nor non-existent. Hence, the “neither-nor” double negation is the basic attitude espoused by the middle-way perspective to deconstruct all essentialist, dualistic clinging. By and large, unreflective people tend to think in terms of either-or or both-and logic instead of neither-nor. Consequently, they see reality as either existence or non-existence, that is, either this or that, or both this and that. But this is delusory, based on false dichotomization or amalgamation. The middle-way perspective is ridding us of all kinds of essentialized binary opposition and its conflation. There are no absolute dualisms in the actual world of conditional relativity. The middle-way perspective denies the essentialist assumption that the principle of binary opposition is substantial and universal prior to the dependent arising of the concrete, historical, and contingent social world. If we are stubbornly attached to such dichotomization, or its combination, as substantially real, there is no end to the world of wrong views. On the contrary, if we come to realize

the truth of the middle way, then contradictions and confusion due to dualistic thinking are overcome.

However, the rejection of the dualistic logic may lead some logicians or theoreticians to think it Reality, especially when they are unable to rectify the dualistic flaw. They are thereby inclined to adopt monism by removing any possibility of relatedness between the two realms, by eliminating one end of them altogether, or by reducing one completely to the other. In appearance they seem to conduct a kind of non-dual thinking by attempting to transcend the tension within either-or dualism, by eliminating the dichotomy. Since the dichotomy is fundamentally eliminated there is no difference between things anymore, things are identical to one another simultaneously. However, as Nagarjuna stressed: "If in identity there were simultaneity, then it could occur without association" (VI 5, p. 17). The difficulty of this alternative is that in identity, the plural word "things" is in contradiction because it implies non-identity. Besides, the relation and interaction between things is thereby sociologically untenable due to their being identical, without any difference. Moreover, the notion simultaneity becomes unthinkable because it does not make sense to say that a thing exists simultaneously with itself. Therefore, all explanations or analysis without regard to the relation and process of social phenomena will be impossible. In identity, there is no dependent co-arising. That which is associated does not arise together. That is, if identical, the "co" of "co-arising" is meaningless. Generally speaking, monism in opposition to dualism is not a true non-dual thinking. To assert the identity of things is still dualistic, for identity is an antinomy to distinction. It is still trapped in the one end of the dichotomy between two extremes, the essential monism and the essential dualism, that is, monism in relation to dualism. In other words, it remains a dualistic concept in the substantialist sense.

The middle-way perspective is neither dualistic nor monistic. Instead of starting with dualism, or monism, epistemologically or ontologically, Nagarjuna wants us to have a non-dual thinking, which makes no attempt to dichotomize or conflate phenomena in a substantialist sense. As quoted above, the non-dualistic thinking of *Madhyamika* asserts neither distinction nor identity, neither existence nor non-existence, it is thus non-substantial and non-nihilistic in any sense. This non-distinction of epistemological and ontological must couple with non-identity as the thrust of *Madhyamikan* non-dual thinking. It is only after we can overcome all kinds of dualism, or

monism, that we can then talk about the dependent co-arising of the duality of social phenomena non-dualistically.

Conventionally speaking, there must be some kind of provisional verbal distinction imputed to things for people to skillfully act, think, feel, and appreciate in relation to other people or things. Otherwise, without distinction there would be no need for two or more words to describe the undistinguishable state. For some reason, which cannot be exhaustively articulated, people still utilize the distinguishing mind and words in their practical life. Hence, the dependent arising of many schemes of distinction are designated in a social world. But we must bear in mind that all socially constructed forms of distinction are empty of self-nature, that is, they do not have inherent and independent existence. They are artificial so to speak. Exactly because there is no essential difference among things, there is no substantially fixed social distinction at all, nor is there any annihilation of distinction in the nihilistic sense either. There is only the relative arising of distinctions dependently conditioned by people's constant and dynamic involvement in the historically specific social background.

### *Emptying Sociological Dualism Again*

Sociologically speaking, all social phenomena in the social world are neither essentially existent nor essentially non-existent, nor both, nor without a cause. According to the middle-way perspective, all principles of our social existence are relationally situated and are contingent on the interplay of various conditions, mediated through the nominal conventions. All classificatory schemes and dualities in the social world are historical, contingent, and relational, rather than substantially established.

The problem with an either-or way of thinking in the social world is that people tend to reify the provisional frameworks and ignore their socially constructed character. The belief behind these opposites is typically dichotomizing and polarizing: if it is not one it must be the other. When people attach to either this or that, or both this and that, side of the opposites in their social practices, many kinds of illusion, conflict, domination, and suffering can emerge. Since the ingrained thought is not only personal, but also collective, it is difficult to become radically aware of the dichotomized bias of our thinking.

Neither-nor thinking is inspiring to us for its not clinging to any essentialized distinction or identity in society. Similarly, social scientists should

discard any metaphysical assertion that affirms either substantialist or nihilistic assumptions of social theory. The theoretically constructed binary oppositions concerning social relations are just heuristic devices for conducting our understanding of the dependent co-arising of the social world. If we obstinately equalized those taxonomies and theoretical pairs to the social phenomena we analyzed, we would not only have perverted the view of society, but are probably also doing violence to the social world whenever the theory becomes the dominant doctrine of social practices. It is therefore important to transcend dualistic assumptions in social theory in order to conduct a better understanding of society, or to awaken people from their attachments and derived discontents.

Dualism in the social sciences tends to assume that society is made up of two elemental categories which are incommensurable. For instance, on the one hand, in a holistic approach, individuals are basically defined as being very much at the receiving end of the social system. According to this view, the individual's position, characteristics, thought, and behavior are all determined by the larger social structure. In other words, their social behaviors, relationships, and their very sense of personal identity as human beings are existent not from itself but from another (social structure). The process whereby they are socialized into the norms, laws, and values appropriate to the role they are to play in that society is unidirectional. Social action is thus the mere product and derivative of social structure. The holistic approach regards the reproduction of social relations and practices as a mechanical outcome, rather than as an active co-creative process in the web of interweaving subjects. On the other hand, in total opposition, the sociology of action conceptualizes social structure and system as the derivative of social action. A social world is deemed to be produced by its members, who are thus asserted as active, purposeful, self-generating beings. The consciousness, intention, belief, interest, or preference of individuals are thereby taken as self-caused, spontaneous. Regardless of the contextual conditions in which individuals are involved, this approach substantializes the self-nature of the isolated self.

Both these extremes of social theory are a form of dualism one could call "epiphenomenalism," which contends that there is only a unidirectional causal connection between the realms. Either individual consciousness is a byproduct of social structure or vice versa. "Parallelism" is another kind of dualistic thinking in social sciences, which contends that both realms exist independently of each other. Thus having separate entities,

they have no causal connection and have no interaction. Since each realm is self-subsistent the relation between them can never be established. Social structure can thus exist without individuals. In the meantime, individuals can exist without social structure. The bifurcation between these two and the preservation of the existence of both at the same time are definitely a deviation from sociological imagination, which stresses the mutuality between society and individuals as condition and consequence of one another.

Indeed, any system of sociological thinking that analyzes social phenomena in terms of two distinct and irreducible principles, such as methodological individualism and methodological holism, subjectivism and objectivism, action theory and structuralism, mind and body, good and evil, or universal and particular, can be defined as dualistic. Some people try to favor the one as determining cause, while downplaying the other one as merely a receiving effect. Some insist on the self-sufficiency of one substance (individual or structure) without taking into account the influence of other factors. Some attempt to establish both ends of the opposition, as two discrete elements, as essentially co-existing. A significant flaw that traps dualism is that it is incapable of resolving the rift created between two opposing elements. Even though many social theorists try hard to build up theories to overcome the contradiction between these two realms, as long as they assert the dualistic assumption in the substantialist sense, the efforts of social research will be futile.

A universal framework of distinction across all time and space is therefore unconventional and thereby unsociological. It is not acceptable in social research, so to speak. Ironically, it is often perceived that, throughout a long-term observation, when an essentialized conceptual distinction has been established, the pursuit of one extreme of the opposites will somehow eventually lead to its own negation.

Moreover, despite their relatively specific cognitive interests and particular conceptual distinctions, the social sciences should not separate themselves dualistically from the observed social world and insist on the independent existence of their conceptual distinction. The dynamic circle of mutual involvement and influence between theoretical and practical worlds requires social scientists to be reflexive and hermeneutical. To some extent, the theoretical world is in the practical world and thereby is constitutive of it. Likewise, the practical world is in the theoretical world and is also constitutive of it. There is no essential distinction between



them, otherwise mutual involvement and influence will not occur. In general, inspired by the middle-way perspective, the sociological way of seeing the world must be non-dualistic. Anyone who holds the either-or way of thinking is being dualistic. The danger of this is, as Nagarjuna warned, that a wrong grasp of the doctrine of emptiness and dependent co-arising dualistically leads to suffering.<sup>22</sup>

### *Relational Thinking*

If all dualism is to be denied, then what is the general characteristic and pervasive feature of existing things? According to the insight of dependent co-arising, this characteristic or feature is relationality, or relatedness. And there is no absolute way to portray a differentiating boundary around the world, or to demarcate its extent, or to impose the referential point of our epistemic schemes. This suggests that both the ontological constitution of things and our epistemological schemes are just as relational as everything else.

The notion of *pratityasamutpada* discussed above inspires us to think of social phenomena non-substantially, or relationally. It approaches human existence and social phenomena not as centered or essentialized upon subjective or objective presence, but as relational and interdependently arising. Human beings are considered as participating in and conditioned by particular social contexts while also being their constructors. From the insight of *pratityasamutpada*, all individuals are located, and can only be understood, in relation to the interweaving social figurations. Therefore, we should observe social phenomena and human behaviors according to their interrelationship. With the caution of non-substantiality, we should observe the actual dependent co-arising of all social phenomena. Meanwhile, we should be horizontally aware of all kinds of interrelationships that make things conceivable. By observing phenomena via interrelationships, we will realize that nothing is independent of conditions and relations, and that everything is without self-nature. Selflessness implies the empty characteristics of all phenomena. As we have discussed above, *sunyata* is not different from selflessness and we can observe the profound significance of *sunyata* from the perspective of interdependent relationships. Based on this understanding we can thereby establish a theoretical foundation for using the relational principle of society as a general characteristic, not only of material social phenomena but also of mental experiences. This, the fundamental cognitive switch of theoretical vision

from substance to relation, is the core of our argument. It is therefore important to investigate more reflexively the relatedness of the social world.

Middle-way relational thinking seeks to overcome dichotomous thinking, which, on the one hand, tends to conceive of human beings in the self-sustaining and self-generative sense in which the individual is disconnected and isolated from the social background. On the other hand, it tends to interpret human beings as completely determined by the surrounding social structures, which are external to and coercive of that individual. Both approaches are non-relational, and cannot really explicate the dynamic changing relations of the social world as discussed above. What kind of relation are we proposing? From the middle-way perspective, *pratityasamutpada* implies that relatedness is not only extrinsic to human existence, as though we were individuals who are just structurally or strategically coping with others and the world. Rather, interrelationships should be understood as a constitutive, integral, and primordial dimension of human beings. We exist and are present even to ourselves as we are always already embedded in a social world that we share with certain relevant others. We are fundamentally relational, internally and externally.

The relatedness of human existence is made possible only if things (such as history) are at the same time fundamentally empty of substance. The middle-way themes of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* remind us that nothing in the phenomenal world is self-explanatory or self-contained. Therefore, based on this understanding, we should see that each relation in the social world carries the aspect of emptiness within. As we have stated, that which is empty is also open and thereby possible. Thus, to be empty is to open up, to dissolve those reified things (which we ourselves construct by attachment) that separate us from seeing or appreciating one another and our background world. In a way, emptiness implies the openness within ourselves which leads us to recognize and cherish the fundamental relatedness that binds us to one another and all that constitutes our world. This mutuality of one another reaches to the very foundation of who we are and draws us toward our background, which is interdependent and interrelational. Fundamentally speaking, we are interconnected and carry an aspect of one another within ourselves. Thus, this accounting points to the actuality that emptiness represents the extensive openness and dynamic relatedness within and without us, as well as our societies. Nothing is left out, nothing substantial is added on either.

### *Relational Social Theory*

To observe the relatedness of the social world, we must first transcend the subject-object dualism in the substantialist sense, which interprets human beings in an attitude that cuts off the relational actuality in which we vividly perform ourselves within the social world as part of it, not apart from it. Individual action is embedded in a meaningful nexus of social relations. Far from being a problem, the social relatedness of human action is the major source of our knowledge about one another. Relational thinking realizes our fundamental openness to the historical-specific social relatedness, which embraces us, and out of which we act, think, feel, appreciate, and become who we are. In other words, we constantly empty ourselves of any ossifying immanence and engage with the already embedded dynamic world. We thus become who we are relationally out of our connecting with the world. The formation of our schemes of action, conception, perception, and appreciation are in turn related to the background world we are thrown into. It is only within the historical-specific relational context of social activity that individuals will have access to the knowledge required to appraise alternative courses of action, thought, feeling, and appreciation. Outside of that relatedness, the requisite knowledge would not be able to exist. Without this shared meaningful background, social life would be continually chaotic. Relatedness, as the ontological foundation of social constitution, indicates that human making must arise dependently. There is no essential line separating us from the world. There is, in short, relatedness that extends beyond the percipient as well as within the unnoticed process that makes up the percipient. In other words, the relational actuality of the social constitution and the self-making are working both externally and internally, or explicitly and implicitly.

In our daily practice we are embedded in the world, for that is where our social self takes shape and becomes manifest as we engage in day to day concerns, whether mentally or physically, deal with the tasks at hand, orient to one another, and try to pursue what is often a significant personal identity. The relational background against which our daily practices occur is the locus where we become ourselves for the most part. Thus, it evolves as a viable vantage point for understanding the social. This vantage point leads our social research to acknowledge that people's involvement with one another and engagement within the social background is integral to what we are.

Actually, however far back in history we go, the fact of dynamic relatedness emerges as fundamental, for it is a dependent co-arising of all other fundamentals. We are born into a family, granted a nationality, and receive an education, without our choosing any of them; and it is these conditions that, in turn, influence our more “voluntary” dispositions and action frames of reference in which we subsequently acquiesce. Undeniably, the family we grow up with, the nationality we are granted, the school we go to, the media we watch, the things we do, the work and careers we pursue, the interests we share with family and friends, the church we attend, the community we grow up in, and so on, are not mere superfluties additional to our selfness as some quantitative social research has implicitly assumed. They are the very paths through which we become ourselves. They are also the working fields we are within while being involved with and mutually influenced by one another. That is to say, we do not exist inherently and independently in a world of our own making, but in a world we make and provide for one another, a world that includes many fields we tacitly count on continuously, though usually unable to articulate them discursively or analytically. The social consequence of which is that we become mutually tied to one another in a social world of, at certain levels, shared interests, world views, fate, suffering, and so on; we are at once mutually constructive and obstructive to one another.

Despite a certain degree of relative distinction, we are interconnected in a subtler sense. We take our bearings from one another more than we might acknowledge and there is little about us that does not dependently arise in some sense from our togetherness or mutual embeddedness, there is little that does not include others as part of who we are. As Whitehead says, the “connectedness of things is nothing else than the togetherness of things in occasions of experience.”<sup>23</sup> If we realize this fundamental connectedness we have within the world of togetherness, we might recognize that there are no self-contained or self-sustaining individuals. Rather, we are actually partaking in a mostly unnoticed, or unconscious, intersubjective event of networking, whereby we mutually condition one another and are contingent upon one another. The networking constitutes the social world in which each of us lives. Rare is the individual who has one, and only one, intersubjective network. The togetherness and mutuality among members of a dependently durable tradition, which emerges as social collectivity identified by members as a culture, holds up the tacit sense of intersubjectivity among members. So, when encountering a social event or object, we tacitly sense that there is a dynamic historicity behind it and

within our intersubjectivity. Of course, such a sense of history should not be substantialized, otherwise our tradition will become simply a social determinant *sui generis* that creates us without being influenced by our intersubjective experience out of the dynamic involvement with the newly emergent world situation. This substantialized view of history is unrelational and thereby unacceptable.

Sociological knowledge is the knowledge of the relatedness of the social world. In actuality, it is also part of the relatedness of the social world. The mutuality and interdependency between conventional knowledge and sociological knowledge is therefore undeniable. To some extent, their relation might be asymmetrical but it does not necessarily mean that sociological knowledge always dominates conventional knowledge. The possibility of their relatedness can be varied depending upon their historical-specific conditions. Nonetheless, one thing for sure is that, due to their intricate and dynamic relationships, sociological knowledge cannot capture the fixed essence of social reality. Because it presupposes a position without presupposition, that is, a vantage point which can detach from the relatedness of itself and the social world and perceive the independent existence of objective facts. *Sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* of human mental faculty cannot formulate an independent essence existing out there, but dependently perceive the condition, effect, and intersubjective meaning of social reality. Sociological conceptualization can only construct a relatively and intersubjectively adequate meaning and plausible interpretation of social phenomena, rather than objectively fixed facts or subjectively true interpretations. The advocates of objectivism assume that they perceive something which is independent of their inquiry, which has an existence in itself, and has pre-existing properties which are revealed by the inquiry. But this assumption is untenable because at the relational-processual level what is inquired is a result of, or greatly influenced by, the dynamics of mental imputation, measurement, and reciprocity between inquirer and inquired, a dialogical process among inquirers. In other words, sociological knowledge is related to the many significant conditions necessary to make the perception of reality possible. The problem with objectivism is its verification of this "reality," with which scientific knowledge is supposed to accord, other than by some dynamic relation and process of scientific venture. If social reality is what is known by means of social inquiry itself, then it is tautologous to say that sociological knowledge is in accordance with reality. This is actually a conspiracy between subjectivism and objectivism.

On the other hand, the campaigners of subjectivism espouse the conviction that an individual's subjective consciousness creates his or her own reality. However, in the social scientific community meaning-adequate and plausible interpretation of social reality is not "reality" unless more than one person agrees regarding what causal conditions and effects it involves. Therefore, there is no such thing as "one's own reality" without involving any relational conditions. Social reality is intersubjectively plausible, at least among many researchers. Anyone, it is said, with the suitable textbook learning and academic training can shape his or her scheme of sociological cognition, thereby enabling him or her to interpret social occurrences sociologically. In this sense, his or her sociological knowledge must be relational. Of course, this relatedness of a researcher's knowledge does not mean that he or she cannot challenge a sociological orthodoxy, but this must occur in the relational context and to some extent be accepted by a significant number of researchers. Indeed, a constant challenge of dogma is also the condition that makes possible knowledge in continual flux. The formation of sociological knowledge is thus not only relational but also processual. A non-relational monologue of a single researcher is therefore not sociologically conceivable.

### *Processual Thinking*

Those who place the primacy of the substance over that of the process must stick to an oversight that stresses the visible or tangible nature of things. This is a substantialist view which always obstructs our processual imagination and thereby misguides our worldview. Nagarjuna's interpretation of *pratityasamutpada* holds that all that can be said to have any reality is a co-creative process, not the fluctuating substances comprising the process. Those with a middle-way perspective understand the conventional world by observing vertically the temporal relationships between preceding and current conditions, and future orientation, through which we can realize the fundamental impermanence of all social existence. The doctrine of *anatman* (non-self) precisely indicates that there is no way in which a thing can ever be given a definitive (persistently fixed) status within the impermanent actuality of things. All things, be they material or mental, be they the objective world, or the subjective state of human beings, are subject to continuous change. It seems some social phenomena may have certain states of existences in which they remain unchanged, or are in equilibrium on a temporary basis (for example a totally adminis-

tered society). However, when we examine them with processual thinking, we will find that not only do they keep changing on a long-term basis, but also that this change occurs at every moment. Immediately after the current state of conditions have ceased to function, the newly co-arisen state starts operating. This is the process of the state of co-dependent arising and ceasing. The rising and ceasing of each short moment discloses that all phenomena are ever moving and ever changing. Some scientists do have some awareness of the changing dimension of social phenomena in terms of social change. However, they still cannot overcome the distortion of the substantialist view, they try to make sense of the changing process in terms of a linear causal explanation. As mentioned previously, the unidirectional explanation of social phenomena is not able to understand the deeper truth of all existences. All things appear, from the perspective of a temporal process, to be ever changing, and never remaining identical for the briefest moment. Impermanence negates the permanent entity and unidirectional development of phenomena. Only those with the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising realize and understand that all forms of fixity are delusory.

Though translated as emptiness due to its etymological origin, *sunyata* actually also refers to the state of impermanence of phenomena, that is, giving the static, eternal flavor of things to the process. In this sense, the underlying actuality of phenomena is not substance but a set of processes in flux, which indicates the constantly changing nature of social reality. *Sunyata* makes tenable the fundamental processuality immanent in all phenomena, opening all things into various relations in which things are sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. But irrespective of what kind of relation they are undergoing, things are changing. It is thus reasonable to say that the middle-way perspective in Buddhism is a precursor of processual thinking, despite the conspicuous lack of reference to its ideas and doctrines in today's processual discourses in the human and social sciences. Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* challenges the notion of persistence and permanence and espouses the idea of fundamental flux through his doctrine of *pratityasamutpada* and *sunyata*. The middle-way perspective posits that what we perceive as the world of eternity and stasis is actually the outcome of incessant dependent arising processes. All entities that fall under the notice of our perception or conception are mentally imputed and are actually in a state of continual flux, even though the verbal designations often find it difficult to describe such movement.

### *Processual-Social Theory*

In the *Prasannapada*, Candrakirti explains that the term *pratitya* is a gerund signifying the phenomenon of “reaching” or “extending over,” and the term *samutpada* means origination or manifestation of the momentary event.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as a conjunction, *pratityasamutpada*, refers to the dynamics of momentary experiential events. When the notion of permanent entity is transcended we can say that all that is observed is the flow of momentary becoming. The flow is fundamentally without fixed things, neither social whole nor individual elements. Whenever we perceive social reality we should always bear in mind that it is actually the social becoming that constitutes the, so-called, social reality. The becomingness of the social should be laid on the foundation of all social constitutions as an extensive process of relational origination. The understanding of this relational-processual actuality is the key to realizing the depth and breadth of social becoming, from the microscopic to the macroscopic realms of the social world.

Since all sensible entities are empty and in continual flux, then the scientific knowledge concerning their observation should not have any fixated proposition either. In other words, instead of insisting on building up a universal and persistent theory or category beyond the empirical world, social scientists should realize that the knowledge constitutions in the social sciences are also empty of essence and in continual flux. Despite his stubborn insistence on logical empiricism and scientific realism, Karl Popper also espouses a view of opposing the idea of perceiving the world as permanent, and knowledge of it as stable. Science, he reiterated, will progress only if it remains open-ended. And it is by and large open-ended because it is constantly deconstructing itself by what he called “falsification,” or “refutation.” After establishing a theory or formulating a hypothesis to describe a social phenomenon, while some colleagues try hard to verify them, the next step for many reflexive thinkers is to try one’s best to transcend it. For Popper, the more we find we are wrong the better off we are, for that way our knowledge stands a better chance of advancing a bit. Although this kind of progressivism is problematic to some extent, we still can be inspired by his view of the process of “scientific discovery.” Interpreting it from a middle-way perspective we can say that knowledge is in a state of flux. It has no fixed essence. Regarding disciplines like sociology, a certain degree of institutional stability and disciplinary normality is coveted and desired, and instability is avoided at all costs. This is cer-



tainly related to a practitioner's extra scientific implication, let us say the will to power immanent in the will to knowledge constitution, or the pursuit of a good job, prestige, and authority. Apart from those, the social scientists' substantialist view of the social world also contributes to the stabilization of its knowledge and discipline. Yet, all pursuits of knowledge are related to many conditions, within and without the discipline, such as the dialogue among different members within the scientific community, the double identity of being both social scientist and lay person, the dynamic circle of mutual influences, and so on. When conditions change, knowledge also changes. Science in flux is the normal situation from a long-term perspective. This actually became a subject matter in the sociology of science over the past couple of decades. It is argued that in science there are no objective and absolute standards of rationality, method, technique, language, and meanings of terms. Where the scientist stands within his/her community is more a matter of social commitment following historically specific paradigmatic training than an independent quest for certainty in empirical evidence. In other words, it is *doxa* (socially related dialogue, opinion, conviction, conversion, and debate), rather than epistemic certainty (objectivism, rationalism, universal law), dialogic process rather than isolated monologue. It is thus significant that social scientists have a basic understanding that what was thought to be known concerning social facts is impermanent and that what is now known will not withstand the test of time, because all things are impermanent and knowledge fluctuates.

Of course, in case we have a right understanding of the notion of flux, it is not necessary for social scientists to nihilistically deny that there are relatively and tentatively durable percept-objects and academically recognized consensus. Otherwise we will be at risk of being nihilistic. The conceptualization and classification of enduring objects is tenable and, to some extent, unavoidable as long as we do not forget the conditions of continuous radical change. Although we hold firmly on to the idea of an ever-changing process of social reality, it does not obstruct us from recognizing some degree of relative stability in the social world, such as the process of institutionalization, bureaucratization, normalization, legalization, specialization, or standardization. It is important not to deconstruct nihilistically the explicability of social sciences concerning the phenomena which involve a dependently durable social reality. However, the problem concerning the observation of the durability of social reality is that a substantialist approaches this durability of social reality as the essential unit of

social analysis. The social reality is seen as a real entity, which exists independently of the dynamic activities of ordinary individuals. Social entity consists of a number of underlying sub-sub-systems each serving a primary function of purpose, that is, each sub-system is adaptive in that it serves the needs of society. Thus, the appropriate focus of this kind of social research is a careful analysis of the structures of sub-systems and the functions that are served by each. The tendency for any entity, in this view, is to be in a state of equilibrium. Stasis is the primal concern, with process or change considered as secondary and expected to be gradual. Unwittingly, this approach often incorporates the dominant institutional values of mainstream society into its theoretical framework and thereby makes processual thinking and its critical impetus difficult. One of the consequences of this kind of substantialist social science is its being in service of the status-quo. In this one-sided emphasis on durability, the social practice of various individuals will be viewed as passive products of social structure. The implication is that its conceptualizations of durable entities are more like the nature of entities themselves, in terms of physical and structural boundaries, rather than the dynamic structuring processes that condition the dependent emergence of social entities. Such a view misses the important influence that agents acting through collective actions (such as social movement) have had on social change. Most importantly, with this emphasis on the substantial properties and functioning of social entities and their subsequent adaptive nature of social change, substantialism of this kind creates a knowledge which focuses almost exclusively on problems of unity, order, stability, cohesion, harmony, and equilibrium. It basically interrogates the social phenomenon in terms of a reified scientific approach, geared to understanding the world in a static sense. The actual dependent arising of dynamic process, movement, conflict, revolution, or negotiation will become incomprehensible. The actuality of knowledge in flux will also be discounted.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hitherto, social science has thrived with all kinds of approaches, such as rational-choice theory, behaviorism, various atomized individualism, norm-based models, holism, and structuralisms, statistical “variable” analyses, and interpretism.<sup>25</sup> Many of them, however, share the substantialist view in their basic theoretical or analytical units by affirming the idea that it is substances that preexist and relations then follow subsequently. This

view dominates throughout much of the discipline. Unfortunately, substantialism distorts the dynamic, relational, continuous, and processual world into a static, isolated, discontinuous, and eternal world. Not only have these distorted grand theories and empirical researches misguided the epistemological and ontological assumptions of social theory, but they also, ethically speaking, have given rise to the knowledge-constitutive power-effect in their form of substantialist presupposition. For instance, orthodox Marxism's historical materialism, Freudian sexual essentialism, social Darwinism, Parsonian structural-functionalism, Skinnerian behaviorism, to mention only a few, all have one thing in common, that is, their theories have turned the things of logic into the logic of things and were imposed on lifeworld practices, causing tremendous ignorance (*avidya*) to numerous people.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, historically speaking, sociology is also a constitutive part of social practices, which can acquire an altogether conventionally real constructive power, and can possibly lead to a kind of symbolically initiated violence caused by theorists, or intellectuals, intentionally or unintentionally. This is a solemn matter that social scientists need to take into account seriously and reflexively.

Finally, I would like to contend, that our theoretical dualistic thinking about self and society has been marked by a certain type of knowing and thinking that has barred us from embarking upon important subjects, such as co-creative relations and process of phenomena, as Nagarjuna observes. Various dualistic, non-relational, and non-processual approaches, such as self/society, activity/passivity, autonomy/conformity, and freedom/constraint, have blocked our conceptualization of, and investigation into, the relational process of co-creativity. Generally speaking, the dichotomization between the individual and the social, favors seeing the individual as creative and the social as orderly. This polarization has prevented us from thinking about the social and creativity together. The image of creativity in social sciences in turn tends to be individualistic, that is, most of the research on creativity and innovation has been on creative individuals.<sup>27</sup> This is definitely unacceptable according to the principle of dependent co-arising.

In terms of the middle-way perspective, creativity must be conducted relationally and processually rather than independently. By talking of relational-processual co-creativity, I mean, broadly speaking, any and all creative processes leading to creative effects that depend upon the relatedness of two or more people in a temporal process. In other words, the process of creativity is the process of mutual involvement. Musical perfor-

mances (in fact, almost any performing art), creative processes in scientific laboratories, work on doctoral dissertations, the founding of a firm by an entrepreneur, the establishment of a monument, are but a few examples of what we mean by relational-processual co-creativity. Such creative processes can never be confined to the workings of a single genius in an isolated situation, because nothing social can be creatively established without any form of interaction and mutual influence. Even if someone works in physical isolation, such as writing a research paper alone, is not he/she part of a larger relational process of discursive formation, constantly in dialogue with, and working with a reference community and tradition? Would the concepts of genius, entrepreneurship, or authorship adequately exist without others?

If we presuppose an atomistic view of the individual in our theoretical understanding, then even creativity in groups or in dialogic settings will be attributed to an individual, rather than to a relational process. Atomism leads to methodological individualism, from which co-creativity is ignored. However, if we presume a holistic view of social determination, creativity is by definition societal, and the individual is just epiphenomenal, that is, society as an entity *sui generis* is self-creating without taking into account any particular individual and its action. This kind of methodological collectivism is without a doubt disagreeable.

Using an understanding of co-creative social becoming with a non-dualistic and relational-processual worldview may go some way toward enabling a deeper understanding of the *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* characteristics of social structure and its implications for the study of a practical and empirical process of institutionalization/de-institutionalization/re-institutionalization, structuring/de-structuring/re-structuring, organizing/de-organizing/re-organizing, and grouping/de-grouping/re-grouping. According to the middle-way perspective, the phenomenal world must undergo a dynamic process of arising, enduring, changing, and ceasing. When existent social realities are observed one has no choice but to say that they are dependently arisen through these three processual characteristics and are empty of inherent and independent essence. Therefore, social analysis should look at the co-creative relational process of the arising, enduring, changing, and ceasing of particular social structures, or entities, which involve the mutual embeddedness of many conditions, specifically the relational interweaving of many acting agencies, and which also condition the arising of some subsequent social consequences. The researcher should be

aware that his/her ideas about social phenomena might have to be changed during the research process. Certainly we do not start with a tabula rasa, nor can we ever be free of pre-understanding and never have to be. Ideas and concepts however should be open to change if conditions are incongruent with them.

## NOTES

1. Ayer, A. J., "I think, therefore I am" from *Modern Studies in Philosophy—Descartes—A Collection of Critical Essays*—Ed. by Willis Doney, Macmillan, 1968. (7s.)
2. In my opinion, this is a kind of imperialism of economics, which asserts an atomized, individualized, and egoistical (self-interested) view of social actors.
3. Durkheim argued that "the social" was in fact an autonomous reality, called a "society". This society, argued Durkheim, was an entity in its own right that did not depend upon the intentions and motivations of individuals for its continued existence and was a reality *sui generis*. Society is a thing-like entity which exists on its own terms. Thus "social" or society had a life and logic of its own. Sociology, for Durkheim, is a science of proving that there exists a social reality, as *sui generis*, which cannot be reduced to social or individual psychological foundations. Thus, it is society, as an entity, that creates individuals.
4. Durkheim, Emile, 1973b, *Moral Education: a study in the theory and application of the sociology of education*. London: The Free Press. p. 60.
5. Baudrillard, J., 1978, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. pp. 18–19.
6. In Bauman, Zygmunt's work, 1989, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
7. Jeffery L. Bineham, "The Cartesian Anxiety in Epistemic Rhetoric: An Assessment of the Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 23 (1990): 43–62.
8. The Sanskrit word *Madhyamika* means one who holds to the middle, so it is translated into English as the middle way.
9. The notion is somewhat similar to what Max Weber used to express in order to repudiate the *na ve* idea, which holds that simply because policy positions differ from one another, a "mid-point" synthesis that steers a line between them is somehow more objective and less partisan. In the realm of cognitive judgments, for instance, this kind of middleness would entail a bizarre idea that the statements like "This box weighs 10 kilos" and "This box weighs 20 kilos" could be "synthesized" into the statement "This box weighs 15 kilos". According to the middle-way perspective, this procedure has no place in relation to either normative or factual judgments.

10. Durkheim, in 1895/1964: xliii (*The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: Free Press), argues that social facts are to be treated as things, which “cannot be conceived by purely mental activity”; they require for their conception “data from outside the mind.”
11. This is Buddha’s saying, quoted in Gadjin M Nagao. *Madhyamika and Yogacara*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991:104.
12. Candrakirti offers a very detailed articulation of the connotation of *pratityasamutpada*. Please see Mervyn Sprung. *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters of the Prasannapada of Candrakirti*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979.
13. Dedicatory Verses states: “I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha, the best of teachers, who taught that whatever is dependently arisen is unceasing, unborn, unannihilated, not permanent, not coming, not going, without distinction, without identity, and free from conceptual construction.” Garfield, 1995:2.
14. 1867. Capital.
15. 1978. The Marx-Engels Reader.
16. Rabinow, Paul, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. By Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. p. 78.
17. Weber, Max. 1949. “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy.” In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 68.
20. Ibid.
21. See D.T. Suzuki’s, “What is Zen?” New York: Harper and Row, 1972. p. 3.
22. *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. XXIV.11.
23. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: Macmillan, 1933. pp. 299–300.
24. See *Prasannapada*, 5.1.
25. Any theory that takes the individual, whether in its idealistic or materialistic form, as an entity and analytical unit as a starting point for causal explanation is problematic. Structuralisms include structural-functionalism, system theory structuralism, and many other collectivist approaches. Variable-centered researchers use a lot of quantitative methods to test their causal hypotheses, including multiple regression, factor analysis, and event history approaches. They take variables as measurable attributes that can explain the causal relation of phenomena. As Abbott (1992a, p. 58) notes, “The realist metaphysics implicit in treating variables (universals) as agents was last taken seriously in the age of Aquinas ... but in this [approach] the ‘best’ causal sentences are clearly realist ones in which variables act.”
26. See Bourdieu’s *In Other Words*.
27. Montuori, A., and Purser, R. 1999. *Social Creativity (Vol.1)*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

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# Indo-Chinese Knowledge and Wisdom: A Cross-Cultural Dialogue Between Confucius and Tiruvalluvar

*S. Panneerselvam*

## INTRODUCTION

Ancient Indian tradition and ancient Chinese culture are based on moral and spiritual values. Both countries have ancient histories that appreciate the role of man in the upliftment of the self. Both countries have synthesized tradition and modernity. Against a background of ancient culture and wisdom, one can understand social progress and justice. There is a treasure of wisdom deeply embedded in Indian and Chinese culture that should be taken into account when developing the values required to make economic progress more beneficial to the public. Values such as fairness, freedom, honesty, humanity, responsibility, solidarity, sustainable development, tolerance, and transparency are those stressed by both Indian and Chinese wisdom. The major stream in Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, argues that the good example of the refined and morally outstanding person (*quanzi*) will have more beneficial effects than merely observance of the law. Mozi, the head of the legalist school who lived during the time of Confucius, argued in favour of the importance of the

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213



law as the ultimate guarantee that the basic rights of all citizens will be represented and as the ideal of “the love of all” (*qianai*). *The Art of War* by Sun Tsu (770–476 BC) is a repository of wisdom and inspiration, and discusses their practical application in strategic management, organization, and leadership. The book emphasizes five principles that represent the ancient wisdom of the Chinese: wisdom, integrity, courage, benevolence, and strength. In Indian tradition the concept of *lokasangraha*, or world sustenance, is that which takes into account the essential values. The twelfth-century Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi emphasized the importance of the recognition of the Other. In post-modern philosophy the concept of the Other has been elaborately discussed by Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze, and many others. This is in opposition to the subjectivity modernism stood for. Modernity dominated over nature and this has caused an ecological crisis and environmental problems. The existence of the “other” played a dominant role in the collected writings and recorded conversations of Zhu Xi. Realizations and interpretations of Confucian values in a world of multiplicity and difference are essential for understanding the contemporary society. Confucius as a philosopher has a contemporary relevance. In him, we find a blend of tradition and modernity. It is not possible to ignore the contributions of Chinese thought and culture for the main reason that it has paved the way for world culture and civilization. In the Confucian tradition we understand the importance of self-realization in overcoming the ego-self and its fixed perspective. This perspective gives rise to the distracting “ego-advantages,” which the ego-self seeks to appropriate from what it constructs as “other.” The process of becoming moral in Confucian thought entails both a dissolution and transcending the distinction between “self” and “other.” The process of dissolving the unnatural barrier between the self and its social and natural environments—the process of overcoming the ego-self and becoming a person-in-context—can alternatively be described as the “objectification” of self, in that it recognizes the correlative and coexistence relationship between self-realization and cosmic realization.

Herbert Fingarette, a contemporary interpreter of Confucius, shows how the central character of custom and tradition in Confucian thought is important in the contemporary world. In the *Analects*, for example, the concept of tradition plays a dynamic role. It is approached from a moral or human perspective: “It is man that can make the Way great and not the Way that can make man great.” What kind of man can enlarge the Way or *Tao*? It is the “superior man” who serves as the moral idea in the *Analects*.

As in Indian tradition, in Chinese tradition we find a synthesis of the spiritual and the moral. Charles A. Moore is right when he says that the ethical and the spiritual are one in China. This unity of ethics and spirituality is crucial to an understanding of the role of tradition in the *Analects*. Tradition is a source of knowledge for Confucius. This knowledge, mediated by tradition, has a sacred foundation for it is rooted in the notion of Heaven's ordinance. This knowledge also calls for moral cultivation. Thus tradition relates a sacred history. It opens up the sense of transcendence, which otherwise would be reduced to merely being in the service of "spiritual beings." Tradition forms the ultimate horizon that shapes and nourishes our being and understanding. Both cultures have moral and ethical values that are emphasized in the great writings of thinkers belonging to both traditions.

The plurality of culture is real whereas the unity of cultures is unreal. Cultural sustainability, as the sustainability of economic activities, must concentrate on both individual and community. The individual's values and the values of the community or the cultural group must be safeguarded. Though community integrates its values with the individual, it should be understood that an individual's values cannot be sacrificed. Moreover, the culture carries its values to future generations and hence those values must be preserved. Individual and social values constitute the culture. Commenting on the individuality as well as the universality of human nature Professor G.C. Pande says:

The individuality of Indian culture must be so interpreted as not to militate against the universality of human nature and value-seeking. At the same time, the unity of Indian culture has to be interpreted with sufficient catholicity to include numerous communities, regions and epochs, which have historically entered into its making. This search for the cultural identity of India, individual but inspiring after universality, one but inclusive of differences, continuous but developing, arises from the awareness of India's historic traditions.

Culture is the guardian of the people. Human society always comes across different conceptions of culture. A people's culture embraces its language, ideas, customs, taboos, and other related components. One must always consider the following aspects with regard to culture: (1) culture unifies men into one cultural group; and (2) the development of many cultures is due to various external causes, such as physical habitats

and resources, and inner causes, the range of possibilities inherent in various areas of activity. If conflict among cultures follows from the very concept of culture, then a theory emerges of a relation between culture and rationality. The difference between them is that a culture unifies all those who belong to it, whereas all men are united in rationality by sharing this essential feature. Culture thus gives people an identity.

India lives in two or more conceptual worlds at the same time: (1) the world of the Great tradition in which the mythological past lies in the present, time exists in a mosaic of different periods, matter and mind appear on the same continuum, and the dominant conceptions are of groups, clusters, and patterns; and (2) the modern world of science and technology in which mathematics plays a major role in describing the world, matter and mind though related are discrete entities, and conceptions are deductive, linear and of individual events. But which one satisfies the requirements of the hour? We need to develop alternative worldviews, alternative metaphysics, as the basis for reflection on technology vis-à-vis society and civilization. The way towards understanding the metaphysical roots of technology must lead through the creation of an alternative worldview that will enable us to grasp clearly the ramifications and consequences of present technology for a future human society. It is here that people from non-Western cultures have much to contribute. But how to start? We must re-examine our intellectual heritage and tradition in light of our present situation. Tradition is always hermeneutical and accommodates new interpretations and understanding and means reconstructing the present categories of knowledge. Man's mode of being-in-the world helps a person to evaluate tradition. It is not possible for a person simply to follow tradition, but he has the right to evaluate it. The world of historicity will have an impact on tradition and it accepts evaluation and reinterpretation. This does not mean that we are revolting against tradition, but that we are interpreting it in the context of present historicity. The cultural world to which we belong allows for a radical interpretation of tradition. This sort of interpretation teaches a way of looking at tradition from a new perspective, which will suit our present situation.

### CULTURE AS THE CRITIQUE OF REASON

In science, as well as in post-metaphysical thinking, the role of reason is unique. It is said that progress and reason always go together. But the role and definition of reason differs among those who talk about this

relation between them. Some, such as Rorty, consider it a social phenomenon. "We have to resist the urge to see social practices of justification as more than just such practices." Foucault attempts to disempower the ideas of reason by totally objectivizing them and asking, "What is this reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?" Derrida attempts a totalized critique of reason. He believes that reason is built into thought and gives rise to illusions and therefore he wants to renounce the idea of reason by interrogating, disrupting, and displacing it. Similarly, Habermas reconstructs the Kantian notion of reason to explain the importance of comprehensive reason. As a critic of scientific-technological rationality, he constructs a social rationality. He has rejected, for example, both Adorno and Horkheimer who considered that developments in Western rationality such as the totalization of reification, domination, and repression. Against this background, Habermas defended the positive aspects of enlightenment, modernity, and Western rationality. He wanted to emphasize the role of rationality in the economy, culture, and morality. This means that for him social rationality has implications in social life, which cannot be neglected. In his comprehensive concept of rationality, different dimensions of social life, such as values, norms, and interests, are studied and preserved.

We need an alternative view of knowledge. For example, philosophers, futurists, and others who are interested in the future of technology and thus in the future of culture would benefit from a dialogue with the alternative world views of Indian culture, which admits an alternative basis for knowledge and life. Western, or technological, society is based to a great extent on qualitative instrumental values, on the basis of which social and political assessments are made. As long as the quantitative instrumental basis remains unchanged and channels its imperative via descriptive science, through industrial profit-efficiency oriented technology, the order of things will remain the same. The West is now in search of quality of life. It has understood the emptiness of the quantitative approach. Modes of life governed by quantity are simply not sufficient. Quality of life is hard to define, although its absence is readily apparent. We know what is within the structure of our experience of it. Quality of life adds to our stature as human beings. Quality of life cannot be understood without a purpose in life. A purpose in life cannot be secured unless we ascribe some meaning to the world or at least some meaning to human life—beyond the immediate gratification of our sensual desires. This means that quality of life

requires a transcendental dimension of life. Traditional cultures and religions can contribute to our experience of the quality of life by providing these transcendental dimensions.

In the contemporary age, we talk about the “universality of science” and the “diversity of cultures.” We often think that science is reliable whereas culture is ephemeral. But in fact it is other way round. It is culture that is enduring and universal, whereas it is science that is transient and ephemeral. The only viable framework for development is culture and not economics fused with technology, as at present. Development must mean the fulfillment within a culture that nourishes and sustains. It is argued that scientific method is infallible. This reliability condition is used by scientists to claim the superiority of science over culture. Can this be a proper criterion? In the scientific model, there is only one kind of value, measured in monetary terms. In such a model, culture is a dis-value. It is outside the model. It is one of the externalities. It is of secondary importance whether we regard religion as part of culture or as a phenomenon more important than culture and, in fact, one that determines the nature of culture. We must adopt the cultural model as the basis for future development. As long as our model of development remains scientific and economic, culture will inevitably be a casualty, and indirectly we shall be its victims, as repositories of culture. The cultural model recognizes a plurality of values and science is one of the positive values. We must adopt the cultural model as the basis for future development. Science will become a stimulus to cultural growth rather than a universal solution reducing culture to a meaningless homogeneous world of uniform practices. India alone can give a direction and serve as a model for the West and other developing countries of how science and culture can interact for the good of mankind.

The increasing awareness that Western culture may be breaking down has made us search for causes and examine facets of modern society which we have hitherto ignored, neglected, and overlooked. In technology there is a focal point at which conceptual and ideological paths meet. To understand these converging paths is to understand the main configurations of the network within which our civilization operates. For example, notions like progress, nature, invention, rationality, efficiency, and so on have a link with culture. To put it in simple terms, the philosophy of culture is the philosophy of society, a philosophy of man in a civilization that has found itself at an impasse, threatened by excessive specialization, fragmentation,

and atomization, and which is becoming aware that it has chosen a mistaken idiom for its interaction with nature. All these problems, to some extent, are due to our wrong approach to science and technology.

D.P. Chattopadhyaya emphasizes interaction between science, technology, and culture, which, according to him, can be approached in many ways. First, it can be shown from the commonsensical or pre-theoretical point of view that every man combines in his worldview the basic aspects of his life, scientific, technological, geographical, historical, and economic. Second, one may try to redo the same thing in a more systematic and refined way at the theoretical plane. Third, we may focus on the differences as well as the relations between civilization and culture, between the material and the spiritual aspects of human life. Fourth, one may explain the importance of the relationship between man and the environment and, in the process, show that even higher forms of culture are not free from environmental conditions. Fifth, one may argue that even disciplines such as mathematics are influenced by practical and social considerations. Sixth, comments may be offered to show that there is a close relationship between the environment, human nature, medicine, ethics, language, technology, and philosophy. Lastly, one may try to say that philosophy, science, technology, and culture are, in fact, an interwoven fabric of human civilization and that their specializations, differentiations and so on, are mainly due to theoretical needs for distinctions. According to Chattopadhyaya, man has a past behind him and a tradition to support and regulate him. His very being is embedded, or, one might even say, he is born in a culture, marked among other things by its tradition and modernity, language and culture. Since man is sustained by tradition and culture, he questions them both. His sense of values can never be completely dominated and determined by his tradition and culture. He cannot transcend the challenge of modernization. Because of this, he questions his own tradition and cultural past. Chattopadhyaya very rightly says: "Continuous growth of knowledge, particularly of its scientific form, and advancement of technology often make us question our own traditional heritage and cultural past." In his interesting paper, "Rationality, Culture, and Values," he deals with the correct relation between rationality and culture. He rejects the claim that there is a unique and universal relation between culture and rationality. He believes that culture-bound rationality is a sort of relativism. He examines the three different concepts of rationality developed in the three branches of human knowledge, namely, economics, evolutionary biology, and psychological behaviorism. By examining all three

concepts Chattopadhyaya comes to the conclusion that all these concepts of rationality are limited and that they underestimate the diversity of human nature born out of freedom and cultural circumstances. They are outer and inner aspects of human nature. Since all the theories of rationality are derived from human experience, their validity and correctness must be tested only through human experience.

### CULTURE, TRADITION AND PROGRESS

Life-world is a critique of functionalist reason. It allows for an evaluation of tradition. Man's mode of being-in-the-world helps a person to evaluate tradition. It is not possible for me to simply follow a tradition, but I have the right to evaluate my tradition, which those who are outside of the tradition cannot do. Moreover, it is for the good of my tradition that it grow and adopt change whenever necessary. The surrounding world or the world of historicity will have an impact on the tradition and it accepts evaluation and reinterpretation. This means that when I try to understand my religious tradition I may have to reject some dogmas, which are not necessary. This means I have the capacity or right to transcend some of those dogmas that are not acceptable at present. This does not mean that I am revolting against my religious tradition, but interpreting it in the context of present historicity. The life-world, which I belong to, allows a radical interpretation of the tradition. This sort of interpretation teaches a way of looking at tradition afresh from a new perspective that suits our present situation. Every man is placed in a tradition, which cannot be avoided. Tradition and historicity play a significant role in the understanding of the myths and symbols of a religion that is expressed by language. It is language that carries tradition from one to the other. In the life-world it is language that ultimately interprets things and passes the message from one generation to the other. It is the hermeneutics of facticity that interprets factual life afresh. The tradition I belong to shapes my life-world and this is common to all traditions. All the time the myths, legends, and stories connected with a particular religious tradition need interpretation, which is inevitable because the life-world demands it and hence there is a connection between a particular religious tradition and a particular life-world. For example, a hermeneutical understanding of the study of myths would suggest that it is used as a form of discourse. The role of myths in human experience and reality cannot be easily rejected because, to some extent they shape our life-world. Myths have relevance to the social con-

text. They transcend time and also first order reference. They are always used as a form of symbolism and ordinary language. They suggest something invisible. Mircea Eliade says: "Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they fulfill a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being." Life-world is concerned with the phenomenology of religion, with sharing a religious life-world with others. There can be friction but not collision. It can be explained in this way. Religion contains certain mythical modes of experience. The relation between them is so implicit that one cannot be isolated from the other. The myths are taken away from their religious content and the world tries to give them a new meaning. Individuals and collectives interact with each other; thus there is a dialectical movement. It is the philosophy of participation. It is the transformation of meaning. In a philosophy of participation, criticisms are inevitable. Criticizability is the essence of free and rational creativity, of "what is objective" and of "what is subjective."

It should be remembered that there may be different approaches to a tradition but its inner meaning should not be lost. For example, take a text like *Bhagavad Gita*; according to Gandhi *Gita* is a step in *dharma* (i.e., in religion and morality); but for Bankim, *Gita* is a step in history. In other words, Gandhi had never placed *Gita* in history, but Bankim had. For Bankim, Krishna was a historical person, and the *Mahabharat* was a real war. But Gandhi believed that this sort of understanding would deprive the *Gita* of its status as a Hindu religious text. Whether the text is historical or religious is not a very important question in this context. What is important is the truth conveyed by the text. Bankim tries to emphasize that his historical interpretation would substantiate the truth, namely the text was written for a purpose. This means that whether it is historical or religious, a text which has some sacredness in it, it must be understood by the role it plays in the life-world situation. Similarly, mythologies must be interpreted in a life-world situation. The stories mentioned in it need not be true, but the inner meaning that is conveyed must be understood to preserve the tradition.

Two great traditions of the world, the Chinese and the Indian, have many commonalities. The life-world of both traditions are based on the ethical principles and values and their role in the development of the individual and the social. I would like to present their two great thinkers, namely, Confucius and Tiruvalluvar, and their relevance in the present age. Let us see how Confucius proceeds.



Confucius in the *Lun Yu* says: “I will not teach a man who is not anxious to learn, and will not explain to one who is not trying to make things clear to himself. And if I explain one-fourth and the man does not go back and reflect and think out the implications in the remaining three-fourths for himself, I will not bother to teach him again.” The Chinese refer to their Confucian literature as the *Ssu Shu*, *Wu Ching*, or *Four Books and Five Classics*, although chronologically the Five Classics came first. Western scholars sometimes refer to the Five Classics as “The Old Testament of Confucianism” and to the Four Books as “The New Testament of Confucianism.” The Five Classics are as ancient as the Vedas in India and consist of:

1. *The Book of Poetry (Shih Ching)*
2. *The Book of History (Shu Ching)*
3. *The Book of Changes (I or Yi-Chin)*
4. *The Book of Rites (Li Chi)*
5. *The Spring and Autumn (Ch'un Ch'iu)*

The *Four Books* or *Commentaries on the Classics* are:

1. *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*, discourses of the sage with his disciples
2. *Great Learning (Ta Hsueh)*, sayings of Confucius, political and moral philosophy for a ruler
3. *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung Yung)*, how to conduct your life
4. *Book of Mencius (The Meng-tzu)*, containing rules of righteous government and the qualities of a good ruler, human nature, duty, and so on.

Confucius aimed to establish a new order in society by straightening out the ideas and habits of leaders and common people on the fundamentals of character building, social obligations, and sound government. One of the significant contributions of Confucius was his insistence on virtues. If good qualities are to be practiced by everybody, there must be a code of good manners, or *li*, to include not only the rules of personal courtesy but all the best social and governmental usages. In his own personal life he sought to exemplify those qualities that he so persistently built into his teachings, and show an ethical character as the foundation

of all true living. Some of the great virtues he insisted on were: uprightness (*Chih*), benevolence (*Jen*), conscientiousness (*Chung*), altruism (*Shu*), righteousness (*I* or *Yi*), and filial piety (*Hsiao*).

Lucius C. Porter, among others, identified *jen* with the human heart. Other translations into English of the word *jen* are: morality, virtue, love, and true manhood. "The firm of spirit, the resolute in character, and the slow of speech are not far from *jen*." Similarly, righteousness (*I* or *Yi*) is very much emphasized by Confucius. He believed in doing a thing because it was right, regardless of the consequences. It is here the distinction between superior man and the inferior man is made. Superior man is informed by what is right; inferior man is informed by what is profitable to himself. Similarly, filial piety was very much emphasized by Confucius as the root of all other virtues and expressed in the five relationships as:

1. Subject to Emperor or citizen to magistrate
2. Son to father, or daughter to mother
3. Younger to elder brother, or sister to sister
4. Younger to older friend
5. Wife to husband

In Confucian philosophy there are four important themes:

1. Human nature and the cosmic order
2. True manhood and the social order
3. Government by moral example
4. Education the prime necessity

### *Human Nature and the Cosmic Order*

In the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung Yung*) human nature is discussed in detail. Confucius found that a basic moral law was operating from which no man can escape. He discovered the same moral order controlling the universe and made the natural deduction that when there is harmony within the central self then human beings can move in the orbit of cosmic or universal harmony. This law of harmony he tried to express in the words peace, truth, and integrity, as the essence of the law of man's moral being. It is susceptible of cultivation but never fully realized. While explaining human nature, Confucius said:

What is God-given is what we call human nature ... The cultivation of the moral law is what we call culture ... Wherefore, the moral man watches diligently over his secret thoughts ... When the passions have not awakened, that is our central self, or moral being ... When these passions awaken and each and all attain due measure and degree, that is harmony or the moral order. To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the Universal order that indeed is the highest human attainment.

Confucius explains that truth does not depart from human nature. When a man carries out the principles of conscientiousness and reciprocity, he is not far from the moral law. It is clear from the above passage that within the human spirit could be established a “golden mean” a “central harmony,” which is cosmic quality and therefore worthy of achievement.

### *True Manhood and the Social Order*

Having established the cosmic quality of human nature Confucian philosophy develops the notion of social order. The *Chung Yung* says: “Truth means the fulfillment of our self; and moral law means following the law of our being ... Only those who are absolutely their true selves in this world can have a pervading influence.” The ideal man who follows the golden mean will show no pride and work for the upliftment of society.

The Indian ethical text *Tirukkural* (written by Tiruvalluvar) examines human life to show how there can be all-around progress in life and how man can live a better life. Thus it could be viewed as a critique of life. It examines the present conditions of human life and guides to the betterment of life. Further, in the text, we see a move from “what is” to “what ought to be.” The values which are prescribed in the text clearly prove the need for possessing them. The text does not accept life as it is available to us, but gives a direction for improving it so that life would be more meaningful. As a critique of life, the *Tirukkural* prescribes some norms for life. It is possible to prescribe them only after examining the life which man leads; and Tiruvalluvar, as well as Confucius, saw society as vitiated by some basic evils that have to be eradicated. Thus in the text we find an inseparable relation between value and action. The value-oriented text is also an action-oriented one. Commenting on the importance of value and action, R. Balasubramanian says: “When a person accepts something as a value, he cannot but be engaged in activities conducive to the attainment of the value in question; to accept something as a value is not just for the purpose of talking, but for

the purpose of doing.” R.M. Hare in *The Language of Morals* says that the logic of value-words should finally result in action. He avers:

The remedy for moral stagnation and decay is to learn to use our value-language for the purpose for which it is designed; and this involves not merely a lesson in talking, but a lesson in doing that which we commend; for unless we are prepared to do this, we are doing no more than lip-service to a conventional standard.

The ethical texts clearly support the relation between value and action. The values he prescribes as norms are for the purpose of practicing them. Indeed, Confucius and Tiruvalluvar represent the life-world of the people. In the Western philosophical tradition, two aspects of human existence are considered important, system and the life-world. In Schutz and Goffman, we see these twofold aspects of human existence. Schutz shows that all the modes of intersubjectivity presuppose the life-world. This means that intersubjectivity presupposes the framework of the natural world in which we give meaning to the experience of others. The life-world shows different dimensions of life. David Carr deals with two senses of the life-world, the anthropological and the philosophical. Aron Gurwitsch makes a distinction between culture-sensitive and culture-relative. Goffman talks about the pluralization of life-worlds. In order to define the process of evolution, we have to make use of the concept of the life-worlds, comprising social, cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects. Explaining the life-world of the people ethical works in China and India encompass a wide spectrum of the cultural, ethical, social, linguistic, political, and emotional aspects of life.

Ethical works available in Chinese and Indian tradition are well-known and world-renowned. They prescribe certain norms for the well-being of both individual and society. Their ethical principles are applicable to the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor, men and women. The norms are always applicable to the whole of human society. The individual represents the society, and the society reflects the individual. The harmony between these two shows a healthy society. Whether it is knowledge, wealth, or happiness, it should be shared by all. This is depicted in Confucius and Tiruvalluvar.

Philosophy in India is value-centred. Indian philosophy is the philosophy of values. It is a transvaluation of all values. Philosophy, in the words of Hiriyanna, is a criticism of values. He says: “Philosophy, as understood

in India, was essentially concerned with values.” The concept of *purusartha* in recent philosophical debates has attained a special significance. Scholars such as M. Hiriyanna, Daya Krishna, Rajendra Prasad, R. Balasubramanian, and others have expanded on this issue. Some Indian scholars discuss how *dharma* in the sense of morality can be well conceived on an independent footing and do not at all require a justification from the perspective of *moksa*. The debate whether *moksa* as the fourth *purusartha* is realizable in this life itself is a question for philosophers’ debate. There are scholars who argue that it is transcendental in nature.

In Confucian philosophy we see the importance of “universal man.” Since the universal man is the common man who has no caste or creed, he is the universal representative of the concept of man. He works for the upliftment of all of humanity. He thinks beyond his family, his town, and his country. He thinks for the whole of humanity. He has no narrow-mindedness; he thinks globally and acts locally. It means that the principle enunciated by Confucius is intended for all. In view of its universal application and secular approach, Confucius has attained universal appreciation.

There are two ethical teachers in the world who have stressed the power of virtue, one representing Indian tradition, Tiruvalluvar, and one Chinese tradition, Confucius. There is no greater virtue than this value, namely, virtue, and no greater loss than to ignore it. One may ask: Where does true virtue lie? It lies in the purity of mind, avers the Tamil text. It is the bed-rock of all virtues. The text says: “Let no sin be thought in mind. That is sufficient. Then there is no need to practice virtue.” Purity of mind, from which only love flows, is the foundation of life. The principle of *yi* shows how righteousness is the supreme virtue. Righteousness for righteousness’ sake was emphasized by Confucius and Mencius.

### KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Epistemologists make a distinction between belief and knowledge. While the former lacks certainty, the latter is certain as well as valid. What claims our attention for epistemological discussion is knowledge vis-à-vis other mental states. A distinction is made between cognition and knowledge. While the former may be true, or false, or doubtful, the latter is true, certain, and valid. The Indian *pramana* theorists convey this distinction by using two different words, *jnana* and *prama*. The term knowledge (*prama*) cannot be qualified by any adjective such as true, or false, or

doubtful. The expression false knowledge is a contradiction in terms; that is to say, what is false cannot be knowledge and what is knowledge cannot be false; also, we cannot, for the same reason, use the expression doubtful knowledge. Since knowledge is necessarily true, there is no need to qualify it by the adjective true. In epistemology, we are concerned with issues such as the nature of knowledge, the means of knowledge, and the validity of knowledge. Knowledge which is generated by a *pramana* reveals the object as it is, where it is. For Socrates, virtue was knowledge. Knowledge in modern discourse is associated with the techniques of control. For Foucault and many others, it is never free from the power relations from which it springs and which are constantly transformed by it. Knowledge, according to him, is always part of a cultural matrix of power relations. Foucault believes that every production of knowledge serves the interest of power. Thus knowledge produced in economics, medicine, psychiatry, and other human sciences is nothing but a part of the power of the social institutions that have grown up around these disciplines.

For Tiruvalluvar, knowledge is that which saves a person from evil and the question is: Why should one gain knowledge? Since knowledge is that which helps us to distinguish truth from falsity, it is necessary for us to gain knowledge. The wise will fear what ought to be feared, because they know the distinction between truth and falsity, real and unreal, right and wrong. It is because they are men of foresight, whereas the ignorant are not. The Tamil text establishes the importance of knowledge, for he believes that knowledge of one person can guide others in the same way as a lamp that is lit can light other lamps. Knowledge of the children, he says, is conducive to the happiness of the parents and also to the delight of the whole world. The whole world is a beneficiary of this knowledge, and hence it is necessary for us to acquire true knowledge. The distinction which he makes between unstable and stable (permanent) knowledge, is intended to convey that false knowledge is only temporary, whereas true knowledge is always permanent and real. Since knowledge, which alone is true, can remove ignorance, he points out that knowledge is essential for all and is even more important for a king. Knowledge is that which always grows. Like a sand-spring that gives a greater flow of water as we dig further down, knowledge also grows. It is a weapon that saves one from evil. Since it is obtained through learning, he proclaims the importance of learning. He says that learning alone is undecaying wealth, whereas all other riches, strictly speaking, are not wealth at all. To show the relevance of learning, he stresses the importance of both number and letters. He

speaks of knowledge explicating two major components: numbers (i.e., mathematics) and letters (i.e., words). Establishing the role of mathematics as well as language, he declares that these two are the eyes of all living beings, and for the unlettered, the eyes are nothing but two sores in their face. What is the use, one may ask, of such learning or knowledge? The answer is that knowledge stands everyone in good stead for seven generations. No country is alien to the versatile person. After giving the merits of learning, Tiruvalluvar points out the demerits of non-learning.

Now let us see how Confucius explains the significance of education. He saw the urgent necessity of education and set himself the task of providing it. The first requirement according to him is to have a quiet place in which to study. The true man, he felt, must have a definite purpose, calmness of mind, and peaceful repose. "Only after having peaceful repose, can one begin to think," says Confucius. "Only after one has learned to think, can one achieve knowledge." The need for education and its general principles are expounded in the *Book of Rites (Li Chi)*. The text says: "The only way for the superior man to civilize the people and establish good social customs is through education. A piece of jade cannot become an object of art without chiseling, and man cannot come to know the moral law without education." Further it says: "Reading without thinking gives one a disorderly mind, and thinking without reading makes one flighty (or unbalanced). ...Therefore, in the education of the superior man ... one is given time to digest things, to cultivate things, to rest and to play." In other words, a student must learn to think things out for himself. "To know what you know and know what you don't know is the characteristic of one who knows." But the learning process will depend very much on the spirit and method of the teaching. It is all important then that pupils have a wise teacher and that a harmonious personal relationship be established between them. The Confucian conviction is that "to be kept stable, society must have leaders who can be trusted; that the only leaders to be trusted are men of character; that character is to be developed through education acquired both from others and through self-discipline."

### THE IDEAL MAN

Who is a man? Is he a mere psycho-physical organism or is he just a physical entity? A distinction between a "person" and a "biological human being" is maintained in philosophical discourse. John Locke, for example,

defined a person as “a thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places.” The idea of personhood is also important in ethical discourse. The moralists hold the view that persons have a special value and that they deserve moral respect. Since a person is different from a biological being, “being human,” that is, being a member of *homo sapiens*, does not automatically qualify one for the special kind of moral respect due to persons. According to Kant, persons are primarily characterized by their rationality, and so they have dignity, an intrinsic value, which makes them valuable.

Tiruvalluvar uses the term *sanror* to signify a person who possesses great virtues. He is not concerned with a man endowed with mind and body alone; his concept of a person is different from an ordinary human being. The person whom he recognizes as an ideal man is endowed with the five noble qualities of love, sensitivity, altruism, compassion, and truthfulness. These are the five pillars of excellence. It is said that if the great fail in nobility, the earth will bear us no more. The question here is: Would men of character fail in their nobility? This is not possible for they cannot lack the five noble qualities. Thus, Tiruvalluvar is sure this will not happen under any circumstances. When he raises the rhetorical question, “If the great fail in their nobility?” the implication is that they will not fail. This could be understood from his answer to the question, “What is the touchstone of nobility?” He says that accepting one’s defeat, even by inferiors, is an expression of nobility. Even though nobles possess the capacity to win over their inferiors, they accept defeat by not fighting with their inferiors. By doing so, their nobility increases. Elaborating further, the author contends that, even when everything is lopsided, nobles will not deviate from their nature; even if the sea erodes the shore and encroaches on the land, the nobles will not deviate from their nobility.

While discussing the qualities of an ideal man, Confucius talks about the qualities of an ideal teacher. The worthy teacher is one “who goes over what he has already learned and gains some new understanding from it.” He is ever a learner dissatisfied with his own knowledge. Through teaching he comes to realize his inadequacy and then feels stimulated to improve himself. Therefore “The process of teaching and learning stimulate each other.... Teaching is the half of learning.” The ideal teacher uses four good methods: “prevention” of bad habits; timely presentation; orderly sequence; “mutual stimulation ... [by] ... letting students admire the excellence of other students.” “A good questioner proceeds like a man



chopping wood: he begins at the easier end, attacking the knots last, and after a time the teacher and student come to understand the point with a sense of pleasure.”

According to Confucius, education begins with poetry, is strengthened through proper conduct (*li*), and consummated through music. *Li* is the expression in personal attitudes and behaviour of the same harmony that flows through all Nature (Heaven and Earth). Confucius once said: “This *li* is the principle by which the ancient kings embodied nature. Therefore, he who has attained *li* lives, and he who has lost it dies.” He stated in detail how the sage kings taught men how to live, and made them more civilized with *li*. Its inner working could be seen not only in people as individuals but also in the various social groups. “*Li*, the principle of social order, is to a country what scales are to weight and what the carpenter’s guideline is to straightness, and what the square and the compass are to squares and circles.” *Li* accounts for affection in the home, piety in public worship, and order in all official circles from village council to imperial court. Therefore Confucius says: “There is nothing better than *li* for the maintaining of authority and the governing of the people.” *Li* includes religion, social order, army discipline, historical scholarship, and all etiquette in life. Perhaps we can equate the term with good. A thing is generally said to be good when it is valuable for some end. For example, a particular medicine is the cure for a disease. The term good does not signify something that is a means to an end, but something that is itself an end. This means that the supreme good or the *summum bonum* implies the supreme end. Confucius insists on the importance of the supreme good, because the good is not only beneficial to one individual, but also for the entire society. MacIver says that a society is nothing but the web of social relationships. A social relationship is meaningful if the individual performs his duty. Modern social theorists like Antony Giddens and Habermas talk about “social emancipation,” which is meaningful in the context of social good. Tiruvalluvar goes a step further and explains how only the individual who is moral and perfect can guide society in achieving its goals. Thus, the individual good should be in conformity with the social good. This includes responsibility, good character, custom, charity, good speaking, and the common good.

Emphasizing the relation between ethics and politics, the Indian tradition maintains the view that there cannot be any polity without the practice of virtue. In the ancient Chinese tradition, it was Confucius who, in *Doctrine of the Mean*, explains the relation between virtue and politics. He talks about

the responsibilities (1) between the king and the ministers, (2) between parents and children, and (3) teacher and students, keeping the common good as the backdrop. Moral rules are forever universal in character according to both traditions. The categorical imperative of Kant also supports the view that all moral rules are universalizable. "So act as if the maxim of your action were to become a law universal," declares Kant. For him, an act is said to be immoral if it cannot be brought under a rule for all human beings. Further, he says that no human being should be thought of or used merely as a means for someone else's end, but also as an end in himself. But Kant failed to make a distinction between an exception to a rule and a qualifying rule, thus permitting no exception to his moral imperative.

In the text *Tirukkural* Tiruvalluvar prescribes the values that are necessary for both the common man and the ruler. Chapters dealing with good action, purity in action, resoluteness, action, true friendship, old friendship, avoiding bad company, and so on show how these values are necessary both for a king and for the common man. The ideal man portrayed by him is free from certain negative qualities and also possesses qualities that are positive in nature. A perfect man should be free from jealousy, evil action, ignorance, backbiting, and vices, and should possess positive qualities such as humility, compassion, being learned and wise, love, pleasant speaking, possessing good conduct, tolerance, and so on. It is easy to proclaim that the entire human race is one community. But to put it into practice is difficult. To do this we need a strong will and determination. The instrument for this, according to Tiruvalluvar, lies in the principle of love (*anbu*) which is the seed that makes the world meaningful. Out of this seed, the tree of humanity grows. The seat of life is in love. A person who lacks love is only a mass of skin-encased bone. Love is that which should flow in one's heart, and the life of an ideal man is always guided by the love for humanity. Tagore, in his *Gitanjali*, says that everyone needs to transcend the narrow walls. This is essential, because out of love, Tiruvalluvar says, springs kindness. Love in turn grows into an inestimable prize for friendship, for he avers: "The ignorant say that kindness is an ally of virtue; but it is a defense against evil too."

Truth and non-violence are the two important virtues that have influenced the entire globe. We could achieve our independence from the British, because Gandhi could apply these two virtues in the political sphere. Tiruvalluvar shows that if we practice truth no other virtue is needed, because all other virtues simply follow it. His emphasis on non-violence has to be taken seriously in the modern world wherein violence

and terrorism are threatening the entire globe. "The path of rectitude is the path of non-violence," declares Tiruvalluvar. A philosophical approach to the problem of violence and terrorism is necessary at the present juncture. Exhorting us to abhor violence, he says: "Do not commit any act of violence though your life is in peril." In the name of fulfilling our vows, sometimes we sacrifice animals and birds apprehending that, if these vows are not fulfilled, we will not have a peaceful life. But Tiruvalluvar says that even when one's life is in danger, one should avoid killing other living beings. Commenting on the importance of virtue it is said that among the three human values (virtue, wealth, and love), virtue alone brings immanent as well as transcendent happiness, and so it is the supreme value. It is virtue which is free from the four evils of envy, greed, wrath, and harsh words. In contemporary debate, the issue becomes significant when F.H. Bradley discusses the question, "Why should I be moral?" in his *Ethical Studies*. He says that the question is not legitimate for it may suggest that there is some ulterior purpose behind the exercise of virtue, or the performance of duty. He says: "To take virtue as a mere means to an ulterior end is in direct antagonism to the voice of moral consciousness." Though he rejects this question, he also answers it as: "A man is moral because he likes being moral; and he likes it partly because he was brought up to the habit of liking it, and partly because he finds it gives him what he wants while its opposite does not do so." Tiruvalluvar discusses this issue in detail and says: "One has to be moral because there is nothing higher than it and it exalts one." He speaks of the power of virtue at length in the text. He declares that there is no greater wealth than virtue, and if one forgets it, then there is no greater evil than this. Purity of mind is the basis for all other virtues; any other activity is merely pompous show.

Thus we see common ground between these great thinkers. There may not be universal agreement in all aspects between them, but the great originality of their thinking and the significance of their impact are not in doubt.



# Dancing East and West: Charting Intercultural Possibilities in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze and Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

*Marcus Bussey*

A deep fear lies at the heart of the modern civilizational enterprise. The key to understanding this fear and the anorexic, yet stoic hope it inspires lies in understanding the struggles around dialogue and co-creativity in which the Other stands as an accusative figure threatening our own sense of Self. Paradoxically this fear, the fuel in conservative political engines worldwide, is both deadly and illusory. To walk through the fear requires the simple human act of being together, sharing a space around an encounter. *Convivencia*, that loaded historical term, can be extended in many ways: we can live together, we can eat together, we can dream together, laugh together and also cry together. In this chapter we attempt a *thinking together* in the company of Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1922–1990) in order to better understand the intercivilizational possibilities available to theory in a time of global encounters and existential transformations.<sup>1</sup> This act of co-thinking is premised on the assumption that one does not think in a vacuum. Indeed, explorations across cultural boundaries enrich all who undertake the venture. Such encounters are sources of the intellectual vigour which is the life-blood of

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233

human imagination and inventiveness. This co-creative process gives us new insights into the world and leads to the emergence of new categories and concepts to help us negotiate it. Both Deleuze and Sarkar take their philosophical traditions and rethink them in the light of new global demands, acting as creative traditionalists who speak from the past to the future through the medium of Western and Indic philosophy respectively. At the heart of this work lies the recognition that “philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 2).

Western philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are famous for their neologisms. They are not alone in this creative enterprise. Sarkar for instance, coined many new terms (neohumanism, microvita, Prout, etc.) to describe and activate the realities his philosophical oeuvre sought to establish. This creativity is amplified when traditions intersect. It is dangerous however to assume that there is some kind of equivalence between a Western concept and an Eastern one. What emerges from such encounters are parallels that generate tension, the opportunity for creative dialogue and the emergence of new hybrid conceptual forms to populate the epistemological space that is emerging in response to intercivilizational engagement.

This activity is a form of futures thinking in which certain intellectual and conceptual possibilities immanent in the present globalizing context are mapped to better understand futures directions in both philosophy and human action (Bussey 2009; Inayatullah 2008). In this, the activity of thinking is directly linked to process. It helps to see the intellectual direction of this futures thinking as a form of shamanic intervention in which the reader becomes, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, acephalic, aphasic and illiterate (1994, p. 109).

## THE SHAMAN

This shamanic positioning allows for the multiple, the contradictory and the rhizomic (Bussey 2009). The shaman, as a figure of dissent, is drawn from the work of Ashis Nandy (Nandy 2007). The key to shamanic presence is that the shamanic persona is both familiar and strange; working in the world of everyday concerns while for ever, and simultaneously so, standing outside the ambit of the real. Every culture produces the shaman in their own image. For the purposes of this paper, Deleuze is the Western postmodern shaman of language play and deterritorialization; Sarkar, is

the Eastern neohumanist shaman of Tantra and socio-political mysticism. The key to this representation is that both thinkers function as lenses that invert *common sense* and release the creative potential immanent in the lifeworld. In this they follow Nandy's summary: "The shaman has one foot in the familiar, one foot outside; one foot in the present, one in the future; or, as some would put it, one foot in the timeless" (ibid., 176).

Both Deleuze and Sarkar chart *crazy vectors* as they defy the epistemological rules (epistemic gravity) of their contexts and chart new conceptual territory in order to better engage with humanity in a globalizing and culturally dynamic context. Deleuze's work can be seen as a sustained resistance to the hegemony of his own discipline of philosophy. His is a resistance from within, with the deep understanding of the history and traditions of the philosophical Western mind. His tools are his creative disregard for boundaries, a playful approach to language and form and what Tom Conley describes as "a consciousness of possibility" (2005, p. 176). His interest is in the morphological nature of signs and the transgressive flights they take. Old categories do not help here as they perform subjectivity in traditional and stereotypical ways. For Deleuze habit is the downfall of the philosopher whose challenge is to expose "regimes of signs" as they "cross over very different 'stratifications'" (Deleuze 2006, p. 15). To do this he positions himself on the periphery of "the system", where hybrid forms emerge and disappear, where identity becomes fragile and alternatives more possible. In this light his own work can be read as a shamanic resistance to the temptation to conform. As he puts it:

the closer one gets to the periphery of the system, the more subjects find themselves caught in a kind of temptation: whether to submit oneself to signifiers, to obey the orders of the bureaucrat and follow the interpretation of the high priest—or rather to be carried off elsewhere, the beyond, on a crazy vector, a tangent of deterritorialization—to follow a line of escape, to set off as a nomad, to emit what Guattari just called a-signifying particles. (ibid.)

Sarkar by contrast, *is* a representative of the Other. From Deleuze and Guattari's perspective he is an exponent of non-philosophy, in that "the Orient is not before philosophy but alongside" (1994, p. 95). This parallel form of thinking is anchored to an attitude towards being that is, from Sarkar's perspective, the Orient-self, individuated via a relationship with the *telos* of becoming-God.<sup>2</sup> As Deleuze does, he challenges his own tradition from within by inverting traditional Indian Tantric practice and culture.

He can, as a result, be seen as doubly other: the *other* of the Other. Thus Sarkar critiques the traditional metaphysical orientation that invalidates the lived realities of most people, and offers a form of praxis that informs spirituality with a pragmatism and revolutionary ardour that links personal spiritual growth with social engagement (Sarkar 1992, p. 94). In this way, Sarkar steps beyond the timeless ahistoricity of the metaphysic of Eastern thought (Lal 2002, pp. 121–122) and situates spiritual practice in the social realities of people.

The result was that he developed a dialectical philosophy that integrated spiritual and practical excursions into philosophical, social and economic concerns. In this he sought to develop the conceptual potential of Tantric thought through an engagement with reality and social struggle (Sarkar 1988, p. 14). This resulted in him reworking ancient Sanskrit categories and also, as Deleuze did, providing new categories when they were absent or insufficient. This project, placed beyond the Western theatre of philosophy, is perhaps easy to categorize as shamanic.<sup>3</sup> What is significant is that it mirrors in many respects Deleuze's strategy of distanciation and deterritorialization in which both thinkers chart crazy vectors across the cultural, intellectual and philosophical landscape.

### RADICAL EMPIRICISM

Both Deleuze and Sarkar offer open systems responses to hegemonic modernity. They do this by adopting a form of *radical empiricism* that subverts the narrow limiting rationality that legitimates the worldviews of both capitalism and metaphysical dualism. Yet there is a difference between the empiricism of West and East as embodied in the practices of Deleuze and Sarkar. Inna Semetsky notes that, for Deleuze, his empiricism is linked to his notion of the plane of immanence (Semetsky 2006, p. 6). Immanence, in the Deleuzean sense, implies both the possibility of inversion and the ground on which any philosophizing occurs. May (1994, p. 36) thus acknowledges that Deleuze's planes of immanence "indicate that there is no source beneath or beyond the plane that can be considered its hidden principle". Empiricism, Deleuze and Guattari assert, "knows only events and other people" (1994, p. 48), yet, they argue, both events and people are multiple, being in a constant process of becoming. Semetsky describes this becoming-context as occurring in a "relational dynamics [that] constitute an anti-representational, pluralistic and distributive semiotics which cannot be reduced to a static recognition" (ibid., p. 12).

Deleuze's empiricism is enacted relationally, driven by a "logic of multiplicities" (Deleuze cited in Semetsky, p. 2), rather than the binary logic of positivism and rationalism. Empiricism thus, for Deleuze, invokes the *and* in relation to the becoming-subjects' experience of the outside/real. This *and* reminds actors that there is always something immanent awaiting emergence from the plane of context, thus the subject's story is never complete, never whole; hence we are always *becoming*. Semetsky notes "it is the *milieu* itself that constitutes every multiplicity" (ibid.). The outside is therefore ontologically privileged with the becoming-subject becoming other in her quest for identity and this identity process is folded, being constructed, ironically, around a non-self (ibid., p. 16). Thus Deleuze formulates it: "I do not encounter myself on the outside. I find the other in me" (cited in Semetsky, p. 16).

Sarkar, working within the context of the Indian episteme, is not so much interested in Deleuze's becoming-subject, though he acknowledges the contingency of subjectivity as a work in progress through "clash and cohesion" (Sarkar 1997). Sarkar's empiricism is based on the subject-becoming-whole. In Sarkar's reading of subjectification, the becoming-subject has a similarly folded relationship to the outside, as described by Deleuze, yet the outside is not ontologically prior to the inside but coterminous with it. The outside-inside is for Sarkar the inside of the cosmic generation of subject-context potentiality. Sarkar sees this folded relationship as layered and multiple in that there is relative homogeneity, heterogeneity and differentiation both between and within these. For him the permanent outside of the relative outside is Brahma, "This visible world is the mental manifestation of *Brahma*, He is an unparalleled and all-pervading reality" (1992, p. 90). Thus:

In this manifested universe all the things that we treat as real at first sight are in fact relative truths. All of them bear *svaja'tiyya* or homogeneity, *vija'tiyya* or heterogeneity and *svagata* or self-differentiation. A tree, for example, is heterogenous or *vija'tiyya* to the houses, hills, rivers etc., and amongst the trees there are homogenous or *svaja'tiyya* differences—the mango tree, jack-fruit tree, palm tree, etc., and amongst the mangoes, there are differences in varieties—langra, bambai etc. And there are also self or *svagata* differences in the trunk, branches, leaves etc. of each mango tree. (ibid.)

As for Deleuze, differentiation involves action, yet it is not action to generate identity, as in the Western sense, but action towards (or away) from an ultimate identity (Divinity) in which the empirical can be a tool



for improvement, while identity is one of many states we experience as we strive to overcome relativity.<sup>4</sup> This improvement for Deleuze and Guattari lies in the subject's overcoming of linearity, in their becoming acephalic, non-philosophers who plunge into chaos to allow for new forms and possibilities (1994, p. 109; 202ff). To assist in this task we have empiricism which is a "great creator of concepts" (ibid., p. 48) that have the potential to better define sets of relationships between subjects, non-subjects and objects (ibid., p. 16). By contrast, Sarkar sees improvement as a collective, not primarily subject driven, concern. Deleuze represents the empiricism of the folded becoming "I" as multiple, contingent and ever unfolding (1993); while Sarkar is focused on the empiricism of the becoming "we" in which individual and collective struggle merge, as Inayatullah notes, in a meeting of the universal and the local (2002, p. 10). Both however understand that it is through the human relationship with context that identity emerges and this aligns them as pragmatists—as opposed to idealists, metaphysicians, transcendentalists—who understand that human action builds human identity. This process orientation, in which the doing is the real thinking, results in an open-ended and fragile present, rich with possible inversions and surprises.

### TRANSCENDENTAL EMPIRICISM?

This fragile becoming entity is open ended and unending, being rooted in what Deleuze paradoxically calls "transcendental empiricism" (Deleuze 1994, p. 70; Semetsky 2006, p. 33). Sarkar's position is both pragmatic and spiritual, thus he offers a spiritual empiricism rooted ontologically in the indigenous Indic philosophy of Tantra. This is not otherworldly but essentially practical, as Inayatullah notes, "Tantra stresses the practical experience of inner transformation" yet "Sarkar's theoretical framework is not only spiritual or only concerned with the material world, rather his perspective argues that the real is physical, mental and spiritual" (2002, p. 8).

Both Deleuze and Sarkar bring an attention to reality that is respectively textual and ideative and both ground their insights in an attention to reality that is read as multiple, intersecting the singular. Their understanding of subjectivity can be seen as grounded in the ontological trajectories they have taken from within the European philosophic and Indian Tantric traditions respectively. Yet even here there are strong parallels. Though Deleuze is grounded in a concern to avoid idealist metaphysics

his emphasis on the immanence of the possible and the role of empiricism in disqualifying dualist strategies—“Only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimension of the visible without falling into Ideas, and how to track down, invoke, and perhaps produce a phantom” (cited Semetsky, p. 34)—is the same as Sarkar’s, who rules out the metaphysical dualism of Brahmanic Hinduism, and describes a relative reality of becoming in which differentiation and unification weave together in the transcendent field of Brahma (Sarkar 1978, p. 94). They are both empirical in that the object of their concern is *reality*. Semetsky’s observation of Deleuze thus becomes equally, though qualitatively so, appropriate for Sarkar:

Deleuze’s method remains empirical by virtue of the object of inquiry regarded as real, albeit subrepresentative, experience. Yet, it is also transcendental because the very foundations for the empirical principles are *a priori* left outside the common faculties of perception. (2006, p. 34)

### SHAMANIC PLAY

The shamanic quality of both thinkers therefore lies in their appreciation for that which is *left outside*.

In seeking to apprehend that which is left outside, both thinkers resort to analogy and metaphor. Thus we find their writing rich in poetic, ecological, topological and mathematical analogues. For Deleuze multiplicity, the creative drive towards differentiation immanent in the logic of becoming, takes the form of the rhizome with no beginning or end, only connection and differentiation, hence Alain Badiou describes him as the “metaphysician of the divergent world of modernity” (Badiou 1994, p. 55). For Sarkar, the sense of the cyclic return of the unitary to the many to the unitary is represented as the ocean/nucleus and the rain drop/electron and experienced as the wave.

Such metaphors are played out by Sarkar in his analogue of the Cosmos in which the individual is located in a subtle matrix of wave-like connections. This means that the subject is posited in relationship to the whole.

You know, the function and the existence of each and every entity in this universe has a certain influence on all other entities. The life, the movement, the thought-waves, of an ordinary ant affect you. Even the thought-waves of an ordinary ant affect your destiny. Nobody is alone in this universe. And

this mutual attraction amongst all the entities of the world maintains the balance of the universe. (Sarkar 1997, p. 82)

He builds on this cosmic metaphor by describing individuals metaphorically as electrons moving around a cosmic nucleus or hub. The metaphor often shifts and folds into poetic-mythic ellipses in which cosmos and ocean merge: “This entire Cosmological order is an ocean, an infinite ocean, of divine nectar. And the many vibrations created in this universe, so many waves, are different *devas*.<sup>5</sup> And the life of an individual moves—goes up and down—just like a boat in the sea, according to the length of the wave” (ibid., p. 87).

In this we see the individual always connected to what Sarkar calls the Great, and the impulse that drives individuation is *longing* or *love* (Inayatullah 2002, p. 10). This drive is collective, though experienced individually, and is the root of Sarkar’s thinking about history, which as Inayatullah demonstrates, also follows wave-like processes (ibid., pp. 11–12).

Deleuze also sees the becoming-subject at sea in a chaotic and fractal world. The folded nature of being-becoming is such that the world is legible only when it intersects the becoming consciousness of the individual as subject/monad. This world contains that which is always beyond, always mystery, yet it is also the relative world of lived experience. Like Sarkar, Deleuze acknowledges the poetry of this relationship of monad to world.

The world exists only in its representatives as long as they are included in each monad. It is a lapping of waves, a rumor, a fog, a mass of dancing particles of dust. It is a state of death or catalepsy, of sleep, drowsiness, or of numbness. It is as if the depths of every monad were made from an infinity of tiny folds (inflections). Endlessly furling and unfurling in every direction, so that the monad’s spontaneity resembles that of agitated sleepers who twist and turn on their mattresses. (1993, p. 86)

In Deleuze’s thinking the impetus to change is the drive to differentiate, to break down and reform, or what he and Guattari call deterritorialize and reterritorialize. In this they too can be as poetic as Sarkar. Semetzky captures Deleuze’s interplay of poetical and mathematical thinking well when describing the Deleuzian self.

Such a singular self ... is capable of multiple “leaps from one soul to another, ‘every now and then’ crossing closed deserts ... And from soul to soul it

traces the design of an *open* society, a society of creators” (Deleuze 1991, p. 111). The “now and then” are distinctive points, or *events* within the qualitative multiplicity, the latter functioning, as we remember, as a mode of existence of any “thing” including subjectivity. It is an experiential event that indeed affects the shape, in almost mathematical terms, of one’s life by virtue of itself being a variation on the curve that gives this or that shape to any figure. (Semetsky 2006, p. 13)

As shamanic signifiers Deleuze and Sarkar both have a lived context that situates them in their worlds as professor of philosophy and as guru. Both categories are intelligible and hold considerable status within their cultures; yet, they both deterritorialize their contexts through a form a radical empiricism that links abstract concerns with practical social issues. Such interventions can be seen to flow around the role of the subject and reality. Both thinkers approach reality, not as a single unitary *out there* but as a multiple and complex configuration that is experienced and created via a process of subjectification.

## BECOMING

For Sarkar the individual is a vibrational centre of consciousness that evolves within an “out-there” of Cosmic rhythms (1978, p. 23, 1993, pp. 50–51). Subjectivity emerges as an awareness of relationship to the Cosmic and proceeds through a struggle towards what he called “liberation” from the causal chain, which is experienced as cycles of birth and death, pleasure and pain. Liberation, known in Sanskrit as *mukti*, is grounded ethically in relation to the other without which no progress can occur. This is a break from traditional Tantra in which the world is seen as an obstacle to spiritual *mukti*/liberation. For Sarkar, “sentimental contact with the external world is a must” (1993, p. 51). Liberation is the primary drive of both the individual and the collective. What enables this drive is seen as rational, what blocks it is irrational. Because this performative rationality is set within a collective consciousness that embodies both the inner and outer processes of subjectivity, as Sarkar defines them, it retains its indigenous Tantric roots as a form of synthetic praxis.

For Deleuze, the individual is a monad or singularity within the chaos of the multiple; an event of sorts, a localized resistance to homogeneity. His individual is defined by a tension he calls *becoming*, in which the outside is selectively, though not self-consciously, internalized via the fold. Folding describes the relationship between subjectivity (the monad) and

the objective reality (the world) in which individuals function. The body is a requirement for engagement with this potent form of creative possibility as it houses “an obscure object in us” (Deleuze 1993, p. 85). This obscure object is the inside of the outside, it is prehended but not apprehended, as it is a non-object—thus Deleuze asserts that “Prehension is individual unity” (ibid., p. 78). In Sarkar’s terms this obscure unitary object is the *atman*, or soul, that resides in the *guhā*, or cave, not in the Platonic sense, but in the Tantric sense of immanent creative presence, or Divine potentiality. The world is internalized through a range of vibrational routes that are both physical and psycho-spiritual in nature. Thus he describes the roll of the senses and of chakras in filtering and processing external stimuli and in shaping the vibrational identity of both individual and culture.

Deleuze’s prehending monad is experienced as multiple, but operationally it is Unitary. This tension—paradox—is something that cannot be overcome but is definitional of the state of being-subject, following what Semetsky calls the logic of non-non-contradiction (2006, p. 28). Thus Deleuze asks, while exploring Leibniz’s thought: “How can the Many become the One?” His response is that “A great screen has to be placed in between them” (1993, p. 76). The screen acts as a *between*, the hinge of the fold that lies between the outside-inside, and is experienced as consciousness, particularly consciousness of mediation. The world is therefore the creative chaosmos of individual prehended reality within which lies all possibility. Thus becoming, the struggle to become, is the primary category of being. Hence Deleuze argues that “Every monad expresses the entire world, but obscurely and dimly because it is finite and the world is infinite. That is why the lower depths of the monad are so dark” (1993, p. 86). The world here is operationalized, as in Sarkar’s category of the outside of the outside, Brahma, as the chaos of “universal giddiness” that is experienced when the screen of apprehension “composes infinite series of whole and parts, which appear chaotic to us (as aleatory developments) only because we are incapable of following them, or because of the insufficiency of our own screens” (ibid., p. 77).

### DESIRE AND LONGING

The situation here between outside-inside, macro and micro, Semetsky describes as problematic because “it involves tension and conflict ... due to the intervention, sometimes beyond one’s awareness of this action, of the brute facts of human existence” (2006, p. 29). Yet, this tension is also

definitional of a Tantric world view in which fold and liberation are coordinates for reading the *real*. Tantra, which has been heavily orientalized over the past century by European commentators (Said 1995), is often misunderstood either as a religion (as in Tibetan Buddhism) or as a sexual cult (Anand 1999). From Sarkar's perspective this is an error (1978, p. 329; 335). He argues that it is an orientation to the real that is premised upon tension and struggle. This emerges as the subjectivity of each individual works to form a relationship with the multiple and fractal elements of their inner and outer realities that collectively constitute identity.

Tantra is not only a fight, it is an all round fight. It is not only an external or internal fight, it is simultaneously both. Internal fight is a practice of the subtler portion of Tantra. External fight is a fight of the cruder portion of Tantra and the fight—both internal and external, is a fight in between the two. So practice in each and every stratum of life has got due recognition in Tantra and the co-related and the co-operated form of practices in all the strata represent Tantra in proper perspectives. (1978, p. 332)

In this struggle the desire for Liberation is essential. In fact, Deleuze argues that desire is not affective but effective, in that it produces consciousness (affects) and is instrumental in the production of “reality”. Thus Semetsky summarizes: “The subject does not possess desire; just the opposite, it is desire that ‘produces reality’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 30) enveloping everything, including subjects and objects alike, in itself” (2006, p. 56). Desire drives expression, both individually and collectively; for Sarkar, as Inayatullah notes (2002, p. 10), it takes the form of the longing for the Great. This longing is external to the unit beings driven by it, being an essential ingredient of Tantric cosmogenesis. It is the source of creativity and the new. Thus Deleuze observes the becoming-subject is not complete, or as Sarkar would have it, *liberated*, “without the sum of perceptions tending to be integrated in a great pleasure, a Satisfaction with which the monad fills itself when it expresses the world, a musical Joy of contracting its vibrations, of calculating them without knowing their harmonics or of drawing force enough to go further and further ahead in order to produce something new” (1993, p. 79).

### FREEDOM AND EUPSYCHIA

Yet, for Sarkar, this liberation is equally an inner state of freedom from distortions to consciousness and a socio-political stance in which injustice and violence are challenged (Hatley and Inayatullah 1999, p. 140).

He is looking not for an eternal verity, but a world in which all beings achieve full potential. This is the eupsychia of the good, or what Deleuze calls the “best of all worlds”, a place he describes as “neither the least abominable nor the least ugly, but the one whose All granted a production of novelty, *a liberation of true quanta of ‘private’ subjectivity*, even at the cost of the removal of the damned. The best of all worlds is not the one that produces the eternal, but the one in which new creations are produced, the one endowed with a capacity for innovation or creativity: a teleological conversion of philosophy” (italics in original, 1993, p. 79). Thus Deleuze’s thoughts intersect Sarkar’s in their collective desire for the *liberation* of an individual’s potential, or true quanta. This is significant because, despite their geophilosophical positioning, their commitment to an open-ended transcendental empiricism align across both culture and ontological tradition, setting up surprising parallels in terms of language and process. They both articulate what Semetsky calls a “grammar of disequilibrium as a precondition for the production of meanings, [that] can be considered a specific syntax of a self-organized language-system” (2006, p. 41).

Thus the *mukti* that propels Sarkar’s vision aligns with Deleuze’s liberation of the monad’s true quanta and recognizes the multiple and layered nature of reality and triggers both epistemological and political interventions that are, as he and Guattari note, “fractal in nature” (1994, p. 40). The novelty of Sarkar’s approach lies in the fact that he uses ancient Tantric concepts to politicize subjectivity and spiritual practice.<sup>6</sup> Thus he defines liberty as “the unobstructed expression of individual rhythmic vibrations” (1993, p. 50) while linking such expression to practical engagement: “It is not enough to read books, scriptures—one will have to be practical, will have to do something in practical life” (1997, p. 64). The concept of *mukti* as liberation is therefore a concept which Deleuze would say is folded. It is both an internal and an external process. The rationality that drives this conceptual project therefore shifts from an analytic to a synthetic praxis. This shift is legitimate in Sarkar’s eyes because the struggle for *mukti* is a form of radical and transcendental empiricism as it shares all the epistemological and performative features of the empirical sciences: being practical (enactment changes the world); experiential (truth must be observed); and open to collective judgement (truth must be replicable and testable) (1997, p. 49).

## CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

The ethical dimension of Deleuze's folded world of the becoming-subject, identifies the relationship of inside-outside as the platform upon which social engagement, to be successful, must be understood. His shamanic potential lies in this reading of *becoming* and his position as a dissident who sees his task as one of "pulverizing the world, but also one of spiritualizing its dust" (1993, p. 87).

It has been the tendency of the West to depoliticize any terms that have a spiritual dimension and relegate them to the subjective realm of personal practice. For Sarkar, such dualisms are ineffective and fail to connect the inner and outer dimensions of a practice which requires both subjective and objective action. In this he is, as Inayatullah points out, both ancient and modern (2002, pp. 1–2). His shamanic potential lies in this characterization. Sarkar stands beyond the traditional Western geophilosophical constructs that have mapped, divided and conquered so much physical and ideological space. Yet his voice is one of growing relevance as the non-Western other is drawn into the global conversation about reality and social action, what Fred Dallmayr calls a cross civilizational dialogue (Dallmayr 2002). His concept of *mukti*/liberation is crucial here as it posits the possibility within any regime of truth of its immanent inversion. This is not simply a binary relationship but one rich in heterotopic possibilities. *Mukti* represents multiple pathways into the future, for liberation, as both Deleuze and Sarkar argue, is not foreclosed and unitary but uniquely situated within the lifeworlds of each being and each socio-historical context.

This analysis has taken Nandy's work on the shaman in a different direction while remaining true to his insight that while threats to categories could be contained in premodern social space, this is no longer possible. With the advent of hypermodernity all social space has been compressed or, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, liquified (2000). Thus we find the shaman standing in the wings embodying alternative categories that augment the global meltdown born of civilizational encounter.

Better categories, however, are not central to the concern of the shaman; rather it is an open-ended and ambivalent attitude to any hegemonic practice that seeks to reinstate order from above. Sarkar has offered new categories to think by and tackle the global issues we face but beyond that he represents the eternally foreign principle; Deleuze, by folding categories into personal-social (inside-outside) space, sees them not as ends in



themselves but as tools (machines/assemblages) for negotiating the real and unpacking power and dysfunctionality (schizophrenia). Both are approaches rich in intercultural possibility and, when danced with dialogically as in this chapter, the critical potentiality is exponentially amplified and provides a dynamic basis for a pragmatic philosophy of intercultural engagement.

## CONCLUSION

This is a time when the shamanic in all its alterity is deepening our critical capacity as a response to emergent conversations, such as that conducted here between Deleuze and Sarkar. The futures thinking this generates is refreshingly unfamiliar. The real melts just as Marx predicted it would. However the melting is not simply a descent into chaos and a world of signs, as Baudrillard and Lyotard argue, rather it is a leading forward into new critical categories, as yet uncharted, which offer the possibilities of renewal and re-enchantment.

## NOTES

1. The work of P.R. Sarkar is ably described by Sohail Inayatullah in his texts *Situating Sarkar* (1999) and *Understanding Sarkar* (2002).
2. Sarkar describes such a grounding in terms of each culture's *prana dharma*—its inherent characteristics, something akin to ethos and mores. “The words *prāṇa dharma* mean the cardinal characteristic of a person which differentiates one person from another. Just as each human being has his or her own traits, similarly an entire race living within a particular geographical, historical and cultural environment will also inhere some traits which distinguish that particular race from other. These traits or specialities are inseparably embedded in the internal behaviour of the entire population, and they help to form a particular bent of mind, expression of external behaviour, attitude towards life and society, and on the whole a different out look” (Sarkar 1998, p. 148).
3. It is worth noting here that Sarkar remained in the oral tradition of Tantra—he spoke but did not write; this task was left to his followers. His linguistic strategy was not to privilege the printed text but to embody the intellectual richness of the premodern, pretextual universe of timeless time. Though many of his talks have been recorded, and published, his concern has been—through speaking *to*—to reinforce the relational nature of spoken thought as a form of “intellect ... always associated with benevolence” (Sarkar 1978, p. 96).

4. Thus we have, from the Cosmic perspective, relative identity and eternal identity, which come with a set of rational processes that support each (i.e. personal and cultural assumptions about the real and a set of eternal verities—benevolence, mission, truthfulness, etc.) that wrap the process in an immutable context.
5. Sarkar defines *devas* as “waves ... carrying so many ideas” that create action in individuals and collectivities (1997, pp. 85–86).
6. It is useful to compare his approach with that used by Ananta Kumar Giri, who develops a social theory of agency around Vedic concepts (see Giri 2006).

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# The Micropolitics and Metaphysics of Mobility and Nomadism: A Comparative Study of Rahul Sankrityayan's *Ghumakkār Śāstra* and Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari's “Nomadology”

*Subir Rana*

*“Travelling for profit is encouraged. Travelling for survival is condemned... The globalized world is a hospitable and friendly place for tourists, but inhospitable and hostile to vagabonds. The latter are barred from following the pattern that the first have set. But the pattern was not meant for them in the first place.” (Bauman 2002: 84)*

## INTRODUCTION

Mobility is a social fact and a fundamental and definitive aspect of our modern lives, albeit having a highly contested terrain especially in the social and urban context.<sup>12</sup> The contemporary “mobile world” (Urry 2007) view of ‘scapes’, (Appadurai 1996) ‘cultures’, ‘turns’ and ‘paradigms’, mobility as a principle of modernity (Bauman 2000) and an inescapable reality that affects people, power and politics (Albertson and Diken 2009: 1). For most of us,

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249

mobility is a common metaphor and a ‘norm’ and habitus of human condition having links with human rights, citizenship and heritage.<sup>3</sup> In a sense, the life of humans at large may be viewed through the metaphor of *homo viator* (as cited in Kellerman 2006) or human beings as constantly moving entities in both society and space.

Mobility is ubiquitous, so much so that space itself is seen to be in constant motion (as cited in Adey 2010). In the era of neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism with deterritorialized corporate houses and a giant mobile workforce, capital too has acquired a *placelessness* or nomadic nature. According to Pratap (2012) mobility of capital is the necessary foundation for the existence of transnational capital and is also the central aspect of the neo-liberal political project. As a primeval spatial practice characterizing mobile subjectivities and decentred modern lives, mobility affects social practices and has strong moral underpinnings. Mobility has its own political economy, socio-cultural attributes, conjectures and contradictions.

### THE METAPHYSICS AND TRAVELOGUE OF MOBILITY: NODES, ROOTS AND ROUTES

*Our nature lies in movement; complete calm is death.* Pascal, *Pensées* (as cited in Chatwin: 183)

Mobility means different things to different people, can take multiple forms and therefore has a wide canvas. In a metaphorical sense, it is understood as civilization, progress and modernity on the one hand or viewed as deviance, wanderlust, resistance and criminality on the other.<sup>4</sup> Put simply, mobility involves displacement, a socially produced motion between locations and is an agent in the social production of time and space or, as Cresswell (2006: 2–3) puts it, “spatialization of time and temporalization of space”.<sup>5</sup> Mobility is “practiced, experienced and embodied and is a product and producer of power that operates within fields of meaning” (Ibid.: 3). From a sedentarist perspective, nomadism is about moving and about routes rather than roots (Clifford 1997). However, nomadism as a social and spatial practice (Deleuze and Guattari 2005) is a “state of mind rather than a state of action” (Kenrick and Clark 1999: 29) in which one relates to the ground on which one moves in a specific way that entails emotional and relational mobility. To the nomad the ground is borderless and a surface for movement and not a territory as it is for the sedentarist (Sheller 2011), and through deterritorialization, mobilists destabilize the

seemingly self-evident nature of the State. In a way then, mobility is a potent tool whereby those ‘othered’ are able to deploy mobility to fight subjugation, or the ‘governmentalities of the governors,’ in order to eke out spaces of power from the peripheries and margins.

Ambulation, mobility or nomadism is an “ideology” (Ahmed 1981), “cultural practice or philosophy” (Bhattacharya 2003) and is the “opposite of history” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 1). Mobility is against “state apparatus” and exists outside the organizational “State” (Ibid.) and is an act of resistance (Certeau 1984; Creswell 1993) or primitive resistance (Scott 2008) and is therefore anti-statist. Mobility is an embodied disposition and was one of the first survival strategies of the pastoralists and the “farmers that allowed them to escape state impositions and wars” (Scott 2009).

Mobility has been the axis mundi of the nomads and Gypsies who have played a vital role in the rise of civilization, state formation, trade and writing of history (Cribb 1991: 13). Some nomadic groups, especially those from Central Asia like the Huns, Timurids, Scythians and Mongols besides the nomads of South America, had established and run *nomadic empires*.

In the past, mobility meant power and translated into geopolitical dominance (as cited in Adey 2010: 58), which in today’s world corresponds to one’s social status where people assign high social value to the “consumption of distance” and “being mobile” (Urry 2007, 2012). Mobility is a prerequisite for work, leisure and relations and is related to social capital or “network capital” (Urry 2012) representing one’s power to be mobile and cultivate global networks.<sup>6</sup> Such an exclusive category of mobilists introduces questions of class in the sense that it attracts only the highly skilled in destination countries through privileged rules on entry and residence, while manual workers and refugees often experience discrimination and exclusion (Castles et al. 2013: 4). This has also set in motion what is referred to as an “age of involuntary immobility” (Carling 2002). Mobility is a relational concept, which means that one’s mobility may be another’s immobility (Albertson and Diken 2009).

Philosophy and social theory look at the “end of sedentarism” and the rise of foundationless nomadism (Cresswell 2006: 1). Recent work on mobility recognizes “regimes of mobility” (Schiller and Salazar 2013) and that “mobilities create an integrated system which can be observed at different scales: family/household, community, national, and the constellation of countries linked by migration flows” (Ibid.). However, events like 9/11, global economic crisis and the recent European refugee crisis seem to have redefined mobility, (national) borders and (ethnic/religious) boundaries. The promise of globalization in a borderless world with its *space of flows*,

regimes of circulation and global interdependencies, lay fractured due to the fear of the other/stranger during the recent European refugee crisis. National sovereignty is once more an issue of grave concern in the domain of economics, labour control, debt, culture and identity. Demagogues and national security experts define mobility as dangerous and threatening, while immobility is seen as normal and necessary for political and personal security (Ibid.). As a result, Europe witnessed a proliferation of new borders while existing ones were being sealed owing to a refugee influx from the world's conflict zones, thereby signalling the death of the Schengen Area. This also suggests that potential obstacles to mobility remain and that our times are characterized not only by large flows of various forms of mobilities but also by immobilities. Immigration policies and harsh controls by local or national governments strongly restrict migration. Therefore, the notion of a seemingly borderless world in constant motion needs to be supplemented with the perspective of an "age of involuntary immobility" (Carling 2002), that identifies and analyses barriers and constraints.

Mobility is a "structure of feeling" (as cited in Urry 2007) that provides a relational understanding and addressing of things, places, ideas, people and objects. It is a way of communicating meaning and significance; a predominant way of engaging with the modern world and a "new code word for grasping the global" (as cited in Adey 2010). Mobility is also a strong enabler that signifies capability (Kronlid 2008), new possibilities and creativity (Cresswell 2006). According to Clifford (1997), travels and contacts are crucial sites for an unfinished modernity whereby practices of crossing and interaction have had a profound effect on culture. Further, he adds that cultural centres and discrete regions and territories do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them as they appropriate and discipline the restless movements of people and things.

As the new century unfolds and explores new turns and paradigms in mobility, we have an interface with new mobilities that create surprising combinations of presence and absence. In the "new mobilities paradigm", (Sheller and Urry 2006) which moves beyond sedentarist and nomadic conceptualizations of place and movement, places themselves are seen as travelling within networks of human and non-human agents. The second wave of *mobility turn* takes into account the moment of interruption and the (temporal and spatial) constraint experienced by those who are waiting or displaced. Today, "waiting" which is a transitory phase of "in-betweenness" is also understood as a state of mobility (Laurent and Musset 2016).<sup>7</sup> The waiting territories, once invaded by white settlers and

explorers, became “intersubjective contact zones” from the perspective of the former while the same space also turned into “territories of uncertainty”, as in the case of native Americans. However, for others such as travellers, naturalists, scientists and explorers, these zones became places of (re)discovery and expectation (Jarak and Giordano 2016: 308).

Mobility is an interdependent, highly differentiated, hierarchical and multi-layered concept.<sup>8</sup> In particular, gendered mobility has become extremely pertinent in today’s world, especially when gender equality is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, Randi Hjorthol (2008) asserts that the study of men’s and women’s daily travel patterns is a substantial proof of the degree of equality between men and women in society.

According to Clifford (1997) mobility entails complex experiences, often involving exploitation along gender lines that include taboos, indenture, displacement and sexual encounters. The mobilities of men and women are different but factors of class, race, ethnicity and religion cross-cut gender. Historical routes both constrain and empower movements across borders and between cultures and are concerned with diverse practices of crossing, tactics of translation, experiences of double and multiple attachment that reflect complex regional and transnational histories. Stasis and purity are asserted creatively and violently against historical forces of movement and contamination. In this regard, Cresswell (2010) points out to a “politics of mobility” which speaks of mobilities that produce immobilities and advocates for “constellations of mobility” that will account for the historical existence of a fragile sense of movement, meaning and practice.

Walking, which is the very primordial act that makes mobility possible, turns the human body into a supreme symbol of the most elementary and a profound form of protest. Visvanathan (2014) sees walking as “the act of the body exploring itself as it traces the world and is a great equaliser and democracies’ greatest act”. In his view, walking is “exploration, discovery, conversation, companionship, meditation, reflection, prayer ... and is the ‘beginning of civics and citizenship’”. Further, he adds, “in walking, one converses and questions the world while seeking a deeper understanding of it”. Some see walking as an art form (O’Rourke 2013: xvii) and as a type of social criticism. So profound is the act of walking and sauntering that scholars and philosophers such as Thoreau, Emerson, Certeau, Heidegger and Geddes devoted a large part of their writings to this primordial act. Thoreau’s *Walking* and de Certeau’s *Walking in the*



*City* reveal how walking can be a practice used for escaping and subverting dominant societal norms and how walkers can be reformers in society. According to Certeau (1984) everyday practices like walking or reading are “tactical” as they continuously resignify and disrupt the schematic ordering of reality produced through the strategic practices of the powerful. Similarly, Solnit (2001: 5), who introduces us to the cultural history of walking, says that walking is “a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned”.

Various social scientists, philosophers, mobility enthusiasts, social theorists and futurists have perceived mobility in different ways. Scholars like Ibn Khaldun (*Al-Muqaddimah*), René Guénon and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Nomadology*) and Rahul Sankrityayan (*Ghumakkār Śāstra*) have dealt specifically and extensively with mobility, nomads and nomadism.<sup>9</sup> However, it was Georg Simmel who bound mobilities with materialities and described the human “will to connection” as able to impress “into the surface of the earth”, generating a “freezing movement in a solid structure” (as cited in Sheller and Urry 1997: 171) thereby giving future scholars a template for the study of mobilities (Sheller and Urry 2006: 215). According to Simmel this produces paths as well as “the miracle of the road” that connects two places and “symbolizes the extension of our volitional sphere over space” (Ibid.). Giddens (2003) has written about the “Runaway World” that will be shaped by the process of “reverse colonisation” and will give birth to new mobilities that will affect institutions like traditions, family and democracy.

Futurists like Marshal McLuhan and Alvin Toffler have tried to forecast the future of societies by basing their predictions on the speed at which societies were changing and the way the world was being “tossed up” into a new societal arrangement called the “global village”. Toffler’s trilogy of *Future Shock* (1970), *Third Wave* (1980) and *Powershift* (1990), has been phenomenal in observing current changes in terms of mobility and giving insights into the effects that mobility and speed would have on different aspects of society and human life, including politics, technology, education, kinship and family patterns, lifestyle and business organization.

While dealing with the *nature* of the future, Toffler (1970) appraises us of the “death of permanence” and a future world of “runaway mobility”, “modular men” and “information overload”, where everything is accelerating, including culture. This condition of intense mobility was believed to be symptomatic of a mental condition known as neurasthenia, characterized by increasing stress due to urbanization and competitiveness. According to

Cresswell (2006: 82) inventions such as railroads, telegraph and steam power had massively increased the number of transactions in modern urban life and had resulted in balding and early tooth decay (Ibid.: 82).

Historically, the connection, scale and magnitude of mobility has had far-reaching effects on many aspects of life. For example, William Harvey's discovery of the human body's circulatory system in 1628 was immediately related to health, economics and city planning (Ibid.: 7).<sup>10</sup> Meanings given to mobility inside the human body have highly gendered connotations and are also being translated into the politics of space race, as in the case of the historic linkup in space in 1975 between the Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft.<sup>11</sup>

Mobility attained bizarre proportions, especially in the twentieth century with innovations in transport and communications technology resulting in more people becoming mobile and having important and durable relationships of a political, economic, social or cultural nature in two or more societies at once. This was seen as undermining the undivided loyalty viewed as crucial to sovereign nation states (Castles and Miller 2009: 3). Moreover, it was also reported from many quarters that a heightened scale of cross-border movements, otherwise called the migration industry, resulted in the "globalization of migration" (Ibid.: 10) and increased cases of human trafficking, sex slavery, drug peddling and cross-border terrorism. However, these cross-border travels have always enriched cultures, histories and people through "regimes of circulation", with Asia being the best example of this cosmopolitanism and salad bowl culture.

According to Ludden (2003: 1063), Asian history is characterized by mobile geographies with foreign rulers, shifting capitals, wandering minstrels, crusaders, peripatetic monks, pilgrims and transients. This mobility is a ceaseless enterprise of human beings that typifies human experience and continues unabated today. Ludden underlines the fact that Asian societies in the past, ruled by different rulers like the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals, were characterized by mobile societies with multiple and mobile capitals. In today's world, we find mobilism as a lifestyle choice, as in the case of neo-nomads or lifestyle-migrants, which involves affluent people moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places that they believe will offer a better quality of life; and that those who embrace such alternate living are breeding a "third culture" (Steegar 2009).<sup>12</sup>

Mobility has shared an uneasy yet symbiotic relationship with sedentism. Scholars like Ibn Khaldun and René Guénon in the past and Casimir

and Rao (2003), Khazanov (1983) and David Ludden (2003) more recently have commented on the opposed but complementary relationship between mobile groups and sedentary communities, based on either economic reasons or to take account of new opportunities (Casimir and Rao 2003: 221). Nomadic societies fitted well with their host societies and rather owed their existence to sedentary groups. The endless transactions between mobility and territorialism have made and remade boundaries, while enriching all societies and pitting mobile and territorial interests against one another (Ludden 2003: 1062). The negotiation and confrontation between the two oppositional tendencies and modes of living are for mutuality, reciprocity and understanding (Bhattacharya 2003: 191). The nature of such transactions and encounters between the two facilitated a criss-cross flow of men, goods, information, knowledge, ideas, techniques and skills, thereby transforming and shaping societies. India has a long history of nomads and transient groups who sustained themselves either as foragers, pastoralists or peripatetics.

According to Casimir and Rao (2003: 221), mobility was present in ancient India as an “institutionalized delocalization” and there were “zones of interaction, of cross-cutting networks” and several criss-crossing categories of “settled” and “wandering” groups, whereby the forests and savannas symbolized the ambivalence of such zones that created new hybrids. However, as time passed, mobility—which had been imbued with a sense of fluidity, despatialized cultural flows and diasporic hybridity—was replaced by territorial attachments and filled boundaries with emotions of security, surveillance, belonging, possessiveness, enclosure, entitlement and exclusion, as we shall see in the next section.<sup>13</sup>

### MICROPOLITICS AND THE THREAT OF MOBILITY: CRIMINALIZING AND DISCIPLINING MOBILISTS IN EAST AND WEST

The ideology of mobility for men and women in east and west was premised on nature/culture, or inside/outside dichotomy, which later became one of the theoretical foundations of contemporary anthropology and the nucleus of gender studies today. Viewed on the nature/culture axis then, mobilists par excellence, such as nomads and Gypsies, belonged to nature or outside since they believe in a philosophy of deterritorialization and a mobile existence.

The image of the nomad with his association with homelessness and rootlessness signified spatial errancy and barbarism in many parts of the world. In China the Confucians simply despised the barbarian nomads, considering them incapable of following a civilized way of life and often included them in a register of disasters that included cholera and plague (Khazanov 1983: 2). According to the Bible, nomads were seen as savage and wild and therefore as having a particular destiny, a means through which God could chastise different peoples. The dubious lineage of the nomad was traced back to the biblical figures of Cain and Ham.<sup>14</sup>

Views and opinions about the alterity of ambulants and transients were also being expressed overtly in the public sphere through writings and popular culture, such as plays, songs and rogue fictions in the Elizabethan period, including a genre of literature called *picaresque* in Spain (Cresswell 2006: 12). For a very small period in the Middle Ages, to be without place, both socially and geographically, meant being placed outside the obligations of place and roots. A seething fear of vagabonds, immigrants and itinerants preoccupied Medieval authorities, which coalesced into the Great Witch Hunt in Europe (Federici 2004: 177). Federici attributes this administrative scare to the Enclosure movement, capitalist accumulation and a price revolution, which finally led to the pauperization, criminalization and persecution of the working class, including the Gypsies, nomads and vagabonds. These mobile communities were now being seen as anti-colonial rebels and symbolized the “world proletariat” (Ibid.: 11).

The premodern world was one of security within relatively small groups of stable people, whereas mobility meant existing on the margins (as cited in Cresswell 2006). With the onset of the nineteenth century in Europe a strong hatred for ambulators, who formed a loose mass of “cultural troublemakers”, was gathering momentum. Increasingly, “mobility began to ‘fall outside normal’ as sedentary sites became authoritative locations for authentic identities” (Ludden 2003: 1063–64). McVeigh (1997) analysed these feelings as sedentarism, which he called “the roots of anti-nomadism” (p. 7). In this connection, Liisa Malkki (as cited in Cresswell 2001) argues that notions of identities rooted in the home soil are profoundly metaphysical and coins the phrase “sedentary metaphysics” in her writing on refugees to denote an incessant desire to divide the world into clearly bounded territorial units, assuming moral and logical primacy of fixity in space and place. She espouses that fixed, bounded and rooted conceptions of culture and identity are linked to particular ways of thinking, which are themselves sedentary. In such thinking, homelessness is a serious threat

to moral behaviour and mobility an assumed threat to the rooted, moral and authentic existence of place.

Nomads also represent chaos as a result of a fracturing of class lines and regional loyalties. A nomad supposedly breaks the continuum of culture perceived as roots and traditions and disrupts both. As Cresswell (2006) maintains, “It is not just a case of fixity against flow or place against mobility, but of ordering and taming mobilities by placing one against another—by producing some mobilities that are ideologically sound and others that are suspect.” (p. 58).

In the official registers of the state, certain mobilities tantamount to the production of ‘pathological’ mobilities and are imbued with abjectness, purposelessness and criminality, which the regime tries to control through state surveillance and states of exception. Mobility was associated with anonymity and mobile groups and other deterritorialized groups and communities raised moral panic and restlessness within the rank and file of administration. A new ‘degeneration theory’ was promulgated in France in the 1890s, according to which a new class of ‘threatening people’ or ‘*classes dangereuses*’—which included riff-raff like vagabonds, gypsies, lepers, beggars, prostitutes, eunuchs, and nomads—began to be seen as socially unproductive, potential rebels, criminals and as vestiges of the system. In France this obsession with a new criminal class was reflected in the writings of Durkheim (*Le Suicide*) and in popular French literature like that of Balzac, Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*), Mercier, Restif de la Bretonne and Eugene Sue, among others.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mobility and vagrancy of any kind was construed as wanderlust and viewed as spatial errancy. There was a growing fear of customary strangers and street entertainers, peddlers, other itinerants and ambulatory groups were viewed as disloyal bands of anti-capitalist rebels who had “criminal propensities” (Dirks 2001). Meanwhile, radical socio-political churning in Europe and England unleashed new societal relations and forces of production that created sharp societal cleavages and upheavals. As a result, new kinds of criminal activity and crimes against property in Europe and England and their colonies became a common strategy to fight impoverishment and dispossession. The subversive potential of mobile people sounded an existential threat for Empires, kingdoms and principalities and soon mobility in itself became a criminal act in Europe and England. Moreover, nomads and mobile communities in the colonies were suspected of carrying rebellious ideas, fomenting mutiny and posing a hindrance to the Empire’s

commercial interests. Surveillance and governmentality over bodies and the movement of mobile communities were enforced, which also had contagious effects in the colonies, including in India.

In India a regressive outlook on nomadism and mobile communities resulted in the introduction of the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) XXVII of 1871, according to which crime and genetics were entwined and mobility became a criminal act. The, so-called, Criminal Castes and Tribes were later known as Denotified Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) or *Vimukta Jatis*.<sup>15</sup> The CTA was a watershed in the definition of crime and criminality and resulted in criminalizing approximately 200 forest communities, nomadic and tribal groups of India (Radhakrishna 2001).

Though the mobility of the ambulants was viewed as suspect and criminal, and nomadism was labelled as erroneous, pathological and unlawful, mobility and its various forms attracted researchers, which has led to a separate branch of study called nomadology. Today, we have two seminal texts on nomadism from both east and the west, namely Rahul Sankrityayan's *Ghumakkar Śāstra* (or *The Wanderer's Manual*) (1948) and Giles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Nomadology* (1987). The last section discusses some of the similarities and key issues raised in these two treatises, particularly with respect to ambulants' relationships with the state, economy, polity and modernity.

### GHUMAKKARĪ OR NOMADISM IN EAST AND WEST: A COMPARISON OF *GHUMAKKAR ŚĀSTRA* AND *NOMADOLOGY*

*All things considered there are only two kinds of men in the world—those that stay at home and those that do not.* (Kipling, as cited in Chatwin 1987: 220)

*There is no happiness for the man who does not travel. Living in the society of men, the best man becomes a sinner. For Indira is the friend of the traveller. Therefore wander!* (Aitareya Brāhmana, as cited in Chatwin: 200)

The notion of nomadism as a cultural phenomenon and as a form of social and spatial practice has existed all over the world for millennia. However, its theorization and its elaboration as a treatise and as a political tool of subversion were rendered possible only in the fourteenth century when Ibn Khaldun (2005) used the figure of a nomad to understand mobility as a central feature of human life. Khaldun was concerned with human nature, and the ways in which mobility and labour become the axis mundi for human beings.

While Khaldun's notion of nomadism was elaborated and theorized in technical detail by way of infrapolitics, stratagems, tactics, manoeuvres and by nomad-state encounters in the twentieth century by Deleuze and Guattari, it was Sankrityayan who elucidated its historical roots and cultural nodes, as well as the practical and sociological aspects of a nomadic lifestyle. Further, Sankrityayan informs the reader about the virtues of a free-floating disposition that is complemented by discovery, new friendships and ideational breakthroughs in the course of a nomadic journey. However, Sankrityayan and Deleuze and Guattari also assert the valour, strength and advantages of a nomadic lifestyle.

Rahul Sankrityayan or Kedārñāth Pāndey (born 9 April 1893) as he was known during childhood days was a multi-faceted personality, a true Renaissance Man and an organic intellectual.<sup>16</sup> Due to his eminence as a polyglot and a polymath, he was given the honorary title of *Mahā Paṇḍit* (Greatest Scholar). Besides his credentials and prowess as an Indologist, poet and biographer who spoke about his own private self while recounting his travels, he was also exalted as a *ghumakkar-rāj* (king of wanderers) and acclaimed as the Father of Hindi Travelogues. Sankrityayan was also a distinguished grammarian, philosopher and lexicographer with an avid interest in Tibetology, drama, folklore, science and nomadism. In an eternal quest to get to the roots of sublime truth, he experimented with many religious faiths during different phases of his life, during which he became an ascetic and *bhikkhu*, a wanderer, an Arya Samajist, a secularist, a political activist and a Buddhist who eventually embraced Marxist Socialism. Above all, Sankrityayan was a freethinking cultural nationalist at heart with strong views on varied aspects of nomadism, nation and nationalism. Soon enough, his opinions on *Bhārtīyatā* (Indianness), “cultural primordialism” and pride in national identity, compelled him to demand an Indianizing Islam and to make Hindi the national language, for which he was dismissed from the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Chudal 2016).

*Ghumakkar Śāstra* is a manual on nomadism in the real sense of the word. It makes the case for the importance of a wandering life and offers guidelines on the dos and don'ts of nomadism and this kind of wandering lifestyle. According to Sankrityayan, the aim of the guidebook is to “identify, develop and guide nomads”, both men and women, and to combine the practical aspects of nomadism, its advantages and relationships, with different aspects of life. *Ghumakkar Śāstra* is divided into 15 chapters and covers a wide gamut of issues, such as the curiosity surrounding nomadism, education, independence, art and craft, backward and nomadic castes and women nomads. The treatise further tries to explore the relationship

between religion and nomadism and to analyse other themes like love, philosophy of death, writing and painting, memory and aimlessness, and to establish their correlation with nomadism. According to Chudal, *ghumakkari* as described by Sankrityayan can also be set off against the modern notion of tourism (ibid.: 56).

Being a compulsive traveller who always preferred being mobile, Sankrityayan never stayed in any one place for long as he was always drawn to explore and experience new societies, people and circumstances. He strongly believed that *ghumakkars* had created the world and were its pride and he identified curiosity as the tour de force of nomadism or wandering. Sankrityayan put nomadism on the highest pedestal among all vocations as, according to him, only a nomad is capable of thinking the best of humanity and society. He further states that the primitive man was a nomad par excellence who was free from the fetters of home and hearth and mundane duties and who roamed and traversed the earth unhindered, constantly, on the move depending on the season. To qualify as a nomad Sankrityayan set forth some basic rules and guidelines, the most important of which was the lack of romantic attachments either in the form of marriage or love affairs. This was followed by indifference to family life, by belonging to a particular age bracket (between 16–18 and 23–24) and having the equivalence of a high-school education to acquire a basic knowledge of history, geography and mathematics, besides learning English, Russian, Chinese and French.

According to Sankrityayan, Charles Darwin occupies an unparalleled position in modern science as not only did he discover evolution and the development of mankind but he also helped other scientific disciplines to prosper. Sankrityayan maintained that this was possible due to Darwin's nomadic proclivity and mobile life and it was the likes of Columbus and Vasco da Gama who, as men of extraordinary league, showed the path of progress to western civilization and constructed today's world. Extolling the nomadic caravans that criss-crossed the length and breadth of this world, Sankrityayan opines that if mankind had not taken to nomadism and travelled to different places, humanity would not have reached the level it has attained today. While saying this, he also accepts the many instances of wars and bloody conflicts among the ancient nomads, such as the Aryans, Shakas and Huns, and more prominently by the Mongols, who invented gunpowder, paper, cannons, the printing press and spectacles, which fuelled the Scientific Revolution in the western hemisphere.

However, Sankrityayan laments the fact that the shrunken worldviews of those Asians who forgot the nomadic religion forbade them from hoist-



ing their flag on the “New World”, especially the Americas. According to him, for two centuries Australia was an unoccupied land but the two mighty and populous civilizations of the east who were weighted down by limited resources, namely China and India, did not care to hoist their flags in Australia. He says that today the doors are shut to Asians but two centuries back it could have been under our control. Further, Sankrityayan claims that both India and China were deprived of the natural bounty and unlimited land resources due to their apathy and oblivious nature and disinterestedness towards nomadic religion.

Sankrityayan opines that those groups, communities and religions that embraced nomadism enjoyed the fruits from all quarters and those who resigned from nomadic religion and neglected it for almost seven centuries compelled us to be treated as unwanted on the world stage. Most religious masters, heads and preachers have led nomadic lives but it was Buddha, the nomad-king who outshone everyone else and excelled in humility, thought and praxis, mind and logic, who from the very inception preached nomadism and a wandering lifestyle to his disciples. His clarion call “*Charath Bikkhvey! Chharikam*” or “Dear monks, practice *ghumakkari*” encouraged many to become religious nomads and roam different parts of the world while spreading the idea of a greater India. According to Sankrityayan, we had a nomad par excellence in Buddha only because there was pressure from other nomads for two centuries before Buddha arrived on the earth. During that time, both men and women displayed their talents by roaming freely across India.

According to Sankrityayan, nomadic religion gives equal space and rights to women and men, unlike Brahmanism, which is governed by gender and caste biases. He further explicates and opines that men created fetters and socio-cultural hurdles for women as they wanted to get rid of women nomads. For Sankrityayan, Buddha is the supreme being who always encouraged both men and women to lead nomadic lives. According to him, if women want to excel in this world and do something for the upliftment of the individual and society, then they should accept this religion with open arms. Sankrityayan saw strong interconnections between nomadism and religion and hold up such travellers as Marco Polo, Hsuan Tsang and Fa-Hien as examples of remarkable nomads. Sankrityayan opines that nomadism suppresses and buries differences of caste, gender, ethnicity and religion and asserts that Buddhism is the best religion for a nomad due to its non-belief in the caste system.

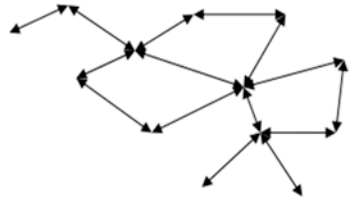
While Sankrityayan spoke of the virtues of nomadic life and its interconnections with nationalism, citizenship, religion, love and gender equity, Deleuze and Guattari engage with the nature of the nomad–state relationship and the forms of these encounters. According to them, although a nomad was marginalized and oppressed by the “state apparatus” formed by the king and the priest, the nomad used “nomad science” and its “war machine” to fight the state and its army which was equipped with “royal/state science”. For Deleuze, the nomads form the packs or bands or groups of the “rhizome” type, as opposed to the “arborescent” type that centres around organs of power. In other words, the state becomes the sole principle that separates the former (i.e. the rebel subjects who are consigned to the state) from becoming consenting subjects (i.e. those who rally to its form of their own accord).

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that nomads “distribute themselves in a smooth/open space and occupy, inhabit and hold that space which is their territorial principle.” They assert that this nomad space is indefinite and non-communicating and marked only by traits that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 380). According to them, the nomad has a territory, speed and infinite patience, and uses locations to define customary paths while going from one point to another, representing them with habits and territories. Deleuze and Guattari add that a nomad is concerned with the trajectory whereby the route and trail is crucial and is in itself an objective. Deleuze calls the life of a nomad an intermezzo, so much so that “even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them” (Ibid.: 419) According to Deleuze, “the nomad is ‘deterritorialized’ par excellence since he doesn’t have reterritorialization” (Ibid.: 421) meaning that it does not entail a return to a previous situation or a reinstalment of the same. A nomad for all practical purposes is a true global citizen and an ambassador of cosmopolitanism.

Nomads are different from migrants as, in the case of latter, there is reterritorialization after displacement. Migrants go from place to place and slip back into the ordered space of arrival. The mapping of nomadism as differentiated from migration in terms of its points/nodes/paths/routes has been shown by Kaluweit (n.d.: 6) in the diagram on the right, which shows the interconnected trajectories that a nomad takes to arrive at a particular point.

The two principal metaphysical ways of viewing the world according to Malkki (as cited in Cresswell 2001) are *sedentary metaphysics* and *nomadic*

*metaphysics*. Both conceptions involve mobility, spatial order and place. Kabachnik (2009) points out that sedentarist metaphysics is the “hegemonic norm and is seen as natural and taken for granted” which sees mobility through the lens of place, rootedness, spatial order and belonging. From a



sedentary perspective, nomadism is about moving, about routes rather than roots, and is not only about corporeal travel, but also about emotional and relational mobility (Kenrick and Clark 1999: 29). Sedentarization as a dominant, ethnocentric instrument of power belongs to a realm of what Lefebvre calls “‘dominated’ space’, a ‘site of hegemonic forces’ and entails exercising authority through and across space. Mobility, in this formulation, is seen as morally and ideologically suspect, a by-product of a world arranged through place and spatial ordering. Nomadic metaphysics puts mobility first, has little time for notions of attachment to place, and revels in notions of flow, flux and dynamism; while place is portrayed as stuck in the past, overly confining and possibly reactionary. In both cases the moral geographies of place and mobility interact to inform ontology, epistemology, politics, practice and material culture. The drifter, the shiftless, the refugee and the asylum seeker have been inscribed with an immoral intent and as defying the responsibilities of citizenship.

However, there are issues of propriety and limitations with nomadology as a sub-discipline, as perceived by Deleuze and Guattari. Shihade (2015) points out the rupture in the meaning of nomad given by Deleuze and Guattari as it is confined to the relationship between the individual and the state. According to him, “Deleuze and Guattari’s romanticized version of the nomad either as a ‘violent conqueror or a world traveller’ erases the Natives who are excluded from such narratives as well as their history and experience due to the violent western/European mobility/nomadology” (p. 6). He also alludes to the fact that for Khaldun, the Arabic term for a nomad was *badawi/badiv* (Bedouin/Bedouins), which is primarily an economic category and a norm rather than cultural trait and refers to a mode of production or the way an individual or a group makes living by raising animals and farming (Ibid.). Khaldun adds that the nature of that work requires both rootedness and mobility and that nomadism is more about labour and sustenance. Shihade rightfully claims that nomadism is a Eurocentric concept that has been used in the western/European

settler colonial adventure to argue against native/indigenous claims to territory. If they are portrayed as nomads who do not belong to a specific place, then they have no right to resist the settler colonial project.

## CONCLUSION

Mobility sways between the binaries of civilization, progress and modernity on the one hand and rootlessness, savagery and criminalization on the other. In the west mobility has been a cursed enterprise ever since Biblical times and posits itself as a counterculture. In the east, especially in India, mobility was entwined with caste and the associated rules of purity and pollution. The act of mobility upsets and unsettles the logic of structure, border, territory, sovereignty and nationalism and in certain cases, as in India, it was viewed as a criminal act as described in the Criminal Tribes Regulation Act XXVII of 1871. However, in many cases the ability to be mobile is treated as an alternative lifestyle and seen as a mark of status and therefore respected.

We have already seen the contradictions of globalization wherein, on the one hand, it creates *network societies* that coexist in a *space of flows*, while, on the other, new borders and new kinds of governmentality and surveillance mechanisms are deployed to guard national frontiers that defeat the very idea of mobility. The paradoxical nature of mobility and prospects as an object of knowledge led futurists, nomadologists and mobilists to theorize, analyse and predict the future of mobility.

The history of mobility and mobile communities is old and, in the event of contact with sedentary communities, has not only led to violence but also zones of reciprocity in which hybridity of various kinds were encouraged and celebrated. However, mobility also gave a fillip to slavery and colonialism in the east and became an organizing concept in law, policy and other regulatory regimes. Nevertheless, both mobility and territoriality or sedentism shared a symbiotic relationship and complemented each other. This dialectical affinity gave rise to nation states that have today become containers of multiple modernities and postmodern creole cultures. The “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) of the twenty-first century with its *time-space compression* and deterritorialization of trade and commerce and of education and livelihood opportunities heralded what is known as cultures of mobility. Today, we have a new generation of neo-nomads, new age travellers and travelling communities who are reinventing the idea of community and who celebrate mobile cultures and alternate living.

Mobility is an inescapable reality of modern times, so much so that speed and mobility have turned into a fetish, a consumable and one of the ways to engage and relate with the world in order to comprehend and unravel its secrets. Mobility constructs identities and has been responsible for the germination of identitarian politics, as in the case of Gypsies, migrants, refugees and diasporic communities. Given a Brownian Motion in social sciences in terms of the new objects of analysis and their ever-expanding and shifting definitions, methods and theories will also need to brace up to keep up with the new forms of mobility, and new pervasive modes of mobilized social inclusion/exclusion.

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## NOTES

1. This chapter has been possible due to my own interest and curiosity about mobility and nomadism which is reflected in my doctoral work that focuses on a mobile cluster of street entertainers popularly called *Nats* and who are now into intergenerational sex work in Bihar.
2. In everyday parlance, mobility and movement are used synonymously but have different meanings. According to Cresswell (2006), movement is mobility abstracted from the context of power or a general fact of displacement of a body which is divested of its context, history and the differentiation between movement and mobility. In other words, mobility is movement with meaning. For details see Cresswell (2006), pp. 2–3.
3. Scholars like Bauman (2000) argue that mobility differentiates the human condition rather than unifying it and therefore it is not universal. Moreover, mobility is a matter of choice for some but fate for others thus pointing towards different social topologies of mobility. Also, mobility can be for different purposes, for example, there are elite forms of movement—such as for business, holidays or diplomatic journeys, which are largely shown in a positive light in contemporary societies—while it is a way of life for nomads and Gypsies.
4. In a paper titled “Mobility as Resistance”, Cresswell (1993) draws attention to the way the author Jack Kerouac uses mobility as a symbol of a countercultural resistance in 1950s America in the novel *On the Road*.
5. Movements refer strictly to a geographic dimension which occurs between an origin and one or several destinations that are identifiable on a map, and are measured according to flow forms.

6. Network capital is explained here as the interrelationship between social relations and social support that makes resources available through interpersonal contacts and ties.
7. According to Bauman (2000), such places are emic, phagic, non-places and empty places.
8. According to Urry (2007), there are five highly interdependent “mobilities” that form and reform social life, bearing in mind the massive inequalities in structured access to each of these, which points to its differentiated nature. These include mobility of objects, corporeal mobility, imaginative mobility, virtual mobility and communicative mobility. Leopoldina Fortunati and Sakari Taipale proposed an alternative typology taking the individual and the human body as a point of reference. They differentiate between “macro-mobilities” (consistent physical displacements), “micro-mobilities” (small-scale displacements), “media mobility” (mobility added to the traditionally fixed forms of media) and “disembodied mobility” (the transformation in the social order). According to Paul Virilio (1995), there are three kinds of mobility related to transportation, transmission and transplant.
9. Translated as *The Wanderer’s Manual* or a treatise on nomadism, *Ghumakkay Śāstra* was written by Rahul Sankrityayan in 1948. In this chapter however, wandering and nomadism have been taken as co-terminus so as to see the differences or similarities between the two forms of mobility.
10. Mobility has a positive and negative side with respect to the biological functioning of human beings. It is assumed that in the body, the sperm’s mobility is coded as masculine and active, whereas the egg is passive, relatively immobile and feminine.
11. For details, see Cresswell (2006), p. 9.
12. The third culture is a hybrid cultural space created by the gathering of foreigners living or working abroad and from the intersection of different cultures. It is an interstitial culture, operating above the limits of territorial cultures, made up of neither the first (home) culture, nor of the second (host) culture.
13. For more, see Rana, S., 2016. “Nomads”, *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*. Eds. Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
14. For details, see Paul Harrison. A similar argument relating mobility with colonialism and sedentism with progress and modernity is observed in Seuffert (2011).
15. Free from the fetters of caste.
16. According to Chudal, Sankrityayan experimented with many religions and wore his robes accordingly and therefore was also known by other names like Baba Ram Udhar Das.

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# From Ecological Ontology to Social Ecology: John Dewey, Radhakamal Mukerjee, and Interscalar Ethics

*Betsy Taylor and Herbert G. Reid*

## ETHICS, POWER, AND PATHOLOGIES OF SCALE

Dangerous evils of our time are linked with pathologies of scale. Global markets in labor and capital overwhelm democratic controls at local and national scales. Injustice is ever more deeply spatialized. To understand these pathologies of scale, this chapter enquires into the ontology of the interscalar. We argue for an ecological understanding of human and natural being, in which diverse spatio-temporal scales intertwine to generate a transformative fabric of interscalar co-being. To do this, we put the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee into dialogue with the American philosopher John Dewey. Both thinkers made original contributions which can help build a transformative ontology of the interscalar for the twenty-first century. We call for theoretical genealogies to re-embodiment and replace social theory in our actual lives—lives embedded in, and emergent from, ecological being that is complex, historical, paradoxical, and dynamic in its scaling.

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271

Dangerous evils of our time are linked with pathologies of *scale*. On the surface, this has to do with the expansion and mobility of vast forces on a global scale. Runaway human production of greenhouse gases is a global threat to the ecosystemic fundamentals of food production, biodiversity, human security, and democratic change—with concatenating, multi-scalar effects which far exceed our scientific, cultural, and moral imagination. Global markets in labor and capital overwhelm democratic controls on local and national scales. Injustice is ever more deeply spatialized. Some regions and neighborhoods become sacrifice zones where toxins and externalities are dumped, and where people suffer erratic and disabling waves of overwork or no work. Meanwhile, everywhere in the world, new and old elites are increasingly able to seize new global resources to stake meritocratic and/or cronyistic claims to global labor and investment markets. But emerging and established elites usually ride paradoxical geographies. On the one hand, they can cultivate a mobile cosmopolitanism geared to global competitiveness and consumption. On the other, global power and wealth of all sorts increasingly rests on violently privileged enclaves—as elites barricade themselves and their families in high-status places, shopping malls and schools that groom bodies and minds for global mobility and consumerist status regimes, while ignoring the plight of immobilized, immiserated others and growing inequalities.

In this chapter, we argue that these pathologies of scale require careful theoretical inquiry into the *ontology of the interscalar*. We argue for an ecological understanding of human and natural beings, in which diverse spatio-temporal scales intertwine to generate a transformative fabric of interscalar co-being. To do this we retrieve some neglected genealogies and debates of social theory. Specifically, we put the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee into dialogue with the American philosopher John Dewey. Both thinkers made original contributions which can help build a transformative ontology of the interscalar for the twenty-first century. In our book *Recovering the Commons: Democracy, Place, and Global Justice*, we argue that much of social theory has made a wrong turn in the last several decades, too often tending to reinforce rather than engage the globalizing knowledge regimes and global elitism of transnational corporate states (Reid and Taylor 2010). We call for different theoretical genealogies to help us reembody and replace social theory in our actual lives—lives embedded in, and emergent from, ecological being that is complex, historical, paradoxical, and dynamic in its scaling.

Before we can engage these two thinkers, we will briefly set the stage by asking three questions. First, what are the pathologies of scale in the

twenty-first century? Second, in what ways is social theory complicit in these pathologies, rendering it unable to contribute to democratic agency projects that are trying to institute alternatives? Third, what social theoretic notions can help us understand a just, sustainable, and prosperous rescaling of our economies, politics, and societies? Of particular urgency is the challenge to understand how people move away from reactionary, defensive “pseudo-populisms” to become participants in a new translocal and transnational politics of just transitions.

### EMERGING PATHOLOGIES OF SCALE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At first glance, our collective problem seems to be that global forces have slipped out of the control of democratic forces at other levels. If this is so, then the solution is to equalize and realign the powers of local, regional, national, and global forces. In this understanding of the interscalar, the different levels are rather like boxes, or vertebrae, in which stability comes from the vertical alignment of discrete and relatively equalized entities.

But let us look at a recent article by Swapna Banerjee-Guha titled “Contradictions of ‘development’ in contemporary India” (Banerjee-Guha 2011). She argues that there are interconnections between several different geographies of oppression built into the models of development that enthrall current government planning in India. She sees similar patterns in: the top-down seizing of tribal lands so they can be leased to global mining corporations; the creation of Special Economic Zones which enclose biodiverse rich coastal areas to allow global chemical production centers; the seizure of commons and multi-use land for specialized hi-tech corporate activities under almost total control by transnational corporations. She says that a “typical neoliberal construction of space, place and scale is taking place in India that is reconstructing a new geography of centrality and marginality.” An image of development is being projected onto special areas which are conjured as glamorous openings onto smooth, vast, and wealthy circuits of global production, capital flows, and consumerist prestige symbols. On the surface, such a neo-liberalized utopia seems to be a seamless and lavish space which reaches strongly into the future. But, underneath this apparent expansiveness, these new economic spaces create a geography of exclusion and constriction. In reality, Banerjee-Guha says, this is “enclave development, once a mainstay of the colonial state” (see also Ferguson on enclave development, Ferguson 2006). Despite the claims to represent the big, the stable, and the new,

these are spaces which insert themselves precariously and violently into the thick matrix of existing economies—by displacement, pollution, and dispossession of many and jobs for few. The negative effects of this neo-liberal development model are starkly evident in post-1970s USA, which is still facing escalating inequality, chronic structural unemployment, decay of public goods and services, civic alienation, and massive corporate intervention in government and media. (For discussion of the historical roots of neo-liberal globalization in the nineteenth-century rise of corporate power in the USA, see Reid and Taylor 2010, Chaps. 2–4.)

Ontologically, then, the spatio-temporal patterns of neo-liberalism are contradictory—a jumble of discrete space-times which have fundamentally different logics but somehow co-exist in the same space and time. What is called global economic space is almost like a *trompe l'œil* painting, which is designed to trick the eye. Look at it from one ontological perspective and it is an endless, flat, open, Cartesian field of market rationality in which anything can be exchanged according to universal principles that transcend the particularities of place and time. Look at it from another perspective and it is a violent, highly localized congeries of embattled places—with elites barricading themselves off with the wealth seized from erratic global traffic, while neo-liberal “place-managers” groom their locales, resources, and peoples for sale in the highly uneven and foggy terrains of global production and waste disposal regimes (for more on place management, see Reid and Taylor 2010, 35, 49, 162).

### COMPLICITY OF SOCIAL THEORY IN PATHOLOGIES OF THE INTERSCALAR

One response to this curious piling together of heterogeneous, contradictory space-times in our era has been the postmodern or post-structural focus on randomness, disjuncture, flatness, circulation, and unstable flicking between aggregation and dissolution. Doreen Massey describes place primarily as a constant movement of social/economic/political processes that entangle and disentangle in contingent nexuses that defy durable description (Massey 1994). Deleuze and Guattari build an elaborate ontology of capitalist space-times as constant decentering movements, generating rapidly nomadic but unstable assemblages, striated space, and plateau zones (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). The notion of governmentality was something of a side comment by Foucault, but it has been seized upon and widely redeployed as a way to understand the State under neo-liberalism as

a “code for conduct” which, like a successful virus, has a wide and flat circulatory transmission, shaping life and thought through horizontal capillary movements (Foucault 1991 [1978]).<sup>1</sup> As we explore in detail in Chap. 7 of *Recovering the Commons*, this fascination with flatness has led social theory into problematic cul-de-sacs where epistemological courage fails:

In reaction against entangled hierarchies of knowledge, state, market, and empire, some social theory ... has tried to dismantle levels within epistemology and ontology, for fear of meta-levels that purport to control ... “lower” levels. Closely related to this are efforts to dismantle the notion of the subject out of fear that a notion of unitary selfhood requires the perfect adequation of ... selves that author themselves from some Archimedean vantage point like an ideal cartographer, and selves that can be known because they are adequated to their objects. (166)

Another problematic trend in social theory has been a tendency to let divisions between scales become sites for projecting problematic dualisms. For instance, there is a recurrent tendency in the work of David Harvey to equate the local/translocal divide with the difference between agency/structure and particular/universal. Despite his best efforts, he ends up seeing the translocal as the scale at which vision and action can generate the broad solidarities that are needed and are able to engage the underlying causal mechanism of oppression. For Harvey, the “militant particularisms” of grassroots struggle might supply the energy of solidarity but not its forms of understanding (Harvey 1996, Chap. 2). Conversely, it is undeniable that many in the grassroots struggle have a libertarian (especially in the USA) or anarchist tendency to see the local as the only reliable scale at which agency can be democratic—so that the local becomes a literal geographic boundary around concerns, culture, social relations, and organizational structure. While we follow Dewey in privileging the local as the spring of democracy, it is not in this sense of local *bounded*, monadic or autarchic ecolocalism. As we argue in our book, Dewey’s view of the Local as “ultimate universal” has to be understood in terms of both his ecological ontology and his theory of democratic culture (Reid and Taylor 2010, 121–128).

### OPENING UP PLACED EXPERIENCE AND THE INTERSCALAR

In *Recovering the Commons*, we argue that powerful ontologies for interscalar transformation are emerging in the global justice movement. We call for an intercultural, transversal conversation between activists and social

theorists, and between Global South and North—to clarify and share ways of understanding, acting, and being.

We define the stuff of human being as “body~place~commons”:

subjectivity as intersubjectivity arising in embodied practices in concrete places within heterogeneous temporalities of the ecological commons. *To be a creature—human or nonhuman—is to be hinged between one’s own embodiment and the particularity of places that accrue the grounds for life from unruly and ruly cycles of interdependence, mortality, and nationality of the ecological commons.* Our being is not “in” us, like something poured in a bag of skin, nor is it “outside” our skin in signs, economies, machines, or powers. The stuff of our being arises as dynamic infrastructures of forms of life that we share with nonhuman creatures—generative matrices of co-constitution among particular bodies within the chaotic piling up of particular conditions of ecological relations within particular places. (5)

This results in a complex and heterogeneous ontology of the interscalar. For one thing, the constitutive logic is essentially habitational and ecological—in the sense that creatures and places sediment out forms of life that have remarkable durability and continuity. These forms of life are built over long periods of time and allow security within habitational limits—as well as unique and emergent kinds of creativity that can be resilient and innovative in the face of change. This involves both organic and inorganic processes. For instance, the ways in which a watershed develops has many of the feedback patterns of life processes. Therefore, the feedback interactions between climate, rainfall, soil composition, and the emergence of a water commons for multiple species shows a certain continuity and durability of being, as a complex adaptive system which is partly biological and partly inorganic. A watershed, like life forms, is also strongly path dependent—once water flows through the earth, it cuts out certain paths on which later waterflows tend to depend. Therefore, unique forms emerge from past history. All of this means that there is a synergistic rather than dualistic relationship between continuity and contingency of form. Contrary to the postmodern/post-structuralist tendency to see contingency as antithetical to holism, integrity, and durability of form, this ontological stuff sees them as emergent from, and embedded in, contingency, creativity, and unruliness.

But, most importantly for this chapter, subjectivity as body~place~commons has powerfully architectonic ontological qualities. This is the basis for the bigness of the scaling of this ontology. The very form and

rhythms of our bodies are the product of millennia of co-constitution between creature and habitat. This is a habitational logic that is thoroughly cultural and natural. Our basic posture is within a world that allows the world to imbue us with the horizontal dimension of our possible being, as well as the earth grounds of the tacit given. This is a necessary and non-dualistic strife between sky and earth, which provides the unconscious habits of embodied being and our conscious creation of cosmos—as a space from which our imagination can chart uniquely new paths in uncertain worlds. We argue in Chap. 5 of *Recovering the Commons* that our biggest philosophic and moral ideas arise from the immanent forms of the praxical architectonics of body~place~commons. This means that cosmos is immanent in, and emergent from, the most creaturely forms of life. The biggest moral questions—such as the distinction between friend and enemy—ride on habitational logics which delineate the boundaries of one’s world (defining what is “inside” and what is “outside” the world that constitutes us, and which we constitute).

This makes for what we call a “folded ontology” of scale rather than the post-structural “flat ontology.” It is a heterogeneous and topological scaling. Cosmos is both the farthest reach of the horizon and also intimately within our nearest habitats and habits. It is praxeomorphic, not cartographic (although we might make cartographic representations of it). Public space is understood to be emergent from civic and environmental commons. The civic and environmental commons is understood as that concatenation of (human and non-human) flows of production, reproduction, and, social and ecological reproduction *in which communities (human and non-human) discover and create continuities of life*. These continuities are not holisms which impose a coherent script upon social and natural ecologies. Rather, they arise from partial and uncertain orchestrations of multiple material practices by creatures anticipating futures, based on habituated pasts, hedged by risk and patchy knowledge. In other words, we propose a praxeomorphic causality,<sup>2</sup> arguing that the legitimating, constitutive frameworks of public space arise from *the shaping power of the embodied, material practices of everyday life* on imagination, philosophy, identity, affective attachments, and capabilities.

This ontology of the interscalar allows for a non-dualistic relationship between the actual/ideal and between the natural/cultural. Both Mukerjee and Dewey have made important contributions in this area, with their lifelong interest in understanding values as emergent from, and embedded in, the pragmatics of actual life and action, but as also having an ideal



dimension. In our ecological understanding of human being as body~place~commons, we understand human being in the world as a very complex “kiltering” of disparate spatio-temporal rhythms—in which the habitational logics of material and social production and reproduction are orchestrated in an ongoing, unique, creative, and emergent way. The morality of this orchestration is in the conscious choices made; but it is also in our openness (collectively and individually) to the tacit dimensions of our finitude as mortal beings who are constrained, sustained, and constituted by the great cycles of the commons (ecological and civic).

For instance, it is urgent that we should let ourselves be open to the horror of the fossil fuel cycle. It takes reflexive labor of moral and scientific thought to make conscious our place in the links of the energy system—from extraction (with all its attendant displacement, ecological devastation, and labor injustice in extracting coal, oil, etc.) to transportation and use (with pollution of land and the atmospheric commons leading to climate chaos), to the spiritual consequences of our energy system (dependency on community-destroying cars and suburbanization, especially in the USA), to the political consequences (in the strong tendency towards inequality, repression, and political corruption in fossil fuel dependent regions). An ecological view of humanity, then, understands us to be embedded in given natural processes of far greater temporal and spatial reach than our individual being. However, this immanence of involuntary ecological being in our very nature is also a hinge to transcendent ideals and possibilities. In *Recovering the Commons* we speak of an ecological hermeneutics that is infused with the local and cosmic surround, one that anticipates regenerative capacities drawn from a shared earth and building on global regional endeavors instituting new solidarities. At this nexus of the environmental and civic commons, such democratic public spaces grounded in cosmogenesis retrieve (1) a holistic understanding of the Local and (2) put “places” in cosmogenic perspective, reintroducing or reaffirming the global dimension as ecological reality and possibility (cf. Reid and Taylor 2010, 214, 153).

### CLIMATE CHAOS AND THE FLIGHT FROM FINITUDE

The twenty-first century is bringing us ecological challenges that we cannot face without a more ecological understanding of humanity. This requires, first, a capacity to calibrate ideals and actuality in non-dualistic and empowering ways. Second, it requires the ability to accept our finitude as mortal creatures embedded in, and ethically responsible for, the natural commons, tending to both the inside and outside of place(s).

We live in a time of world history when the idea and reality of the Atmospheric Commons has asserted itself. Most scientists around the world are clear that the threat of anthropogenic climate change augurs the collapse of whole ecosystems, with impacts rippling across all legal and political boundaries. Already our world is beginning to be torn asunder by increasingly chaotic climate change and by globalizing forms of socio-economic inequality. For climate scientists such as James Hansen the political challenge is finding the policies that will rapidly phase out coal's carbon dioxide emissions (Hansen 2009). The most dramatic effect of what has been called "global warming," according to scientist Peter D. Ward, will be sea-level rise. This species-extinction expert argues in *The Flooded Earth* that even if we stopped all carbon dioxide emissions today, the seas will rise 3 ft by 2050 and 9 ft by 2100 (Ward 2010). One of the concerns he takes up is the impact on world agricultural yields.

In *Recovering the Commons* we mark the political and ethical challenge of food security programs for people most beset by the tsunamis of a world food crisis which could be defined as profiteering in the context of scarcity. This, however, points up the larger question of climate justice, or what for us is the compelling argument that future ecological sustainability and multilateral environmental governance require climate equity (whatever form is given to the latter). Two American scholars have noted the key 1991 contribution of the late Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain (Athanasίου and Baer 2002). Their case for "equal per capita rights to the atmospheric commons" might be said to have constituted the highest ethical standard for decarbonizing energy systems, at least alleviating the horrors facing future generations.

It is indisputable that the Global North bears greater responsibility for this ecological crisis than the Global South. This is probably not the most adequate frame for proceeding because, for one, inequality extends all the way down, shaping politics and political decisions in every nation-state, north or south. The French journalist Hervé Kempf bluntly makes the main point: the "predatory oligarchy is the main agent of the global crisis" (Kempf 2008). His view is that our present situation is in dire need of the principle "Consume less; share better." We agree, but have to note that in the USA the national oligarchy's support is deeply rooted in the corporate consumer culture. It is also the case that in the USA citizen action politics for food democracy and for decarbonizing energy systems overlap and increasingly make connections with the global justice movement. That is why a well-known ethicist such as Michael S. Northcott, instead of excoriating the "Global North," astutely focuses on ways in which the "global

market empire” structurally and pervasively impacts our stressed climate system (and more) (Northcott 2007).

But our purpose here is not to review the burgeoning scientific literature but simply to mention a few aspects that underline the global urgency of this unprecedented challenge. Nor do we intend to pursue further the global complexities of climate policy politics. However, we do want to keep contemporary questions of climate justice in mind as we devote most of our attention to two thinkers who by the middle of the twentieth century had made powerful cases for a pragmatic and hermeneutical social theory sounding earth ground and world horizon, social ecology and ecological ontology. We refer to the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968) and the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952).

### DEWEY AND MUKERJEE: REVOLUTIONARY ONTOLOGY AND SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Ramachandra Guha’s book of 2006 closes with the observation that by the middle decades of the present century intellectual and political debates will resound with clashing ideas and values about consuming less and sharing better (Guha 2006). The contributions of Dewey and Mukerjee, if understood, would facilitate such a development in both India and the United States. However, in the first decade of our century Guha found “a tremendous backlash against environmentalists” in India and a deep interest in “the successful Americanization of Indian society” (69). A *New York Times* column of the same year by Pankaj Mishra lamented that India, beset by a “culture of greed,” was putting growth ahead of morality and losing sight of the powerless and the oppressed (Mishra 2006). From Guha’s map of the “Indian road to sustainability” we learn of key ideas from Patrick Geddes and Mukerjee to Madhav Gadgil, with whom he has generated important studies of ecology and equity.

Guha’s documentary and analytical efforts make clear that Mukerjee, influenced early on by the socio-ecological approach of Geddes, founded the discipline of “social ecology.” In the years between the two world wars, Mukerjee’s work toward an integration of ecology with the social sciences was “considerably ahead of its time” (Guha 1994, 12). Mukerjee’s idea of “regional balance” issued from his deep interests in the ecological infrastructure of social life. Human action without regard for the ecological process was the path of folly and social regression. As Guha puts it, and as our own studies of Mukerjee confirm, he argued that “ecological

adjustment [must be] raised from an instinctive to an ethical plane” (Guha 2006, 46). It is in this context that Mukerjee was particularly interested in what he called “valuation,” the aspect of John Dewey’s work that seems to have been of most interest to him.

An interplay of ideas between these two thinkers may be reconstructed by giving attention to Mukerjee’s two works of the 1950s, *The Social Structure of Values* and *The Dynamics of Morals* (Mukerjee 1950, 1952). It is in these two studies that he gives attention to several of Dewey’s works. But first we want to note that in the second of these titles he says: “Social ecology is the biological aspect of ethics or evolutionary ethics.” Ecology teaches us that it is by attuning ourselves “to the social and environmental interrelations” that we can assure a sustainable world (88). As he explains in a later chapter, our “ecological relationships and cultural patterns [considered] parts of one dynamic ‘region,’ ‘field,’ ‘social and moral space’” enable us to engage problems of regional balance or unbalance (223–225).

Humanity “lives constantly in the midst of a great battle of values and ideals,” Mukerjee writes in *The Social Structure of Values*. He goes on to say that the “struggle for the higher values within the self seeking to achieve deeper and more integrated levels of experience, and the struggle for a better, juster society with more righteous social habits, customs, and laws, act and interact” (Mukerjee 1950, 146). Put another way, his view is that “valuation ...[is] the nexus of all human relations, groups and institutions” (vii). In Mukerjee’s theory each culture is “an Experiment in Value Hierarchy” (82). Mukerjee’s dialogue with Dewey is evident throughout this study (cf. pp. 12, 221, 403). Both wrote with a deep sense of what Mukerjee termed the “crisis in modern industrial civilization,” relating to “the fractionalization of self, values and society” and “the supremacy of pecuniary and instrumental” modes of consciousness (228–233).

Not surprisingly, when Mukerjee addressed an “unfortunate dualism in contemporary ethics” he turned to Dewey (Mukerjee 1952, 153). Quoting and commenting on two Dewey studies, he may be paraphrased as observing how modern capitalist economy instrumentalizes reason and value, treating moral ideals as simultaneously inept and “utopian” (152–154). Dewey’s 1925 Paul Carus lectures published as *Experience and Nature* did a remarkable job of identifying the cultural and philosophic dualisms that interfere with a stronger understanding of new place-based forms of democratic inquiry and development and their political potential (Dewey 1929 [1925]). He explains that we will not get very far if our interpretation is based on a familiar modern Western dualism

between emotion and reason, feeling and knowledge, body and mind, and nature and culture. Social scientists who allow nature only “emotional salience” for human growth would monopolize what they regard as a “scientific tradition,” but one that has roots they seldom take into account. This historical configuration of an isolated, incorporeal intellect protected from the alleged dangers of its sensorial landscape is a long story of many chapters to which we can only allude here.

Dewey (as well as Merleau-Ponty) understood that the dualism in question was bound up with a mechanistic ontology that left nature in silence. Rejecting the spectator theory of knowing, in *Quest for Certainty* he proclaimed that “Nature ... is idealizable” (Dewey 1960a [1929], 245, 302). Later, he added: “Nature and society include within themselves projection of ideal possibilities and contain the operations by which they are actualized” (306). Philosophies and religious doctrines that try to proceed on the notion of “the fixed union of the actual and ideal in Ultimate Being” make a consequential mistake. A very few years later, Dewey restated this argument in the Terry Lectures at Yale University, the basis for his book on spiritual renewal entitled *A Common Faith* (Dewey 1960a, 1960b [1934]). Instead of arguing for scientism, Dewey spoke of an “active relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name of ‘God’” (51). In calling for “the realization of distinctively religious values inherent in natural experience,” he knew full well that “the release of these values” required a challenge to a monopoly sometimes claimed by institutional religion (27–28). It is also important to understand the expansion rather than the positivization of knowledge sought by both Dewey and Mukerjee (cf. Mukerjee 1952, 213, 217). We might observe here that Dewey outlined a pragmatic spirituality as vitally important for communities striving to be democratic. We would also contend that Mukerjee’s approach to valuation in social ecology is pointed in the same direction.

When Mukerjee writes in *The Dynamics of Morals* that “Democracy is both an institution as well as a method of social action,” Dewey’s influence is unmistakable. This statement is followed by one about the “democratic ideal of equality,” which by diminishing economic insecurity and injustice fosters “cultural democracy” (390, 392). Mukerjee’s effort here is toward a theory of political obligation which includes “political obligations in the coming polity.” The prescient moral principle of an intergenerational commons is clear in his call to reconcile “the interests of unborn generations to the present society [through] wise husbandry and improvement of physical resources and technical and scientific skills ...” (395–396).

When Dewey said that “nature is idealizable,” he marked why the enclosure of the commons is such a momentous issue. Marcuse was only partly right when he said in the 1970s that nature, too, awaits the revolution. Human life, to exist, is dependent at least on limited access to the commons. Capitalist or any authoritarian appropriation of the commons is also a matter of restricting human possibilities and imposing on the Many a highly limited range of values chiefly amenable to dominant institutional forms of power. Mukerjee apparently understood with Dewey that it is values and ideals that create and bind a public together and that the big challenge for democratic communities is keeping themselves ideally present to themselves. That is very difficult when Americans are fooled by the Right’s message that the “Free Market,” that bastard offspring of the mechanistic world picture, is best left alone.

Dewey (Dewey 1929 [1925], 61), calling “every existence ... an event,” went on to view “the organism *in* nature ... as events are in history, in a moving, growing never finished process” (241). When we talk of place we mean more than a mere intersection of nature and culture but rather their chiasmic co-envelopment and ongoing temporalization, including both sedimentation and reactivation. This is why we may speak of our placed embodiment in terms of where/when temporalization of experience works as a kind of reincarnation that *finds its political ecology* by consciously reopening to and within both “commons” and “world.” An ecological hermeneutics moving between earth–ground and world–horizon illuminates and depends on landscapes co-enveloping nature and culture and their mutual reciprocities. Political theory and social ecology need ecological ontology and a post-dualist sensibility that begins in the intercorporeal field, where place and self are co-ingredients in a never finished process.

What Dewey and Mukerjee sought may be illuminated in the language of A.K. Giri. They worked toward an “ontological opening for epistemic cooperation” transcending the reifications of identity politics in recreating “civil society as a space of ethicopolitical mobilization of the subject,” the very heartbeat of transformative institutions (Giri 2002, 326–331). Democracy has a chance in this context.

As we try to show in detail in *Recovering the Commons*, in the USA the technocorporate triad of globalization/subjectivization/worldlessness undercuts the ability of potentially democratic publics to discover and identify themselves.<sup>3</sup> When post-democratic plutocracies deploy information technologies in ways that help to dematerialize the earth’s horizon

and when consumption is structured to rob the cultural present of its traces of history, the public chances of time, memory, and place serving democratic discourse and action are minimized. When an increasingly globalized inequality is smothering a commodity-saturated pluralism, it becomes farcical for intellectuals to come along and proclaim diversity-in-itself as the new democratic totality that can do without traditional concerns with equality. This may simply demonstrate that at least some of them have yet to think through the dark side of the real comforts of junior membership in the new global investor class. But there is much more involved than this suggests.

Cultural critic Mark Dery offers a fascinating view of what he calls a new “digital zeitgeist” that includes a “collective dream life ... filled with images of a better world than this, where the mind leaves the body behind like the booster stage of a rocket” (Dery 1999). Dery and others have noticed that some of the digerati hate politics and espouse a radical libertarianism that sometimes endorses both a post-national body politic and a laissez-faire economics that is given the “force of natural law by couching it in the language of chaos theory and artificial life” (256, 236–237). Global economic space and individual market mobility hover in the background. Corporate globalization from above and its particular version of the ideology of Speed is taken for granted or held to be unquestionable. Place is negative, romantic, provincial, despised—views reaffirmed in the parodies of global corporate media and its anti-historic time. What may actually be involved in the shrunken, dematerialized culture of this faction of digerati is a peculiarly postmodern trauma of displacement that has much to do with our argument for a new ontology of the interscalar. “Perhaps,” Mukerjee wondered sixty years ago, “some kind of a technological revolution, decentralization and regionalization of industry may be necessary before ... a moral change may be brought about” (Mukerjee 1952, 504). His prescience is evident as the ecological costs of global export agriculture mount and global conversations turn to “deepening” economies as a response (cf. McKibben 2007). However, forging new forms of democratic space and political action seems necessary to launch such an agenda. The emerging movement of what Roger Gottlieb calls “environmentalism as spirituality” is raising these issues (Gottlieb 2006). Hopefully, this chapter has illuminated the relevance of Dewey and Mukerjee with regard to these concerns, and their resonance with emerging projects of the global justice movement.

## NOTES

1. For instance, two excellent recent books critically engage development in the Indian context in richly historicized ethnographies—Agrawal’s *Environmentality* and Gidwani’s *Capital, Interrupted* (Agrawal 2005; Gidwani 2008). We would argue, however, that their complex ethnographic awareness of the multiple spatio-temporalities of actors and landscapes is undercut by the flattening effects of their reliance on a Foucauldian way of understanding the State.
2. We take this term from Bauman’s discussion (Bauman 1998, 27–32).
3. Our emphasis on “world” draws on Hannah Arendt’s important development of this notion. We say, “Arendt emphasizes that world is a strange mixture of history as residue from past action and history-in-the-making as sheer openness of new possibilities for action (Arendt 1958),” and we define world as “that durable architectonics of engagement that creates the background which actors need to illumine future and present as coherent settings for action, and, into which acts can transmute into remembrance (or habit) that avails past for future action” (Reid and Taylor 2010, 11).

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PART III

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Social Theory and Asian Dialogues:  
Asia, Europe and the Call of Planetary  
Conversions



# Nature, Culture and the Debate with Modernity: Critical Social Theory in Japan

*John Clammer*

The notion of critical theory in the West immediately brings to mind the work of the Frankfurt School and its many intellectual descendants; possibly also the deconstructive projects of the more politically inclined post-modernists (Baudrillard and Foucault perhaps), and the work of independent critical scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman. In this tradition, much of it rooted in Marxism and—as with both the mainstream Frankfurt thinkers and significant but more sociologically peripheral figures such as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Bruno Bettelheim—in Freudian psychoanalysis, the thrust has been the critique of mass society, its cultural productions and the mystifications, false consciousness and distortions that they create and perpetuate. This has often been accompanied by an elaboration of the class nature of capitalist industrial society and its modes of cultural production and consumption, and, for many of the central critical theory scholars, a systematic attempt to advance the so-called “Enlightenment Project”: the pursuit of rationality, democratization,

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289

social justice and progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society best perhaps summarized in the venerable slogan of the French revolution: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

But both critics of mainstream critical theory and those who have built upon its foundations, without necessarily acknowledging their debt, have also pointed out some of the gaps and silences in the classical version, including the absence of any systematic analysis of gender, race, post-colonialism, religion or that most recently discovered area of sociological enquiry, the environment. However, all of these areas as they appear in mainstream social science discourse share with classical critical theory many of its epistemological and ontological assumptions, and, it must be said, its Eurocentrism. In an era of globalization in which many forms of local knowledge compete, and in which context as Marshall Sahlins has so cogently pointed out Western knowledge is simply one form which for historical reasons (imperialism being one of the main ones) has become hegemonic (Sahlins 1996), many possible sociologies and their accompanying philosophical anthropologies are conceivable. So there is no a priori reason to suppose that Western sociology, together with its particular philosophical underpinnings, is necessarily universal.

If this is the case, then it requires us as an act of intellectual honesty to explore the possibility that there might be other sociologies, and other forms of critical theory, rooted in quite different intellectual and historical soils. The very European (and specifically Central European) origins of critical theory and its sources in Marxism and psychoanalysis should inspire us to raise two issues. The first is that of the “sociology of sociology” and the question of the extent to which the preoccupations of Frankfurt, Berlin and Vienna, themselves shaped by central European history, Judaism and Christianity, and the grammatical structures of the German language, can in fact be projected onto the world as a whole. The other is to enquire empirically as to whether quite different traditions of critical social theory exist, the extent and significance of which (or even their existence at all) have been suppressed or marginalized by the hegemony of the Western varieties and the export to the rest of the world of Europe’s particular preoccupations by way of colonialism and its successor, “development.” To raise these possibilities is not to reject the immense contributions of Western critical social theory as such: rather, it is to situate it within its own specific socio-historical context which gave birth to it and has sustained it, and to open up the possibility of there being other varieties that spring from different philosophical sources and

differing historical experiences. Here I will explore some important aspects of just one of these possible and actually existing alternative traditions (and there are many others in Asia—India for example, South and Southeast Asian Muslim social thought, or Chinese non-Marxist social theory, to cite a few examples)—that of Japan.

Japanese social thought is particularly interesting in this regard. Japan has an extensive sociological tradition of great depth and antiquity, much of it unknown except to Japanologists, but which directly challenges the assumptions of Western social thought (Clammer 1995). While critical theory is only one part of this largely occluded body of thought (Chinese and Indian philosophy and to some extent social theory being much better known internationally), it is a very significant sector of Japanese intellectual culture because it clearly reveals an approach to society and the world different from, but potentially complementary to, Western critical theory. Certainly it is in a position to interrogate the latter on its epistemological assumptions and to raise the fascinating question of the nature of social theory rooted in a Buddhist/Shinto cultural nexus rather than a Judeo-Christian one.

### CRITICAL THEORY AND JAPANESE SOCIETY

Japan, with its opening to the wider world beyond that of China and Korea at the time of the restoration of the Meiji Emperor in 1868, after two centuries of feudalism and self-imposed isolation, has been an eager enquirer after and adaptor of knowledge from and about the international environment. Protestant Christianity, Marxism, new agricultural practices, military, industrial and marine technology, Western fashions, philosophy, foods, architecture, law and constitutional forms, and political institutions derived from the Occident all flooded the country in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. But all were also selectively utilized and adapted. Christianity, which in the modern period has never attracted more than 1 % of the population, while rejected theologically as undermining fundamental Buddhist- and Shinto-inspired aspects of the culture, was nevertheless an important source (largely through missionary activities) of innovations in agriculture, education and medical care. Marxism on the other hand, which is of course a secular theory and which appeared to address the emerging problems of a newly industrializing country, became and has remained very influential, both as a political and as an intellectual movement (Hoston 1986).

Yet psychoanalysis, that other major source of Western critical theory, has had almost no impact in Japan, where there are to this day only a very tiny number of practitioners, almost all of whom have modified the strict Freudian method to accommodate Japanese cultural expectations (e.g. Doi 1971, 1985). So while Western critical theory is read (and many of its central works have been translated), its cultural and intellectual ingredients and the particular historical and sociological experiences that it addresses remain alien to most Japanese. The question then arises as to whether an indigenous Japanese critical theory exists, or even can exist, in a religious and historical environment dominated by Buddhism and Shinto, in which any notion of class is weak despite the existence of socio-economic differences and considerable hierarchy in the society, and in which civil society is weak and social movements fragmented (Clammer 1997; Pharr and Schwartz 2003)? Let us first set this in context.

To generalize somewhat, it could be cogently argued that Western critical theory, including its later manifestations in the work of Habermas and the critical postmodernists, has several major characteristics that separate it quite radically from many of the main traditions of Asian social thought, Indian and Chinese as well as Japanese. These include a deconstructive rather than a constructive (the latter often characterized in the West as “Utopian”) approach to social analysis; an “external” view of the significant aspects of social, cultural and psychological reality rather than any central concern with self-knowledge (in the Buddhist tradition) or self-cultivation (in the Hindu and Confucian traditions); an almost complete aversion to any discussion of the transcendental dimension of human experience; the resounding absence of any discussion of the place of humanity in nature; and a fundamental belief in the superiority of rationality/reason over emotion/imagination.

Paradoxically, Western critical theory, in its striving for a just society, has suppressed the utopian impulse and as a consequence has marginalized such significant social thinkers as Ernst Bloch (Jacoby 1999) and has banished to the edge of social thought the role of art, religion and the non-Western humanistic traditions. The economism of both Marxism and neo-liberal economic thinking has displaced the social, and the unconscious of psychoanalysis has displaced the spiritual. Can we therefore find in Asian forms of social theory a balance to this oneness? Given that Asia constitutes almost half of the whole of humanity, it would be myopic if not downright ethnocentric not to attempt to discover the nature of any such theory and its possible contribution to the social heritage of humankind as a whole.

While the contours of such a theory clearly exist in Gandhian thought (Kappen 1990) and in classical Chinese social philosophy (Hall and Ames 1998), few attempts have been made to discover it within Japanese social thought, or even to ask if there is such a thing as a Japanese critical social theory. Here I will attempt to demonstrate that there is, although it is often disguised, for the simple reason that in Japanese culture the boundaries between the social and the religious, religion and philosophy, the cultural and the economic, the self and the transcendent, do not exist, are much more permeable than in the West or exist, but form a different map of reality than is found in European or North American cultures. Understanding this map may suggest a very different set of configurations of the notion of the just society and the ways of achieving it than those we are more familiar with from mainstream Western social theory.

The Western model for the transformation of society is essentially one of structural change in the institutions that make up the organizational framework of that society, rather than one of the primary (and prior) transformation of the self as the basis for any lasting social change. It is, however, this latter position that broadly characterizes Asian thought in the areas fundamentally shaped by Buddhism and Hinduism. There, reason becomes a tool in the pursuit of a deeper enlightenment—a notion that the Buddhist scholar Stephen Batchelor tellingly calls “the other Enlightenment project” (Batchelor 1998). This is close to what the major Indian thinker Sri Aurobindo called a “yoga of integral knowledge” (Giri 2003), and which has more recently surfaced in the increasingly influential philosophy of the Anglo-Indian thinker Roy Bhaskar with his notions of non-duality and self-realization understood as “the cessation of negative incompleteness” (Bhaskar 2002: 261). So in pursuing the nature of such (perhaps even radically Other) forms of social theory, we not only engage in a genuinely transcultural and global activity, but we may in so doing locate the forms of positive and humanistic social thinking that have precisely not led, as Zygmunt Bauman argued about the outcome of the rationalist modernist project, to the moral, physical and civilizational disaster of the Holocaust (Bauman 1999).

In broad terms, therefore, what characterizes Japanese social thought? What gives it both its own identity and distinguishes it from Western varieties of critical theory? I will suggest five main features.

The first of these is the nature of the self and the position of that self in relation to society. If in the West the dominant notion of the self emerging from Greek and Christian sources has been expressed as essentialist,

permanent/eternal and individualist (Morris 1991, 1994; Dumont 1985), in Japan the self has been understood as contextual—formed and embodied in a network of social relationships, not a free-standing entity and impermanent, subject in Buddhist thought to some form of transmigration or reincarnation and in Shinto as having very permeable boundaries with the natural world on one side and the divine on the other (Ono 1990; Yamakage 2006)—a position constituting a sophisticated but unmistakably animist view of reality. The self is thus something to be “overcome” if one has made the common philosophical mistake of identifying it with the ego rather than with the “deep self” or essential nature which is egoless; so self-realization is an activity of cultivation and philosophical transformation,, understood not as a solitary and selfish activity, but as something that can only be carried out in a relational context (society) and through intense ethical practice. Consequently, meditation and ritual (in the Buddhist context) are useless as means to enlightenment, understood essentially as insight into the true nature of things, and indeed to see beyond things in grasping their essential “emptiness” or dependence on “mutual arising”—their embeddedness in a huge network of causality with no beginning and no end, without the practice of justice. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that is found in Japan and throughout East Asia (as opposed to the Theravada schools of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka), the ethical ideal is that of the Bodhisattva—the realized (enlightened) being who remains in the travails of the world until all other beings are saved rather than pass into nirvana. (On Japanese notions of the self see Roland 1991; Kondo 1990; Rosenberger 1992.)

From this perspective a number of new elements enter social theory—the transformation or transcendence of the self as a pre-condition for systematic social transformation; a position that requires a contextual theory of the relationship between self and society, in which social injustice is seen as one of the elements that negates or retards the realization of the integral self; and the recognition that self-cultivation and ethics inevitably go together. The cultivation of the self, which may be expressed through such demanding and disciplined activities as art, calligraphy, the tea ceremony, religious practice and/or meditation, can, however high the attainment in any of these cultural fields, be only genuinely achieved through just practice in the world.

The second factor is the place of nature in relation to humans and human society. Until the very recent emergence of environmental sociology as a small sub-discipline, nature has played a very small part indeed in



Western sociology, to the extent that many of its major practitioners have either simply ignored it or have argued that it is of no relevance to the understanding of the human subject. This position, now rightly coming under fire from within Western sociological circles (e.g. Bell 2004; Dickens 2004) as well as from ecological ones, is entirely alien to the Japanese understanding of both self and society as essentially “relational” and “interpersonal” (*kanjinshiki*), in that not only is society made up of such networks, but equally humans are not abstracted from nature but are very much part of it—a kind of modified socio-biology position shorn of the genetic determinism of some of its Western varieties (Hamaguchi 1982). Hence the deep “animism” of Japanese culture, expressed not only through Shinto as a religious system and set of institutions (International Shinto foundation 1995), but equally as a non-anthropocentric understanding of the place of humans in the total cosmos (Iwata 1991).

This non-anthropocentric position, with its roots in Japanese religious culture, has many affinities with the position now known in the West as “Deep Ecology.” It derives not only from Shinto, but equally from the Mahayana conception of the Buddhahood (or potential Buddhahood) of all beings, including apparently non-sentient entities such as rocks, plants and mountains, and the consequent logical necessity to extend the concept of rights well beyond humans to include the rest of nature, a view that philosophical (and legal) thinking in the West has only recently caught up with (Stone 1996; Cullinan 2011). By radically extending the notion of rights in this way, Buddhist- and Shinto-based social thought stands in many ways opposed to the Western notion of modernity and of development, which is understood as extending dominion over nature, permitting unlimited extraction for human use of non-renewable resources, and the returning of pollutants and industrial byproducts to the Earth, which is understood just as a “sink.” It furthermore fundamentally undermines the Western conception of individualism (the fiction of the existentially autonomous individual separate from nature and in control of her/his destiny) and instead reasserts an ecocentered rather than an anthropocentric conception of humanity (Kaza and Kraft 2000). Nature thus reenters sociology, and the critique of modernism inherent in critical theory is given new dimensions that include both the inclusion of ecology and the recognition of the spiritual dimensions of existence, since nature and religion here appear as aspects of each other. A radical holism then exists in Japanese social thought that the West has been struggling to recover, but unsuccessfully as its conception of humanity is

over-sociological and insufficiently ecological, and where the philosophical implications of environmentalism have not been assimilated into mainstream social theory.

The third relevant factor is the inclusion of religion as a still significant category of socio-cultural analysis in Asia, where religious practice is still so widespread as to fundamentally undermine the sociological concept of secularization, a fact that has significant methodological implications for the sociological study of Asian societies (Clammer 2000). Japan is an interesting case of this, since amongst Asian societies public religious observance is not conspicuous, but closer acquaintance shows it to be pervasive and a significant social force, as the multiple-million membership of the so-called “New Religions” (*shin-shukyo*) attests (Reader 1991). Given the relative marginalization of religion in contemporary mainstream sociology, it is perhaps not surprising that these new religions, and the many older more established forms too, while they have been studied for their beliefs, have been little studied either as social movements or as the carriers of utopian ideas and ideals in which Japan is relocated in the globalized world as the new promised land—as the source of teachings of peace, new forms of spirituality, harmonious relations with nature and new socio-economic and ethical patterns that reflect this recognition of a new age (Kisala 1999; Clammer 2012a). From these have sprung many new ideas about social arrangements, ecology, communal living, alternative agriculture, artistic production, peace and conflict resolution, and healing, all of which have significant social effects. Part of the problem is that Western sociology (with the exception of a small, mainly Catholic French school of thinkers) has been concerned with the sociology of religion, not with religious sociology. There is a fundamental difference between attempting to analyze religion using sociological methodologies and understanding religion as the basis for creative social ideas, and it is largely the latter that prevails across huge areas of Asia, where religion is not something to be explained, but something to be lived.

Inherent in these fundamentally religious sources of social practice is the fourth element, notably ethics. This includes both the symbiotic relationship between self-cultivation and ethics noted above, and ethics reflecting humanity’s place in, and not above or opposed to, nature. A Shinto shrine is almost always located in a sacred grove: a space in which nature is protected, its presence enhancing the spiritual aura or power of the shrine itself or of its resident deity, and in which the total dependence of human life on the provision of nature is indicated in subtle ways. The

gardens often to be found in the precincts of Buddhist temples fulfill a similar function. It is significant that Japan's first major systematic ethicist of the modern period, Watsuji Tetsuro, was the author only of a major treatise on ethics, drawing in part on his discovery of Western philosophy, but also of a celebrated book on the philosophy of nature (Watsuji 1935). Ethics and social philosophy then become, if not identical, aspects of the same relationship to the world, both in its social and in its physical aspects. This ethical stance is not simply a philosophical one, but is reflected in a set of practices that has a considerable impact on the world. The average Japanese consumes less than half the energy of the average American or Australian and much less than the average European. Waste is considered harmful and unsightly, a notion captured in the Japanese concept of *mot-tainai* or literally "don't waste!", a concept promoted and internationalized in the writings of the late Nobel Peace Prize winner and environmentalist Wangari Maathai (Maathai 2010: 106–110).

The fifth ingredient to which attention should be drawn is that of aesthetics. Many commentators on Japanese culture have of course remarked on the central role of aesthetic ideas and practices (Anesaki 1973; Keene 1990), but few have commented on the role of aesthetics as a social as well as an artistic or philosophical category. While there has been substantial discussion of the ethics of modernity and development, there has been little discussion of the aesthetic dimensions of these world transformative movements from a sociological (as opposed to an art history or cultural studies) approach (for two of the few sources that do see Giri and Quarles Van Ufford 2003 and Clammer 2012b). To introduce the notion of beauty into discussions of modernity and into the construction of social theory might at first seem frivolous, until it is recognized that there is an intimate connection between ethics and aesthetics (Maffesoli 1990) on the one hand, and on the other that empirical evidence is accumulating that the violence of many forms of recent and contemporary "development" is not only in its disruption of traditional forms of life, the introduction of monetization, forced migration and displacement and so forth, but equally in the ugliness and destruction of beauty that accompanies so much urbanization, industrialization and ecological destruction in the name of progress. The growing recognition of the relationships between stress and many forms of mental illness and not a few physical ones and the deprivation of access to nature and to cultural forms of beauty such as art (Pretty 2006) suggest that the appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of society itself (and not just of its cultural productions) is a sorely neglected

field, and it is in Japanese social theory that we find the outlines of a conception of beauty (reflected in such social forms as courtesy) that is not merely a decorative feature of objects, but is a category to judge the whole process of modernity (along with its ethical dimensions) and to evaluate the appropriateness of social interactions. There is a “social style” as well as a “social structure,” and if it is to the latter that Western social thought has inclined, it is now also necessary to recover the former.

### THE SOURCES OF CRITICAL THEORY IN JAPAN

It is perhaps evident from the foregoing sketch that critical social theory in Japan is diffused and is in a sense an “attitude,” and no unified body of thought comparable to the Frankfurt School or its successors exists. There are, however, a number of contexts in which critical social thinking is expressed, and when these are added up they constitute a considerable body of work.

The first of these contexts is that of social movements. Whereas a great deal of Western social movement theory has concentrated on resource mobilization and the conditions under which a social movement can “take off” and sustain itself as a transformative movement, much less attention has been given to such movements as generators of alternative ideas—as not only explicit or implicit critiques of society, but also as experimental seedbeds where new forms of praxis are being worked out. While civil society is generally considered relatively weak in Japan (Pharr and Schwartz 2003), there are in fact a wide range of utopian, organic, religious, environmental, consumer and quasi-political movements involving farmers, housewives, nature-loving citizens, anti-nuclear activists, elderly people and many other concerned groups, often organized around the meaning of citizenship in globalizing and corporate-dominated Japan (for an excellent example and ethnography of the political lives of Japanese women, particularly housewives, see LeBlanc 1999). Similarly there is a wide range of non-governmental organizations devoted either to specific problems (e.g. environment, undocumented foreign workers) or to systemic change in the social order as a whole (Muto 1998). Many of these movements reflect either a feminist or an environmentalist position, or both, and both tendencies have been the source of potent criticisms of the statism and top-down governance typical of Japanese political culture (Mackie 2003). Some of these movements have also been critical not only of aspects of Japanese society, but equally of Western modes of critical and

deconstructive thinking. For example, Maruyama Masatsugu suggests that while Shinto points to a systematically ecological worldview, Western ecofeminist viewpoints do not work well in Japan, where the political context, social structure, culture and religions require that culturally site-specific strategies for change must be adopted, and that a universalizing version of ecofeminism imposed on Japan from outside is in fact ethnocentric (Maruyama 2003).

So while utopianism is certainly not a uniquely Western phenomenon, in Japan it is expressed principally in the widespread peace movement, the New Religions, organic farming and communistic communes such as those of the Yamagishi farming movement, and in some forms of popular culture, especially the ubiquitous manga or comic books and their filmic and televisual equivalent, anime. As a result it is critical cultural studies rather than formal critical social theory that often prove to be the source of critique—of those cultural forms themselves, the consumerism and anti-environmentalism that they engender, and the corporate interests that so relentlessly promote them via the media and advertising (for some representative examples see Azuma 2001; Lukacs 2010). But probably the most significant area of a more systematic critical social theory in Japan has emerged from the critiques of modernity that have been an important feature of Japanese intellectual life at least since the 1940s. The various permutations that this has undergone, and its connections to shifting views of human rights, Japanese wartime responsibility, and post-war senses of identity is an important topic to which we will now turn.

The key framing issue here has been that of the nature of modernity, understood as a global movement, and Japan's relationship to that movement. Japan's war of aggression against China, Southeast Asia and subsequently (and fatally for Japan's imperial ambitions) the United States, while hiding behind a rhetoric of liberation from Western colonialism and the creation of a "Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," was in part ideologically inspired by a certainly extreme right-wing but nevertheless interesting attempt to theorize and reject the "modern" (seen as a largely Western hegemonic project). This took the form of the formulation of the concept of *kindai no chokoku*, or "overcoming the modern," formulated at the outbreak of the Pacific war by a group of prominent intellectuals meeting in Kyoto. This theory was aimed not only at providing an intellectual and ideological rationale for the overthrow of Western colonialism in Asia, but also to provide an alternative model of social development based not on simple nativism, but on the rejection of the very philosophical principles

on which Western modernity was based—its universalism, secularism and progressivism, and their replacement by largely Shinto-inspired values of what many Japanese intellectuals thought of as being an unfairly marginalized (although by 1940 militarily and economically powerful) world culture—notably their own (Hiromatsu 1989). This view had deep cultural roots, going back to much older forms of Japanese nativist thought, in particular to eighteenth-century attempts to differentiate Japanese culture from that of its dominant neighbor—China (Nosco 1990).

The main post-war critic of this position was the major political theorist Maruyama Masao, one of whose books, consisting of a series of linked essays, is fortunately available for those who find Japanese inaccessible (Maruyama 1966). In this book Maruyama wrestles with what was the overwhelming intellectual (and moral) issue of the 1950s—of how Japan, with its sophisticated culture and after centuries of isolation from most of the rest of the world, could have become involved in a violently aggressive imperialist project abroad that was allied with fascism and repression at home. And, indeed, could it happen again? Maruyama offers a set of reflections on this question that involve several controversial theses. These are essentially: that the real problem facing Japan during the immediately pre-war and war years, and extending into the postwar period, was not so much political coercion as psychological coercion, made possible by lack of freedom of belief until 1946; the very under-developed legal system or culture of legality; and the socio-political expression of this in what Maruyama calls “vertical dependence”—a hierarchical social structure creating little room for independence or initiative at its middle and lower levels. An important result of these patterns is, according to Maruyama, what he terms “the externalization of morality”—the absence of any subjective or interior sense of ethical responsibility in a social system in which group norms trapped the individual in a network of obligations originating outside her/himself, and with a consequent loss or absence of moral autonomy. The weakness of an ethical sense strong enough to resist the onset of fascism was not a result of the absence of such ethical values in Japanese philosophy (as we saw above), but the difficulty of translating those values into action in a social structure greatly emphasizing conformism and obedience.

The validity of these claims is strengthened by Maruyama’s explorations of the sociology of Japanese modernism. In Maruyama’s view, Japan is indeed “unique,” not in the sense commonly argued by its large community of nativist or *Nihonjinron* (“the theory of Japaneseness”) writers with

their intense cultural nationalism (Yoshino 1997; Dale 1986) and racial and linguistic theories, but in the form of its evolution as a modern state. When compared with the other modernizing states of Europe and North America, with the possible exception of Germany and Italy, modernity was subsumed by fascism and modernization subordinated to nationalism. The result was that the psychological structures of nationalism became the dominant feature of the Japanese collective psyche, and in the rare cases where the private lives of its citizens were not invaded by the state, a severe form of compartmentalization took place: inside/outside, public/private, the real face/the public face; categories that still dominate and are constantly reproduced in many instances of Japanese sociology and anthropology, and in foreign anthropologies of Japan, without in most cases any serious empirical investigation of their validity and often drawing on the misleading and outmoded conceptual vocabulary of Ruth Benedict's wartime study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (e.g. Hendry 1987, Chap. 3; Bachnik and Quinn 1994).

The fundamental problem as seen by Maruyama is the absence of what he terms *shिताisei*, which might be best translated as "autonomy" or "independence of spirit," and the "failure" of modernity, or the inability to yet achieve it, which lies not in any lack of economic progress (hardly the case in Japan), but in the failure to transform the self in such a way as to internalize morality and act independently on the basis of that morality, and not to be swayed by external structures and imposed norms of behavior. The central problem is not that of overcoming modernity, but rather that Japan has not yet achieved it (Koschmann 1984). The issue here again is not the existence of apparently modern social and political institutions (parliament, universities, courts, schools, hospitals, etc.), but that their internal functioning does not yet approach true *shिताisei*. The critique is thus not so much of institutions as such, but of the failure to bridge the gap between the religious and philosophical underpinnings of Japanese culture and the expression of the values embodied in those dimensions in practice: in actual social and political behavior. There are indeed three very practical implications of this position: that genuine democracy in Japan depends on the possession and exercise of such autonomy; that most Japanese are still very unclear about the country's role in an increasingly globalized world (and the lack of an independent foreign policy is often seen as evidence for this); and that without enhancing this sense of autonomy, what happened in the 1930s and 1940s could happen again, since the basic underlying psychology has never been adequately addressed or transformed.

While never positioning himself as such, Maruyama might be seen as Japan's leading post-war critical theorist. Steeped in Marxism, he also had an extensive knowledge of Western political theory and of theories of nationalism. While certainly his position can be subject to criticism—for example, his rather excessive downplaying of the role of nature in Japanese culture, on the grounds that it can easily lead to a kind of nature romanticism, which leads to even less clarity about the boundaries of the self, this being in his view the basis of the nativist nationalism against which he was struggling—he nevertheless represents an outstanding Japanese example of the critical intellectual willing to confront the problems of his own culture and history, drawing on both Western theory and a deep knowledge of his own society. What he also succeeded in placing at the center of Japanese intellectual discourse was the issue of modernity, a discourse in which two main strands can be detected.

The first of these is represented by Japanese attempts to assimilate and interpret in the local context Marxism (Hoston 1986), non-Marxist forms of socialism and anarchism (Duus and Scheiner 1998), and pacifist forms of Asian quasi-socialism—Gandhi in particular having a substantial following in Japan (not surprisingly as he represented a non-Western variety of socialism (Rao 1970), and forms of Christian socialism. This strand represents the attempt to indigenize the foreign, but with mixed success. Marxism has had considerable intellectual (although less political) success, and Christianity much less as a specifically religious force (attracting very few converts), but with considerable indirect impact as was suggested earlier on education, social work, medical care and, as a result of the background of many of the early generation of American Protestant missionaries, on agriculture. In the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taisho periods (1912–1926), Christian socialism was a not insignificant force, but much of its potential was suppressed by the rise of fascism in the 1930s and dissipated by the ideological and sectarian struggles of its different denominational communities.

The other strand was that of the rejection of the West and of culturalist attempts to define the uniqueness of Japan, its “destiny” in relation to the rest of (under-developed) Asia, and the conception of a form of modernity quite different from that of the materialist and universalist ideology of the West (Najita and Harootunian 1998). The continuing tension between the two strands can be seen in the controversies that still constantly occur in Japanese society—over school history textbooks, the issue of Japanese



war guilt and the question of Japan ever becoming a “normal” nation again in the light of its history, its prospects for becoming a real democracy and its uncertain relationship to the rest of the world (Kato 1997; Barshay 1998). Japanese critical theory reflects the pre-occupations of these two strands—one drawing directly or indirectly on Marxism or non-Marxist forms of socialism and struggling with their application to the particular historical and sociological characteristics of Japan, the other rooted in conceptions of tradition, rural ethnography, religion and philosophy thought to be indigenous to Japan. How these work out in practice we will now discuss.

### CULTURE AND CRITICISM IN JAPANESE SOCIAL THEORY

Japanese social thought and philosophy therefore reflect a continuing tension between those drawing on mostly Western sources of inspiration, and in particular Marxism, and those advocating a culturalist solution. An example of the former is the philosopher Mutai Risaku, who promotes an approach that is multi-disciplinary and brings philosophy into dialogue with the social sciences as well as to some extent with the natural sciences, and which has given rise to a largely positivist and empirical version of social criticism embodied in the journal *Kagaku no shiso* (The Science of Thought). A contemporary example of the latter is the literary critic and writer Kamei Katsuichiro, who recommends a return to the sources of Japanese tradition as the inspiration for a continuing critique of modernity, and in doing so has created an interesting form of indigenous Japanese cultural studies. Interestingly, in practice the two broad tendencies often get mixed—a synthesizing tendency characteristic of many aspects of Japanese culture.

The social critic and writer Hasegawa Nyozeikan, for example, while an advocate of systemic reforms necessary in his view to return post-war Japan to a viable and respected place in the community of nations, is also the author of a well-known volume on Japanese tradition (Hasegawa 1982). Likewise, the more creative exponents or developers of Marxist thought such as the philosopher Hiromatsu Wataru manage to take a rather distinctively Japanese approach to Marx himself, arguing in his numerous books for a non-dualistic, anti-Cartesian and non-economistic worldview that places the individual and the construction of systems of meaning back in the heart of the Marxist project, as signaled in the titles

of two of his major works that would read in translation as *Being and Meaning* and *The Intersubjective Structure of the World*. The philosopher Yamawaki Naoshi assesses what he sees as being Hiromatsu's genuinely original contribution in the following terms:

If one were to characterize the core of Hiromatsu's philosophy in a nutshell, one could say that on a fundamental level he criticized modern world views, whether idealistic or materialistic, which were caught in the dualistic grid of subject and object. Hiromatsu rejected the Leninist-type of materialistic theory which sees in the object the mere product or reflection of matter. Instead he developed a new theory which recognized the object as the intersubjectively constituted world of relations. In the background of this kind of thinking one can detect the strong influence of constitutionalism derived from phenomenology and neo-Kantianism, as well as the relationalistic epistemology of E. Cassirer. Up to the end, however, Hiromatsu did attempt to place his intellectual effort in the center of the Marxist tradition in that he considered the world of relations not as an a priori trans-historical world, but as an a posteriori socio-historical world which stands in constant need of reform or even revolution. (Yamawaki 1997: 272–273)

At the basis of a great deal of Japanese philosophy is this underlying idea of non-dualism, an idea which appears not only in philosophy and religion, but also in Japanese anthropology and the communalistic ideology that underpins many intentional communities in Japan, and even, some would say, society as a whole.

A very good example of this is to be found in the work of the poet and literary and social critic Yoshimoto Takaaki and his innovative theory of the role of fantasy in human thought and behavior (Yoshimoto 1978). Yoshimoto, who is critical of both Marxism and Maruyama Masao, argues that the role of social thought is “to articulate the very concrete realities of the masses in their humble everyday life.” In contrast to Maruyama, he maintains that only in the sphere of fantasy can true personal autonomy (*jiritsu*) be possible. Human behavior in his theory manifests three forms of fantasy: individual, dual and collective. Of these, he privileges the second, since individual fantasy can lead simply to narcissism, and the collective, embodied in conceptions of the state, to alienation, while the dual promotes contexts such as that of the couple or the family where the individual can find genuine fulfillment (Blocker and Starling 2001: 163).

Similarly, although in my view overvalued by some Western commentators who know of few other figures in Japanese philosophy, the leaders of

the so-called Kyoto School—Nishida Kitaro and Nishitani Keiji in particular—while compromised by their accommodation to pre-war and wartime fascist thinking, nevertheless stand out as critics of the West’s universalist claims, of the dualism of much post-Cartesian philosophy, of the separation of religion and philosophy, and of modernism and in particular its privileging of rationality over other possible forms of knowing. It is against this background that we can make sense of why post-structuralism, particularly in its French incarnations, produced so much excitement in Japan. What we see are two broad positions that have been taken on this movement by Japanese intellectuals. The first is that postmodernism, while hailed as a major breakthrough in Europe, simply reflects and reproduces aspects of Japanese culture that are very old: that Japan is indeed the original postmodern society and has long been so (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989). The other is that postmodernism, whatever its geographical origins, is deeply subversive of established institutional and intellectual orders in that it is radically socially-constructivist, argues against any fixed points of authoritative interpretations, opposes the logocentricity of most formal philosophy and stands against the domination of rationality/reason as the sole basis of explanation (see e.g. Yamaguchi Masao 1975).

As such, postmodernism, as assimilated into the Japanese intellectual field, has been able to be refashioned as a weapon to turn against the West by critiquing its universalist and hegemonic pretensions, and also as a kind of internal methodology for resisting the more culturalist forms of Japanese philosophy and social thought that are based on an ahistorical and essentialist image of Japanese culture, and on the suppression of internal differences and countervoices that existed even during the idealized past. As Jean-Marie Makang has argued for the concerns of contemporary African philosophy, but in terms that could equally well apply to Japan, for philosophy to remain critical it cannot strip its subjects of their historicity, dynamism or variations, or attempt to mine ethnology in the pursuit of an archaism that illegitimately promotes its uniqueness (Makang 1997).

### EMANCIPATORY PROJECTS AND JAPANESE SOCIETY

So there is clearly no one form of “Japanese” emancipator theory (or indeed of practice, which range from left-wing politics, through social activities of some of the New Religions and on to communal, environmental and civil society movements of many kinds). If they have anything in common, it is perhaps their distrust of reason as the fundamental or only

basis of social action, their recognition of the limits of knowledge itself, and their transcending of the endemic methodological individualism of so much Western sociology and social theory. The Japanese projects stand in contrast with that of Habermas and his assumptions about the universality of the so-called Enlightenment project and the primacy of reason amongst the human faculties.

There are a number of factors that explain this divergence of Japanese and German viewpoints (despite the close cultural dialogue between the two societies going back to the time of the Meiji Restoration and the formulation of Japan's first modern constitution). If Japan represents an example of what some have called the aestheticization of life, it might also be argued that this process went just as far in the German Romantic movement and its social expression in Nietzschean, Wagnerian and nativist aspects of German fascism. But other sources can also be found in the differing conceptions of human rights held in Japan and in Europe, and in the economic basis of social life, notably the different forms of capitalism that have emerged globally in the post-war period. In the first case, while some voices have argued for the possibility of a discourse of "Asian Values" as the basis for promoting some form of cultural and political difference or uniqueness (a model tried not only in Japan, but also in Singapore: see Clammer 1993), critics of this position, while rightly attacking its essentialism, have in practice simply fallen back on recommending a basically Western form of liberal democracy as the best model for maintaining human rights while accommodating the stresses of communitarian tensions in post-colonial and often very multi-cultural societies (Inoue 1999).

What this response tends to overlook is that notions of rights are themselves cultural and are rooted in the particular social ethics generated in particular societies, often out of an intersection between their religious and political histories (Cowan et al. 2001). Debate has occurred, for example, in the Buddhist community internationally as to the possibility of there being human rights at all in Buddhist social thought, given the decentered nature of the self and the impermanent and interdependent nature of all phenomena in the Buddhist worldview (Keown et al. 1998). In the specific context of Japan, the historian T.C. Smith has argued that the social and economic history of modernizing Japan suggests that the Japanese concepts of rights is not one of demands for abstract justice, but rather of benevolence: that which is mostly sought is not the eradication of differences, but the correct recognition of those differences and the ascription to each social role of the correct and legitimate status and

respect due to that role (Smith 1989). As Japan industrialized it certainly developed a sophisticated form of capitalism, but one that is distinctive and operates with different conceptions of internal order, responsibility and is based on a very distinctive sociology, which differentiates it from, say, German, British or North American varieties (Sakakibara 1993; Kenrick 1990).

The underlying premise of these varieties of critical social theory in Japan is that they attempt to move beyond the old categories of “modernization,” “Westernization” and so forth that have hitherto structured social science debates. Neither capitalism nor modernity need be seen as unitary phenomena, and so the political choices equally are not necessarily between some form of Marxism and Western liberal democracy. All this signals the significance of Japan to the wider social science community: a society with hierarchy but little class; capitalist, yet managing that economy on highly communitarian principles; saturated with media, but yet maintaining the value of intimate and long-lasting social ties; highly urbanized and crowded, but with very little crime; modern in so many respects, but yet encouraging respect for tradition (Clammer 1995; Arnason 1997). It is also a society in which Buddhism takes on a role that needs to be as fully appreciated as that of Christianity and Judaism in the West in the formation of conceptions of the self and the individual, of law and rights, of the structuring of social relationships and in philosophies of history. The significance of the Kyoto School lies in large part in its struggle to create a dialogue between Western and Japanese (and specifically Buddhist) philosophy, not simply as an academic discourse, but as a critical means of struggling with questions of modernity and the shaping of conceptions of self, of historicity and of nihilism.

For if notions of “emptiness” (the interdependence of all phenomena in the universe), and of impermanence are given central place, a radically different epistemology than that informing Western critical theory begins to emerge. In his discussion of Nishitani Keiji’s debate with modernity, Dale Wright suggests (Wright 1995) that at the heart of Nishitani’s project are the themes of, firstly, the establishment of the non-autonomous “background” or “field” of the self. This implies its dependence on and arising from a complex interplay of phenomena over which it actually has little or no control (rather than a Maruyama-like conception of an autonomous self). And secondly, the transformation of the “nihilistic emptiness” of modernity and postmodernity, as interpreted in the West under the influence of Nietzsche, into a “relational emptiness” in which fullness of being

is not achieved by subtraction from the world around the self (the autonomous/individualistic model) but by immersion in it. This has parallels with the notion of the “ecological self” emerging in the West from Buddhist-inspired strands of Deep Ecology (Macy 1990). Potentially the political implications of this are immense, since it suggests neither a Marxist nor Liberal model, but a new form of communitarianism, and one in which rights are extended to nature as well as to other humans: a holism in the fullest sense.

### GLOBALIZATION, CRITICAL THEORY AND RELIGION

The critical intellectual or the intellectual activist are certainly not unknown categories in Asia. Oppositional thinking is a well-developed tradition of considerable antiquity in China, India, Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere, and the history of Asia has been punctuated with peasant uprisings, millennial movements, utopian experiments, the emergence of new religions and, of course, revolutions. While Orientalist visions of Asia may have portrayed this vast area as socially conservative, culturally tradition-bound and politically repressive, the reality is one of boundless diversity, a huge body of “social theory” often disguised as literature, religious writing, quasi-philosophical discourse (e.g. Confucianism), or appearing in genres that fit uneasily into Western intellectual categories, such as Taoism or much of the literature of Zen Buddhism, for example. The critical impulse is not lacking, but, as we have seen in the Japanese case, is often expressed in cultural terms and/or religious discourse. To take one instance: one of the major reform theorists of early Japan was the monk Nichiren (1222–1282), whose iconoclastic writings and teachings not only led to his own exile, but have subsequently given rise to whole schools of Buddhist practice, much of it socially engaged, including two of Japan’s biggest “New Religions”—Soka Gakkai and Rissho-kosekai ).

Furthermore, critique is not in itself the end point for most Asian social theory, since in many cases it gives rise to actual social movements, often reflecting visions of a new society arising out of the initial critical move. One of the few scholars to have actually bothered to contrast and juxtapose Western and non-Western critical thought, Fred Dallmayr, has indeed noted that critical thought flourishes in Asia, Africa and Latin America. As he puts it,

Derrida’s call for a critical kind of theorizing or philosophizing—one opposed to the hegemonic ‘positivism’ (in technological, military and economic

domains)—obviously is not restricted to the confines of Europe but has a ‘cosmopolitan intent’ ... As it happens, his summons today finds echoes or resonance in many parts of the world, from Asia to Africa and Latin America. Actually, given the intrusive and oppressive effects of the reigning ‘positivism’ in most non-Western societies critical theorizing tends to be widespread and at a premium precisely in those parts of the world. (Dallmayr 2005: 122–123)

His own brief survey, concentrating mainly on Indian thought, cites only the Kyoto school philosophers as a prime example of Japanese critical theory on the grounds that “from the angle of nihilation, Buddhist thought can have no truck with totalizing modes of domination (with Derrida’s ‘technical-economic-military positivism’) given the Kyoto School’s emphasis on the centrality of Zen Buddhist notions of ‘nothingness’ and *sunyata* or ‘emptiness’” (Dallmayr 2005: 129). As we have seen, the range is actually much larger, and in conclusion would like to try to draw some broad implications from the specific Japanese case.

Several key elements stand out amidst the diversity of Japanese critical thought, so only a small sample has been surveyed here. The first of these is the critical dialogue with the West and the selective assimilation of Western philosophical ideas. Some would argue that Japan is the only major non-Western society to have successfully assimilated and reproduced advanced capitalism (without being colonized), while nevertheless retaining the integrity of much of its indigenous culture, and has in fact reshaped capitalism in its own cultural terms. It has certainly been the case that intellectual dialogue with the West has been one of the major engines of Japanese theoretical creativity: rejecting, selectively assimilating or transforming ideas that were originally of foreign origin.

The second is the place of politics in Japanese and perhaps more generally Asian thought, especially those forms influenced by Confucianism. Again as Dallmayr rightly suggests:

[Hannah] Arendt’s complaint about the blurring of domains might also have been addressed to the East Asian context ... Asian culture (on the whole) has resisted the neat division or demarcation of domains, preferring to see human and social life instead as a complex web of relationships, as a holistic fabric of elements held together by some kind of inner balance. This difference is particularly important with regard to politics or the ‘public sphere’. Although acknowledging its function, Asian culture has never assigned to politics the commanding height over society that was allocated to it in the Western tradition (even when its supremacy was subordinated to the still more commanding heights of philosophy and theology. (Dallmayr 2004: 161)

What this suggests is the larger theoretical and sociological point that maps of reality can be drawn differently in different cultural spaces, something not perhaps fully recognized in Western social thought, with its preoccupation with disciplinary boundaries and its zealotry in drawing sharp boundaries between “serious” intellectual work and “the literary,” a distinction that finds no real place in the Japanese intellectual universe.

The third is the issue of not only retaining culture as a major component of a critical vision and thereby resisting the positivism that Derrida (rather belatedly from a Japanese perspective) denounces, but also of understanding the essential nature of society itself in cultural as well as in political and economic terms, the hegemony of the latter in particular needing to be strongly resisted. Cultural politics is thus at the center of much of the Japanese critical enterprise, since future society is not seen as a dictatorship of the proletariat or an economy of collective ownership, but primarily as a cultural space in which the pursuit of cultural activities defines the good life in a kind of post-political society in which politics and economics are the servants of that larger libertarian vision, not its masters.

The final factor is the role of religion. While directly religious impulses have played only a small part in the formation of Western critical theory (whatever the underlying influence of Judaism on Marxism and to some extent on Christianity), in the Japanese case religion has been very much a formative factor. Shinto is the inspiration for much of the indigenous social thought and certainly for Japanese forms of utopianism, and Buddhism for philosophical reflection, social and environmental activism, and as the basis for forms of social theory based on very different premises from their Western counterparts (Loy 2003; Jones 2003; Clammer 2009). In its activist forms, Japanese Buddhism has been converging with what has now become known as “Engaged Buddhism,” and in developing new forms of social practice has necessarily been forced to theorize that activism (Stone 2003).

In his call for a “global public sphere,” Fred Dallmayr approvingly cites Ulrich Beck’s call for a “critical theory with a cosmopolitan intent” (Dallmayr 2005: 131), and himself implies that in the contemporary world situation in which religious fundamentalism, ecological crisis, rising militarism and the negative effects of globalization promoted by rapacious and profit-hungry corporations, critical theory itself needs to be informed by the positive dimensions of a spiritually based cosmopolitanism. The more creative forms of Japanese social theory demonstrate how such a project might be pursued



in a way that leads not to Western intellectual hegemony, but to genuine dialogue between civilizations, which preserves the cultural differences that are as essential to the social health of the planet as biodiversity is to its ecological health. Many forms of social theory can flourish together, and their encouragement can only lead to the enrichment and variety of the social sciences, and to the possibility of new and creative answers appearing that address the current common crisis engulfing the planet.

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# The Self-Description of Society in East Asia: If It Is Not Society, What Else Could It Be?

*Saburo Akahori*

## INTRODUCTION

Society is a very frequently used word. However, even in sociology, the notion of society is unclear. Society is sometimes regarded as a nation-state or a group of human beings. In addition, with the advent of globalization, the image of society has become more ambiguous. Nonetheless the concept of society is crucially important for sociology in a globalizing era, because there is no other choice but to use it to talk about ‘societal issues’, such as environmental problems, inclusion/exclusion, individualization, and so on.

It has often been said that society does not exist in the non-Western world because the concept of society was born in the West and because it reflects the process of modernization, in other words, Westernization (Fig. 1). Is such a view valid, though?

This chapter discusses society by examining how and why the Japanese word *shakai* (社会, 社會) was introduced to East Asia (or to the so-called

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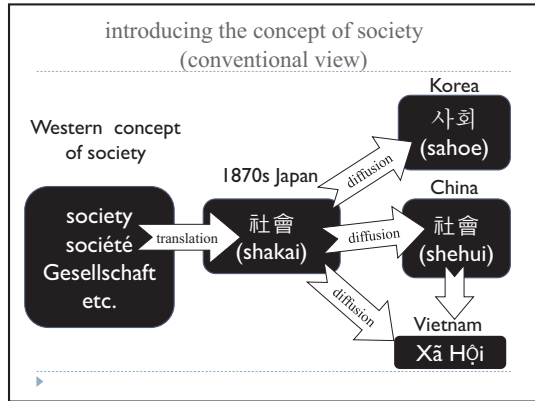
Tokyo Woman’s Christian University, Tokyo, Japan

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317

**Fig. 1** Introducing the concept of society (conventional view)



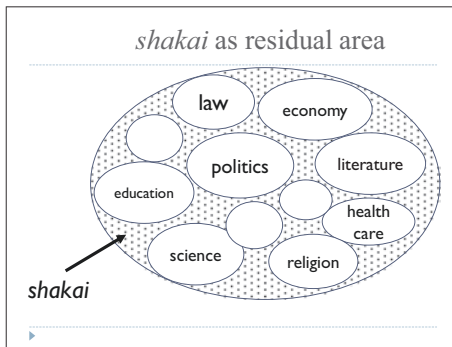
‘Sinosphere’) as the translation of ‘society’,<sup>1</sup> and will explore the alternative (i.e. non-Eurocentric and non-anthropocentric) way of describing society.

#### BACKGROUND: ATTENTION TO THE NOTION OF *SHAKAI* IN JAPAN

Some sociologists or social scientists in Japan have already been analysing the usage of the word *shakai*.<sup>2</sup> In their arguments, the difference between society (as a Western concept) and *shakai* (in a Japanese context) is considered as problematic. For example, sociologist Yōsuke Kōtō (厚東洋輔) stated that the ambiguous word *shakai* became a stumbling block in describing society in modern Japan (Kōtō 1991: 40), and political scientist Takeshi Ishida (石田雄) argued that, apart from the Western concept of society (i.e. civil society, *bürgerlich Gesellschaft*), the Japanese word *shakai* has been accepted as the excluded and the underdeveloped part of the existing societal structure, and as the grey residual area that has had no defined domain since the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 2). Ishida also pointed out that the section named *shakai* in the leading opinion magazine at that time was considered to be a kind of miscellany (Ishida 1984: 46–47). In this connection, news items on accidents or crimes have traditionally been categorized as *shakai* in most Japanese newspapers.

Their statements can be summarized as follows: (1) the word *shakai* is not the same as ‘society’ in the context of Western civilization (i.e. civil

Fig. 2 *Shakai* as a residual area



society, *bürgerlich Gesellschaft*); (2) compared with the Western idea of society (civil society, *bürgerlich Gesellschaft*), the idea of *shakai* is more ambiguous.

#### APPROACH: SOCIETY AS SELF-DESCRIPTION

This chapter is not trying to question whether the notion of *shakai* is problematic or not. Instead, it assesses whether the sociological theory of society should follow the Western idea of society or not. For this purpose, the chapter makes references to the concept of self-description that is derived from Niklas Luhmann's theory of society (*Gesellschaftstheorie*).<sup>3</sup>

The concept of self-description plays an important role in Luhmann's sociological systems theory. Self-description does not mean that a certain human being writes about her/himself, for example in an autobiography or a narrative of self, but that society describes itself. In Luhmann's theory, society (*Gesellschaft*) is redefined as a system that labels itself as society and distinguishes itself from its environment (Luhmann 1997).

According to Luhmann, society consists of communication, and all communicative events are included in society. Since society is regarded as a system of communication, communication about society is also included in society. In other words, society, not human beings, communicates about itself. Furthermore, we can say that society is a self-description of society. In order to indicate such a recursive feedback loop between society and the description of society, this chapter uses the term 'self-description of society'.



As is commonly known, the word ‘society’ has various meanings. Sociologists have no right to determine exclusively what society is or what it should be, because there are numerous ways of viewing society in society besides a sociological view. Correspondingly, sociologists cannot decide that the idea of society should follow the idea of society in the Western tradition.

It is definitely nonsense, at least for sociological theorists, to argue whether ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ society exists or not in the non-Western world. What is more significant for sociological theorists is *to describe how society has been observed and described in what kind of words or terms*, because, based on the idea of self-description, the way of describing society reflects the character of society as a self-observer or self-producer.

Following such a viewpoint, we will observe the process by which the word *shakai* was selected in the second half of the nineteenth century as the translation of ‘society’ in Japan and other East Asian countries.

#### OVERVIEW: THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORD *SHAKAI* AS THE TRANSLATION OF ‘SOCIETY’

Firstly we will see when and by whom the word *shakai* was introduced as a translation of ‘society’.

In his paper on the translation of ‘society’ in Japan, Japanese sociologist Megumi Hayashi (林恵海) reported that *shakai*, as a translation of the word ‘society’ (i.e. modern society), was first applied by the journalist Gen’ichiro Fukuchi (福地源一郎, 1841–1906). Fukuchi first used the word *shakai* in the newspaper editorial column of *Tokyo-Nichi-Nichi Shimbun*, the predecessor of the *Mainichi Shimbun*, on 14 January 1875 (Hayashi 1966: 83). After that, Amane Nishi (西周, 1829–1897), Rinsho Mitsukuri (箕作麟祥, 1846–1897) and other leading intellectuals of the time strongly supported the use of *shakai* in this context.

The word *shakai* was not newly created by Japanese intellectuals or journalists; rather, it originated in China. Nishi had already used the word *shakai* in his writings before Fukuchi. He used the word *shakai* for the first time in Japan, following Hayashi’s opinion, in March 1874. Nishi introduced the word from Chinese classics (we will return to this point later). According to Hayashi, however, *shakai* was not used as a translation for society because he had been using other words to express society at this time (Hayashi 1966: 82–83).

After the adoption of the word *shakai* as the translation of society by Fukuchi, Mitsukuri promptly and intensively used the word in the same context in a book about politics issued in October 1875 that he translated. After this, the usage spread widely and rapidly in Japan. The word *shakai* has been established as the translation for society since about 1880 (Hayashi 1966).

### SELECTION PROCESS OF *SHAKAI*

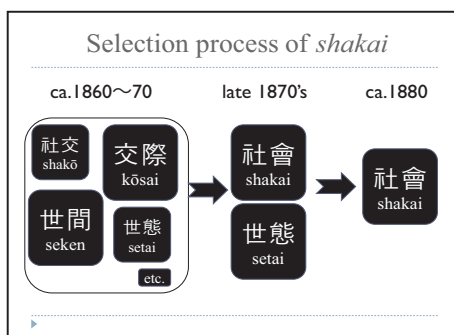
However, apart from *shakai*, there were numerous other options for translating ‘society’, especially before the late 1870s (before the emergence of the word *shakai*).

For example, Yukichi Fukuzawa (福沢諭吉, 1835–1901), who was one of the most famous and popular leading intellectuals of the time, attempted to use the Japanese words *seken* (世間), *setai* (世態), *jinmin-kōsai* (人民交際) and *ningen-kōsai* (人間交際) to translate the word ‘society’ during the 1870s (Hayashi 1966: 75; Yanabu 1982). Amane Nishi also tried to use the word *shakō* (社交) before the adoption of *shakai* in 1875 (Hayashi 1966: 76–77) (Fig. 3).<sup>4</sup>

Here we may raise a question. How and for what reasons did *shakai* drive out other translations of ‘society’? Two scholars have expressed different views on this issue.

On the one hand, Akira Yanabu (柳父章), a researcher in the areas of translation studies and comparative literature, wrote an essay on the subject (Yanabu 1982). In this essay, Yanabu argues that the word *shakai* became popular as a translation for ‘society’ because it had fewer connotations

Fig. 3 Selection process of *shakai*



compared with other options; namely, the Chinese characters *sha* (社), *kai* (会) and the combination of these two letters had no connection with the meaning of society in terms of modern society (Yanabu 1982: 22).

On the other hand, Megumi Hayashi explained that *shakai* was selected because it had been preferred in the leading universities in Japan, Keio University and the University of Tokyo, since about 1877 (Hayashi 1966: 108–109).

Both Yanabu and Hayashi mention the *Mei-Roku-Sha* (明六社), which was an association established by Arinori Mori (森有礼, 1847–1889), a leading statesman and diplomat, in 1873. The purpose of the *Mei-Roku-Sha* was to promote enlightenment to Japan by introducing elements of Western civilization. Yukichi Fukuzawa, Amane Nishi and Rinsho Mitsukuri were founding members of this group, and Gen'ichiro Fukuchi participated in it later.

What Yanabu and Hayashi paid attention to is the fact that the Chinese character *sha* (社) was used in the *Mei-Roku-Sha* (明六社). According to Yanabu, *sha* had already been interpreted as a word that indicates a group of people with a common purpose or interest, and thanks to the activities of the *Mei-Roku-Sha*, *sha* (社) became fashionable and gained huge popularity (Yanabu 1982: 14–15). However, Hayashi's opinion is much more profound than Yanabu's. In the following we will explore the details of this.

### THE REASON WHY SHAKAI WAS SELECTED

My question is why *shakai* was selected as the translation for society, despite it not having the same literal meaning. The reason may possibly be that the word *shakai* reflects the East Asian view of society, based on the Confucian tradition.

As we have seen already, the word *shakai* (社会, 社會) was not coined at the time. It derives from early Chinese writing, primarily from the Confucian tradition. We can find the word *shakai* in *Jin-si-lu* (『近思錄』), the introductory textbook of *Zhu-zi-xue* (朱子学), also known as *Dao-xue* (道学),<sup>5</sup> fourteen volumes written in twelfth-century China. The original meaning of *shakai* is quite different from 'society' in the modern Western context. Initially *shakai* meant a small community that consisted of approximately fifty people, and furthermore the word was scarcely used even in China (Kōtō 1991: 30).

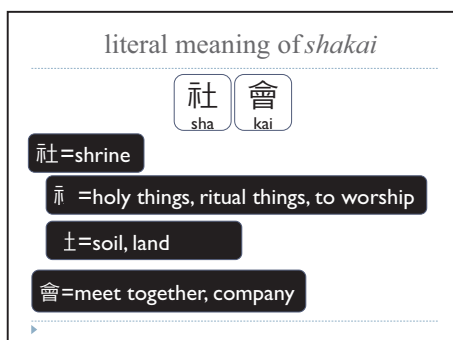
We should look into the literal meaning of the two Chinese characters of *shakai* (社會). The letter *sha* (社) consists of two parts: the left-hand-side radical (礻) means holiness or ritual things and the right-hand-side radical (土) means soil or land. The combination of these two radicals (社) means shrine. The letter *kai* (會) means meeting or to meet together. Therefore, *shakai* (社會) literally means the holy place in which to worship the productive power of nature. The letter *sha* (社) implies ‘the sacred’ and nature in itself (Fig. 4). This is more than the word society literally means. This fact may remind us of the sociological literature of Emile Durkheim, especially *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. However, the adoption of *shakai* as the translation for ‘society’ took place much earlier than the period when Durkheim was writing.

Megumi Hayashi puts stress on the connotation of the word *shakai* to explore why the term was selected. According to Hayashi, it is because the word *shakai* was, for the translators at the time, especially for Rinsho Mitsukuri and Amane Nishi, an ‘ideographic symbol’ to express the essentials of society (Hayashi 1966: 88). So what were these essentials for them?

Amane Nishi was in the Netherlands from 1862 to 1865 as a student sent by the Tokugawa Shogunate, and he studied natural law, public law, national law, national economics and statistics at Leiden University under the instruction of Simon Vissering (Hayashi 1966: 71). According to Hayashi, Nishi also looked into the thoughts and writings of Auguste Comte (Hayashi 1966: 73).

After returning to Japan, Nishi opened a private school called *Iku-Ei-Sha* (育英舎) in 1870 and gave a series of lectures there to enlighten young people. In these lectures, Nishi interpreted the modern concept

Fig. 4 Literal meaning of *shakai*



**Table 1** The process by which *shakai* was introduced

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March 1874: Amane Nishi (西周) used the word <i>shakai</i> (社會) for the first time in Japan. He introduced the word from Chinese classics. It was not used as the translation for ‘society’.
January 1875: Gen’ichiro Fukuchi (福地源一郎) used the word <i>shakai</i> (社會) as the translation for ‘society’ for the first time in an influential newspaper. However he did not care about the connotations of the word <i>shakai</i> .
October 1875: Rinsho Mitsukuri (箕作麟祥) intensively used the word <i>shakai</i> (社會) as the translation for ‘society’.

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Source: Hayashi (1966)

of society as a constructed unity based on the division of labour, and explained society as ‘the way to support each other’ (「相生養之道」).<sup>6</sup> This is included in a transcript of his lectures, *Hyakugaku-Renkan* (『百学連環』: the translation of *Encyclopedia*) (Hayashi 1966: 72–73). Since the letter *sha* (社) was an ‘ideographic symbol’ for Nishi, he tried to translate ‘society’ by using the word *shakō* (社交). However, *shakō* (社交) or *kōsai* (交際) only reflects another meaning of ‘society’; that is, the relationship between human beings. In the meantime, Gen’ichiro Fukuchi used *shakai* (社会) as the translation for ‘society’ (i.e. modern society) in 1875; then Rinsho Mitsukuri, taking the connotation of the Chinese letter *sha* (社) into account, started to use *shakai* (社会) (Hayashi 1966: 88–89). At this point, *shakai* drove out other translation options (Table 1).

### SELF-OBSERVATION OF SOCIETY IN EAST ASIA

The fact that the word *shakai* (社会) was selected as the translation of ‘society’, rather than one of the other options, indicates how modern society is observed and described in East Asia. In the context of globalization, it is important to compare what is observed and described by the word ‘society’ and what is observed and described by the word *shakai*. As we have seen, the Chinese letter *sha* (社) implies the concept of integration by ‘the sacred’. Therefore we can safely assume that in East Asia the concept of *shakai* is more normatively accepted than the Western concept of society.

From the viewpoint of Niklas Luhmann’s sociological systems theory, we can see that society is a communication system that contains various

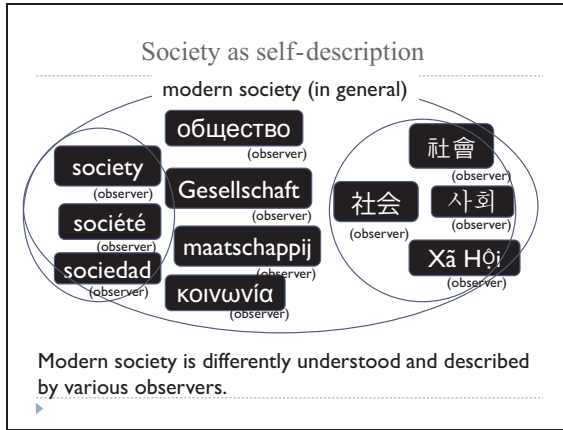


Fig. 5 Society as self-description

self-descriptions (Fig. 5). For each internal observer, society is viewed as a single entity. However, if we take the viewpoint of the second-order observation, we can see there are various different observers inside society, which can be thought of as more complex. Based on this, we can see that society is conceived in different ways by each observer, and this includes the concept of society itself. The understanding of modern society changes from modernization (Westernization) to typology of modernity or to multiple modernity, and this can be an alternative for Eurocentric and anthropocentric ideas of society.

By using the self-description concept, we can see how a border is drawn between society and non-society (= environment). From this viewpoint, we can reconsider the concept of society that is appropriate for the ('multiple') modern era. What would be the advantage of non-Western social theory, or strictly speaking a theory of society or societal theory (*Gesellschaftstheorie*)?

It can be summarized in two points. First, the concept of *shakai* implies the Confucian tradition. From the Western point of view this is probably not accepted. However, sociologically speaking, it can also be a clue when we look for alternatives to the concept of integration, solidarity or inclusion/exclusion. Secondly, at least initially, *shakai* does not draw a distinction between nature and society. Nature and *shakai* are linked to each other. This may be an alternative to the anthropocentric concept of society.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen above, the concept of society and the concept of *shakai* are not identical. In Japan, the word *shakai* was preferred as the translation for society during the 1870s and 1880s, not because it reflects the literal meaning of society (as the Western concept) but it implies the connotation of the concept of society; that is, the idea of integration through a distinction between sacred and profane (and possibly owing to the influence of *Zhu-zi-xue*, as Amane Nishi had explained society as ‘the way to support each other’ (「相生養之道」), but such an implication has been lost since the word’s adoption). This does not mean that East Asia does not have the concept of society. It tells us that it is possible to understand modern society in different ways and also to build non-Western theories of society. This could be useful both for sociology and for society itself.

## NOTES

1. The Japanese word *shakai* as the translation of society was exported to China (*shehui*), Korea (*sahoe*), and Vietnam (*xã hội*).
2. In recent years, several sociologists have issued writings on the notion of ‘society’ itself in various ways. For example, Yasutaka Ichinokawa (市野川容孝) published a book entitled *Shakai* which deals with the concept of ‘the social’ (Ichinokawa 2004), Teruhito Sako (左古輝人) wrote articles on the usage of *shakai* (Sako 2007, 2008), and Naoe Kimura (木村直恵) pursued the history of introducing the concept of society in Japan (Kimura 2007, 2009). Then Shōichirō Takezawa (竹沢尚一郎) issued a book entitled ‘*What is Society?*’, which discusses the emergence of the concept of *société* in France (Takezawa 2010). In addition, a book named *The Birth of ‘Society’* written by Kazuhiro Kukutani (菊谷和宏) was published in 2011 (Kikutani 2011). Furthermore, Niklas Luhmann’s *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, two volumes on the theory of society, was translated into Japanese (Luhmann 1997=2009). In this way the concept of society has been gaining greater attention in Japan.
3. Self-description (*Selbstbeschreibung*) is also the title of the last chapter of Niklas Luhmann’s magnum opus, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Luhmann 1997).
4. *Seken* (世間) = human relations among the people, (*jinmin-*)*kōsai* ([人民]交際) = (people’s) communication or relationship, *setai* (世態) = conditions of the world, *shakō* (社交) = relation to other people.
5. *Zhu-zi-xue* (朱子学), or *Dao-xue* (道学), is the new school of Confucianism which appeared in the twelfth century. In Japan, *Zhu-zi-xue* had been a

school of learning advocated by the Tokugawa shogunate since the seventeenth century. Intellectuals in late nineteenth-century Japan, such as Amane Nishi and Rinsho Mitsukuri, often began their academic career in the tradition of *Zhu-zi-xue*.

6. In the translation of John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* which was published in 1877, Nishi explained society as 'a unity where people support each other' (「人々相養之一体」).

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# An Intercultural Perspective on Chinese Aesthetics

*Karl-Heinz Pohl*

The imprint of Western-style modernity on the world can be observed in the remotest corners of the globe. Whether these developments are a blessing or a curse for human enterprise on this planet will be left for later generations to decide. Whatever the ultimate judgement may be, there seems to be a globally accepted assumption among intellectuals that the theoretical approach and level of complexity in the Humanities, as they are studied in the West, are to be applied as universal norms. This would appear to be inspired by perceptions of Western superiority in many other areas, particularly in technology, natural sciences and even military capability.

In the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this assumption has been subjected to criticism. However, the effects of this post-colonial critique have been marginal in the West in terms of questioning and challenging US- and Eurocentric views and developing a deeper consciousness of other cultures. We are still cooking in the juice of our Western style scientific theories, and take it for granted that people from other cultures will simply have to become well versed in Western modes of thought—even in the Humanities, which are designed to explore the very essentials of human existence. The so-called cross-cultural exchange in the Humanities

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has, then, actually been taking place on a one-way-street: Euro-American theories, categories and models have been adopted everywhere and have become the universal standard of discourse for intellectuals all over the world. Meanwhile, in the West, the preoccupation with other cultures has been limited to a kind of cultural–anthropological positivism: the peculiarities of other cultures have been researched, mapped out and filed in the edifices of Western academia.

China is no exception when it comes to this one-way-street of cross-cultural exchange. Since the early twentieth century, particularly since the so-called May Fourth Movement (*c.* 1917–1923), Western social and scientific theories have become dominant. Beginning in 1949, Marxism, as the allegedly most ‘progressive’ of all the Western theories, was determined to be the one and only acceptable ‘order of discourse’ in China. Only recently, after a *de facto* departure from Marxism and a merely nominal adherence to the teachings of Trier’s great son, have there been certain tendencies towards a re-evaluation of China’s own cultural tradition. Thus, modern Chinese intellectual history can largely be read as a history of China’s struggle with Western ideas.

Modern Chinese aesthetics forms an essential part of the historical struggle with Western thought. Concerning this, however, one often hears the objection that China never had a discipline that could be compared with occidental philosophical aesthetics. Seen from a methodological point of view, such objections may carry a certain weight, but because of a similarity to art-philosophical aspects of Western aesthetics, the Chinese, in general, understood and still understand their own rich tradition of poetic rather than systematic reflections on the essence of literature and art as ‘aesthetics’. The ‘aesthetic fever’, *meixue fe*, that broke out in China during the 1980s can be understood from the pre-eminent role that aesthetics played and still plays in the history of Chinese ideas. Hence, if we want to avoid getting further tangled up in the snares of Eurocentrism, we would be well advised to accept this cross-cultural approximation in spite of its vague rather than rigorous definition of terms. Before dealing further with these intercultural aspects, let us first take a look at the basic ideas in this long and rich Chinese tradition.

\* \* \*

Traditional Chinese poetics and art theory give weight to two seemingly contradictory notions: to naturalness (*ziran*) and regularity (*fa*). The

stunning aesthetic effect of this unity of opposites can best be observed and studied in the so-called ‘regular poems’ (*lüshi*) that flourished during the golden age of Chinese poetry, the Tang dynasty (sixth to tenth century AD). These poems have to follow a strict set of rules concerning length and number of lines, tone patterns, parallelism and the like. And yet, reading the works of not only the greatest poets of that time, such as Du Fu, Li Bai or Wang Wei, one gets a feeling of absolute naturalness and ease, recalling Goethe’s dictum that ‘true mastery only reveals itself in restriction’ (*In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister*). True, this preponderance of regularity also has its linguistic roots: the structure of the Chinese written language—single characters pronounced with a single syllable—lends itself supremely to neatly regular arrangements, parallelisms and such, unknown in this form in Western languages. But there are also ideological reasons for this feature, such as a Confucian predilection for regularity, or rather regular rites (*li*), in interpersonal conduct. Naturalism, on the other hand, is the domain of Daoism. And when the Chinese literary and art theorists, all through the ages, elaborated on the notion that a work of art both follows and transcends rules (*fa*), they drew their inspiration for this mostly from Daoist stories. In the Song dynasty, for example, Su Shi (1037–1101), the most influential scholar-literatus for the last 800 years of imperial China in terms of aesthetics, invoked Daoist images of natural creativity when he compared his writing to

a thousand-gallon spring that issues forth without choosing a site ... There is no knowing how it will take shape. But there is one thing I am sure of; it always goes where it should go and stops where it should stop.<sup>1</sup>

In later periods, after Buddhism had taken a strong hold in Chinese society, particularly for the scholar-literati class in the Daoist inspired Chan- (Zen-) Buddhist school, Buddhist concepts became major reference points in aesthetics. This also applies for the concept of *fa*. In Buddhism, *fa* is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit *Dharma*, which has a double connotation, both as the teaching of the Buddha or truth and as the ultimate reality. Thus it is not surprising that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the discussion on rules and methods (*fa*) in poetry and painting reached its height, we have constant reference to its Buddhist usage, requiring that ‘method’ or ‘rules’ (*fa*) be matched by ‘enlightenment’ (*wu*), thus leading to an ‘intuitive mastery’,<sup>2</sup> the main goal in

Chan-Buddhism. Here basic concepts of Chan-Buddhism serve in an allegorical way as explanations for the central questions of Chinese aesthetics: the unity of regularity and naturalness.

Here the question arises about the kind of rules the poets or artists were to follow. Even the most ardent followers of rules, the so-called archaists, who, flourishing in the Ming dynasty, looked up to the great masters of the past, were eager to point out that following rules or models did not mean following the models of ancient poets but following nature, because it was the rule of nature which the ancient poets followed, in the words of one of its main representatives, Li Mengyang (1475–1529):

Words must have methods and rules before they can fit and harmonize with musical laws, just as circles and squares must fit with compasses and rulers, which were not invented by them but really created by Nature. Now, when we imitate the ancients, we are not imitating them but really imitating the natural laws of things.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of unity of naturalness and regularity—in terms of following the rules of nature—was further elaborated by juxtaposing the notion of ‘living rules’ (*huo fa*) against that of ‘dead rules’ (*si fa*).<sup>4</sup> In the Qing period, the literary critic Ye Xie (1627–1703) expressed his idea of ‘living rules’ in the image of the clouds on Mount Tai. They form their beautiful and natural structure because they do not follow dead rules but the unfathomable living rules of nature. An untranslatable part of this inspiring passage (in Stephen Owen’s translation) is the ambiguity of the important Chinese term *wen*: meaning both beautiful/regular pattern/structure and literature:

Within Heaven and Earth the greatest forms of *wen* [pattern/literature] are the wind and clouds, rains and the thunder. Their mutations and transformations cannot be fathomed and have neither limit nor boundary: they are the highest manifestation of spirit (*shen*) in the universe and the perfection of *wen*. But let me speak of them from one particular point of view. The clouds of Mount Tai rise from the merest wisp, but before the morning is done, they cover the world. I once lived half a year at the foot of Mount Tai and grew familiar with the shapes and attitudes of these clouds. Sometimes, as I said, they rise out of the merest wisp and stream off flooding all the ends of the earth; sometimes all the peaks of the range seem to try to rise above them, but even the very summits disappear. Sometimes several months will pass in continuous shadow, but then the clouds will scatter in the short hour

of a meal. Sometimes they are as black as lacquer; sometimes as white as snow. They may be as huge as the wings of the Peng bird, hanging over both horizons, or as wild as tangled tresses. Sometimes they sit suspended like lumps in the sky with no others following them; sometimes they are continuous and fine, coming one after another without interruption.

All at once black clouds will mount upward, and the natives of the region will read the signs by established rule: 'It will rain,' they say. And it does not rain. Then again some clouds, lit by the sun, will come out, and their established rule tells them, 'It's going to be sunny.' And it rains. The attitudes assumed by the clouds can be counted in the tens of thousands; no two are the same. Neither are any two manners of clouds the same by whose colours we might forecast their future movements. Sometimes all the clouds will come back; sometimes they will go off for good, and never come back. Sometimes all come back; sometimes half will come back—no two situations are the same. This is the natural pattern of Heaven and Earth, its perfect work.

But let us suppose that the pattern of Heaven and Earth could be set according to a rule. When Mount Tai was going to dispatch its clouds, it would first gather the troops of clouds and hold a conference with them: 'I'm about to send you clouds out to make the Great Pattern of Heaven and Earth. Now you over there—I want you to go first—and you follow him. I would like you to rise up; you next to him—you sink down. You should try shining in the light, and you might try making a rippling motion. You back there!—you should turn around as you go out and come back in; and I think it would be especially nice to have you sort of roll over in the sky. This one is to begin; this one is to close; and this one here is to follow up the rear wagging its tail.

If the clouds were dispatched like this and brought back home like this, there would be no vitality in any of them. And if the pattern of the universe were made in this manner, then the universe would feel burdened by having a Mount Tai, and Mount Tai would feel burdened by having clouds, and no clouds would ever be sent out.<sup>5</sup>

This vivid image illustrates the Chinese traditional aesthetic ideal of a great work of poetry or art better than any theory: that of a living, organic pattern, not dependent on rules derived from 'orthodox' models or periods but following the rules of nature. Such works come alive, creating their own rules, in each new period with each new poet-artist who is

stirred by the world and its affairs. In painting, it was the influential unorthodox monk–painter Shitao (1641–1717) who pinpointed this idea with his famous notion of ‘no-rule’ being the ‘ultimate rule’ (*wu fa er fa, nai wei zhi fa*).<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the way to achieve this ultimate state of natural creativity, it was understood from the earliest time that constant practice (*gongfu*) according to masterful models was the only means of reaching mastery and perfection. This emerges from a famous story in the *Zhuangzi* (fourth to third centuries BC) which is central to Chinese aesthetics. It pictures a cook who, transcending mere method, was able to wield his knife in an unfathomable spiritual fashion, because he had entered the *Dao*. However, as he also confesses, he had to practise cutting up oxen for a decade until he could reach this level of spirit-like mastery.<sup>7</sup> Hence, constant practice and copying led to an intuitive mastery over the artistic medium. Thus, the first ideal of traditional Chinese aesthetics is to achieve a degree of artistic perfection in the work of art which, when imbued with a ‘vital resonance’ (*qiyun*), makes it seem like a work of nature, and yet conveys a sense of spiritual mastery.

A second important notion in Chinese aesthetics is that of openness and suggestiveness. This also has a linguistic root: the syntactical indeterminacy or ambiguity of classical Chinese syntax, lending itself to openness and suggestiveness. In terms of aesthetics, the idea of suggestiveness found a lasting coinage in the dictum of the Tang poet and critic Sikong Tu (837–908), that poetry should convey ‘images beyond images’ and ‘scenes beyond scenes’ (*xiang wai zhi xiang, jing wai zhi jing*).<sup>8</sup> In terms of a philosophical background, we again have here Daoist roots; that is, the notion that words cannot completely transmit ideas, let alone convey the ultimate truth or *Dao*.<sup>9</sup> In a way, this emphasis on suggestiveness—compounded by the syntactical indeterminacy or ambiguity of classical Chinese prose—led to the predominance of poetic diction in Chinese writings of all kinds, rendering even philosophical discourse poetical and suggestive rather than conceptual and rational. Furthermore, painting, which aimed at a depiction of ‘inner reality’ (*zhen*) beyond ‘form’ (*xing*), was supposed to have this suggestive, allusive and finally poetic quality (with titles of paintings often being lines of poetry),<sup>10</sup> leading to the well-known feature of Chinese painting that the empty space (*xu*) is more important, that is, suggestively telling, than the painted substance (*shi*).

Let us now turn to the creator of art, to the poet and artist. In Chinese thought, we have the notion of ‘vital force’ (*qi*) which serves as the main

category with which to discuss the creative power of a poet or artist. At first, ‘vital force’ was taken to be an innate quality which could not be acquired. Over the centuries, the notion of the ‘vital force’ of a person changed, however, ranging from an innate capacity to something which can be cultivated and acquired. Thus the rather dazzling notion of *qi* stands for both an innate talent as well as an acquired power of expression, being the first requirement of a poet–artist.

A second important requirement is the artist’s imaginative capacity. This indispensable faculty of a poet, called ‘spiritual thinking’ (*shen si*),<sup>11</sup> was thought to bring about a fusion of the artist’s mind with the outside world.<sup>12</sup> There is a well-known image used by Su Shi that describes this faculty most impressively in the capacity of his friend, the bamboo painter Wen Tong, of having the ‘complete bamboo in his mind’ before painting (*xiong zhong cheng zhu*), or rather of actually becoming bamboo when painting bamboo.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, the above-mentioned features—‘living’ rules, suggestiveness, creative power and imaginative capacity—have led to notions such as unity of rule and no-rule, unity of concreteness and openness, fusion of scene (*jing*) and idea/feeling (*yi/qing*), and fusion of self with world or subject with object. Two more ideas need to be mentioned, though. First is the tendency to balance out complementary or opposite elements according to the well-known and ubiquitous *yin–yang* pattern, that is uniting strong *and* weak, hard *and* soft, male *and* female elements in a duality and not in contentious dualism. This balance is at the very heart of Chinese aesthetics: the unity of naturalness and regularity. It can also be observed in Chinese landscape painting, where mountains (the *yang*-element) are united with water (the *yin*-element)—hence its Chinese name of ‘mountain and water painting’ (*shan-shui hua*). Second is the importance of the calligraphic brushstroke. The black–white contrast of the calligraphic line with its dynamic movement was considered to have more aesthetic appeal than colours, which were not only considered rather static but also carried a rather vulgar (*su*) connotation. These notions can be singled out as the most important ideas in Chinese aesthetical thought.

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What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western aesthetics? In spite of the different styles of discourse we can find certain correspondences. Where the Chinese theorists emphasize adherence to

rule, that is, imitation of models, but ultimately transcending them in the concept of ‘living rule’ or ‘enlightenment’ (i.e. intuitive mastery), we have in Western thought the concept of mimesis as the imitation of nature in art. Aristotle, however, had already propounded, just like one of the Chinese authors mentioned, that mimesis, as artistic creation, is not the imitation of finished things in nature but imitation of the original creativity of nature. This thought is further elaborated by Kant as art being the product of genius through which ‘nature gives rules to the work of art’. For Kant, however, there are also ‘scholastic’ aspects in art which require adherence to rules. It is the power of genius to transcend them, or, as it were, create works which are and at the same time are not made according to rule, thus becoming models for the inspiration of others.

Kant’s ‘genius’ also finds its analogy in the Chinese concept of ‘vital force’ (*qi*) as a disposition which transmits the vital power of nature into the mental and thus artistic realm. Su Shi’s description of his creative force, his ‘thousand-gallon spring that issues forth without choosing a site’, creating writing which is ‘like drifting clouds and flowing water, things which cannot be constrained by definite patterns and which go where they ought to go and stop where they ought to stop’,<sup>14</sup> very much fits this idea of genius through which nature gives rules to art. The work of art thus created does not show any signs of conscious artistry and cannot be taught to others, both notions that are found both in Western and Chinese aesthetic thought.<sup>15</sup>

So much for some of the similarities. What about the differences? Since Kant, there has been a strong emphasis on originality in Western aesthetics. This does not find much correspondence in Chinese thought.<sup>16</sup> For Western art, however, particularly for the period of romanticism and thereafter, in other words the modern period, this emphasis has had far-reaching consequences, becoming the dominant characteristic of a work of art. In contrast, Chinese aesthetics places more emphasis on mastery or perfection (*gong*), both through orientation on past models and through natural creativity. The two respective features of Western and Chinese aesthetics—originality and perfection—do not only mark the strong points but also stand for the weaknesses of Western and Chinese art. In the West, the emphasis on originality has led to the conceptualization of art, to the loss of its truly artistic features. In China, on the other hand, the insistence on perfection has led to too much orientation on past models and therefore stagnation.

Let us finally compare not the content, the ideas, but the form of discourse on art in the West and in China. The Western way, with Kant’s or



Hegel's writing being typical for the Western approach in general, is highly analytical, and at the same time very systematic, creating a complex system of thought. This, no doubt, is its strength, but, considering its sometimes tangled and indigestible language, is also its weakness. Chinese discourse, on the contrary, is unsystematic, suggestive, indeed poetic. The description quoted above of the clouds on Mount Tai exemplifies this metaphorical rather than conceptual approach to aesthetic questions. Seen from the Western perspective with its tradition of defining its terms, the poetic ambiguity of the Chinese approach appears to be a weakness. Put in the categories used at the beginning of this chapter, we could say that the Western systematic discourse is 'with rules' (*you fa*), whereas the ambiguous, suggestive Chinese discourse is 'without rules' (*wu fa*). Considering, however, that the topic of this discourse is art—poetry, painting or calligraphy—and that it is expressed by poets and artists (not philosophers!), 'without rule' might as well be understood in Shitao's terms as the 'ultimate rule' (*zhi fa*); that is, as the adequate type of discourse for the topic of art. In comparison to this, the Western scientific and analytical approach appears detrimental to art, killing its spirit with its discursive style. Possibly also for this reason, aesthetics in the West appears to have become a subject with a purely academic interest. It does not seem to be a vital, intellectually inspiring tradition any more. Today, the general reading public does not care about aesthetics at all; an 'aesthetic fever', as occurred in China during the 1980s, would be unthinkable in the West.

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Coming back to the modern period and intercultural issues, in two regards aesthetics assumes a special place in China's grappling with Western thought. First, aesthetics, particularly in its early modern phase, constituted a realm relatively free of politics. For this reason it allowed the Chinese to explore occidental thought freely and without political restraint. Second, philosophy of art as part and parcel of aesthetics offered, as already mentioned, many ways of linking up with China's own tradition. This was important because—other than the mainstream of Chinese traditional social and political thought, particularly Confucianism—this part of the Chinese tradition had not been discredited by the reception of Western ideas and the radical anti-traditionalism of the May Fourth period. Quite on the contrary: when the Chinese began to define their place in relationship to the West at the beginning of the twentieth century, they understood

their own culture as an essentially aesthetic one. In their monumental *History of Chinese Aesthetics* (*Zhongguo meixue shi*), Li Zehou and Liu Gangji marked as the last and most important characteristic of traditional Chinese aesthetics the idea that an aesthetic consciousness was regarded as the highest and noblest consciousness to be attained in life.<sup>17</sup>

The encounter with Western thought offered the Chinese, on the one hand, a range of fascinatingly new ideas (such as the category of the tragic or Hegel's grand system) and, on the other, a chance to look for familiar concepts which could be aligned with their own tradition. In particular, Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), the president of Peking University during the May Fourth period, felt motivated to this twofold endeavour. He was instrumental in formulating the idea of the mentioned cultural–aesthetic self-understanding of the Chinese. Through his studies in Germany he was familiar with occidental philosophy, particularly with Kant. He regarded Western man as largely shaped by religion, whereas for China he held aesthetics (a combination of ritual, art and ethics) to be the functional equivalent. For this reason he demanded for modern China 'aesthetic education in the place of religion'. As China is in the process of reinstalling aesthetic education in schools, one can see that his ideas are still reverberating there (though he failed with his attempts in his own time).

In his article 'The Spreading and Influence of German Aesthetics in China',<sup>18</sup> Liu Gangji showed that modern Chinese aesthetics has been largely formed by dealing with the German tradition of aesthetics. Because of the enormous problems of translation, this tradition of aesthetics—from German idealism to Marx and Heidegger—was received in China with a phase shift of about 100 to 150 years. Owing to this background, it is not surprising that the discourse of Chinese aesthetics of the twentieth century was largely shaped by the categories and questions of German philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The rather rigid reception of Marxism only reinforced this tendency. This fixation also explains the Chinese translation of the Western term 'aesthetics'—'beautology', if we want to retranslate the Chinese term *meixue* back into English. This translation is for China somewhat misleading, if not unfortunate, as the category of the 'beautiful' has not played a significant role in traditional China, whether in the form of natural or as artistic beauty. In early Confucian scriptures, the character *mei* (beautiful) was used almost synonymously with 'moral goodness' (*shan*) without further differentiation or emphasis on a category of beauty. Apart from this connotation, Confucian discourse

on literature and art seems to have slighted formal beauty, deeming it, as outward ornament, to be less valuable than the substantial ethical or moral content. For Daoist writers, the recognition of beauty only led to the notion of ugliness, as *Laozi*, Chap. 3, succinctly states: 'When everyone in the world knows the beautiful as beautiful, ugliness comes into being.'<sup>19</sup> In Chinese literary theory and art philosophy, therefore, 'beauty' used to carry more a negative, if not a vulgar (*su*), connotation. More important in terms of aesthetic 'categories' were attributes such as 'harmonious/balanced' (*he*) or 'natural/spontaneous' (*ziran*). As already mentioned, a work of art should not imitate reality or nature, but should convey a sense of natural creativity; apart from this, it should have a poetic or self-transcending suggestive effect on the viewer or reader.

The modern Chinese aestheticians' frantic search for beauty in their own tradition thus appears in many ways like a voyage into the wrong direction which, however, as is not unusual with such voyages, has also let them discover unknown and interesting territory, such as a few parallels between Chinese and Western aesthetics, some of which having already been mentioned. Also worth noting is the creative appropriation of Marxist aesthetics in China, an accomplishment which could be stimulating in Marx's own cultural hemisphere, if anyone took notice of it. What is needed is simply to get a dialogue started on these issues.

A dialogue will not take place, however, if one side simply lectures and the other, as in a teacher–student relationship, listens attentively. Dialogue happens when both sides can express their views and are taken seriously. It is about time to begin such dialogues between the West and other cultural areas on the globe. An essential condition for a successful dialogue, however, is that each side is able to get to know the other through translations. In terms of English translations of Chinese aesthetics, we now have Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty* (*sic!*) (in English and in German),<sup>20</sup> and the volume edited by Gene Blocker and Zhu Liyuan, *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* (New York 1995); but this is not enough when compared with the numerous translations of Western works, from Kant to Benedetto Croce. Levelling out this asymmetry will be of paramount importance for a fruitful dialogue in the future, and not only on aesthetics. In fact, the discovery of the cultural other could have a broadening and vitalizing effect on our humanities in general; for it is very likely, paraphrasing Hans-Georg Gadamer, that the other, in this case the other culture with its different answers to existential questions, has something to tell us.

## NOTES

1. Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, Cambridge, MA 1971, p. 35.
2. Richard John Lynn, 'Orthodoxy and Enlightenment: Wang Shih-chen's Theory of Poetry and Its Antecedents', *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.), New York 1975, p. 219.
3. R.J. Lynn, 'Orthodoxy and Enlightenment', p. 232.
4. See also Richard John Lynn, 'The Sudden and the Gradual in Chinese Poetry Criticism: An Examination of the Ch'an-Poetry Analogy', *Sudden and Gradual*, Peter Gregory (ed.), Honolulu 1987, p. 392.
5. Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992, p. 509. See also K.-H. Pohl, 'Ye Xie's *Yuan shi*—A Poetic of the Early Qing', *T'oung Pao*, LXXVIII (1992), pp. 1–32.
6. Lin Yutang, *The Chinese Theory of Art*, New York 1967, p. 140.
7. See Burton Watson (trans.), *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York 1968, p. 50f.
8. Owen, p. 357. Maureen A. Robertson, "... To Convey what is Precious': Su-k'ung T'u's Poetics and the *Erh-shih-su shih-p'in*", David Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *Transition and Permanence. A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-ch'üan*, Haon Kong 1972, p. 327ff. See also K.-H. Pohl, 'Bilder jenseits der Bilder—Ein Streifzug durch die chinesische Ästhetik', *China. Dimensionen der Geschichte*, Peter M. Kuhfus (ed.), Tübingen 1990, p. 232f.
9. See the beginning of the *Daodejing*: 'The *Dao* that can be spoken of is not the eternal *Dao*.'
10. Lin Yutang, p. 63f.
11. See Liu Xie's *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong*), Owen, p. 201.
12. Owen, p. 202.
13. Lin Yutang, p. 92f., Bush, p. 38f.
14. See note 1.
15. See, for example, the parable of the wheelwright in *Zhuangzi* who cannot teach the spiritual mastery of his craft to his son. Watson, p. 152.
16. With the exception, perhaps, of the writers of the so-called Gong'an school, a movement towards greater self-expression in literature at the end of the Ming Dynasty, led by the writer Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) and his two brothers; see James Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, Chicago 1975, p. 79ff.
17. Li Zehou and Liu Gangji, *Zhongguo meixueshi* (*History of Chinese Aesthetics*), I, Beijing: Xinhua, 1984, p. 33f.

18. Liu Gangji, 'Verbreitung und Einfluss der deutschen Aesthetic in China', K.-H. Pohl (ed.), *Trierer Beitræge. Aus Forschung und Lehre an der Universitaet Trier*, July 1996 (Sonderheft 10).
19. Lao-tzu: *Te-tao Ching. A New translation Based on the recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts*, transl. Robert G. Henricks, New York 1989, p. 54.
20. Li Zehou, *The Path of beauty. A Study of Chinese Aesthetics (Mei de licheng)*, transl. by Song Lizeng, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994; *Der Weg des Schoenen. Wesen und Geschichte der chinesischen Aesthetik*, ed. by K.-H. Pohl and Gudrun Wacker, Freiburg: Herder, 1992.



# Making Sociology Universal: Revisiting the Contributions of Syed Hussein Alatas

*Habibul Haque Khondker*

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of a global, universal sociology has provoked acrimonious debates. To make a complex discourse simple, let us consider two intellectual positions presented in a binary format. The first position is what I call a strong universalist position, also known as an “orientalist” position, and the related positions that draw from the basic tenets that uphold the superiority of the so-called Western theories. The other position is a critique, a renunciation of the strong universalist position, which calls for a non-Western, indigenous perspective. While the so-called indigenous position is on the slippery slope of relativism, the strong universalist position is in effect a particularistic position that masquerades as a universalist position. Ironically, a strong indigenous position is often a mirror image of the strong universalist position; and both are untenable upon critical analysis. In this regard, the dialogic approach enunciated by Ananta Giri (in this book as well as in other writings) provides a useful corrective. The present

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This chapter draws upon an earlier paper “Sociology of Corruption and ‘Corruption of Sociology’: Evaluating the Contributions of Syed Hussein Alatas”, *Current Sociology*, January 2006, 54 (1) 25–39.

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chapter, a reflection about and an interpretation of the works of Syed Hussein Alatas, is based on the core premise of Giri's important epistemological position.

I would like to begin with one of Alatas's key interests, namely corruption. Every time the word corruption is mentioned, one might automatically think about Nigeria or the Philippines during the Marcos era. However, careful thought based on logical and empirical data would reveal that in a globalized world corruption in the Global South is often entangled with corruption in the Global North. Corruption, like environmental pollution, knows no national boundaries. Let us take an example to illustrate this point from the *Financial Times*, which reported that the aircraft engine-maker Rolls-Royce admitted to paying bribes to officials in Indonesia, Thailand, China and Russia in order to secure orders and other deals. Rolls-Royce, a key company in the UK, had to pay a fine of £671 million to the authorities in the UK, the USA and Brazil (Hollinger and Belton 2017).

Corruption is as varied as it is ubiquitous. Transparency International, an international watchdog that focuses on corruption, in its 2016 report ranked New Zealand as the least corrupt country in the world, giving it a score of 90 out of 100 (the higher the score the less corrupt the country). Singapore was given seventh place (Transparency.org 2016). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) scored the highest rank. The UAE was ranked twenty-four, scoring sixty-six in the 2016 report. Bangladesh was ranked 145 of the 176 countries that Transparency International surveyed. In 2004, a Transparency International report gave Singapore 9.3 in a 1 to 10 scale, where the higher figures signify lack of corruption and Bangladesh 1.5. Singapore was ranked fifth least corrupt country (Finland, with 9.7, held the first position, followed by New Zealand with 9.6). Bangladesh occupied the bottom position, which it shared with Haiti. In the *Strait Times* (Singapore) of March 5, 2004 one would read, *inter alia*, stories related to corruption—its absence or presence. The condition of Bangladesh has improved under democratic regimes but corruption still remains a major problem, hamstringing good governance.

Singapore is the least corrupt country in Asia, according to a poll of foreign business executives. On a scale of zero to 10—with 10 being the worst—expatriates surveyed by the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (Perc) gave Singapore a score of 0.5. Japan was a distant second with 3.5 and Hong Kong was in third place with a

score of 3.6. Indonesia, with 9.25, was the worst performer. Fear of punishment acts as an effective deterrent. Besides, the Singapore government has been vigilant and kept itself clean. “The top-down nature of the anti-corruption fight in Singapore has worked as well as it has not only because the country’s leaders have pushed the campaign, but also because they have personally been beyond reproach” (Perc 1994).

Singapore, according to Alatas, is not corruption free. However, it is one of the crowning achievements of the country’s leadership that they ensured an entire generation grew up not experiencing first hand what corruption is; a generation that did not have to bribe with a single cent to get the services that were due to them. The critics of Singapore’s authoritarian style need to consider this fact before invoking the mantra of human rights. Corruption is humiliating for citizens and a violation of their human rights. Preempting corruption contributes to reinstating their dignity and their human rights. In the words of Gerald Caiden, a leading public administration specialist, “corruption in all its manifest forms gnaws at, undermines, and contradicts all the democratic elements. It embodies the antidemocratic ethos, for it embraces selfishness, self-centeredness, particularism, unfair privilege, exploitation of weaknesses and loopholes, unscrupulous advantage of the weak, the exploitable and the defenseless, and all manner of shady dealings. It is undeserved, unfair, unjust, and immoral...” (Caiden 2001: 227).

What is interesting from the point of view of the sociology of knowledge is not that corruption is rife in many parts of Asia and pretty much under control in Singapore; it is the absence of sociological focus on this ubiquitous problem. Alatas was one of the few scholars, along with Myrdal, who identified this problem in the 1950s and 1960s (Alatas, 1957, 1963). It is equally interesting to see that Alatas avoided taking a culturalist or relativistic position by pleading for an understanding of corruption in view of local cultural traditions: he viewed corruption as a universal problem. At the same time, in other contributions, especially his *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Alatas took a more reflexive tack which did not lead to a denunciation of “Western sociology” but a critique of it. Juxtaposition of these two strands renders the sociological approach of Alatas nuanced and interesting, worthy of wider attention. This is the rationale of this chapter.

Once a sociologist raised the issue of the corruption of sociology while criticizing the position of the American Sociological Association (ASA) regarding the US invasion of Iraq. In response to the ASA resolution that criticized the invasion, he wrote, “The non-sociological drift in



the ASA entails a corruption of sociology to further a particularistic political agenda” (Deflem 2004: 9). Space does not allow me to explore this debate, but it would be useful to reflect on the notion of “corruption of sociology”. Corruption is hard to define, and one is tempted to create various typologies of corruption. For Deflem, corruption is a deviation from scientific norms. In his view, science should be kept separate from politics and should not ride the high horse of morality. I am using the idea of corruption of sociology in the sense that sociology as a discipline has failed in its task to be a scientific study of society by neglecting some of the burning problems of society, of which corruption is one. The other blind spots are war and famine. It is ironic that in his important introductory text to sociology Giddens devoted an entire chapter to the military, with a section on terrorism, in his first edition of 1987, but dropped terrorism completely and truncated the section on militarization in the third edition of 1993.

Major events (defined as major by the Western governments and media) shape the intellectual agenda. In the ambit of the Cold War, corruption as a social process was not on the priority list of Western governments. A close parallel can be found today. Since the terrorist attack of 9/11, the Western world and its allies have suddenly awakened to the reality of Islam as a religion, and the existence of “Islamic societies.” More research money, publications, publication and research opportunities are now available on this topic than any other areas in social science. This is most unfortunate. The autonomy of intellectual inquiry is under serious challenge. As more researchers undertake research on the spread of Islamism, fundamentalism, political Islam and so on, as if it is a form of spreadable disease or virus, a whole new intellectual field will be born, or similar areas that previously remained idle or dormant will return to life. Some old publications will be dusted off, and reprints will make it to bookstore and library shelves.

Alatas was a lonely voice, who remained isolated as he did not share the common paradigm shared by the rest of the social scientific community in Southeast Asia. Even today, an outlier faces the same fate. It is not the importance or relevance of one’s views but the topicality of one’s ideas in terms of the dominant paradigms that dictate the acceptability and popularity of particular themes, topics and research areas in social science. And very often these dominant paradigms are imposed from above. Sociology in Asia was simply imitating (or aping, by which I mean copying without thinking) the so-called Western sociology. In some cases, sociology was

transplanted by the European and American social scientists; in other cases local sociologists who were trained overseas came back to teach sociology, and applied Western sociological problems unreflectively.

Media reports on corruption, whether in China, Indonesia, Korea or Germany, show an intricate relationship between corruption and economics on the one hand and corruption and power politics on the other. The relationship between corruption and politics is interesting because it helps us understand the nature of the state itself. In 2004, when Bangladesh was ranked at the bottom of the Corruption Perception Index, a position it shared with Haiti, the Finance Minister of Bangladesh flew to Germany to persuade Transparency International to revise its indicators. The report had ranked Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world for the third time in a row.

Ironically, despite media attention, the subject of corruption has received scant attention from social scientists in general and sociologists in particular. In the widely used sociology textbook (1997, third edition) by Giddens, the word corruption does not appear in the index or the otherwise useful glossary. However, he touched on Pearce's (1976) idea of the crimes of the powerful, and the governmental crime of the Nazi Holocaust and Stalin's purge are used as examples. Political scientists and specialists in public administration have made some important, albeit narrow, contributions to the studies of corruption. The idea of "kleptocracy" (state power captured by the thieves), introduced by Stanslav Andreski, a sociologist, was not pursued in any rigorous manner. Social scientists in the so-called developing countries were too busy pursuing various theoretical models and theories that fitted with fashions of the day, yet were oblivious of problems that were deeper and more complex and were right there in their own backyard. It is only in recent years that some social scientists have begun to pay attention to this complex subject. While analyzing the case of China, it has been argued that such factors as systemic problems, increased opportunities and incentives brought forth by market-oriented reforms, a crisis of values, deficient legal and supervisory mechanisms as well as cultural factors explain rampant corruption (Hao and Johnston 2002: 585).

Alatas wrote about corruption as far back as the 1950s and 1960s. In his own words, "interest in corruption first awakened during the Second World War in Java under the Japanese occupation ... My next intensive exposure to corruption was in 1952, when I spent four months in Iraq and Iran as part of my postgraduate fieldwork at the University of Amsterdam.

I felt then that the most serious problem plaguing the developing societies was corruption. This impression remains to this day” (Alatas 1991: 1). In recent years, a number of new books, including an updated version of Alatas’s book, have been published. For economists, corruption is “an illegal payment to a public agent to obtain a benefit for a private individual or firm” (Rose-Ackerman 1999: 517). Some of them view corruption as a rent-seeking behavior. In purely economic terms, corruption raises the cost of doing business. Economists argue that corruption follows the style of Mafia protection rackets. The rate of protection fees keeps increasing to a point where the system is unable to neglect it. Social and cultural contexts remain largely absent in all these analyses. Gunnar Myrdal, in his *Asian Drama*, identified the problem of corruption as a serious bottleneck for Asian development. The problem persists forty years since Myrdal’s analysis in a more acute and much more dramatic form. In a number of countries in the developing world, corruption has become a part of the fabric of society.

“Corruption is a form of crime and it should be treated as such,” commented Alatas, the foremost sociologist of corruption. While talking to the present author a couple of years ago, he stated that his book *Sociology of Corruption*, first published in 1976, is being reprinted by Prentice-Hall. This republication in a way signifies a renewed interest in the subject of corruption in the wake of the deepening financial and economic crises worldwide. Before the crisis hit the Southeast Asian region, there was a misperception shared by both the public and some academics that corruption can be “bad” or “good.” The latter type characterized countries such as South Korea and Indonesia where widespread corruption went hand in hand with rapid economic growth. “Bad corruption” pre-empted economic growth. This notion is now being seriously challenged. Corruption, like crime, is a threat to society and should be dealt with as such. There is no point trying to justify it in terms of levels of political economic development or culture. Corruption is corrosive, and every step must be taken to stamp it out.

Of course there are scales and degrees of corruption, and the response to it must be proportionate. But there is no point viewing corruption as a lubricant in a rusty system. Again Alatas’s point is worth recalling. For him, a society or administration cannot be completely free from corruption, and the point is how the leadership, the centre of power, responds to it. The key issue here is tolerance. A country such as Singapore has a very low tolerance of corruption; in most developing countries the levels of

tolerance vary from very high to moderate. Alatas uses the phrase “tidal corruption” to refer to the situation in some of the developing countries. “It is one that floods the entire state apparatus including the centre of power, immersing everything in its path. It multiplies the number of perpetrators ... paralyzing the administrative machinery and dampening the enthusiasm of sincere and capable civil servants” (1989: 990). There is a parallel between Alatas’s notion of tidal corruption with that of secondary corruption. Drawing upon Werlin (1994), Peter Hodgkinson’s (1997) discussion of primary and secondary corruption states that the latter creates a condition such that the political system rather than combating corruption facilitates or condones it (Werlin 1994: 550 in Hodgkinson 1997: 23).

The present Singapore society is a fertile source for reflecting on the problem of corruption. We mean by the problem of corruption not the mere existence of corruption, here and there. This is present in Singapore. Crime is present everywhere but it is not the same as the control of authority by criminal elements. When we say there is no problem of corruption in Singapore we mean that the authority is not dominated and manipulated by corrupt elements; that it is possible for a generation to go through life without having to bribe government servants in their transactions with the authority; that taxes are properly collected; that the courts are not at the service of the corrupt; that the police perform their duty without bribes; and so do other services for the public. (Alatas 1989: 985)

Alatas sought to conceptualize corruption historically, by questioning a simple-minded Marxist explanation. In his words:

The economic system of ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries is capitalism. The degree and manifestation of corruption in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore differs greatly. In Thailand, The Philippines, and Indonesia, corruption is rampant. In Malaysia it is not rampant, and in Singapore it is hardly noticeable. The differential development of corruption in these countries cannot be explained by the capitalist system. Furthermore, capitalism in Western European countries is not associated with corrupt governments. Consequently, here capitalism by itself cannot be the cause of widespread corruption.

The inadequacy of the historical-context approach as presented by Marxists and certain functional sociologists is apparent from their failure to explain both corruption as a universal phenomenon affecting all complex social

systems in all ages and its different manifestations within the same system at different times. The Marxist analysis does not descend to a level sufficiently microscopic to see the operation of hitherto neglected organisms. It is at this level of analysis that we find the significant causes of corruption, the most immediate and decisive, the leadership and their cliques. (Alatas 1989: 990)

Alatas provided a conceptualization of corruption that aimed at universality (1986: 21). He finds a close parallel between corruption in Latin America and corruption in Southeast Asia. He sincerely values the importance of empirical data with regard to corruption. His main comment on a paper by the present author, "How to think About Corruption In Bangladesh," (Khondker 1987) was that it needed to provide more empirical data, more cases of concrete corruption. He recognizes the problem of doing empirical research on corruption because the data are not readily available. When Prof Alatas and the present author had these conversations, Transparency International was yet unborn, only being set up in 1999. Alatas had no aversion to so-called Western research methods, which he emphasized was taking the context or milieu into account. Nor is he happy with the idea that some corruption, such as bribery, is good as a lubricant for business. He takes exception to Weiner's politics of scarcity thesis. He has little patience for the so-called cultural relativist. Alatas takes Abueva (1970), a social scientist from the Philippines, to task for his argument that the anti-corruption ethic of public service was derived from the West, a position that Alatas thought was also held by some Western writers. For Alatas, Asia did not have different standards of public morality (Alatas 1991: 94).

Alatas conceptualizes corruption by drawing upon the work of Wang An Shih (1021–1086), the great Chinese reformer. For Wang, corruption was rooted in bad laws and bad men. Alatas finds Wang's analysis "extremely instructive." Wang classified human beings into two groups, the morally mediocre and the morally high. Changes of fortune did not affect the latter. The danger comes when the moral mediocrities gain control of government. In the last analysis, the two absolute prerequisites to avoid corruption were power holders of high moral caliber and rational and efficient laws. Neither could function without the other; both had to be present for any effort to be successful. The problems confronted by Wang An Shih in eleventh-century China have again emerged under a new guise in contemporary Indonesia and many other Asian countries (Alatas 1986: 6–7). Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a scholar and a man of action, sought to eliminate corruption in his capacity as a judge, but failed. Khaldun considered the root cause of corruption to be the passion for

luxurious living within the ruling group. It was to meet the cost of this that the ruling group resorted to corrupt dealings (Alatas 1986: 7–8).

Alatas identifies three types of corruption: bribery, extortion and nepotism (1986: 9). He refers to Wertheim, who argued that extortion and embezzlement are important aspects of public corruption. Lest it might give one the impression that Alatas was using his teacher's framework, it is important to remember that his first contribution regarding corruption goes back to a short article that he published in 1956. In "Some Fundamental Problems of Colonialism" he identified three types of corruption for the first time.

One comprises bribery, theft, embezzlement, extortion, and so on. The second is political corruption involving both individuals and groups. This type of corruption usually takes the form of striving for party or individual interests without moral considerations. The third type of corruption is the weakening of the moral impulse expressed by an attitude of comparative indifference towards corruption itself and other vices. Colonialism has helped to generate the second and the third type of corruption in no small degree. (Alatas 1956: 9–10)

He continues:

To allow these countries to drift in the manner of Europe following the Industrial Revolution would be catastrophic. To allow the negative forces released by colonialism to continue unchecked is an invitation to disaster. The only alternative is the execution of a sound and profound planning ... This should be our answer to colonialism, not demagoguery, xenophobia, not an empty glorification of the past, or bombastic speeches, not an attitude of laxity towards truth and virtue, and neglect of the common welfare. Every problem faced by a society in a given time and place, is an intellectual and moral problem and for this reason our attempt to solve the problems created by colonialism must evidently be based on thought, action and moral values. (Alatas 1956: 10)

From the above, it becomes clear that Alatas was examining corruption not just as a problem of governance but sought to view it broadly as a social phenomenon which he sought to explain in terms of other "social facts." In providing a macro-sociological and historical framework for understanding corruption he introduced the context of colonialism. However, Alatas's position is not that of nativism; he alerts us to avoid "xenophobia and empty glorification of the past." It is also evident that Alatas is concerned with universal moral values. He does not show any sympathy for a relativistic position. It is his study of corruption that makes him a universalist.

We could continue to talk about forms of corruption and the sociological framework that Alatas introduced to study it; but this would only provide a partial understanding of the contributions of a sociologist who developed an original insight into the study of society, combining historical sociology, structural sociology and a healthy skepticism towards classical sociologists. His use of classical sociology alerts us at once to the usefulness of his work as well as its limitations. Alatas's sociological analyses clearly do not reject the contributions of the giants on whose shoulders we stand, but they portray a less imitative approach. It is important to try to understand his sociological contribution both in the area of concrete research on practical social issues (i.e. corruption) and regarding theory. How should we understand social categories—as universal properties or as particular events? Is there a singular modernity, or are their multiple routes to modernity, or multiple variants of modernity? Is there an Asian or Southeast Asian or Indian tradition of sociology?

Here it would be pertinent to discuss Alatas's views on the state of social sciences in Asia, a subject that he discussed in 1969.

There is only a small minority among Asian social scientists who feel the need to develop an autonomous a creative social science tradition relevant to Asia as well as to the general development of social sciences. The great majority of them are merely extending the use of the social sciences current in Europe and America without the necessary adaptation which the very scientific consciousness itself, if present, would dictate us to accomplish. There is here not only a cultural lag in the domain of intellectual consciousness, but also an indication that in the world of learning the Asian scholars are still under intellectual domination. (1969: 2)

“We need a sociology of social scientists in Asia. We have to subject their scientific thought and activity to an analysis of the kind developed by the sociology of knowledge.” Alatas argued that Asian social science can be interpreted as what the economists call a “demonstration effect.” “The demonstration effect is actually part of a more general tendency called by psychologists and social anthropologists ‘diffusion’.” Like demonstration effect, “The main drive in assimilation of social science knowledge from the West is the belief in its utility and superiority.” Other similarities with demonstration effect are frequency of contact, weakening or breakdown of previous knowledge or habit, prestige accompanying the new knowledge, and that it is not necessarily rational and utilitarian. The spread of

social science knowledge in Asian countries takes the form of an uncritical demonstration effect. Alatas points out that even some Western scholars such as Gunnar Myrdal stressed the need for the creation of an autonomous social science tradition in Asia and other developing regions (1969: 3). An American scholar also pointed out “that traditional concepts and theories have lost their relevance. To some extent the current disenchantment with the rate of economic development in many countries is the result of the inadequacy of theoretical frameworks to diagnose the nature of the problem and to prescribe appropriate course of action” (Kapp, quoted in Alatas 1969: 4).

Alatas was not so much concerned with the opposing views of Western versus Eastern economists; his critique was directed against those works that lacked rigor. For example, Alatas took Kuznets to task for offering propositions that were not “empirically verified in a reliable manner” (1969: 6) as he compared them against the work of Gerschenkorn. “Unlike the comparative study attempted by Gerschenkorn, based on definite historical cases, utilizing numerous historical data, offering conclusions derived directly from those data, Kuznets’ comparative study has not been very helpful. It does not reveal to us the interplay of variables in the process of development. The general summary conclusions are useful only to the uninitiated” (Alatas 1969: 6). Alatas raised the interesting point that the work on the origin of capitalism in the West is based on reference to concrete historical and sociological data, but not on the works on Asia by the “absentee foreign scholarship” (1969: 7).

In another context, Alatas criticizes Herskovits for viewing the entire indigenous tradition of Africa as an undifferentiated single tradition. His second criticism is the inadequacy of data or data-driven knowledge. When Herskovits alleges that the Sudanese are not punctual, he did not consider, according to Alatas, that as Muslims they are very punctual with regard to breaking fast or performing Friday prayers; so a Sudanese is not entirely devoid of the sense of punctuality (1969: 10). Alatas then refers to a chapter of the Quran “Al-Asr (The Time)” and then to the Hsiang-yin or incense seal in China as an ingenious device that measures time. Here he quotes from the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*.

What is striking is Alatas’s breadth of knowledge as well as his originality of ideas and his penchant for interdisciplinary analysis. Related to this, in another context he wrote about the need to bring the social sciences to bear on the interpretation of archeological evidence in order to build historical knowledge based on data. (1964: 31).



The issue of Western hegemony was developed in his article on captive social science: social science is dominated by the West, but there is a complicity of our acceptance.

In an article written in 1969, Alatas stated: “An uncritical imitation pervades almost all the entire domain of the scientific intellectual activity. All its major constituents such as problem setting, analysis, abstraction, generalization, conceptualization, description, explanation and interpretation, each and everyone of them, has been affected by this process of uncritical imitation” (1969: 4).

A critique of an uncritical imitation should not be confused with a wholesale rejection of the so-called Western social science. In discussing economic development, Alatas enumerates the following “determinants of economic development: (a) the historical-sociological, (b) the geographical, (c) the strictly economic, (d) the political (e) the psychological, and (g) the representational aspect, in terms of both positive and negative collective representations” (1965: 7). Alatas takes a holistic position that is not too different from that of Fernand Braudel. He specifically mentions Weber’s contribution in this regard, especially the point of collective representation or broadly the cultural factor. His “historico-sociological” factor has a close parallel with what Skocpol and other contemporary historical sociologists would call a comparative-historical or comparative-social structural approach.

The theoretical point is whether or not we can divide the world neatly between the West and the East. No: the geography of East and West keeps changing. Sociological traditions are often centered around national traditions, which allows us to speak of a German sociology as opposed to Korean sociology. In the same vein, we often talk about continental sociology: European versus North American or Asian sociology. Or one can talk about sociology in ideological terms, such as Marxist sociology versus bourgeoisie sociology, a divide that has been made obsolete after the collapse of “really existing socialisms.”

It is a truism that there are multiple traditions in sociology. In a Mannheimian sense, it is very important to consider what would now be called the social embeddedness of knowledge, even if we look at the individual; but it is also plausible to look at the individual author as a representative of “embodied history” as opposed to “objectified history,” to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu. Sure, it is impossible to separate the sociology of Syed Hussein Alatas from his biographical and intellectual

experience, his training in Holland under Professor Wim F. Wertheim and so on. But here the main purpose of looking into his work is to see him as an exemplar. There are two broad areas of sociology in his work: studies of corruption of which he was a pioneer; and social epistemology, the idea of captive mind. Are these two contradictory positions? No. In his work on the role of religion in Asian development, captive mind and so on, Alatas is making a case for what later on came to be known as multiple modernities. That is, one can be modern without being Western, to the dismay of modernization theorists for whom modernization was a code word for Westernization, more suitable for a post-colonial world. Yet his approach to corruption is premised on some level of universal and invariant definition of corruption. If we do not start with a clear definition of corruption, and begin with the premise of relativism, we could endlessly argue that what is corruption from your point of view is an integral part of my cultural practice. Among people stole their brides. In modern society that would be interpreted as kidnapping, and jail terms would await the hero, the bridegroom.

Universalism is not a problem, but it has to be true universalism not Western science dressed as universalism. We need to engage in a dialogue with the external and the internal. This engagement has to take place at several levels. Between theory and research—concepts and empirical data, academia and policymakers, the state and civil society, scientists and laypeople. The more dialogues we have the better off we are. In these dialogues, of course, intellectuals have a great role and responsibility.

Alatas gave a considerable amount of thought to the question of intellectuals and the role in Asia. He saw sociologists as public intellectuals. In his own sociological research and activism, Alatas demonstrated how these two roles can be fused. He insisted on political leadership having both ideas and ideals. Many of the countries where corruption is minimal are countries characterized by leaders with high moral standings.

In his trail-blazing *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Alatas stated: “It is the thesis of the book that the image of the indolent native was the product of colonial domination generally in the nineteenth century when the domination of the colonies reached a high peak and when colonial capitalist exploitation required extensive control of the area” (1977: 70).

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, identified two works, Ranajit Guha’s *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of*

*Permanent Settlement* (published in 1963) and S.H. Alatas's *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (published in 1977) as belonging to the genre of post-colonial specialist scholarship. "Both these books, the former by a Bengali political economist, the latter by a Malaysian Muslim Historian and social theorist, show their authors' assiduous archival research and scrupulously up-to-date documentation, argument, and generalization" (Said 1993: 296). According to Said (1993), Alatas's book, as startlingly original in its own way as Guha's, also chronicles how European colonialism created the lazy native, who performed a crucial function in the calculations and advocacies of what Alatas calls colonial capitalism. This native, subjected to stringent rules and an exacting discipline, was meant, in the words of Sinbaldo de Mas, a Spanish official who in 1843 was entrusted with keeping the Philippines as a Spanish colony, to be sustained "in an intellectual and moral state that despite their numerical superiority they may weigh less politically than a bar of gold" (Alatas 1977: 56); this native was talked about, analyzed, abused and worked, fed with bad food and with opium, separated from his or her natural environment, covered with a discourse whose purpose was to keep him or her industrious and subordinate. Thus, says Alatas, "Gambling, opium, inhuman labor conditions, one-sided legislation, acquisition of tenancy rights belonging to the people, forced labor, were all in one way or another woven into the fabric of colonial ideology and given an aura of respectability. Those outside it were derided" (1977: 96).

According to Said, "One of the sharpest attacks in Alatas's *The Myth of the Lazy Native* is against those Malaysians who continue to reproduce in their own thinking the colonial ideology that created and sustained the 'lazy native' idea. In passages that recall Fanon's strictures against the national bourgeoisie, Alatas shows how residues of colonial capitalism remain in the thought of the newly autonomous Malays, confining them—those, that is, who have not become self-conscious in methodology and aware of the class affiliations that affect thought—to the categories of 'colonial capitalist thought'" (Said 1993: 152). Thus Alatas continues: "The false consciousness distorts the reality. The Malay ruling party inherited the rule from the British without a struggle for independence such as that which took place in Indonesia, India and the Philippines. As such there was also no ideological struggle. There was no intellectual break with British ideological

thinking at the deeper level of thought.” (1977: 152) Again we turn to Edward Said:

Alatas supplies us with an alternative argument about the meaning of the lazy native, or rather, he supplies us with an argument for why the Europeans succeeded in holding on to the myth for as long as they did. Indeed, he also demonstrates how the myth lives on ... The myth of the lazy native is synonymous with domination, and domination is at bottom power ... Alatas’s work has had two aims: to establish a foundation for a post-colonial methodology of South Asian history and society, and to further the demystifying and deconstructive work suggested in *The Myth of the Lazy Native*.” (Said 1993: 307–308)

Alatas’s social science has a deep commitment to moral visions. In this sense there is a close parallel between the sociological projects of Robert Lynd (1939), C. Wright Mills (1959), N. Hahn et al. (1983) and Burawoy (2004), who also envisioned a moral grounding of sociology, a program best exemplified in the works of Bourdieu, especially in his later works such as *The Weight of the World*. It is impossible for social scientists to run away from the moral concerns of the day. And with Montaigne we will plea for reason rather than opinion as the yardstick of social scientific analysis. Alatas was an indefatigable champion of reason and evidence-based research as he sought to establish sociology on a solid scientific basis without losing its moral vision. Syed Hussein Alatas often engaged with the burning issues of the day. He indicated to the present author his various positions, ranging from why music is not antithetical to the tenets of Islam to the importance of a major modern university under the sponsorship of the Organization of the Islamic Countries. He was a true public sociologist in the vein of Michael Burawoy.

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# Political Intrusion in Social Science: The Elimination of Leftist Critical Thinking in Indonesia

*Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata*

## BACKGROUND

In his review article on Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology* (1970), Martin Shaw argued that sociology has never produced scientific studies of society based simply on empirical research and finding, since it cannot avoid political baggage: this pushes the radical sociology of a Marxist and New-left approach away from centre stage (Shaw 1972: 32–33). Writing in the context of critical social thinking, Ananta Kumar Giri comes up with a similar conclusion as he argues that critical discourse has been preoccupied with politics and power. Critical thinkers both in the West and the East, he argues further, cannot make their points without talking about the 'politics of fulfillment' and the 'politics of self-transfiguration' in the case of Seyla Benhabib, and 'life politics' in the case of Anthony Giddens (Giri 2002: 8–9).

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361

However, the way in which ideology and power politics influence social science discourses varies depending on the political constellations in certain regions or countries. In Africa, the politics of the Cold War era contributed to the rise of radical scholarship and critical Marxist perspectives, promoted by scholars such as Franz Fanon, Claude Ake, Cheikh Anta Diop, Chinua Achebe, Shamir Amin, and some others (Arowosegbe 2008: 333–335). In Southeast Asia, social science has been loaded with ideological and political baggage as scientists have for decades been charged with the duty of serving the vested interests of the ruling elite, so that it maintains its control on national power. In an essay, Ignas Kleden argued that social scientists in Southeast Asia region were expected to furnish their theoretical and technical expertise in order to support the state's modernization projects (Kleden 1996: 136–137; Gerke and Evers 2008: 2–3).

In Indonesia, it is generally believed that a critical episode of power struggles tends to determine the direction of social science in terms of discourses and research outputs. In their compiled work on the relationship between social science and power in Indonesia, Vedi Hadiz and Daniel Dhakidae argued that Indonesian social science in its very nature and character is inextricably linked to the shifting requirements of power over time (Hadiz and Dhakidae 2005: 2).

This chapter examines the critical juncture of social science in Indonesia which denotes the linkage of power and discourses of social sciences in that country. It argues that the political upheaval in 1965–1966, which led to the subsequent elimination of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the nationwide ban on Marxism-Leninism, tended to push Leftist critical social thinking onto the margins of social discourse. The marginalization of critical discourse by the New Order government,<sup>1</sup> from 1966 to 1998, was so extreme that Vedi Hadiz dubbed it as 'the politics of forgetting the Indonesian Left' (Hadiz 2006: 554). The term social science in this chapter refers to scientific knowledge available for research and teaching in various Indonesian academic circles from the 1940s to the present encompassing a variety of disciplines, such as history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, literatures, linguistics, economics, and political science (Ardhana 2006: 131). Although it is difficult to put these differing disciplines into one category, it is notable that in Indonesia the fate of these branches of social science is much influenced by the dynamics of power struggles within the elite circle.



The discussion will be divided into four parts. The first will elaborate the crucial events during 1965–1966, when Leftist soldiers killed seven army generals. This assault provoked military retaliation, which led to a mass murder of hundreds of thousands of PKI members and affiliates across the nation. This massacre was followed by the elimination of Marxist ideology from Indonesian social and political discourse. The second part will provide a brief historical account of the emergence of Indonesian social science, which was brought into the country by Western scholars during the colonial era and promulgated by Indonesian scholars who had pursued their studies in Western countries. The third part will discuss the discourses in Indonesian social science. For more than thirty years of the New Order government, social science was used as a conceptual justification for the government's development policies. Subsumed into government development agendas, the teaching and research agendas of social science were dedicated to the progress-oriented theory of modernization, rapid economic growth, political stability, social harmony, strong government, and so forth. The fourth part will look at how the government's persistent ban on Marxism led to marginalization of Leftist critical thinking in Indonesian political and social thinking, where the fear of being accused of 'political treason' prompted intellectuals to avoid using concepts such as class analysis, social revolution, and historical materialism, which could be associated with the banned Marxism. As a result, social science in Indonesia in general is lacking a critical assessment of social, economic, and political reality, which may affect the theoretical development of the discipline.

### POLITICAL TURMOIL IN 1965 AND THE ANNIHILATION OF MARXIST THINKING

In the late 1950s, the Indonesian government endured a serious political and economic crisis. Sukarno was facing uncontrollable inflation, undervalued exchange rates, growing geographical disparities (between Java and outer Java), religious tension, separatist movements, military rebellion, warlordism and intrigue, and government malfunction (May 1978: 75; Mackie 1994: 32). Separatist movements in West Java, West and North Sumatra, and South Sulawesi became intensified. In Jakarta, political dissatisfaction was widespread, as manifested by mob politics and by various

protests that accused the government of being corrupt and insolvent (Feith 1962: 600). Political parties, the civil service, and the military were torn apart by ethno-religious tensions and ideological conflicts. Parliament was also weakened by a deadlock over the Muslim plan to incorporate the Jakarta Charter (insisting on the use of Islamic law) in the nation's constitution, which was strongly opposed by secularist groups (Rickelfs 1981: 253).

Realizing the potential danger of his position, President Sukarno exploited rivalries within the armed forces (between the army and the air force) and between the army and the PKI. Facing pressure from the army, Sukarno decided to choose the PKI as his political ally. Hailing the Communists as 'fighters against imperialism', Sukarno adopted an old Javanese proverb to express his association with them: 'you are my blood relatives; and if you die, it is I who should be the loser' (Mortimer 1974: 79). This assurance propelled the PKI to launch a national campaign for land reform. During 1963–1964, in the party's *aksi sepihak* (unilateral action) PKI members began to seize land in many parts of Java island, Bali and North Sumatra as part of a bold action to implement the land reform laws of 1959/1960 (Mortimer 1974: 262). This immediately put the PKI into violent conflict with landowners, many of whom were committed Muslims, local bureaucrats, and military officers. Brawls, burnings, kidnappings, and killings began to spread, particularly in East Java, the main stronghold of the biggest Islamic organization in the country, the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) (Crouch 1978: 64).

The political commotion culminated in 1965. In the early hours of 30 September, seven army generals were kidnapped and killed by left-wing military soldiers led by Colonel Untung (the commander of President Sukarno's security guards). On the following day, General Suharto (the Commander of the army's Strategic Command) and his colleagues immediately developed the view that the coup attempt had been a PKI plot, and the PKI's many enemies throughout the country accepted this version of events (Rickelfs 1981: 274). What had truly happened on that day was not at all clear. While most Indonesians believed that this calamity was a failed coup by the PKI against Sukarno's government, a document written by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and Ruth Mcvey (1971) known as the 'Cornell Paper' posited that the coup was the result of internal army divisions, in which younger officers acted against senior officers portrayed of

being decadent and corrupt. The 'Cornell Paper' also denied PKI's role, on the grounds that the PKI did not have enough motive to initiate the coup (Anderson and McVey 1971: 4).

In the days immediately following the attempted coup, Indonesia had to endure the bloodiest conflict in the country's history. Between October 1965 and February 1966, while complicated manoeuvres took place in Jakarta to demolish the so-called G-30-S/PKI (the 30 September 1965 movement), in the countryside mass killings of PKI members and affiliates exploded with the encouragement of the army (Crouch 1978: 224). There was no reliable information on how many people were actually killed, but most scholars accept the estimated figure of between 150,000 and 500,000, mainly in rural areas where land reform conflicts between the PKI and landowners were intense (Crouch 1978: 155; Rickelfs 1981: 274; Mackie and MacIntyre 1994: 10). On 11 March 1966, under pressure from General Suharto and some other army generals, President Sukarno issued the *Supersemar* (the 11 March Letter of Order), which gave Suharto supreme authority to restore order and impose a permanent ban on the PKI and organizations linked with it. Hundreds of thousands of PKI members and sympathizers who had survived the massacre were detained and imprisoned. It was estimated that about 200,000 people had to accept their fate as political prisoners, and they were put into exile on Buru Island (Crouch 1978: 224).

The new government under President Suharto, who was sworn in in 1968, immediately took firm action against the possible spread of Communism. The New Order government not only issued a ban on teaching Marxism at higher educational institutions, but also drove out radical political jargons from public discourse and the academic world. Hilmar Farid maintains that during the early years of New Order government, social scientists who upheld a radical egalitarian view that can be associated with Marxism were removed from the scene, which meant some major universities did not have enough teaching staff. Those who later returned from exile in Buru Island were not allowed to continue teaching in their respective institutions (Farid 2005: 169).

Under these circumstances, Indonesian intellectuals were forced to subdue their radical thinking in order to ensure survival. Celia Lowe recalled that repression by authoritarian regime had forced Indonesian social scientists not to develop Marxist thinking because 'incarceration, disappearance, exile, terror, and death were all possible outcomes for

oppositional speech, and the state deliberately associated political discourse with the imagery specter of Communism' (Lowe 2007: 117). In his assessment of the government's elimination of Leftist critical thinking in Indonesian social sciences, Vedi Hadiz argued:

[T]he elimination of the Left from Indonesian social and political landscape meant that for decades there would be no substantial sources of radical challenge to the state-centralizing, authoritarian and remarkably predatory brand of capitalism that developed in Indonesia until the late 1990s. (Hadiz 2006: 554)

It is therefore obvious that for about three decades under the New Order government, social science in Indonesia had been subdued under the government's anti-Communist political propaganda and oriented towards endorsing the government's agenda of modernization and capitalist development. In this setting, social scientists were driven towards the government's developmental policies, focusing on rapid economic growth, social harmony, and political stability, which will be elaborated further in the next section.

### HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT

As have happened in many other developing countries, social sciences in Indonesia were strongly influenced by Western thought brought by scholars from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and later on the United States. During the colonial era, Benjamin White argued that the appalling record of Dutch colonialism in providing education was manifested in the failure to establish a single university for the nation's 60 million population. Not until the 1940s did this change, when the Dutch established two faculties, namely the school of agriculture in Bogor and the engineering or technical school in Bandung. The first independent university, the University of Indonesia (UI), began in the late 1940s, with a group of European teaching staff using Dutch as the language of instruction (White 2005: 113–114).

During the colonial era, the work of British scholar and administrator Stamford Raffles on the history of Java generated interest among some Indonesian students in pursuing historical studies. In the area of sociology/anthropology, the work of Dutch scholars such as Snouck Hurgronje on the Acehnese people and William Wertheim on social

change in Indonesia were influential in generating curiosity among Indonesian students about studying anthropology and sociology. Later on, the works of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz on agricultural involution in Java and divisions within Javanese Muslim populations were also prominent among early generations of Indonesian social scientists, namely Koentjaraningrat, Ongkhokham, Soerjono Soekanto, Sartono Kartodirdjo, Selo Soemardjan, and Umar Khayam (Ardhana 2006: 134; White 2005: 114).

In the 1950s, Western influence was brought in by American social foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. They helped Indonesian universities improve teaching facilities, provided reading materials (scientific books, journals, reports, and so forth), and trained lecturers so they gained better qualifications. In 1953, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation through its Council on Economic and Cultural Affairs issued book grants to various universities in Jakarta, Bandung, Bogor, and Yogyakarta (White 2005: 114). During this period, the Ford Foundation was involved in establishing training centres for social scientists at the University of Syiah Kuala in Banda Aceh, North Sumatra, and the University of Hasanuddin in Makassar, Sulawesi (Ardhana 2006: 136).

These two foundations were also involved in nurturing Indonesian academics by sending them to pursue graduate studies in American universities. From the 1950s to the 1970s many Indonesian social scientists—most of them lecturers from top universities—were sent to various universities in the United States, such as the University of California at Berkeley, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Northern Illinois to pursue graduate studies. These scientists included Ichlasul Amal (a political scientist from Gadjah Mada University), Koentjaraningrat (an anthropologist from the University of Indonesia), Sartono Kartodirdjo (a historian from Gadjah Mada University), Selo Soemardjan (a sociologist from the University of Indonesia), Suwardi Wiriaatmadja (an International Relations scholar from Padjadjaran University), and Umar Khayam (a cultural specialist from Gadjah Mada University).

Many of them returned to their positions in their respective universities, and some became cabinet ministers or served as the state's top bureaucrats. Those who returned to academia introduced American perspectives and research methods such as behavioural approach, Parsonian structural-functionalism, area studies, modernization theory, and so forth. These Western-bred intellectuals indicated a Western influence on Indonesian

social science; as Ganie-Rohman and Achwan put it: ‘Mainstream social sciences in Indonesia were a replication of the social sciences that dominated development thinking in the West’ (Ganie-Rohman and Achwan 2005: 201).

### POWER AND DISCOURSE IN INDONESIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Discourses of Indonesian social science can be divided into two crucial stages. It is important to note that social science has been used by various groups to advance their political preferences. In the first stage, social science was used as an instrument for struggles against colonialism, in which the nation’s intellectuals served as what Gustav Le Bon called ‘the men of words’, spreading the idea of freedom, basic human rights, nationalism, and so on in order to instigate a struggle for independence, which subsequently led to the formation of a new nation-state. This formula is particularly notable in the Southeast Asia region, especially in the case of Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore, but is less significant in Thailand. In the second stage, intellectuals in post-independence Indonesia became involved in the planning and implementation of economic development. Even if they stayed outside the state’s bureaucracy, their role was still needed in order to provide theoretical justification for the state’s development policies. During this period, there was a certain critical moment when some scholars were sickened by the attitudes of their colleagues in providing moral justification of the government’s development policies. This minority group courageously detached itself from the link with power politics, and began to develop critical thinking that challenged government development policies.

In his introductory chapter to *Indonesian Political Thinking* (1970), Herbert Feith maintained that during the struggle for independence there was a strong connection between the ‘world of political ideas’ and the ‘world of political power’, since the main leaders of the movement were intellectuals and it was they who were authors of most of the movement’s political thinking (Feith 1970: 3). The comments from Sukarno on unity and nationalism, Sajuti Melik on the greatness of Indonesian old kingdoms, and Mohammad Hatta on democracy and prosperity were examples of what Feith termed the movement’s political thinking that shaped Indonesian nationalism. At the height of the struggle for independence in the 1920s, Communist activists joined the bandwagon alongside the nationalists. Brought to the country by a Dutch revolutionary, Sneevliet,

Marxism-Leninism inspired many early Indonesian Leftists who tried to use Marxist revolutionary ideas as a tool for struggle for independence. During that period, Marxism attracted young intellectuals who were enchanted with events such as the nationalist revolution in China in 1911 and the success of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 (Hadiz 2006: 558). These pro-independence activists began to imagine that they were part of the growth of Asian nationalist movements.

In the years immediately following the country's independence, at the height of ideological cleavages in the 1950s, social science discourse was under strong influence of party ideologies. The Indonesian nationalist party (PNI), for example, used the arguments from Sukarno and Roeslan Abdoelgani that stated nationalism was commensurate with Indonesia's urgent need to eradicate poverty and to maintain national unity (Sukarno 1957 [1970]: 154; Abdoelgani 1957 [1970]: 173). Major Islamic parties, the *Masjumi* and the *Nahdlatul Ulama*, defended Islamism by arguing that secularism ran the risk of omitting ethics and morality in political practices and instead emphasized 'the glorious function of Islam in relation to international laws for ensuring a lasting welfare and peace' (Natsir 1970 [1957]: 216; *Nahdlatul Ulama* 1970 [1954]: 205). By the same token, the PKI defended its Marxist-Leninist ideology by arguing that the party was charged with the duty to liberate Indonesians from the double oppression of imperialism and feudalism, which had resulted in the broad mass of the people becoming more destitute (Aidit 1970a [1957]: 250).

During this period, sociologist Selo Soemardjan wrote a conference paper that defended President Sukarno's dismissal of the parliament in July 1959, which placed absolute power in his own hands, this marking the beginning of 'Guided Democracy'. In a paper presented at the Pacific Science Congress in Hawaii in 1961, Soemardjan argued that Guided Democracy, based on personal leadership of a strong leader, was more acceptable to most Indonesians than liberal democracy with collective leadership, because this personality-type of administration was more consistent with the institutionalized authoritarian structure of Indonesian society at large (Soemardjan 1970 [1961]: 127–130).

In 1966, during the New Order era, as already mentioned Suharto, an army general, came to power, following the dramatic political turmoil where thousands of followers of the PKI were either massacred or detained at Buru Island as political prisoners. The government's persistent threat to Leftist critical discourses had a great impact on university teaching and activities, with social scientists developing 'Leftism-phobia'

and deliberately avoiding Karl Marx's concepts of class struggle, historical materialism, revolutionary changes, and so on. Some scholars, however, bravely challenged the government ban on any discourses that could be associated with Marxism by using class analysis in their explanation of poverty in Indonesia. Borrowing the concept used in dependency theory that developed in Latin America in the late 1950s and early 1960s, scholars such as Arief Budiman, Aswab Mahasin, Farkhan Bulkin, Sritua Arief, and Adi Sasono used class analysis in their assessment of rampant poverty. In various writings and speeches, they fervently attacked Indonesia's 'capitalist middle-class'—who were nurtured by the New Order government—for causing poverty and the country's dependence on foreign assistance (Hadiwinata 2009: 69).

Dubbed as 'structuralists', these scholars tried to replicate the debates on policy choices in Latin America in the 1970s that took place between the 'monetarists' (represented by the International Monetary Fund, IMF), who opted for reducing state control on the national economy and providing incentives for private enterprises through strict control on labour wages, and the 'structuralists' (represented by the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America, ECLA), who demanded a stronger role for the state in removing the bottlenecks in economic development, such as a feudalistic agricultural system, unfavourable currency rates, poor taxation, dependence on imported products, and political instability (Lewis 1975: 272–278). Although it is difficult to accept the association of Indonesian structuralists with their Latin American counterparts, as they differed on the state's role in economic development, some scholars believe that reference by Budiman, Mahasin, Bulkin, and others to social structure, global injustice, and the cutting-off of ties with world capitalism meant they fell into the category of 'structuralist orthodoxy' (Heryanto 2005: 78; Farid 2005: 173; Subianto 1989: 74).

This critical episode of social discourses in Indonesia nevertheless substantiates James Coleman's observation regarding post-war American social science that government opposition parties tended to use scientific arguments to challenge the policymakers in their power struggles. As he put it:

Policy makers have already the legitimation provided by political authority and have little need for additional legitimation. But opponents, lacking the power of political authority, gain the legitimacy of 'scientific truth' or 'scientific evidence', which can constitute an important weapon in the political struggle. (Coleman 1982: 98)



However, despite their courage in challenging the government's preference for the policy prescriptions of modernization theory, the structuralist approach was seen to 'still mainly exist at the margins of the social science community' (Heryanto 2005: 79). Under the New Order government, social science was used by the government as an instrument to legitimize its power. Ignas Kleden argued that Indonesian social science during the New Order government served the function of 'engineering' in various areas—political, educational, cultural, legal, and moral. In such a capacity, social science, according to Kleden, tends to produce a poor explanation of social reality and manufacture bureaucratically oriented works rather than quality research that focuses on conceptual, logical clarity and precision. In order to survive in an authoritarian regime, social scientists must adopt 'linguistic euphemism' that pleases the government (Kleden 1986: 6–22). One can therefore argue that the New Order government was successful in implanting the culture of pragmatism and compromise among Indonesian social scientists. Their academic activities were those that would please the government.

There was a promising moment in the late 1990s when the thirty year rule of the New Order government was put to an end. The financial crisis which spread across East and Southeast Asia region during 1997–1998 dealt a fatal blow to the government, which was already facing harsh criticism from students and opposition leaders for its susceptibility to corruption, nepotism, and collusion. Kimmel argued that resistance turns into revolution if there are the right triggers; that is, immediate historical events which can spark off the entire revolutionary process (Kimmel 1990: 9). In 1998, the precipitous fall of the Indonesian currency, the soaring prices of basic items, the collapse of the national banking system, and the devastation of the industrial sector followed by burgeoning unemployment generated nationwide protests, in which students and pro-democracy activists demanded Suharto's resignation and the installation of a democratic government. Unable to withstand the pressure, in May 1998 he announced his resignation, and appointed B.J. Habibie, the vice-president, as his successor (Hadiwinata 2003: 78). These events marked the beginning of political reform (*reformasi*), in which democratic government was installed in the country.

As far as social science is concerned, however, the post-New Order government provides too few opportunities for social science to flourish in the country. The opening up of public space in post-1998 Indonesia has allowed the so-called 'critical non-governmental organizations'

(NGOs) to proliferate, benefiting from funding support from international donor agencies. Looking at their deliberate agenda to overturn the dominance of power structures and the mainstream development narratives, ‘critical NGOs’ or ‘movement NGOs’ can be perceived as those non-governmental organizations that deliberately nurture critical knowledge with the counterhegemonic aim of overturning dominant power structures, and in so doing finding themselves outside the mainstream of social knowledge (Hadiwinata 2003: 117–118; Ganie-Rohman and Achwan 2005: 198).

One prominent NGO in this category is the Indonesian Society for Social Transformation (INSIST). Established in Yogyakarta in 1997, this organization used the counterhegemonic goals of Gramsci’s theory in spearheading ‘social transformation from below’ and in countering state domination and capitalist hegemony (Sinanu 2009: 60). This project, however, did not last very long. Barely five years after its inception, INSIST’s social transformation project began to founder, since the organization was ruptured by entrenched internal conflicts; and its project proposals failed to attract foreign donors because of its insistence on its radical social transformation agenda. Sinanu’s account of INSIST’s failure refers to the difficulties faced by this organization in translating its radical approach into concrete action. This seemed to ignore foreign donors, who demanded more output-oriented programmes (Sinanu 2009: 94).

The fate faced by INSIST is just one small example of how a critical or radical approach can find itself on the margin of social thinking in Indonesia. Reflecting upon the experience of various critical NGOs in post-Suharto Indonesia in serving as advocates for workers, women, minorities, and other marginalized groups, Ganie-Rohman and Achwan argued that the critical social thinking proposed by this group remains excluded from centre stage because its agenda of radical social transformation is not commensurate with the government’s development policy preferences and contradicts donors’ interests in maintaining capitalism and the free-market economy throughout the world (Ganie-Rohman and Achwan 2005: 211).

Academia faces a similar destiny. While links to power holders are still important, the reputation and credibility of academics is sadly built upon their personal connections to the power holders, either by simply serving as advisors to certain ministry or in becoming part of state bureaucracy. Moreover, heavy teaching loads, poor research funding, and inadequate income have prevented academics from concentrating on their rightful

tasks, namely conducting research, writing conference papers, attending conferences and workshops, and producing published works for the advancement of their disciplines (Hadiwinata 2009: 61)

Even if they produce some works, such products tend to be bureaucratically oriented research outputs lacking critical assessment on current social and political conditions, and most of them are basically project-oriented, with the practical purpose of fulfilling orders from various international donors (NGOs, development agencies, and foreign government institutions) and from Indonesian government agencies and/or ministries. What is needed to produce works like this is a personal connection with various international donors and state agencies, and some technical capability to run projects (Hadiwinata 2009: 74). In their assessment of current trends among Indonesian scientists, Hadiz and Dhakidae argued: ‘An army of social scientists came to be well trained in the technique of developing research programs, project evaluations and the like, that essentially helped to legitimize state development policy’ (Hadiz and Dhakidae 2005: 8)

#### PERSISTENT COMMUNIST-PHOBIA AND THE SUBSIDING OF LEFTIST CRITICAL THINKING

In Indonesia, it has been rare for scholars to use class analysis in order to explain social reality. Although Marxism-Leninism was brought into the country in the 1920s, early Marxist-Leninist writings by Indonesian thinkers can be found in political pamphlets written by Communist politicians such as Njoto, Lukman, Dharsono, and D.N. Aidit. Founded in 1920, the PKI survived two suppressions by the colonial government in 1926–1927 and by the Indonesian military in 1948, and became stronger in the 1950s. Foreign observers even dubbed the PKI as the ‘largest Communist party outside the Sino-Soviet world for some years before its suppression in 1965–1966’ (Feith 1970: 245). Indonesian Communist thinkers, such as D.N. Aidit, for example, often argued that the links between corruption and destitution and between insolvency and imperialism had produced deteriorating living standards in Indonesia society (Aidit 1970b [1959]: 259).

As discussed earlier, President Suharto’s crackdown on the PKI and the persistent ban on Marxist-Leninist ideology sent a strong message to most Indonesians that they should not attempt to comment upon or write anything that could be associated with the banned ideology. The New Order

government imposed a firm restriction on teachers, academics, researchers, and other professional groups on discussing concepts such as class struggle, revolutionary movement, social criticism, and the like that have a close link with Marxism. In the mid-1970s, the government introduced the so-called ‘campus normalization’ policy (*normalisasi kampus*), in which political content in scholarship, writing, and curricula was eliminated in favour of teaching and research that promoted national development, national stability, and economic growth.

To prevent a possible revival of Communism, the New Order government imposed strict administrative control on society. A special letter of ‘non-involvement’ with the PKI (*Surat Bebas G-30-S/PKI*), issued by the local police, was required for school and job applications either in the public or private sectors. Applicants for positions in political parties, mass organizations, the civil service, and the military were asked to go through a special ‘screening process’ (*litsus*) in the sub-district military office, which traced possible involvement of their extended families or associates (Hadiwinata 2003: 68).

Working in such a difficult environment, scholars were terrified, and avoided critical writings that might isolate them from their communities, or lead to detention, torture, kidnapping, even killing. A few scholars who attempted to detach themselves from the government’s free-market liberal developmentalist ideology had to face continuous intimidation and pressure, which often resulted in dismissal. This was experienced by prominent academics from Satya Wacana Christian University, such as Arief Budiman, Ariel Heryanto, and George Aditjondro, among many others (Heryanto 2003: 33–41). One incident that led to imprisonment took place in 1998. Three students from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Bambang Subono, Bambang Isti-Nugroho, and Bonar Tigor Naipospos, were prosecuted under the anti-subversion law. Charged with treason for spreading Marxism by distributing a banned novel written by the ex-PKI member, Pramudya Ananta Toer, these students were sentenced to between six and eight years behind bars (Uhlin 1997: 107).

Under these difficult circumstances, only a handful of scholars were brave enough to employ the class analysis method in assessing social, economic, and political realities in Indonesia. One famous work in this category was Richard Robison’s *Indonesia: the Rise of Capital* (1986).<sup>2</sup> Elaborating on the historical trajectory of Indonesia’s capitalist class, Robison’s book generated controversy among the Indonesian public,

especially among government officials who were preoccupied with a phobia against Communism. The book was widely discussed in academic circles before it was banned by the New Order government barely a year after it had begun to circulate in the country. Another substantial work was Vedi Hadiz's *Workers and the State in Indonesia* (1997).<sup>3</sup> Working under the supervision of Richard Robison, Hadiz argued that Indonesia's increasingly important manufacturing sector had generated a 'cheap and docile labour force' willing to work under appalling working conditions and low wages (Hadiz 1997: 111; Farid 2005: 184).

The reason for the lack of interest in class analysis is quite obvious. The fear of 'PKI stigma' and the dreadful threat of incarceration, disappearance, terror, or even death faced by many Indonesians forced scholars to avoid the use of research methods that might inspire government accusations of treason or subversion. The marginalization of a Leftist approach such as social discourse, however, continued in the post-New Order era. One reason for the persistent demonization of Leftist critical thinking was the fact that many officials and members of social and political organizations who had been involved in the violent elimination of the Left under the New Order continued to hold positions of influence after 1998 as parliamentarians, government officials, party functionaries, and leaders of educational and social organizations (Hadiz 2006: 565; Hadiwinata 2009: 80). It appears that the New Order's tireless attempt to entrench 'Communist treason' as a grand narrative in the country's post-colonial history embedded Indonesian society with Communist-phobia and anti-Leftism.

Such anti-Leftist phobia still lingers in the minds of post-Suharto era parliament members. In Yogyakarta, for example, a member of the local parliament lamented that contemporary labour unrest was a result of Communist infiltration. Another local parliament in Medan developed a similar view, saying that the labour movement remained vulnerable to Communist incursion. Such a phobia is particularly strong among Islamic parties, given the fact that during the 1960s PKI's land reform campaign put the party into head-on collision with various Islamic parties. This bitter encounter seems to have generated reprisals among some Muslim activists. One member of a prominent Islamic party averred that the Muslim community still feels vengeful towards the Communists (Hadiz 2006: 565).

The elimination of Marxism has also had a crucial impact on the teaching of social science in Indonesia. Alienated from Marxist thinking, students have difficulty in understanding critical social thinking, particularly the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and the French Post-Structuralism. As one senior lecturer who teaches Philosophy of Social Science at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Parahyangan, Bandung, confirmed:

The absence of adequate basic knowledge of Marxism had made it difficult for students to absorb Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and the French post-structuralism. It is difficult to draw their attention to those critical approaches because they have in their minds that radical critical view should be avoided since it may bring social disharmony and disorder. It needs more time to convince them that radical criticism is by no means illegitimate. (P.Y. Nur Indro, interview, 14 May 2010)

Outside university campuses, the publication of Marxist writings and discussion of Marxism were both put under serious scrutiny by a number of social organizations, especially the militia wings of political parties (*sat-gas*) and radical Islamic organizations. In July 2005, for example, these groups joined forces in protesting against the publication of an Indonesian version of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* by raiding bookstores, seizing dozens of copies of the book, and burning the confiscated books in public. A year later, a discussion on Marxism organized by students and NGO activists in Bandung was forcibly disbanded by radical Islamic organizations, and the organizers were intimidated. These incidents underlined the continuing marginalization of Leftist social thinking, prompted by persistent anti-Leftist views among majority groups in Indonesian society.

## CONCLUSION

The marginalization of Leftist critical thinking in Indonesia seems to substantiate Ananta Kumar Giri's contention that critical social thinking is intermingled with the world of politics and power. In fact, the exploitation of social science as an instrument for the theoretical justification of political struggle for the public sphere among powerful groups is by no means an exclusive set of circumstances that can only be found in Indonesia. But the level of atrocity and the persistent annihilation of Leftist critical thinking is indeed a specific case.

The New Order government's preoccupation with modernization theory focusing on rapid economic growth, close ties with world capitalism, political stability, social harmony, and top-down development planning combined with continuing 'Communist-phobia' provided a critical foundation for the continuous marginalization of Leftist critical thinking. Working under these circumstances, social scientists have been forced to submerge their critical views and conduct academic activities (teaching, research, publications, seminars, workshops, and so forth) in order to serve the need of the ruling elite for specific knowledge or skills, namely producing outputs that justify the government's development projects. In a situation where links with power holders are important, intellectuals' credibility and reputation are based on their personal attachment to the ruling elite.

In this situation it is almost impossible to talk about what Ariel Heryanto calls 'true intellectuals'; that is, scholars who can keep themselves some distance from the most powerful and wealthy social groups in their societies, and establish their credibility on the basis of some meaningful detachment from activities that can produce material and non-material rewards (Heryanto 2003: 29). With strong ties to power holders, social scientists in Indonesia showed no interest in conducting research or other activities that would contribute to the advancement of their discipline. This explains why Indonesian social scientists are generally muted, even when they witness a long-lasting systematic annihilation of Leftist critical thinking.

## NOTES

1. The New Order government was a military-supported regime led by General Suharto, an army general, who ruled Indonesia for more than three decades (1966–1998). This anti-communist government took power after the political turmoil which killed hundreds of thousands of PKI followers throughout the country. The tragedy was a culmination of rivalry between the Army and the Communist Party during the presidency of Sukarno (1945–1966), Indonesia's first president.
2. Richard Robison is lecturer at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, who from 1991 to 1996 supervised Vedi Hadiz in writing a doctoral thesis on Indonesian workers, which was subsequently published as a book in 1997.
3. Vedi R. Hadiz is a former student activist who completed his doctoral study at Murdoch University, Australia, and is now working as Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore.

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# Social Welfare and Harmony in East Asia and the Nordic Region

*Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt*

## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical assessment and a comparative perspective on social policies in East Asia,<sup>1</sup> and the Nordic region.<sup>2</sup> Are there lessons to be learned from the models of social provisioning that ensure decent, secure and harmonious lives for all citizens—particularly the poor, the excluded sectors in society and the unemployed? East Asia might offer lessons for the Nordic region and vice versa in social welfare, equity and labor market policies. The chapter asks whether the welfare systems of East Asian countries are distinctive, with Confucian assumptions about harmony implicitly and hidden beneath the surface, or are such notions about ethics and moral duties used as a social engineering strategy by the state and as a tool to discipline the workforce in order to create a conducive environment for a continuation of paternalism, developmentalism and hierarchies in labor markets and social welfare? These propositions are compared with the corporatist Nordic welfare model, which is rapidly changing into a workfare or competition state. In conclusion, the question is whether these societies are converging or diverging in light of the present financial and social crisis in the world economy.

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The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives insight into the academic and theoretical debates about the role and determinants of social policy. It also establishes the theoretical framework for the chapter. The second section dwells on the debate between “East” and “West” about the role of entitlements, and whether there is a convergence between neo-conservatives on the use of ideology, culture, values and identity as a social power tool and as a competing norm both domestically and internationally. The third and fourth sections deal with the notion of corporatism in the regions. Finally, some tentative comparative conclusions are given.

### *The Political and Ideological Controversy Over Social Entitlements*

Comparative political economists have developed different arguments regarding the determinants of social policies. One argument notes that social welfare policy convergences reflect an underlying logic of industrialism; another sees them as state responses to the social requirements of capitalism. A third view suggests that the survival of market-based capitalism relying on a Keynesian strategy essentially saves capitalism itself from self-destruction (Galbraith 1997: 5). The necessary pre-requisite for the latter solution is a social compact or contract between labor and capital based on mutual trust, bargaining, harmony and tripartite negotiations among equal actors. This type of argument is based on two readings of the Keynesian social welfare state. The first sees it as a tool of compromise when the foundation of capitalism is at stake, as it was during and after the crisis in the 1930s, after the Second World War and again in 2008—when a new international financial and multi-layered crisis and depression is looming (Schmidt 2010). The second reading regards the socio-economic dimension (i.e. the surplus absorption); by functioning as a demand primer, including social expenditures, Keynesian macro-economics alleviates the tendency towards stagnation (Schmidt and Hersh 2000: 8). In this way, those readings form the very basics of Nordic corporatism—where the state is projected to be the arbiter between labor and capital while the East Asian model is defined as “corporatism without labour” (Schmidt 2000b). This historical approach is closely related to the important debate regarding the past and present of the way in which corporatism is tied to the world economy, patterns of geopolitical and geoeconomic competition, and processes through which national and transnational cultures, ideologies and policy discourses have influenced social policies. The

impact of external determinants on social policy agendas and labor market policies cannot stand alone, but should be coupled with an understanding of the domestic impact of states, elites and social forces on social and labor market policymaking (Schmidt 2000a).<sup>3</sup>

These theoretical concerns make the recourse to history important—and broadly speaking, the present dominance of a global neo-liberal discourse and prescriptions for de-regulating finance, fiscal, social and labor market policies cannot be based on the record of the past. History provides no examples of laissez-faire policies that resulted in high wage economies capable of supporting widely dispersed wealth, equity and welfare benefits for a large population (Schmidt 2006). Essentially what is happening is what Bienefeld (1993: 31) has referred to as “the disarming of the state.” Financial de-regulation is a route to an increasingly polarized society in which the majority will suffer sustained welfare losses and in which the goal of a more humane, caring and leisure-oriented society will soon be dismissed as utopia.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, the question which social sciences faces in view of neo-liberal hegemony and globalization and the ongoing recession cum depression since 2008 is whether the process will result in greater social welfare or whether neo-liberal globalization serves to reduce the social dimension of twentieth-century capitalism. Will an evolution towards more democracy open the way to a greater contest over the economic surplus/social product? How will the political systems absorb the demands of individual social classes at a time when adjustment to the conditionality imposed by the present crisis goes in the direction of reducing the welfare functions of the state? Finally, what are the implications for values, political culture and ideology in relation to labor market regulation, social welfare and the imposition of the binary relation between harmony and disharmony? These are the pertinent questions facing both East Asian and Nordic countries.

### *Convergence or Divergence of Social Welfare Ideology and Values*

One consequence of the effects of globalization and neo-liberal hegemony has been the ideologization of the role of the state in East Asia and implicitly the region's social welfare systems. Neo-conservatives in Europe, the United States and East Asia are seemingly in convergence when they point to the importance of culturally bound social values such as hard work, discipline, enterprise, family, thrift, responsibility and respect for authority.

Thus, the Weberian interpretation of European capitalism as a product of Protestantism and Calvinist values has been recycled as the functional equivalent of Confucianism to explain the so-called East Asian miracle, including China, in terms of a specific ethical and moral codex and discourses about “harmonious society” and “harmonious labor relations” (Wei He 2010).

In fact, a certain ideological convergence has made its appearance despite the much-publicized divergences. Yet one of the results of economic growth and the reemergence of East Asian self-confidence (Koh 1998; Frank 1998; Arrighi 2007) has been based on the fact that “the preconditions for new political alliances spanning ‘East’ and ‘West’ are emerging,” and “opponents of liberalism and social democracy, both inside and outside ‘Asia’, are drawing on each other’s arguments and views with a growing synergy” (Rodan 1995: 2). Although there is a convergence among these neo-conservative ideologies on the particularly important aspect of defending the rights of capital and business against perceived threats from labor and trade unions, there are differences regarding their perception of the role of the state. One view promotes the Confucian welfare state and another a more productivist and competitive welfare regime, where social policy is subordinated to economic policy, but both views share negative assumptions about organized labor as part of a tripartite arrangement.

Nonetheless, beneath the surface of these ideological divergences and convergences toward social welfare the bottom line of the debate is that oppositional forces and anti-traditionalist groups and segments promote social security issues which are assuming greater importance. Historically speaking, there have also been attempts in the form of pressures and often militant actions from labor movements as they push for the state to adopt and implement social security and equity-related legislation and policies. Seen in this perspective the maldistribution of wealth and the increasing vulnerability of modernizing social systems in East Asia can potentially lead to unrest and instability. It seems clear that it would be ahistorical not to realize that elites may use ideological and “culturalized” positions of social welfare as a tool to discipline social actors, and in this way it becomes a factor that shapes internal and external policy in various directions, depending on the specific circumstances and contexts.

The Nestor from Singapore, former Primeminister Lee Kuan Yew stressed that Confucian values remedy deficiencies and excesses in Western culture and politics, including the emphasis on rights and duties and the

primacy of family, male and kinship lineage supremacy. In this regard, the family plays a particularly important role for both East Asian conservatives and Western right-wing proponents, since the latter “use ... the moral politics of the family for legitimating major cutbacks in welfare programmes (or in ‘rolling back the state’), the moralization of family issues in Korea has had a preventive effect on the *starting up* of any such progressive welfare programmes” (Chang 1997 cf. Shin and Shaw 2003: 338). In this way, Confucian familism has been mobilised as a means to “enervate” the volatility and militancy of labor movements, which in the Korean case protested against employers highly repressive and “authoritarian treatment of workers which has been characterized as the military-camp style of labor control (Kwon 2007: 66).

China, for instance, uses Confucianism as an “Imagined Asian identity” (Anderson 1991) to construct and invent itself as the natural cultural leader or gyroscope of the region. In this way, Beijing persistently uses “Asian or Confucian values” to establish itself as a competitor to the “West”. “Confucianism’s concern with ethics, the emphasis on groups rather than the individual, and the primacy of unity, harmony, order, education, and hard work, have a wide appeal, especially now that ‘the Western values’ of individualism and liberalism are under pressure” (Ham 2010: 39). For China, playing the “Asian values” card offers opportunities to set competing norms and standards in international politics by launching Confucian principles such as “harmonious world” and “peaceful co-existence.” Domestic policies encapsulate harmony and peace, and at the same time China emphasizes soft power in its foreign policy and attempts to distance itself from hardcore realist notions of conflict and coercion (Schmidt 2008). It is also a way to distance itself from a long history of humiliation, victimhood and Eurocentric racism, and a way to promote a so-called specific Chinese mix of productivist and Confucian conservative social welfare. This particular mix can also be observed in South Korea (Shin and Shaw 2003) and Taiwan, and to a lesser degree in Japan. In a regional perspective, Confucianism can be regarded as merely a mediating factor and not a determinant per se, although it still plays a role as “surrogate social policy,” where emphasis is put on agricultural protection and enterprise welfare (Kim 2010: 413), and as denominator for a strong focus on education in all three countries.

By putting “politics in command,” the developmental state played an important role in the capitalist growth process in the East Asian late

industrialization model. It was based on the implementation of a specific understanding of political economy, whereby the state assumed a function in the guidance of the economy without disregarding the importance of the market. Government policymaking was thus organically tied to the production factors—land, labor and capital—in actively creating comparative advantages. Before the Asian crisis in 1997 and much ahead of the crisis in 2008, neo-Listian theory enabled a clear explanation for and provided the definition of the East Asian developmentalist state, which had “a role different from that of the Keynesian welfare state in the already advanced countries. The Keynesian welfare state serves to restrain market rationality by measures to protect groups vulnerable to the consequences of market rationality. In contrast the developmentalist state restrains market rationality in order to pursue a policy of industrialization *per se*” (Hoogvelt 1997: 206).

It seems that both the Listian developmentalist state and the welfare state are bound to change as a consequence of the new social circumstances and in the face of neo-liberal globalization and its concomitant financial crises.

Real changes as a response to both domestic and external impediments and challenges can be seen in China, where a growing potential for social unrest and instability forced former President Hu Jintao and the government to announce a gradual change away from productivism-based social policy to a new “Harmonious Society,” emphasizing the need for more redistribution and equality as well as for a sustainable social agenda aiming at the equalization of basic social services by 2020. This has been highlighted by the ongoing economic and financial crisis, despite which China was able to maintain high economic growth. Yet the crisis has exposed some of China’s most prevalent problems and challenges, such as the widening gap between rich and poor regions and a lack of adequate (even basic) social protection for a large proportion of its 1.3 billion population (Sander et al. 2010). However, the result so far is meager, and the policy related to “Harmonious Society” as social virtue has become more a disciplinary instrument to keep labor demands at bay (Danford and Zao 2012) and in tackling social unrest rather than being a moral imperative.

Public social expenditure in Taiwan and South Korea remains very low at about 4–7% of gross domestic product (GDP), while the Nordic countries spend between 20% and 25% of GDP (OECD 2011). China is the lowest while Japan spends about 7%. Health expenditures show the same picture, with South Korea spending 6.5% of GDP with half of this being



private contributions, while the Nordic countries spend approximately 8–10% of GDP with low private contributions.

Even the Nordic countries seem to be changing rapidly, urged by the continuing crisis. The Danish welfare state is gradually changing its functions away from a focus on flexicurity (flexibility on the labor market combined with high levels of social security) and away from traditional welfare service provision to a workfare or a competition state (Schmidt and Hersh 2012).

The real issue as Ankie Hoogvelt (1997: 113) convincingly argues is a historical trend towards forms of production organization in which capital no longer needs to pay for the reproduction of labor power. At the same time, participation in the global marketplace means that the domestic market is no longer needed to serve the self-expansion of capital. Jobless growth is what the present phase of capitalism is all about. “It is this process of globalization rather than any claimed imbalance in the national accounts between public and private sector growth (the fiscal deficit), nor any demographic imbalance (the greying population) that is the main reason for the perceived need to shed and restructure the welfare state which has become the dominant political project in all advanced countries” (Hoogvelt *ibid*). It also entails that the increased mobility of capital has forced governments into a “race to the bottom” as far as social policies are concerned. If internationally mobile investment is to be attracted, governments must pursue an agenda of low taxation, low inflation and flexible labor markets (Mishra 1999). The welfare state must be residualized as a result of reductions in public expenditure, forcing a move to more individual responsibility and private provision (Holden 2003: 306).

The competing logics of collective organizations and the promotion of capitalist development are shifting the focus of “state intervention” from forms which “decommodify” those activities pursued by the state (which organize essentially domestic socio-economic activities along non-market lines) to those which “commodify” or “marketise” both state economic activities and the other elements of state structure too (Cerny 1990: 53). The state is thus becoming “a commodifying agent” rather than a “decommodifying agent,” a return to the role it played in the emergence of capitalism in the post-feudal period (Cerny *op. cit.*: 230). The dividing line between public and private is thus being “eroded,” and yet “paradoxically, the total amount of state intervention will tend to increase, for the state will be enmeshed in the promotion,

support, and maintenance of an ever-widening range of social and economic activities.”

The main question is whether the state corporatist arrangements in the Nordic and East Asian contexts are changing as well owing to the encroachment of various interest-based groups who directly or indirectly—externally or internally—attempt to influence or even erode the autonomy of state policymaking. What are the social and political economic arrangements in terms of labor market regulation and social welfare?

### *Corporatism with Labor (The Nordic Model)*

In a well-known article Walter Korpi presents a general framework for comparing social policy strategies in a comparative perspective. The focus is put on the distributional arrangements in each society, and the key variable is the way in which working classes have been incorporated into politics. Welfare is seen in terms of pressures from below and as pressures from a particular class (Korpi 1980). Korpi found at least five types of working-class organization and control in the capitalist countries during the post-war period 1946–1979. What is of interest here is that based on Korpi’s data there were great differences between countries in this respect. This might imply that based on historical and empirical evidence there are more roads to social welfare than we might expect, and it also provides some leverage to the argument that East Asia consists of many different societies and hence different types of working-class pressures may result in varying social welfare models. This is a fact that is confirmed in a number of studies by Gösta Esping-Andersen (1996), who initially described the so-called “three worlds of welfare,” but is now more inclined to talk about four or even five models.

Related to this, the characteristic of the Nordic model is that although it emphasizes individual self-realization, it is at the same time characterized by a high degree of social trust and trust or confidence in common institutions, such as the system of justice, public administration and the institutions of the state (OECD 2011). This is probably also one reason why corruption historically speaking has been low, and at least this partly can explain why Denmark scores high on the happiness index—although there are many other factors such as leisure time and access to health.

The Nordic model is based on the principle of universalism, which strives to keep unemployment at low levels and includes women in the labor force. Until fairly recently social benefits have been disbursed to all

regardless of social status and not exclusively related to position in the labor markets. It is exactly this aspect which makes it different from the Anglo-Saxon model, which is based on the neo-liberal principle of means-tested aid. This means that it only supports the socially disadvantaged, and thereby leaves itself open to welfare backlash.

Corporatism can be defined as some kind of “natural” organic unity of societies and a “natural” division of society into various groups each with its “proper” roles. The post-war model of Nordic corporatism became a rough synonym for the social democratic welfare state. In Weir and Skockpol’s essay on Keynesian responses to the Great Depression, they note that Sweden and the United States applied different policies, thereby reinforcing the differences in the original societal set-up. The reason why it has been extremely difficult in the long run to establish any kind of statist co-ordination of policy, and especially one which favors social welfare, in the United States is the combination of separation of powers at the center with federalism. In Sweden, in contrast, the state is centralized and has a unitary nature, which includes major interest groups; this increases both the knowledge and the drive necessary to run such a policy (Weir and Skockpol 1983). Although this is still the case today, this example clearly shows that there is not *one* model or convergence in the organization of different types of corporatism, but many types in terms of social and labor market policies.

For instance, one study notes a striking difference between macro- and micro-corporatism, where the first is exemplified by Sweden and the latter by Japan and especially Germany. Large companies in these countries are supported by a mass of subsidiaries and smaller firms, often relying on cheap and non-unionized or company-based labor, sometimes bereft of basic labor rights as defined by the International Labour Organization. Such a society is dual, whereas Nordic countries in the European context are homogeneous and labor market relations, although with important exceptions, have been characterized by a mutual respect for negotiated contracts among both employers and unions. It is also important to note that political legislation and intervention have played a more reduced role in regulating labor market relations than voluntary agreements between strong unions and employees’ organizations that are overseen by the state.

Corporatism in the Nordic case is based on co-operation while in the East Asian case it is based on co-optation and the incorporation of various institutions, especially those associated with the labor market. The question

is therefore not which instruments the state should use to support corporatism including labor, but rather how the state can establish a policy dialogue with societal actors. In other words, before anything else, state and societal actors must establish new governance structures. This applies to necessary changes internal to business associations and trade unions as well as to networking between them. The state has to establish close consultation and collaboration within the bureaucracy, and cut its overly detailed interventions into economic and social processes. Societal actors have to establish a certain degree of internal cohesion. This is particularly difficult in traditional corporatist environments, where associations receive their mandate from the state rather than from their members. Only after this has taken place will policy networks emerge that are aimed at problem-solving rather than confrontation or exclusion.

As Schmidt and Hersh (2012) note in the Danish context, the mode of functioning of this system of industrial relations is based on the regulation of conflicting interests between wage earners and employers in the context of a capitalist labor market. In praxis, this means that agreements on a basic framework for wages and working conditions are reached between the different organizations for a period of two years at a time. Thereafter, all major groups of employees are expected to accept and conform to the results of these negotiations. These institutionalized labor market relations form the dominant aspect of the so-called Danish model, which has played a determining role in shaping the social and political evolution of Danish society for the past century.

They further emphasize (Schmidt and Hersh 2012) that the foundation of the welfare state has been based on the workings of this collective bargaining system as an arena of consensus-making, whereby conflicts of interest between the different actors of the labor market can be resolved or reduced. The mode of operation of this consensus-seeking institution has contributed to a high degree of stability by creating economic growth, social well-being and reducing political contradictions. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to portray Danish society as inherently more harmonious than other capitalist formations. At the same time, though, the institutional innovation of collective bargaining has contributed to a reduction in potential conflicts and disharmony. A student of the Danish labor market put it this way: "This constant capacity for releasing tensions, defusing threatening situations and breaking crippling deadlocks has made the relationships between the social partners the main pillar of the Danish model" (Petersen 1997).

The central axis around which the Nordic social model is centered is the common negative view of unequal power relations between individuals in general and hierarchical institutions in particular, such as the traditional patriarchal family and demeaning charitable organizations in civil society. In this regard, the Nordic model differs from both its Anglo-American and continental European counterparts and East Asia. There is also an element of social solidarity, but it should be seen in conjunction with the focus on individualism that defines social relations and political institutions in the Nordic countries. According to this interpretation, it is precisely the fundamental harmony between the Nordic social contract and a combination of individualism, a strong welfare state, adherence to the rule of law, low levels of corruption, gender equality and broad social trust which have shaped the success stories of Northern Europe.

### *‘Corporatism Without Labor’ in East Asia*

Traditionally the peak associations of large corporations in East Asia have interacted in a highly corporatist fashion with government ministries. These complex arrangements depend upon a stable long-term working relationship with the state bureaucracy (Unger and Chang 1995: 36).

Although the general mode of “corporatism without labor” in East Asia does not appear conducive to emulation of the Nordic model, there have been important changes recently. In South Korea and to a lesser degree in other East Asian countries, the experience shows that this depends on the ability of labor to organize and maybe even more importantly to institutionalize a political party, which can represent and defend the rights of workers and the type of welfare state best suited to each country. The old-style corporatism was based on state structuring of interest representation through a quasi-representational monopoly. What the new-style corporatism will be based upon remains to be seen, but it seems that there is a broad divergence of East Asian models, with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan slowly adopting fairly universalist “social insurance” models (Carney 2010: 193), while Taiwan and South Korea recently approved universal health insurance (Kim 2010: 415). These improvements are very much the accomplishment of public pressure from organized labor and an organized civil society.

The privileging of family as the primary institution for support of such policies is hard to sustain in the face of contemporary pressures, where population mobility stimulated by urbanization and global forces serves

to fragment and weaken the capacity of extended families to bear such burdens. The same forces also challenge the principle of social “harmony” between classes and genders on which Confucianism rests (Carney 2010: 199).

Asher and Nandy (2008) argue that East Asia’s accumulation of budget surpluses and inability to consider the reasons for low fertility rates risk the region becoming a “geriatric poorhouse.” They further refer to Singapore’s commitment to “social Darwinism,” concluding that “[t]he current social protection system in Singapore is an outcome of conscious policy choices, and cannot be attributed to the globalization phenomenon” (Carney 2010: 200). Ultimately, social sector policies exhibit a revealed preference concerning the overall vision of society. As Bowring (2007 cf. Asher and Nandy 2008: 58) has argued, “investment in children through government spending may provide a much better return than accumulating vast fiscal surpluses to be invested in low yielding foreign assets or unnecessary infrastructure. There is a dumb arrogance in East Asia’s approach to excess savings and its inability to face up to the reasons for its abysmal fertility rates. The two are linked. That must change if the whole region is not to be a geriatric poor-house.”

Until quite recently, East Asian leaders deliberately encouraged economic growth by emphasizing international competition through a neomercantilist export-led strategy and avoidance of social welfare programs. This essentially anti-entitlement attitude laid the platform for a stable societal order based on political ideology and a specific set of social values and principles of social harmony between class and genders on which Confucianism rests (Carney 2010: 199). Policymaking in this regard promoted a political culture which claimed that public welfare reduces productivity. Social welfare expenditures were primarily located in the private domain and concentrated on public employees. The explicit purpose of this course was to avoid wage increases and in general neutralize labor and oppositional policy groupings. This particular strategy has been implemented either through co-opting, repressing or linking high growth and increases in employment opportunities with control by the government.

The Confucian concept of harmony has been used as an excuse for “control” and anything that threatens paternalism (Deyo 1989), and authoritarian social relations has been presented as something that threatens “harmony.” This also implies that what threatens this control will threaten civil harmony, and in this way it seems that Confucianism and

its concomitant parameters have been used as a tool to minimize conflict, labor unrest and union agitation, or in many cases restrict trade union action and control unions, as well as avoid union multiplicity. In short, “social harmony” as a disciplining tool is also used to establish moral authority, and as a political cultural matrix and discourse which attempts to avoid conflict. It is furthermore used by functionalist cultural researchers who explain East Asia’s economic success with reference to human and social factors shaping organizational life. They claim that national cultural traits and social organization contributed to the success of the developmental state. “On the basis of this, it was argued that an almost ‘natural’ positive connection exists between organizational coherence, social harmony and financial achievements.... Social harmony is here to be understood as mutually accepted and maintained, conflict-free social relations....” (Jonasson and Lauring 2006: 34).

As with family, East Asia tends to be organized with a hierarchical stratification as the foundation of the social order. It is the vertical relationship between superiors and subordinates that guides all human interaction, and social coherence and harmony are dependent on the observance of these relationships. A related aspect of Confucianism is trust between superiors and subordinates. According to this viewpoint, when acting within the hierarchical framework East Asians have an intuitive feeling for social balance and harmony. The Confucian ideology thus supports the maintenance of harmonious relationships. Furthermore, the expressed empathy between group members is considered necessary in order to build satisfactory social interactions. In other words, social harmony among employees is crucial for maintaining smooth relations in the hierarchically structured East Asian organizations (Jonasson and Lauring 2006).

Today, Confucian influences remain important, with strong assumptions of family, market and voluntary sector responsibility rather than state responsibility, strong expectations of women’s obligations without compensating rights, a hierarchy of gender and age, and a highly distinctive, vertical family structure, in which women are subject to parents-in-law. In rapidly changing economies and societies in East Asia and the Nordic region, these social characteristics are changing too. But they still put powerful pressures on women to conform to expectations about care, while weakening their rights to security and support. Nowhere do welfare states’ promises bring gender equality in practice. Even in Scandinavian countries women earn less, care more and have less power than men (Pascall and Sung 2007).

The family's key role in society as a provider of social welfare is common to East Asian welfare systems. Welfare systems have been described as "productivist," emphasizing economic objectives with strong education and health services to reproduce human resources, or Confucian, to emphasize the role of the family in welfare and of Confucian values in social harmony. Confucian values may be seen as a cover for welfare states pursuing economic growth at the expense of everything else, in particular real Confucian values of social solidarity. While welfare states everywhere have a place for family responsibility, East Asian ones draw on Confucian values to give families a special responsibility for social welfare (Pascall and Sung 2007: 5). The emphasis on the family indicates a gender bias and is reflected in the comparatively much lower female labor market participation rates in East Asia compared with the Nordic region (about 40% and 80%, respectively) (OECD 2011). It is also interesting to note that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development stresses that countries with a more equal income distribution, as measured by the Gini coefficient, tend to have higher social spending and more mutual trust.

However, as Kim (2010: 416) notes, export subsidies and preferential credits to big companies in East Asia gave "the wherewithal, and tax exemptions gave the incentive to offer various enterprise welfare programmes to their core employees: education, housing, health care, recreation, retirement, etc." It is confirmed by a number of studies that enterprise welfare in Japan and Korea was systematically fostered by the state to forestall popular demand for universalist welfare policies. In this sense, enterprise welfare in East Asia qualifies as "surrogate" social policy, which is not typically regarded as social policy but is nonetheless intended to serve the same or similar purposes (Kim *ibid.*).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the tensions between harmony and disharmony can be deduced through an analysis of how state bureaucracies and elites may use a variety of norms, values and policies in order to promote an agenda conducive for economic growth and enhancement of individual as well as collective wealth and welfare.

It seems that periods of social cohesion coincide with those of economic growth, and it may be posited that it is economic growth, and the attendant possibility of upward social mobility, that gives people a stake in society, that comprises the "glue" that binds heterogeneous societies



together (Green et al. 2009: 84–85). This may also explain partly why in the more homogeneous Nordic region the tripartite mode of bargaining holds considerable resonance, but in contrast the opposite seems to be the case in the East Asian region, where labor seems willing to sacrifice privileges if economic growth is reduced or even shrinks, as seen during the recent financial crisis (Schmidt and Hersh 2012). However, levels of trust in institutions remain high and levels of organized labor and civil society groups' social engagement also appear to be high.

In contrast, the World Values Survey shows that Japan is among the countries with the lowest scores for both passive and active civic participation. Using data from the Asianbarometer surveys on countries including South Korea and Taiwan, it may be seen that there is a relatively low level of associational membership in these countries. The most popular social groups are identity-based groups—such as alumni associations, sports and recreational groups or religious groups—that tend “to emphasize primordial identities rather than economic interests” and are “likely to encourage in-group solidarity or the ‘dark side’ of social capital.” Park and Lee (2007) also report weak or no correlation between associational membership and social trust in these countries, and no significant relationship with reciprocity and citizenship norms (cf. Green et al. 2009: 85).

It is interesting to note that the levels of trust in South Korea and Japan are much lower compared with the Nordic countries and even lower in China, where there seems to be widespread mistrust especially with local governance but a much higher score when measured at central levels of government.

This chapter has furthermore revealed a corresponding and gradual move away from the state orchestrated social engineering of Confucian welfare in South Korea and Taiwan to a more universal type of social welfare state, while China still seems to emphasize Confucian family-based welfare, although the rhetoric points to a harmonious society. At the same time, and paradoxically, it seems that Nordic welfare is undergoing a gradual change towards a competition or workfare state with a reduction in universal social entitlements.

This is partly related to changes in corporatist arrangements in both regions. Although there are differences, there seems to be a slow convergence towards a more lean and mean type of social welfare provision and labor market regulation policy, which is also the result of changes in, and dependency on, global capitalism itself. The real question is whether this convergence is the result of politics and ideology or is a requirement of global capitalist change.

## NOTES

1. Here including Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea but with some reference to Singapore as well.
2. Including Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland.
3. Social policy is here understood broadly as social security, health and education.
4. Exactly the opposite of the promises of neo-classical theory and proponents of neo-liberalism.

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# Critical Theory and Communicative Action: The Challenge of Legitimation in a World at Risk

*Elaine Desmond*

*I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which  
I am tied to 'you', by trying to translate but finding that my  
own language must break up and yield if I am to know you.  
(Precarious Life, Butler, 2004: 49)*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the centrality of the concept of legitimation in critical theory. This is examined in relation to the idea of 'risk society' developed by Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999, 2009). The chapter argues that the process of legitimation involved in risk society engages humanity in local, national and global struggles. These are aimed at securing a fair allocation of resources and inclusion in the political process as a concern with justice and the way in which power is exercised in the negotiation of risk. The contestation involved in the process of legitimation is waged through discourse. This increasingly requires humanity to develop 'communicative competence' (Habermas 1984: x) as the means not only to asserting judgments, but also to negotiating the normative issue of the boundaries

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399

between self, state and global society which the process of legitimation entails.

The emergence of global civil society has both resulted from, and contributed to, the increased problematisation of the boundary of the state in risk society. Within the ‘cosmopolitanisation’ (Beck 2007: 225) associated with a world at risk, an ever-expansive, transcendental concern for justice must struggle with immanent fear and uncertainty related to preservation. The chapter explores how humanity’s attempts to negotiate boundaries in risk society will be contingent upon the way in which such immanent–transcendental dimensions of human existence are discursively reconciled within the multi-level process of legitimation involved in negotiating a world at risk.

### LEGITIMATION IN CRITICAL THEORY AND RISK SOCIETY

The concept of legitimation, which relates to the way in which power is exercised as a concern of justice, is central to the critical theory tradition in sociology. Its importance emerged from the acute awareness of the tradition’s early authors of the impact of power relations on the ability of both individuals and societies to negotiate risks to their ongoing survival.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that the critical theory concern with legitimation has never been more significant than in the ‘risk society’ described by Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999, 2009).

Beck (1992: 19) claims that, in contemporary global society, the ‘social production of *wealth* is systematically accompanied by the social production of *risks*’. These risks are characterised by the fact that they ‘induce systematic and often *irreversible* harm, generally remain *invisible* ... and initially exist only in terms of the (scientific and anti-scientific) *knowledge* about them’ (ibid.: 23, emphasis in original). Aspects such as climate change, financial collapse, wars, increasing refugee numbers, resource scarcity and terrorism, for instance, represent global risks which are at times actualised in particular contexts as crises, but whose *potential* for escalation and catastrophe is globally pervasive at all times. Both the actualisation and potential of such risks give rise to legitimation struggles as to the way in which they should be negotiated.

Strydom (2002: 114) notes that ‘[t]he discursive construction of risk is a social process in which different social actors or collective agents compete and conflict with one another in the medium of public communication and discourse’. This discursive contestation represents the process of

legitimation through which risk is negotiated. The struggle to legitimate perspectives on risk involves disputes regarding its definition (what is its probability of actualisation and its likely impacts?), the trade-offs involved (are certain risks worth taking in order to secure other benefits? Are certain rights worth sacrificing in order to guard against risk?) and the negotiation of risk (how is risk distributed, who is at risk and who is responsible for remedial action when it is actualised?). The conflict involved in answering these questions occurs through discourse at local, national and global levels as part of a process of legitimation.

As Strydom (2011: 18–27) notes, the classical concern of critical theory involves attempts to reconcile Kantian, Left-Hegelian and Marxist thought. Critical theory has sought to emphasise the vital significance of a social actor capable of making judgments not only with regard to a self-legitimizing Kantian self but also in relation to a Left-Hegelian concern with the constitution of societies which both reflect and inform the self-legitimation of social actors in ways which promote their freedom and autonomy. Marx's dialectical materialism later highlighted the significance of access to the means of production to the way in which power relations, societies, consciousness and learning are challenged and develop over time. Central to the Marxist analysis was the idea of the eventual universal delegitimation of the inequality and injustice associated with class struggle in capitalist society and its replacement by, in Marx's view, a more legitimate socialist form of organisation which emphasised equality and collective effort.

The concern with legitimation lies at the intersection of the work of these key authors. Legitimation involves the intra- and intersubjective contestation of the plural, shifting, power-mediated perspectives of judging, reflecting social actors, who are simultaneously morally and ontologically concerned, in order to bring about the institutionalisation of societies and to allow decisions with social impact to be collectively agreed upon. In this sense, legitimation involves a negotiation of the boundaries between self and immediate others, as well as the wider social context through which individuals derive their ethical concerns.

Max Weber ([1968], 1978: 213) argued that '[e]very system of domination attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy'. His perspective on legitimacy was challenged within critical theory by Jürgen Habermas who questioned the passivity and atomised nature of Weber's account. Habermas (1984: xx) argued that 'interests, desires and feelings are not essentially private but [are] tied to language and culture

and [are] thus inherently susceptible of interpretation, discussion and change'. He therefore emphasised the discursive nature of legitimation, arguing that it was through intersubjective communication in the public sphere that the boundaries of self and society are negotiated, established and transformed.

Hurrelmann et al. (2007: 8) highlight the distinction between legitimation as a *process* of evaluation, and legitimacy as the *attribute* which is being assessed (emphasis in original). Scanlon (2012: 892) notes that it is through a process of legitimation that we try 'to work out with others ideas that can serve as a common standard of justice in our political lives'. With regard to risk, this is crucially related to how risk should be negotiated, differentiated and addressed as a concern of social justice. Thus, as Douglas and Wildavsky (1982: 8) argue, the 'choice of risk and choices of how to live are taken together'.

Clark (2007: 195) asserts that 'legitimacy [is] a constitutive element within a society'. It is also constitutive, as Kant implicitly recognised, of an ethical self. This is noted by Habermas ([1973], 1976: 88) who argues that a concern with 'ethics remains the foundation of legitimation'. In risk society, legitimation entails the determination of where the boundaries of self and society lie as an ethical, normative and ontological concern. This relates to attempts to reconcile an immanent concern for preservation with transcendental, decontextualised understandings of justice.

Strydom (2008: 0) notes that the idea of immanent transcendence is a 'key concept of contemporary critical theory'. This refers to the Habermasian idea of a 'transcendence from within' (Habermas 1998: 7) justified from a 'transcendent God's eye point of view' (ibid.). This latter point of view is crucial to the way in which secular societies judge themselves in terms of how they are constituted as a moral concern. This transcendent point of view also determines how the exercise of power is legitimated in context as a normative concern of justice. The idea of immanent transcendence is particularly pertinent to legitimation in risk society given that transcendental ideas related to ideals such as justice, freedom and right must be reconciled with immanent concerns regarding fears for the safety of oneself and those to whom one is emotionally and geographically proximate. It is through discursive contestation that attempts to reconcile transcendental and immanent concerns are assessed and judged as part of a process of legitimation.

The negotiation of boundaries involved in the process of legitimation entails an evaluation of the power relations that emerge as a result of a



differentiated access to resources.<sup>2</sup> The latter contributes not only to a differentiated exposure to risk but also to a differentiated ability to influence decision-making with regard to its alleviation and negotiation. Forst (2014: ix) argues that ‘the first question of justice is power’. He (2014: 6) further claims that ‘the basic question of justice is not what you have but how you are treated’. This relates to the process of establishing a *basic structure of justification* where the right to justification is recognised as a concern of fundamental justice (Forst 2007: 296, emphasis in original).<sup>3</sup> This chapter argues that the process involved in seeking to establish such a basic structure of justification is that of legitimation.

According to Forst, the right to justification grants social actors, regardless of their access to resources, the right to ask for and challenge reasons for why power is being exercised in a particular way; in risk society, however, this demand for justification is often itself directly related to what people have as their means for negotiating risk. This is given that inequality in access to resources is often the basis for the differentiation of risk exposure for which justification is sought. Such inequality also plays a key role in determining the extent to which social actors can have their right to justification recognised. In the negotiation of risk, an individual’s right to justification is abstract and meaningless until it becomes recognised and incorporated within a process of legitimation.

In her dialogue with fellow critical theorist Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser (2003: 44) argued that both redistribution and recognition are required to secure participatory parity in modern democratic societies. She (Fraser 2008: 17) later added the crucial dimension of political representation to formulate her three-dimensional theory of justice. It is possible, through mass mobilisations, to secure recognition and representation in the absence of redistribution; however, justification of resource distribution remains a key concern of the process of legitimation given the impact of access to resources on the ability to negotiate risk.

Through the process of legitimation, the power relations and understandings of justice which themselves arise from particular distributive patterns are problematised. Within this, what an individual *has* remains central to the immanent struggle for justice. This immanent struggle between social actors with unequal resources and exposed to varying degrees of risk involves assessments of the legitimacy of how people are treated as a result of the power relations arising from such an unequal distribution of resources. These judgments of legitimacy are made through drawing upon local interpretations of transcendental ideas of fairness to determine what

should normatively be regarded as ‘right’ or ‘just’ within a given social context.<sup>4</sup> Such judgments determine the extent to which the right to justification in challenging power relations and resource access will be recognised through a process of legitimation which operates at local, national and, increasingly, global levels.

According to Habermas (1984: 23), the process of legitimation relates to assessments of the validity claims of truth, rightness, adequacy, truthfulness and comprehensibility incorporated within the process of communication itself. This refers to the ‘communicative action’ (Habermas 1984) which Habermas argues is central to the legitimation process. Communicative action relates to the way in which individuals assess the legitimacy of speech acts as a concern for the constitution of their ethical positions and of the wider society in which they are embedded. Such assessments entail the development of ‘communicative competence’ (Habermas 1984: x) as the basis for moral learning and the ability to mediate between transcendental and immanent concerns in judgments of validity claims.

The centrality of communication to the process of legitimation is also asserted by Strydom. He (2015: 13) argues that ‘[d]iscourses emerge from the interrelation of differently positioned actors and agents, the actions and practices in which they engage and, in particular, the distinct sets of competing, contested and conflicting cognitive structures or frames they communicate and thereby introduce into the public sphere’. Bernstein (2004: 18) notes the localised nature of understandings of legitimacy, arguing that they are ‘highly contextual, based on historical understandings ... and the shared norms of the particular community granting authority’. The process of legitimation also entails varying understandings of what should normatively be considered as just. These seek ideological justification through ideas formulated discursively which transcend the particular context of the struggle in order to assess what should legitimately be considered as normatively and universally right and just.<sup>5</sup>

Through his idea of ‘triple contingency’, Strydom (1999, 2001) highlights the way in which communicative action extends beyond those who are actively engaged in debate to incorporate the judgment of validity claims by a watching public. This relates to ‘the contingency that the public as the bearer of a third point of view brings into communicative relations and hence into the social process’ (2001: 165). In this way, the wider public becomes engaged in the process of legitimation through serving as an audience for public sphere deliberations. This is also noted by Schneider

et al. (ibid.: 132) who claim that '[c]itizens express their legitimacy beliefs, and political elites advance their self-representations, through participation in, or exposure to ... communication [in the public sphere]'.

The emergence of triple contingency and the media technologies which support it have given rise to the potential for learning and communication across borders. This enhanced consciousness has contributed to challenges as to where boundaries should legitimately be drawn as part of the process of legitimation. The increasingly global nature of triple contingency has problematised the legitimacy of the boundary of the state itself as the territorial demarcation for where legitimation struggles to reconcile demands of preservation and justice, as a political concern, have traditionally been fought. This will now be explored.

### LEGITIMATION, RISK AND THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM OF THE STATE

The legitimacy of the state, as a political entity, is derived from its primary role as protector of its citizens. Locke ([1690], 1967: 371) argued that the supreme power of the commonwealth should be 'directed to no other end, but the *Peace, Safety, and public good* of the People' (emphasis in original). Rousseau ([1762], 1973: 247), too, asserted that the 'single will [arising from the social contract of the state was] concerned with the ... common preservation and general well-being [of all of its citizens]'. This function is particularly crucial with regard to state decision-making on risk.

The construction of the state extended the boundary of a concern for preservation beyond oneself and those with whom one shared immediate familial or emotional bonds to an expanded concern for the preservation of those with whom one shared a collective national identity. Given the requirement for common preservation as the basis of state legitimacy, a productive and well-run economy was recognised as crucial. As Habermas (2008: 330) argues, '[the state] cannot preserve the necessary level of legitimacy in the long run unless a functioning economy fulfills the preconditions for an acceptable pattern of distribution'. This reliance on the economy relates to the state's need to secure the resources required to alleviate the risk exposure of its citizens as a concern for its own legitimacy.

In risk society, the right to justification for particular patterns of resource distribution must be asserted by vulnerable groups and/or their representatives through a process of legitimation. This is achieved by

gaining recognition and representation for the injustice of an unequal distribution of resources and the heightened exposure to risk which this constrained access to resources gives rise to for many. Such assertions of injustice by citizens serve as the basis for demanding the resources required to alleviate risk. This demand is directed at the state and the state is bound to respond as a concern for its own legitimacy. Ongoing failure to alleviate the risks of its citizens can result in the de-legitimation of a particular government in a number of ways: the government's electoral rejection, the takeover of the state apparatus through a coup d'état, or the fragmentation of the state amid demands for secession by the disgruntled inhabitants of regions seeking to improve their own ability to negotiate risk.

The state is also regarded as the means through which transcendental ideals are translated into an immanent practice legitimated by its people. This is particularly true of democratic states which often have their commitment to transcendental ideals such as justice, equality and human rights constitutionally enshrined. In terms of risk society, the Rawlsian Difference Principle provides the basic standard of justification for the way in which power and resources are allocated by the state as a concern of justice. This holds that a given social structure should not 'secure attractive prospects for the wealthy unless to do so is to the advantage of those less fortunate' (Rawls [1971], 1999: 65).

Benhabib (2004: 19) notes the centrality of the state to political autonomy and democratic self-governance. She argues that 'popular and democratic sovereignty [constitutes] a circumscribed *demos* which acts to govern itself'. The process of legitimation which forms the basis of the way in which a given *demos* seeks to achieve self-governance is illustrated by Habermas (1996: 354–357) in his portrayal of political will-formation. Habermas (1996: 354–357) claims that the process of legitimation can be viewed as a circulation of communicative power between the periphery of civil society and the core of the state.<sup>6</sup> He (ibid.: 356) argues that 'binding decisions, to be legitimate, must be steered through communication flows that start at the periphery'.

This communicative flow between the core of the state and the periphery of civil society forms the basis of the legitimation process in democratic states and represents the means by which state policy is evaluated in terms of its justice in relation to the citizens to whom it applies. In risk society, such democratic will-formation permits assertions of risk by vulnerable groups and/or their representatives which must be redressed by the state through the distribution of resources, benefits and services in order to secure its own legitimacy.

Habermas highlights the centrality of social movements to the legitimisation process. He (1996: 370) claims that such mass movements

attempt to bring up issues relevant to the entire society, to define new ways of approaching problems, to propose possible solutions, to supply new information, to interpret values differently, to mobilise good reasons and to criticise bad ones.

Habermas argues that the legitimisation struggle to which social movements contribute is waged through communicative action in the public sphere. He (1996: 371) claims that ‘influence transformed into communicative power legitimates political decisions’.

The rise of social movements has coincided with the increasing emergence of ‘injustice frames’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 615) as the basis for discursive contestation. In terms of risk, these seek to discursively assert the need for recognition of the right to justification of vulnerable groups and to demand remedial action for their exposure to risk through the (re-) allocation of resources by the state. In highlighting these injustice claims, movements not only demand justification of the power relations and resource distribution over which the state presides; they also challenge ethical understandings of the way in which risk should be negotiated as a normative concern through seeking to redefine the boundaries within which demands of preservation and justice should apply.

In risk society, communicative power challenges not only the differentiation of risk exposure through demanding recognition of the right to justification of vulnerable groups; it also challenges the way in which the complex ‘trade-offs’ (Renn 2008: 196) associated with risk are negotiated with regard to both preservation and justice. The demand for human rights by vulnerable groups as a concern of justice can impact upon risk negotiation with regard to the preservation of the larger collective. This can be seen, for instance, in the protests against the building of large dams by indigenous populations whose habitations are lost in drought-prone areas whose wider populations are heavily reliant on failing agriculture. These trade-offs must be discursively negotiated and justified as part of a process of legitimisation.

While there have been questions regarding the legitimacy of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements themselves (Haunss 2007: 161),<sup>7</sup> these organisations and collectives are generally regarded as central to both democratic legitimacy and the legitimacy of the state. This is asserted by Haunss (*ibid.*) who argues that ‘while

challenging the legitimacy of their opponents, [movements] may, at the same time, strengthen the legitimacy of the system as a whole'. Touraine (2000: 93) argues that many social movements have become 'ethical movements' which 'directly assert and defend both equality and the rights and freedom of the Subject' (ibid.).

It should be noted that not all movements pursue progressive agendas and the ideological stance of movements with which an individual associates is assessed as part of that individual's legitimation of their own ethical positioning. Such movements often occupy different positions along a spectrum of preservation and protectionism versus a broader concern for social justice. In this way, the conflicting moral positions of movements themselves become incorporated within local, national and global processes of legitimation. This can be seen, for instance, in the ongoing race riots in the United States and the presence of the Ku Klux Klan who urge white supremacy as the means to the preservation of (white) humanity to the detriment of all other ethnicities. Conflicts between movements often directly problematise the attempts at preservation by certain groups where they directly impact upon social justice and the equal right to state protection of all citizens from risk, regardless of dimensions of differentiation such as ethnicity, creed or gender.

Habermas ([1973], 1976: 46–47) argues that processes of globalisation have meant that the state is increasingly unable to exercise autonomy in responding to the demands for redress of risk by its population. He (ibid.: 55) notes the 'growing need for legitimation of the political system' as attempts to establish where 'thresholds of tolerance lie'; but he also highlights the potential for legitimation crises (ibid.) which can result in a withdrawal of mass loyalty to the political system. The latter can occur when the demands of civil society consistently fail to be recognised and/or legitimately addressed. The danger of legitimation crises is of particular concern in risk society given the careful negotiation and justification of trade-offs which risk negotiation involves and the centrality of this justification to the state's ability to maintain its legitimacy.

The diffusion of risks arising from the global interdependencies associated with the 'functional globalisation' (Strydom 2007–2008: 24) of the economy, politics and, to some extent, law has increasingly contributed to a restricted ability of states to respond to citizens' assertions of risk. The impact of globalisation on the autonomy of the state has led political analysts, such as Kothari (2005: 128), to argue that globalisation has led to an 'erosion in the role of the state'.

States are also charged with the definition and justification of remedial actions for risks arising from their global interdependencies. Although global risks such as climate change, terrorism or financial crises are deterritorialised in that their causes transcend the boundaries of individual states, they also give rise to material impacts within states. This has led to the increasing emergence of national legitimisation struggles with regard to globalised risk and the growing significance of ‘communicative globalisation’ (Strydom 2007–2008: 24) as the means by which struggles to negotiate borders in response to risk negotiation are waged.

The problematic nature of the state itself with regard to justice is highlighted by Fraser (2008: 22) who refers to the ‘boundary problem of the state’. As Fraser (2007: 28) notes, globalisation ‘problematise[s] the question of the “how” of justice, [even] as it politicises the question of the “who”’. The ‘all-affected principle’ (Fraser 2008: 25) and the idea that ‘all those affected by a given social structure or institution have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it’ (ibid.) is difficult to apply when decisions which seemingly enhance the justice of risk negotiation within the borders of individual states negatively impact upon the risk negotiation of those beyond its borders. Such decisions on risk often prioritise the demands of the citizens of individual states as part of a national legitimisation process. This means that the state can serve as a barrier to the type of ‘enlarged mentality’ (Arendt [1954], 2006: 237) required to negotiate risk as a concern of justice globally.

The struggle to negotiate the boundary of the state in a world at risk coincides with a growing awareness of the centrality of the state in risk negotiation. This is highlighted by the ongoing demands for secession in risk society.<sup>8</sup> Such demands are often linked to attempts to invoke a state boundary as the means to establishing a right to resources to the exclusion of those seen as lacking such entitlement on the basis of territorial or ethnicity claims. Secession demands can also indicate a failure within a given state to more fundamentally address power relations and the unequal distribution of resources and risk as a concern of justice within the state. This means that vulnerable groups are left with no alternative but to seek their own territory as the basis for creating a separate process of legitimisation in which their right to justification and demands for resources to address their exposure to risk are more effectively recognised and represented.

Kothari (2005: 174) claims that the concern for self-rule in contemporary global society derives from the fact that ‘[c]ommunities now want to control and protect their access to natural resources’. Boylan (2015: 762),

too, argues that Catalonia's struggle for secession from Spain is motivated by a desire 'to end subsidising disadvantaged regions in the [wider Spanish] state'. The tendency towards protectionism in a world at risk is highlighted by Beck (2009: 200) who noted that it is 'experiencing a revival'. While he regarded this as a positive reaction against the negative impacts of globalisation, there is also the potential that protectionism will be used negatively as a means of erecting boundaries against the emergence of global solidarity in response to risk.

The tendency for states to protect their own interests in ways which violate human rights and justice is all too evident. This was highlighted by the assertions of the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, that Muslims should be banned from the USA as a response to the 2015 Paris bombings by the jihadist militant group, ISIS. This potential for the rationale of preservation within the framing of the state to lead to blinkered nationalist thinking to the detriment of global justice and human rights can also be seen in the ongoing debates as to whether those fleeing war in Syria should be permitted refuge within particular states. These discussions are being held by a number of the governments actively engaged in bombing the country (the USA, France, Germany, and the UK, for example). The conflict which such issues give rise to represent complex attempts to reconcile concerns of preservation with demands of justice within the legitimisation struggle involved in negotiating risk. At the same time, the debates which surround them challenge individuals to define where the boundaries of their own ethical positions lie.

The process of legitimisation and the right to justification which underlies it challenge the justice of responses to risk through deliberations which highlight risk negotiation as an ethical concern.<sup>9</sup> The awareness of interconnectivity which issues of global risk raise has meant that the concern for justice has increasingly expanded beyond the state boundary. This has been promoted by social movements which problematise the boundary of the state even as they lobby the state as the means by which to do so.

In this sense, the state remains central to a process of legitimisation which increasingly problematises the state's own ideological framing in the struggle to reconcile the demands of preservation and justice through which the state's legitimacy is derived. This complex dynamic of the state in a globalised world at risk has led Mann (1997: 472) to argue that globalisation has contributed to both 'state-weakening and strengthening tendencies'.

The increasing engagement of states in global deliberations, as well as the emergence of a global civil society, has led to the cosmopolitanisation



of legitimation itself. This is expanding the boundaries of a concern for preservation and justice beyond those of the self and those who are emotionally and geographically proximate to increasingly incorporate a concern for the preservation of the collective of humanity. This has seen the growing inclusion of global issues within national processes of legitimation in ways which problematise the state boundary even as protestors continue to seek redress for the risk exposure of the vulnerable worldwide through the framework of the state.

### THE COSMOPOLITANISATION OF LEGITIMATION IN A WORLD AT RISK

Beck (2007a: 225) argues that, as concerns of global civil society are merged creatively with national interests, risk society is leading to the 'cosmopolitanisation' of the state. This blending of the local and the global is, it is argued here, also leading to the cosmopolitanisation of legitimation as the consciousness of citizens is transformed, and ethical concerns are increasingly informed, by the activity of global civil society. This process is being consolidated through the emergence of 'cosmopolitan law' (Strydom 2008: 13) in the form of intergovernmental treaties such as the United Nations Charter, or transnational institutions like the International Court of Justice; however, it is clear that pressure for such treaties and institutions arises owing to the changed consciousness of social actors themselves. This expanded imaginary heightens the awareness within local and national legitimation processes of the threats to everyday realities represented by global risk, as well as of the social unrest and moral dilemmas arising from the demands for justification for the unequal access to resources and differentiated exposure to risk worldwide.

The political imaginary of a 'postnational constellation' (Habermas 2001) or a 'democracy across borders' (Bohman 2007) both derives from, and informs, a post-national self whose ethical concern for justice increasingly transcends boundaries dictated by the assertion of self-interested or national demands for preservation. The constitution of this post-national self may be derived instrumentally from a calculation that one's own preservation and that of those to whom one is emotionally and geographically attached is inseparable from the wider preservation of the species as a whole; nonetheless, this calculation itself contributes to a desire for the reconciliation of preservation and justice globally which transforms understandings of the way in which boundaries of the self and the state should be negotiated.

As part of this cosmopolitanisation of legitimation, power relations between states are increasingly problematised through communicative action by transnational NGOs and social movements as part of a globalised legitimation process. The latter often focusses on the validity claims of global power-holders in relation to risk negotiation worldwide. This activity has informed the creation, and led to attempts at reform, of international institutions. Kuper (2004: 175), for instance, notes the growing power of international NGOs in global deliberations in the United Nations, arguing that ‘1600 NGOs have consultative status [in the United Nations]’, and ‘20 NGOs meet with the UN Security Council’ (Kuper 2004: 176).

It is recognised that international NGOs are subject to the same concerns regarding their representativeness and democratic accountability as NGOs which operate within states. However, the inclusion of non-state actors within global deliberations adds to an emergent global process of legitimation through which transnational power relations and the unequal access to resources and exposure to risk associated with them are challenged. The inclusion of NGOs in global deliberations also acknowledges the need for recognition, representation and the right to justification of a global civil society. This reflects an increasing awareness that, as Pogge (2008: 215) claims, the ‘global institutional order ... requires justification’ given that it presides over a world in which radical inequality and power imbalances exist.

Transnational NGOs and social movements also seek to alter the consciousness of local populations through creating the basis for an ‘enlarged mentality’ (Arendt [1954], 2006: 237). This contributes to the incorporation of global concerns within national legitimation processes. Clark (2007: 210) argues there is an ‘emerging reality of world society. We feel its presence through the alternative normative principles that it enshrines, however embryonic and unsettled these might remain.’ He (2007: 210) predicts that ‘[n]ew norms will emerge from this process of negotiation as power-holders are obliged to accommodate some of the demands as a concern for their own legitimacy’.

Along with the activity of transnational movements, the diffusion of media technologies has expanded the phenomenon of ‘triple contingency’ (Strydom 1999) to incorporate a global audience which judges on behalf of humanity. This global audience represents a virtual watchdog of state activities as part of the cosmopolitanisation of legitimation. As Beetham (2013: 271) notes, global civil society ‘constitutes both an audience for,

and an adjudicator of, the legitimacy claims of international institutions'. As part of this globalised communicative action, international NGOs seek to assess the validity claims of global power-holders in relation to social justice and the risk negotiation of the vulnerable. In doing so, they instigate a legitimisation process by engaging a watching and judging global public.

The contribution of widely diffused media technologies to the emergence of a global legitimisation process is evident with initiatives such as Avaaz, an online campaigning community with 42 million members in 194 countries worldwide. Given the spread of their membership, Avaaz can raise awareness of global issues, encourage engagement through petitions and campaigns, and assert the need for the inclusion of such global issues as part of legitimacy assessments of particular states. Likewise, through their online presence, transnational NGOs such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Transparency International and Oxfam can bring issues of global justice to the attention of a global public who incorporate them into demands directed at state governments concerned for their own legitimacy. The cosmopolitanisation of ethics to which these organisations contribute must be reconciled with individual attempts to secure access to resources as a more immediate concern with preservation in local contexts.

Media and communications technologies also facilitate the mobilisation of global protests, the scale of which reinforces the legitimacy of the causes of these groups and asserts their 'counter-power' (Beck 2007b: 6) in relation to the power of individual states. This is evidenced by international mobilisations associated with, for instance, the World Social Forum (WSF), an alter-globalisation movement, which campaigns for social justice in relation to the global economy. In 2005, 155,000 participants from 151 countries took part in a WSF protest in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Ghimire 2005: 3). Their banners proclaimed 'another world is possible' (Pleyers 2010: 59).

These movements challenge the risks associated with functional globalisation and assert the need for greater social justice between states. In this way, they contribute to the emergence of 'communicative globalisation' (Strydom 2007–2008: 25) associated with 'an increase in communication ... the making of problems into public and political issues ... collective learning, social transformation, and ... the creation and organisation of society' (ibid.). The activity of these movements has broadened the scope of legitimisation, challenging the boundaries of self and the state,

and expanding the concern with reconciling the demands of preservation and justice to a global level. This means that states are increasingly required to justify their actions to a global civil society.

While it is argued that global civil society remains an ‘elite phenomenon’ (Beetham 2013: 271), it is clear that it comprises diverse interests and issues. Protests by global civil society often support minority groups in gaining global recognition for their risk exposure. This puts pressure on states, concerned for the impact of international condemnation on their ability to maintain their legitimacy, to take action. Movements such as the Landless People’s Movement,<sup>10</sup> the Chipko Movement,<sup>11</sup> and La Via Campesina,<sup>12</sup> raise issues of social justice related to preservation and justice globally. Through this activity, they challenge ethical understandings and problematise the boundary of the state even as they demand state action for the resolution of the risk exposure of the vulnerable within particular states.

Habermas (2008: 348) argues that there is a marked ‘legitimation deficit’ at the transnational level given the absence of a global core to respond to the demands for recognition of the right to justification asserted by the periphery of global civil society. He (2001: 105) asserts that ‘both the competence for political action of a world government and a corresponding basis of legitimation are lacking’. Beck (2007b: 81), too, claims that ‘as ... global problems increasingly impact on people’s everyday lives and yet are dealt with either inadequately or not at all on the national level, the crisis of legitimation in nation-state politics deepens’.

The need for global governance and an authority capable of enforcing legally binding agreements on states is particularly acute in a world at risk. This concern is also asserted by Beck (2007b: 27) who argues that ‘[a]s long as there is no global authority responsible for monitoring global inequalities, they disintegrate into a patchwork of nation-state inequalities’. The legitimation deficit associated with the absence of a global government must, however, also be assessed against the threat to the state’s autonomy of a global authority and the need for the state to be able to tailor its responses to addressing the risk exposure of its own citizens as a concern for its legitimacy. This represents the ongoing tension associated with the framing of the state with regard to global risk.

The legitimation deficit at a global level can be seen, for instance, in the approach to the ‘war on terror’. National governments in the West seek legitimation for attacks on Iraq and Syria on the basis of fear and

self-preservation and the purported need to eliminate jihadist groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, through their annihilation. This competes, however, with a concern for justice in the exercise of power by many in global civil society amid assertions that such an approach to terrorism results in the further unjust loss of innocent lives and contributes to an ongoing radicalisation which exacerbates the risks that humanity as a collective must confront.

The scale of civil society protest against the approach of many states to the war on terror was evidenced by the fact that approximately 9 million people worldwide protested against the 2003 war in Iraq (Haunss 2007: 156). These mobilisations challenged the justification for the war with subsequent repercussions for the political legitimacy of key protagonists, such as George Bush and Tony Blair. Despite this contested justification, however, the war went ahead and its contribution to global risk continues. This highlights the lack of global accountability associated with the absence of a global government whose legitimacy is dependent on reconciling the demands of preservation and justice for the collective of humanity as a whole.

There are also occasions, however, when the pressure exerted by global civil society impacts upon the motivation of states to reach consensus through global deliberations. This could be seen in the 2015 Paris climate change summit which involved representatives from 196 states and 50,000 attendees. Despite, or perhaps because of, the summit being held in a city in which 130 people had been killed weeks earlier in an ISIS terror attack, an agreement was finally reached on the negotiation of climate change to which all countries could agree.<sup>13</sup>

Hailed as the ‘world’s greatest diplomatic success’,<sup>14</sup> the summit involved separate negotiations between representatives of powerful states concerned for their relative economic positions and interests, as well as the preservation of their citizens. These included discussions between the US Secretary of State and the Chinese foreign minister. There were also opportunities for ‘confessionals’ where delegates could speak ‘from the heart’ to French diplomats as a means of reaching consensus. All states made compromises and all agreed to cut emissions to keep global warming from exceeding 2°C. More powerful states committed to financially assisting those in the Global South to help with emissions reductions and to providing urgent aid to states hit by climate-related disasters.

It is recognised that the agreement is not legally binding and climate change activists argue that it does not go far enough to prevent ongoing climate catastrophes. It also remains to be seen how effectively these agreements are put into practice, particularly given that actions required to meet these commitments will need to be legitimated within national contexts; however, the summit nonetheless illustrates the expansion of communicative power beyond the boundary of the state, as well as the emergence of a global legitimation process in which transnational power relations must be negotiated as part of an ongoing requirement of risk society.

The widespread legitimation of the agreement was evident in the response to President Trump's subsequent decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. This was challenged not only by activists outside the United States but also within it. His reversal of President Obama's agreement was deemed illegitimate by 11 of the federal states, including Washington DC, California and New York. These have formed a United States Climate Alliance and vow to uphold the accord. The situation highlights the way in which the discourse of risk and the global legitimation process which it has given rise to serve as a challenge to the legitimacy of world leaders even in the absence of a globally recognised authority to enforce transnational agreements or to hold such leaders accountable. It also illustrates the tension between concerns for the preservation of the lifestyles and standards of living of particular states against demands for global justice in response to risk.

Beck (2009: 188) notes that a world at risk opens up 'a complex moral and political space of responsibility' as 'meanings of proximity, reciprocity, dignity, justice and trust' (ibid.) are transformed. The possibility of ongoing cosmopolitanisation as a concern for global justice must compete, as part of its legitimation, with the potential for protectionism as states and individuals seek to reinforce boundaries as a concern for their own preservation; alternatively, states may seek to constrain the legitimation process through authoritarian measures aimed at limiting mobilisations and restricting access to media technologies. Attempts to mediate the tensions associated with the ongoing negotiation of boundaries of self and state in a world at risk remain contingent upon the way in which communicative power evolves globally as a result of developments arising from these ongoing struggles for legitimation. The outcome of the evolution of our cognitive capacity for communicative competence is as contingent and uncertain as the materialisation of risk itself. It is, however, in this crucial

area of communicative action, as well as the legitimation process to which it is central, that the greatest risks to, and opportunities for, the future of humanity lie.

## CONCLUSION

Giri (2013: 288) highlights the need for ‘appropriate self-preparation and self-transformation for belonging to and creating a cosmopolitan world’. This, he (*ibid.*) argues, involves cosmopolitanisation as a ‘multi-dimensional process of self-development, inclusion of the other, and planetary realisations’. This chapter has sought to highlight the way that the transformation involved in cosmopolitanisation occurs through the challenging of boundaries involved in the expanding basis for legitimation as a response to global risk. An enhanced awareness of the interconnectedness of humanity developed through actions undertaken to address global risk, as well as the mounting materialisation of risk, will continue to contribute to legitimation struggles involved in the negotiation of the boundaries of self, state and an emergent global society.

The idea that the preservation of the individual may be best achieved through the securing of justice for the collective of humanity will require the development of significant communicative competence if it is to be translated into a globally legitimate political practice in a world at risk. This is particularly evident given that the reconciliation of the immanent and transcendental dimensions of human existence that such an idea would entail is one with which the state itself continues to struggle given power imbalances, inequality of access to resources and conflicting interests among its own citizens.

The endeavour to achieve such a reconciliation on a global scale in a highly unequal world fraught with risk, while negotiating the significant pressure to erect boundaries in the name of the preservation of the self and the state, represents the ultimate challenge for legitimation and communicative action. The latter relates to the breadth of vision, reasoning and negotiation skills, and complex assessments of validity claims required in any attempt to reconcile transcendental demands of justice with significant fears for immanent preservation on a global scale. The achievement of such a reconciliation remains, however, something to which humanity must continue to aspire if it is to legitimately address the significant ethical and moral dilemmas involved in negotiating a world at risk.

## NOTES

1. The Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research) which was established in Germany in 1923 was home to the Frankfurt School from which critical theory emerged (Held 1980: 29). At its inception, many of the Institute's most prominent authors were Jewish, including Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979). These authors were forced to flee Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933 and much of their work was produced in exile following the school's re-formation in the United States. These origins have continued to inform critical theory's concern with intellectual autonomy as the means to challenging injustice and the illegitimate exercise of power. Through the work of Jürgen Habermas, communicative action has been increasingly recognised as central to this project.
2. Access to resources relates to the means required to negotiate the risks of a particular context. In situations of humanitarian disasters, access to food, water and shelter will be of primary importance. Under non-emergency conditions, however, security of access to food, water, land, housing, political influence, social status, assets, wealth, employment and natural resources all serve as the basis for mitigating exposure to risk as an ongoing preoccupation. Competition to gain greater access to these resources represents an attempt to mitigate risk exposure as a concern for the preservation of certain individuals and groups over others. This highlights the ontological significance of power relations in risk society.
3. Maximal justice would mean that a *fully justified basic structure* has been established—one that grants 'rights, life chances and goods that citizens of a just society could not reciprocally deny each other' (Forst 2007: 296).
4. This relates to the cognitive capacity for assessing claims of justice from a decontextualised 'original position' (Rawls [1971], 1999: 13) where necessary in order to resolve immanent conflicts.
5. The definition of 'right' and 'good' emerges through the process of legitimation itself and its concern with the negotiation and reconciliation of immanent and transcendental dimensions of human existence. The potential for relativism associated with legitimation is highlighted by the Rawlsian ([1993], 2005: 393) concern that injustice itself can be legitimated in particular contexts. This gives rise to the possibility for approaches to risk to be legitimated in one context which can exacerbate risk exposure in others. There is greater potential for injustice to be legitimated when the basis for legitimation is founded on perspectives which are narrowly or erroneously conceived, or informed by fear. The more open the process of legitimation is to extraneous influences beyond the boundaries in which it operates, the greater the likelihood is that unjust legitimations will be challenged by competing perspectives.



6. The dynamic interaction between the state and civil society is referred to by Habermas (1996: 354–355) as the core-periphery model of democratic will-formation.
7. These relate to concerns regarding their representativeness and lack of democratic accountability (Mehta 2007: 71), as well as their diversity in terms of their contribution to human emancipation and social justice (Adeney and Wyatt 2010: 149). This is particularly evident in the case of radical nationalist right-wing movements that assert the prioritisation of the preservation of citizens of their own states, often on the basis of a purported superior evolutionary advancement in relation to others. The presence of these movements highlights the potential for injustice, as well as the ongoing tension in the negotiation of borders with regard to preservation and justice in response to risk.
8. Between 1990 and 2007, secessions led to the creation of 25 new states which were given international recognition (Pavkovic 2008: 1). There are also many other territories which are demanding statehood such as Kosovo, Chechnya, Somaliland, Catalonia, as well as secession struggles by groups in a number of Indian states, including Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Nagaland. In India, the state of Telangana was formed in 2014 following the secession of the region from the wider state of Andhra Pradesh. A full analysis of how the demands for secession in Telangana intersected with the process of legitimation and negotiation of risk in the region can be found in *Legitimation in a World at Risk: The Case of Genetically Modified Crops in India*.
9. Self-transformation is made possible through the moral learning and ethical reflection that occurs as a result of the legitimation process which such complex issues give rise to. This learning challenges understandings of the transcendental basis for the legitimacy of immanent power structures and social practices.
10. The Landless Peoples Movement in Brazil and South Africa asserts its demand for access to land as a concern for social justice.
11. The Indian Chipko movement which sought to protect the livelihoods of indigenous forest populations inspired environmental protests worldwide.
12. La Via Campesina has a membership of 200 million small farmers in 73 countries and works to promote social justice and dignity through the promotion of sustainable agriculture as a counter-power to globalised commercial agriculture.
13. While attempts were made to prevent civil society mobilisations at the summit owing to security concerns, thousands gathered at a protest organised by Global Justice Now on 12 December, 2015. Agreement to this protest had been negotiated with the French government.
14. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations>. Accessed on 23/11/2017.

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# The Gift of the Grain: Beyond Biopolitics?

*Abhijeet Paul*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the conundrum of seed-sovereignty currently plaguing the globalized world, where technology, economy, community, and nature are more entangled than ever. With this in mind, the ecosocialist Vandana Shiva, who runs a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Navdanya (meaning nine grains), calls for new ways of thinking about seed as a physical, biological, ritual, and ethical concept. Shiva's idea is to make us think about seed in epiphenomenological terms rather than solely as the commodity of monocultural economic exchanges. In this, she emphasizes the aesthetic, ritual, and symbolic notion of seed as perhaps the most crucial thing affecting our behaviors around it. This is partially reflected in the naming of Navdanya, which enables the NGO to articulate the idea that it values biodiversity as inseparable from the notions of community and commons. Further, Shiva suggests that there is no way to bypass the importance of language and culture in figuring something pre-emptively unique and abundant in nature—seed. And yet, when seeds are patented throughout the world today, their vulnerability to irreversible forms of power become more and more evident. What ensues from the latter is patents, which are a “total control system.” Shiva says:

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[Patents] allow corporations to claim ownership over life forms—micro-organisms, plants, animals. They allow corporations to define the acts of saving and sharing seeds as “intellectual property crimes”. And they allow the crime of biopiracy—the theft of traditional knowledge and biopiracy to be treated as a right. (“The spinning wheel and the seed: Gandhi’s legacy, humanity’s hope”, “The Practice of Earth Democracy” [http://www.navdanya.org/about/practice\\_earth\\_dem.htm](http://www.navdanya.org/about/practice_earth_dem.htm))

While Navdanya’s political objective is to challenge the corporate norms of patenting life-forms such as the seed in agro-industrial settings, it does so by engaging in a positive reconstruction of the community, instead of by merely treating individuals as consumers and producers. Since one’s identity in a community and, arguably, commons is largely based on how one acts, evidently Shiva is asking us to rethink policy in similar terms. At the same time, the notions of community and commons are constantly threatened by corporatization and neo-liberalization, which have greater power to manage data and metadata of all forms and types, affecting policy. But community practices, or communities of practice, as Etienne Wenger once said, thrive on mutual support, and can be more elastic and resilient than they appear to be (Wenger 1998). Somewhat echoing Wenger’s views, Navdanya proposes a commonsense proposition: what if the farming community took control of the seed it plants for harvesting? What if banking became small-scale? What if rhetoric became policy? What if everyone learned to share when the going was tough?

Is seed a commodity or a gift? Navdanya, an environmental non-profit in India, managed by the renowned ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, is often confronted with this question. In its attempt to respond to such a commonsense question, it has effectively fueled a social movement of sorts in India and South Asia. To be sure, this is not an idle question to be buried for the sake of solving more burning questions such as food security in the developing world. In fact, it is a question that lies at the heart of food security, for addressing the philosophy and culture of seed could spell the difference between monocultures and biodiversity in food-making and consumption.

Seed as gift becomes grain for food. In this commonsense statement, food is wrapped up in partial acknowledgment of the notion of the gift: the gift of the grain. By contrast, the terms of liberal discourse around food economics and security—“seed-sovereignty” and “biopolitics”—are often staged carefully through a discourse of expectations and ethics of life

that is impossible to politicize and yet is somehow already political. These terms function on the basis of the paradigms of friendship, care, knowing, and a reawakening of the human–nature relationship in social theory and thinking. Unsurprisingly, Navdanya’s mission and vision statement, articulated by Shiva,<sup>1</sup> draws on the concept of local knowledge of seed and their complex ritual and traditional practices. These rituals implicitly critique state and market capitalism, environmentalism, and globalization. The status of seed in ritual terms equally posits difficulties for the discourses of seed/grain in biopolitical terms—often explained via networks of food security and enclosures. It is therefore tempting to argue that questions around the seed are directly concerned with the nature of capitalism, bio-power, and biopolitics (Foucault 2004, 2008, orig. 1977–1978, 1978–1979; Agamben 1998; Esposito 2008).

Indeed, they are, but is it also possible to challenge disciplinary enclosures themselves—liberal, post-Marxist, or otherwise—which are entrenched in knowledge practices, arguably Western? Can we, instead, draw on seed ethics that is grounded in the commonsense of the local, often inseparably entangled with universal discourses? Can we become a little more mischievous and look at seed and its concomitant fruit, the grain, as gift? Is Navdanya taking us back into the future of natural resources as something to be envisioned and enjoyed as gift and not as commodity? The distinction between gift and commodity is essential because, unlike commodity exchange, the act of gift giving and taking involves reciprocity, which lies at the heart of seed community beliefs and practices. And yet reciprocity is not at all easy to achieve and must exist within a complex network of exchanges, some equal but most unequal.

#### EXISTING DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT IN GENERAL AND THEIR INADEQUACIES: “STRATEGIC ACTION” AND “SOCIOLOGICAL MARXISM”

Before delving into the everyday practices and beliefs around seed and gift-giving practices, it is important to understand the liberal and post-Marxist discourses and knowledge practices of food and development themselves. Undoubtedly, since the 1970s the science of development has been useful in locating the geography, networks, and laboratory of environmentalism as well as strategic action and multiple interventions in

assessing food and development. The field has been well marked by sociologists through “strategic action theory,” part of a broad-based field theory of change and organizational development. For example, sociological theory has made attempts to engage with meso-level social actors and networks (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), the economy and markets (Fligstein 1996; White 1994), population ecology with its focus on niche (Hannan and Freeman 1977) and niche partitioning, and more recently with its concern with the identities of organizations (Carroll and Swaminathan 2006).

As a counter to the unified theory of social organization, sociological Marxism and political sociology propose an integrative approach to the study of society vis-à-vis power and globalization as a central problematic of capitalism. The latter is often manifest in the pre-eminence of the state, which is akin to what Karl Polanyi might have held responsible for the gradual disappearance of “active society” (Burawoy 2003: 198)—the latter is dialectically opposed to market and commodification. Thus unified theory (systems theory, discourses of rights, etc.) and oppositional theories (Marxist and post-Marxist) are useful in their own ways in assessing the scope and limits of social theory around development, broadly speaking. But both types of theories seem to retain a Parsonian faith in an ineluctable social system, thereby making the distinction between the state, political economy, and sovereignty into a merely legal and political problem. In both systematizing and Marxist formulations, the recognition of the biopolitical is almost absent. We are barely able to scratch the stuff of life itself, which resides outside politics, and yet it is life that is the most politicized (Foucault 2003, 2004, 2008; Agamben 1998; Esposito 2008). This dichotomous situation needs further clarification.

### BIOPOLITICS: FOUCAULT, AGAMBEN, AND ESPOSITO

As a direct counter to the above practices of systematizing discourses, the non-determinism of discourse and critical thinking on language, techniques, and technologies of power (Foucault 2003: 241) appear as attractive alternatives. Indeed, at the heart of this chapter lies the recognition that the birth of the modern state as well as the developmental state is marked by the notion of the “biopolitical” (ibid.: 244). In this development, the difference between disciplining the body, the individualizing process, and the massification of a globalized body through technology is important to consider (Foucault 2003: 242–243).<sup>2</sup> Biopolitics thus



displaces the pre-modern sovereign, whose realm in the old form lies in “thing, land” (Foucault 2008: 45). In the new form, biopolitics becomes the “government [that] must not intervene” but merely be “interested in interests” (ibid.). Or, as Foucault said earlier (in 1976), the old right of the sovereign to kill was not exactly replaced by the new scenario of “make” live and “let” die, but complemented and permeated by it (Foucault 2003: 241). Foucault’s remarks on political scene of modernity take a rather new turn in Agamben (1998: 11). Agamben’s rethinking of Foucault’s biopolitics through the genealogy of bare life and sovereignty introduces *zoe* (bare life) as constituting the sovereign exception in the *bios* (political life). Agamben points to a lack in Western political theory that optimally increases the political through legal systems that, he argues, do not notice the impossibility of politicizing bare life! The weight of the argument thus needs to shift from a mediating social network environment to an analytic of the process itself. The analytic constitutes governmental reason that makes certain technologies such as the climate, weather, soil, water, and the natural world as well as systems of thought—medicine, administration, science, and technology—vital components in the laboratory. Esposito further complicates the matter by explaining how biopolitics and sovereignty are “completely unassimilable” (Esposito 34), essentially asking “what” biopolitics means, “what” it produces, and “how” a world is continually more governed by “biopolitics configured” (31). In an attempt to determine how this works, Esposito explains the “biopolitics effect” in which

either life holds politics back, pinning to its impassable natural limit, or, on the contrary, it is life that is captured and prey to politics that strains to imprison its innovative potential. (2008: 32)

According to Esposito, the problem is unresolved in Foucault. If we revisit Agamben in this context, we see how he viewed the problem almost two decades ago:

The 24 centuries that have gone by have brought only provisional and ineffective solutions. In carrying out the metaphysical task that has led it more and more to assume the form of biopolitics, Western politics has not succeeded in constructing a link between *zoe* and *bios*, between voice and language, that would have healed the fracture. Bare life remains included in politics in the form of exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion. How is it possible to “politicize” the natural sweetness of *zoe*? (1998: 11)

Clearly, sovereign, as a concept that guides the political, becomes less relevant in this light. So, for example, when Carl Schmitt articulated the meaning of the sovereign in the context of legal and political realism of Weimar Germany in the 1920s as “The sovereign is one who can make an exception” (Schmitt 2005: 1), he intuited how the concept was de-limited by the legal conceptions of the political. As Agamben counters the very notion of the sovereign with the essential unassimilability of *zoe*, he shows the weakness in Schmitt’s concept of the “sovereign as political.” After all, even the sovereign cannot now kill, as biopolitics makes it essential for the sovereign to remain subservient to its technologies (science, governability, production).

In the real world, biopolitics has a particular shape: biotechnology, bio-engineering, and corporate control (Boal 2007),<sup>3</sup> which has an unprecedented ability to “imagine itself” through genetic revolution, “Frankenfoods,” and the fear of technology and loss of the “natural” in certain areas of human life, namely food and reproduction (Francois 2003: 43, 45).

#### SEED: NATURE’S GIFT AND ITS ANTECEDENT SOCIALITY

Navadanya’s battle is therefore at once within the walls of and in spite of development in traditional as well as non-deterministic forms. As we have witnessed earlier, the central organizing principle in Navdanya is the seed. Philosophically, seed comes before food. Its value precedes labor, property, and capital–market relations. It is the most valuable member of society in that it has a permanent identity owing to its potential to create form and matter and sustain life. The greatest gift of seed is tradition, which unquestioningly keeps the seed outside rights, politics, and modern forms of capitalist exchange. The tradition of keeping or saving seeds protects and regenerates a long-standing practical system complementary to the genetic memory of the seed that can deal with cold, or heat, or lack of water. The philosophical, mystical, and scientific commons ultimately acknowledges the seed as nature’s gift to humanity. As an archetypal gift giver, nature performs gift giving to humanity that humanity does not have the where-withal to return. Thus, the notion of a countergift is redundant in its *ur-*moment; instead, humanity is left with gestures towards a form of giving—ritual, performance, and conservation without sacrificial self-interests. Since the gift in nature is non-deterministic, the Maussian ideas of gift exchange based on “total prestation” or the obligatory transfer of objects (Mauss 1969: 10–11) and of the exchange of inalienable objects or services

between related and mutually obligated transactors are partially applicable to the Navdanya case. Indeed, Navdanya as an organization assumes a certain natural authority that mediates seed giving and identifies the receiver's voluntary character, while the gift receiver obliges ethically—for “we operate under a coercion” of ethics (Simmel 1950: 392).

### THE GIVING AND RECEIVING OF THE GIFT: NAVDANYA'S MAUSSIAN AFFECTS

The ethics of giving and receiving is thus emphasized in Navdanya's transaction of the seed. In the context of Polynesian societies, Mauss had described the preliminary exchange of the gift in the Kula relationship among Trobriand Islanders. There is an environment of freedom in Mauss's example:

The Kula partnership starts with a preliminary gift, the *vaga*, which is strenuously sought after by means of solicitory gifts. To obtain this *vaga* a man may flatter his future partner, who is still independent, and to whom he is making a preliminary series of presents ... [O]ne can never say whether the *vaga* will be given in the first place or whether even the solicitory gifts will be accepted. (1969: 25)

These elements identify the key dimensions in terms of which transactions are understood: the degree and manner of the obligation to transact, of the link between what is transacted and those who transact it, and of the link between transactors. While buying and selling are free, gift obliges one to hold a transaction, in full expectation of what can never be deterministically expected. The paradox of giving and receiving gifts is thus a “total prestation” that metonymically stands for every aspect of the society it is part of, and one that presages “separate existence that constitutes our social life” (Mauss 1969: 65).

By moving such an object as a gift, which has no monetary or commodity value through the social landscape, the gift giver rearranges the fabric of sociality—and this forms the basis of the gift's power. Indeed, as Derrida studies Mauss's *Gift in Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1992), he examines the gift's irresolvable paradox at what seems the most fundamental level of the gift's meaning: for the gift to be received as a gift, it must not appear as such, since its mere appearance as gift puts it in the cycle of repayment and debt.

For there to be a gift, it is necessary [*il faut*] that the *donee* not give back, amortize, reimburse, acquit himself, enter into a contract, and that he never have contracted a debt ... It is necessary, at the limit, that he not recognize the gift as gift. If he recognizes it as a gift, if the gift appears to him as such, if the present is present to him as present, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift. (Derrida 1992: 171)

Navdanya's tradition encourages its members to permeate the cycle of giving back through care and hospitality as part of the exchange effect, recognizing the gift of the seed as outside the economics of commodity exchange. By extension, they do not belong to the corporate circuits either, although a large portion of large-scale farming is controlled by corporate seed banks and companies.

Seeds are a gift of nature and diverse cultures, not a corporate invention. Passing on this ancient heritage from generation to generation is a human duty and responsibility. (Shiva, "Freedom of Seed")<sup>4</sup>

### SEED: MONOCULTURE AND ITS CRITIQUE

In the present context, from a human-seed relationship standpoint, it takes years of growing, natural selection, and farmers' selection for the seeds to adapt and for the strong to live. This makes it necessary to work out a seed episteme. Navadanya's framework of knowing involves travel, democratization, and sharing of *bija-shiksha* (seed education). Navadanya knows that this paradigm is seriously damaged when we begin to think in terms of environmental marketing and exchange of commodities. In the latter paradigm, seed, which embodies power and control over nature, food, and security, has been controlled through a mechanism of seed bank exchanges across the country. This practice has altered the meaning of traditional farming through the various stages of colonialism, imperialism, market capitalism, and state sovereignty. Together, these have brought into effect monocultural farming practices, thereby producing lack: lack of biodiversity, of multicultural reason, or, as Spivak says, of "responsibility" (Spivak 1994: 43).

Once monoculture is introduced into the farming communities and society at large, the distribution of seed becomes dependent on the demand of both the domestic and the international grain market and, by a modular extension, food. The relationship between seed, farming, subsidy, and technology is further naturalized through an understanding

between the producers, consumers, finance capitalists, transnational corporations such as Monsanto, the tariff hegemonies of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and World Trade Organization (WTO), and the government. In the case of India, for example, large-scale farming, a product of the Green Revolution since the 1960s (Shiva 2000), has transformed agriculture, food sufficiency, cropping, and, ultimately, India's dream of catching up on a global scale. And yet small farmers, poor farmers and the farming community, non-intensive farming communities, non-subsidized farming communities, and an entire network of subsistence farming have all suffered owing to the sheer scale of growth and problems in food security and development monopolies (Sainath 1996: 63–75, 136–139, 197–200). As the national and regional or state governments of India increased their annual budgets for new allocations of resources for superior farming technology, increased production of electricity, telecommunications, transportation, and increased mobilization for heavily subsidized farmers who have large landholdings, seed, water, and food have remained outside the reach of the commons.

### NAVDANYA: ITS ORGANIZATIONAL LOGIC

Indeed, as part of its structural environment, Navdanya cannot ignore the market either where the labor market in the agricultural sector has grown manifold in particular regions owing to existing monocultures, agri-business, and organic farming. In fact, Navdanya does not ignore existing temporalities, but builds them into its radically altered vision through its participatory role in seed episteme and practical philosophy of the gift of the grain. Instead of presuming an ordoliberal status within a state and social system that conditions society for better market opportunities (monopoly, legal protection, corporations), Navdanya engenders the logic of a new framework without the trappings of organizational niche theories, popular in sociological theory today. That logic is shaped by the practice of giving, sharing, and living alongside the seed. Shiva says:

For us, protecting native seeds is more than conservation of raw material for the biotechnology industry. The diverse seeds now being pushed to extinction carry within them seeds of other ways of thinking about nature, and other ways of producing for our needs. Uniformity and diversity are not just patterns of land use, they are ways of thinking and ways of living.<sup>5</sup>

What Shiva is suggesting is that in a particular sense Navdanya recognizes that globalization is a phenomenon that refuses to go away, and one that robs society of its vital mechanisms such as craft, community, and local life.

### BEYOND BIOPOLITICS: NAVDANYA'S CULTURAL ETHOS AND SEED SOVEREIGNTY AS LOCAL PRACTICE

With a radical seed epistemology drawn partly from the notion of the gift and partly from the Sanskrit root word “dhan,” or grain that is a gift of nature, Navdanya proposes to radically alter the critical cultural conditions—broadly construed—of that essential exchange effect that often regulates the sovereignty in particular. It introduces a philosophy and culture of the seed that shapes, invents, and enacts the promise of a powerful concept in itself: seed sovereignty within the practices of the local. In this setting, seed sovereignty practices the technology of saving, sharing, and making available seed that does not belong to a commercial entity but to a community system of banking. Furthermore, it attaches critical importance to non-processing seed, and by extension food. In order to establish a working relationship with the seed, community, and development, Navdanya introduces seasonal educational tours in the hundreds of North Indian villages from which it draws its farmer membership.

This is a serious use of technology in that it refuses mechanization of knowledge and feeds into cultural diversity while encouraging direct participation in learning about the gift that demands responsibility. In a particular sense, Navdanya unleashes the technology of decontrolling, and the fulfillment of the conditions of sovereignty that acknowledges its disinterest in monopoly, property rights, statistical averages, pest and disease control measures, monocultural cropping, and large-scale buying and selling of government seed, and so on. It is true that the seed becomes the site of political debate for all practical purposes. It is also true that the seed, once saved, retains the status of being outside politics. The logic will forever escape a unified theory, but can be understood if we are prepared to see that the seed generates its own sovereign exception, and the farmer makes incidental use of his responsibility as the saver.

Since saving seed is a big part of sustainability agriculture, the underlying assumption of the farmer–nature relationship becomes vital. If seed is a gift of nature, it ought not to be treated as a commodity, but must be understood as a temporal enactment of giving, receiving, and expecting

certain social boundaries within an act of living in a community. Its market value is consciously undermined, while its value as a participatory membership in society is strongly highlighted. In consonance with the ethos of gift giving and exchange effect, Navdanya stresses the man–nature, man–man, man–community relationships that are missing from mainstream environmental thinking, which posits man and nature in two different hierarchical positions. The paradigm of nature for man is often marked by isolation, commodification, commercial forestry, and governmentality, while the paradigm of man for nature is marked by oppositional discourses based on wilderness enclosures and conservation. As Ramachandra Guha has remarked in relation to forestry and the sovereign power of the state, environmentalism in all its sponsored forms (non-profit, intergovernmental, and corporate) replicates a certain notion of the “Western” logic that presumes an essential divide between nature and society, nature and culture, language and voice, economy and livelihoods, and state and society (Guha 1989: 56–57). Shiva’s organization recognizes the problem of attaining biodiversity beyond an existing binary model. Partly in recognition of this and partially in an enactment of giving and care, Shiva introduces the paradigm of resistance through seed in order to sidestep the older model of “monocultures”:

The native seed has become a system of resistance against monocultures and monopoly rights. The shift from uniformity to diversity respects the rights of all species and is sustainable. Diversity is also a political imperative because uniformity goes hand in hand with centralization, while diversity demands de-centered control. Diversity as a way of thought and a way of life is what is needed to go beyond the impoverished monocultures of the mind.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, Navdanya should be placed in the bigger picture. In its totality, Navdanya involves about 70, 000 farmers in India who preserve seed and spread the good word about seed conservation and biodiversity. The figures are impressive. In traditional farming, where the choice of seed and cropping is not based on urban want but on the randomness of the weather, climate, and seed potential, the farmer automatically eliminates the possibilities of multiple enclosures. There is a vast literature on the problem of enclosure that I cannot discuss here, but I will merely point out that enclosure produces the divide between use and non-use of land, water, and technology, as well as a commons around the farming village that would evolve into private property in order to avoid the tragedy of

the commons (Olwig 1995: 387). In a return to the community via knowledge laboratories, traditional farming makes itself aware of the history of enclosures, thereby avoiding excesses. As saving seed, crop development, and responsible land use become realities, the ravages of a post-genetically modified organism (GMO) agricultural environment and earlier forms of enclosures of colonialism, capitalism, and heavy industrialism begin to soften.

## CONCLUSION

Navdanya is not a revivalist movement that merely boasts, for example, of its target of resuscitating the several hundred thousand rice seed varieties. At the heart of the movement lies the awareness of the possibilities that such knowledge can produce. Diverse species such as dwarf wheat, black pepper, cucumber, and moth bean—once thought to be lost from the biodiversity landscape—are now real possibilities. Much of Navdanya's work is based on recognizing native seed saving that produces a marginal farmer who has control of an entangled local—political, environmental, and ecological.<sup>7</sup> The seed, however, continues to retain its own sovereignty; that is, it lies outside the politics of commodity exchanges. Concomitantly, seed sovereignty can be better understood through the practices of seed cultures themselves, which lie outside the scope of biopolitics as such. Simply put, the seed decides the course of its own future, as Navdanya makes clear in its manifesto.

## NOTES

1. Shiva 2000, 2001, 2007.
2. “Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied not to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species. To be more specific, I would say that disciplines tries to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and if needs be, punished. And that the new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall process characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on. So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second



- seizure of power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but as man-as-species. After the anatomo-politics of the human body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, we have that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a ‘biopolitics’ of the human race.” See Foucault 2003: 242–243).
3. Ian Boal, Specters of Malthus: Scarcity, Poverty, Apocalypse *Iain Boal in conversation with David Martinez, Counterpunch*, <http://www.counterpunch.org/boal09112007.html>.
  4. “Freedom of Seed,” “Manifesto of the future of seed,” <http://www.navdanya.org/earthdcracy/seed/seedmanifesto.htm>.
  5. See “Diversity and Freedom” under *The Practice of Earth Democracy*” on the website [http://www.navdanya.org/about/practice\\_earth\\_dem.htm](http://www.navdanya.org/about/practice_earth_dem.htm). The website of the non-profit is [www.navdanya.org](http://www.navdanya.org).
  6. Ibid.
  7. Shiva, “Saving Seeds: Rejuvenating Agricultural Biodiversity” <http://www.navdanya.org/earthdcracy/seed/seedkeepers.htm>.

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# Democracy and Meritocracy: A New Intercivilizational Challenge

*Vittorio Cotesta*

## DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD

In 2014, according to Freedom House (Freedom House 2015a), of the 195 countries officially recognized by the United Nations 89 (46%) are “free”, 55 (28%) are “partly free” while 51 (26%) are “not free.”

In the brief time between 2013 and 2014, there seems to have been a slight increase in the figures for “not free” and a simultaneous decrease in those for “partly free.” Furthermore, over the past ten years there does not appear to have been any great shift in the distribution of the “free,” “partly free” and “not free” categories, only internal adjustments between them.

This datum, over the long term (about forty years), is far more positive. In 1972, the year of the first survey, the “free” numbered 44 out of 151; the “partly free” totaled 38, the “not free” 69. During the next forty years the number of independent countries recognized by the United Nations increased, and the distribution between the three categories has changed markedly: indeed, the figures seem to have been inverted. At the

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437

beginning of the period “not free” accounted for 46%; now it is 26%. The “free” tallied 29%, and are now 46%. The percentage for “partly free” countries has grown too: it used to be 25%; now it is 28%.

The distribution between these three categories, at world level, confirms the positive picture drawn up by referring to single countries. The world percentage for “free” countries rose from 35.90% in 1980 to 39.80% in 2014, “partly free” from 21.60% in 1980 to 23.79% in 2014, and the “not free” dropped from 42.50% in 1980 to 36.19% in 2014.

This optimism needs, however, to be mitigated. If we examine the aggregate world population, it is evident that fewer men and women live in a free country than in a country that is not or only partly free. Roughly speaking, the ratio is 6 to 4, where 6 stands for the sum of the countries deemed not free (about 36%) or only partly free (24%) as against 40% free. Of a world population of 7.2 billion men and women, about 4,3 billion live in countries that are either not or only partly free, while about 2.8 billion reside in free countries.

In the period between 1989 and 2015 the number of electoral democracies increased from 69 to 125, an increase of 21% when compared with the total number of countries recognized by the United Nations (195 in 2015).

One might conclude, therefore, that according to the Freedom House reports the majority of human societies are moving towards more just and democratic forms of co-existence.

Nevertheless, great caution is required when reading these data. Some countries have passed from being “partly free” to being “not free” because there is a civil war in progress or because they have experienced a *coup d'état*. During the past ten years the numbers in the three categories have remained pretty stable while there have been some internal shifts; primarily the rise over the past three years in the number of countries considered “not free,” from 42 in 2008 to 51 in 2014.

The Freedom House data are based on certain assumptions that need to be highlighted. The three classifications are based on two parameters: enjoyment of individual political rights and enjoyment of individual civil liberties. These two parameters are the synthesis of twenty-five indicators regarding compliance with or failure to respect human rights as per the 1948 *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Furthermore, the report indicates “the real rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals” (Freedom House 2015: 2) and operates on the assumption that “the freedom of peoples is achieved at the highest possible level in democratic societies” (Freedom House 2015b: 1).

Various objections have been raised to this way of thinking about human rights, social institutions and forms of government. In this chapter we shall consider the Confucian—or neo-Confucian—vision of human rights, democracy and meritocracy.

### THE CONFUCIAN CHALLENGE TO HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE WORLD ORDER

We shall begin by centering our arguments on three themes: (1) human rights; (2) democracy; (3) the conception of world order.

Meetings between China and the West were rather sporadic until the mid-nineteenth century. Previous attempts at making contact on the part of European countries, religious congregations and single travelers met against enormous difficulties. China was until the end of the eighteenth century the wealthiest country in the world and imposed its own view of the world on international relations. It considered itself as the center of the world and based its relationship with other states, especially those closest to it, on the “tributary state” model (Fairbank 1987: 36–38). The two Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1865–1869) created a Chinese elite, and from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards (after the Taiping Revolution: 1861–1864) it began to seek ways in which to avoid China’s increasing dependence on Western powers. Attempts at modernizing Chinese society may be dated back to these years. The first attempt took place during the final phase of the Qing dynasty (1860–1911). The aim was to import Western productive technologies and place them within the framework of Chinese society, without changing its basic structure. The second attempt began after 1911, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, and presented more complex features. The nationalism of Kuomintang, on the one hand, adopted the Soviet organizational model and, on the other, it attempted to establish a capitalist economy. After the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (1949), the Communist party emulated the Soviet model, both as far as the economy and government were concerned: large-scale industry, economic planning, centralized management, dictatorship of the proletariat. This model did not produce the desired results. First the Hundred Flowers Policy (1956–1957), then the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) proved to be total failures. In the years that followed, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969), disrupting the country’s social, political and cultural structure. Then came a period of unrest, culminating in the revolt of Lin Biao (1971) and the

Gang of Four (1976). The third attempt at modernization began after Mao's death in 1976. Then, not without uncertainty and setbacks, under Deng Xiaoping China began a new economic, political and cultural course. Announced by [Hu Yaobang](#) in 1964, and again by [Hua Guofeng](#) and [Zhou Enlai](#) in 1975, the plan to modernize Chinese society got off the ground only in 1978, when the leadership of Deng Xiaoping was definitively established. This new course was founded on four pillars of modernization, in the realms of agriculture, industry, science and technology. It pre-supposed a radical reform of the Communist party—to which Deng dedicated constant attention—and an overall reform of the political system, the fifth pillar, as requested by the Chinese human rights movement ([Wei Jingsheng](#) 1980: 47–69). The problem of political modernization, already posed in 1976 with the first Tiananmen revolt, came to a head at the end of the 1980s. It is still possible to recall the vivid image of the lone demonstrator who, in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, faced a tank alone. The revolt—as it is known—ended in a bloodbath. It has never been known exactly how many people died, how many were imprisoned or suffered other kinds of punishment.

By the beginning of the 1990s, however, the modernization of the economy had already proven to be largely successful. Many Chinese began to demand political reform and, once more, human rights and democracy. Government strategy changed. First it tried to minimize these calls, by suggesting that the human rights movement was a form of provocation by the USA, and therefore an attempt at interfering in Chinese internal affairs. By way of retaliation, the Chinese government set up a working group to investigate human rights in the USA. The aim was to report violations of human rights perpetrated by the West through the ages, and particularly by the USA in the present day.<sup>1</sup> The working group also suggested a different approach to human rights, not construed as individual rights but as well-being in society. It held that to operate in favor of human rights meant saving millions of people from poverty and hunger. “Poverty is not socialism, that socialism means eliminating poverty” (Deng Xiaoping, April 15, 1985); or: “Poverty is not socialism. To uphold socialism, a socialism that is to be superior to capitalism, it is imperative first and foremost to eliminate poverty” (Deng Xiaoping, October 13, 1987). Human rights are incompatible with the Confucian values of social harmony and discipline ([de Bary](#) 1998: 6).

At the time of Tiananmen the government and the Communist party changed their attitude towards tradition and Confucianism ([Scarpari](#)

2015). From the years after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1911) onwards, and especially within the context of the May Fourth Movement (1921), Confucianism was seen as part of a reactionary regime. This line was adhered to by the Communist party during the struggle for liberation and while it sought to build China's socialist society. Deng Xiaoping, however, sought to recover many elements of the cultural tradition to construct a new *han* nation. Confucianism became, once more, an instrument used to legitimize the structure of society, as well as the theory and practice of power.

Within the ambit of this new process of national identity-building, human rights were severely criticized as an ideology typical of the Western world. The official version claimed that Western conceptions of human rights were overly individualistic and therefore incompatible with the traditions of community based on Confucianism (de Bary 1998: 8). The Western nations, it was held, were experiencing a period of "decadence due to their individualistic values" (de Bary 1998: 8).

The work carried out to restore the Confucian tradition within the process that was aimed at rebuilding Chinese national identity (*han*) involved an enormous number of intellectuals, Chinese, Western, Chinese-Western, and led to a new renaissance: the so-called Confucian renaissance. The point about this vast cultural endeavor which is of greatest interest to us is the development of the theory in which it is argued that human rights are compatible with Confucianism. Indeed, according to some, the world would be a better place if human rights were grounded in Confucian philosophy and the Chinese model of government, based on meritocracy, rather than in the traditional democratic model of Western societies.<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical work relating to this begins with two books by Wm. Theodore de Bary (de Bary 1998; de Bary-Tu Weiming 1998). The aim of this work was still rather limited and inclined to exempt Confucianism from the political exploitations of the past and present, claiming that no incompatibility existed between human rights and Confucianism. Furthermore, according to de Bary, Confucianism favors the self-affirmation of single people within their own communities, their own particular traditions. It favors neither society nor the ego, but seeks a balanced rapport between them. For Confucianism, civil society is the point of conjunction between the individual and the state. If traditional Confucianism had previously been exploited by the authoritarian state, in the twentieth century, however, a humanist liberal tradition favored the participation of

the people in political life. Liang Qichao, in particular, makes a connection between Western constitutionalism and the history of China.<sup>3</sup>

Wm. Theodore de Bary's interpretation seeks a new convergence between Confucian and Western humanism, where human rights and democracy may be acknowledged not so much as a past experience as a possible future.

Another author who is of interest in this discussion is Joseph Chan. Chan's work aims to found the theory of human rights in the philosophy of Confucius. In his most recent book, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (2014), Chan posits Confucian bases for human rights and democracy. Like other scholars, he reconstructs Confucianism by referring to Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. From a methodological point of view, he is inspired by Rawls, and in particular by the Rawlsian distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory. At "ideal-theory" level, he claims that Confucianism is a better political and human perspective than liberalism. Besides, the Western theory of human rights follows a metaphysical approach when it attributes rights to individuals regardless of historical and social context. Confucianism, instead, does not aim so much at recognizing rights as at guaranteeing the well-being of society and individuals. However, a problem exists: individuals do not always tend towards good and, even when they do, they may not choose to do so because of—we might express the concept in these terms—"a flaw of the will." It is not the ideal which is imperfect but humans, who, while in a position to behave in a virtuous manner, refuse to do so (Chan 2014: 13–15). The Confucian deal of a harmonious society remains a regulatory ideal, a goal towards which individuals tend during their lives and a source of inspiration for rulers.

Confucian political philosophy contains the problem of the gap between values and the empirical reality. In order to try to bridge this gap, according to Chan, it is necessary to introduce into the philosophy, as Rawls had already done, a "non-ideal" theory which addresses the problems present in historical concreteness. At this level Confucianism encounters the challenge of modernity. Political perfectionism is a philosophical vision whereby the social and political order must be judged according to its contribution to the human good life. "This philosophy incorporates a number of basic institutions of liberal democracy, grounds them on Confucian perfectionism, and redefines their roles and functions. It mixes Confucian values with liberal democratic institutions in a way that hopefully strengthens both" (Chan 2014: 18).



To be able to follow this pathway, Chan needs to demonstrate that human rights are not compatible with the Confucian tradition. There are, he sustains, two ways of intending human rights. The first “takes human rights as an important device for protecting people’s fundamental interests; the other does not deny the instrumental value of human rights but insists that they have also an important non-instrumental value, in the sense that they are necessary expressions of human dignity or worth” (Chan 2014: 125). Chan follows the first of these two interpretations and attributes an instrumental value to human rights.

A further step in his theory involves reducing the list of human rights, restricting them to civil rights and political freedom only. This preference for a short list of human rights had already been expressed by Rawls (1999: 80n). In that case it was a matter of justifying the idea of “decent” societies which, without being liberal, respected civil and political liberties. Here reduction tends to grant credit to societies where the balance of power is weighted on the side that favors the rulers and considers human rights to be a barrier to their despotism.

This thesis is confirmed by what Chan thinks of personal autonomy. Confucianism—he claims—has often been criticized for its failure to recognize individual autonomy. However, it no longer proposes anything of the kind. If the deepest inspiration of Confucianism consists in considering individuals as moral agents, personal autonomy becomes one of its undeniable premises. A social environment devoid of tolerance and freedom becomes hostile to the development of the moral autonomy pursued by Confucianism. “Confucian ethics should incorporate a moderate notion of personal autonomy in the wider sense that people should have the freedom to form life goals and chart a personal path of life. This should not be a moral right or, in liberal terms, an individual sovereignty, but a valuable aspect of the good life” (Chan 2014: 21). This is true above all in today’s pluralistic society.

We can now formulate a brief summary. Confucian perfectionism tends to build society around the virtues of individuals. “According to this perspective, political authority exists *for* the people and is partly justified by its ability to protect and promote the people’s well-being. But the authoritative relationship between the governed and those who govern is also constituted by mutual commitment on both sides—those who govern are committed to serve the people, and the governed willingly and gladly accept and support the governance” (Chan 2014: 19). The goal is the well-being of all in a well-ordered, harmonic society, where the “grand

union” of all human beings is achieved. This ideal vision, alas, exists nowhere; not even in Confucian lands. Therefore, it is necessary to think of real-world alternatives.

“Democratic elections can perform both as a device to select virtuous and competent politicians for the common good (the selection function) and as a mechanism to reward and sanction them (the sanctions function)” (Chan 2014: 20). One needs to observe, however, if they are compatible with Confucianism. Chan’s thesis is that Confucian political perfectionism and democracy are complementary (Chan 2014: 20).

The common thread running through Joseph Chan’s argument is that which criticizes the conception of the world whereby individuals, both singly and collectively (the people), are entitled to rights for the simple fact of being men and women. One seems to catch a glimpse of the romantic, communitarian, anti-illuminist critique of the abstract ideal of humanity that is countered by a conception of human qualities as social and historical constructs. Nothing could be more wrong: the illuminist ideal of “human nature” was just as much a historical construct as Confucianism. In the former case, thanks to an act of faith in the rationality and reasonableness of single beings, people are entrusted with the right and duty of giving themselves good rulers (even if this does not often happen) and, on the other hand, fearing, perhaps, the irrationality and egotism of individuals, and giving the task of governing for the good of all to the wise, the virtuous, the experts, in a nutshell the erudite (even if, exactly as in the case of democracy, this hardly ever happens). This trait of Confucian perfectionism advocated by Chan is, to say the least, ambiguous, and justifies the hypothesis that, at times, there emerge from Confucianism authoritarian features typical of the legalism against which Confucians, especially those of the present day, have always been strongly opposed.

In his book *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (2015), Daniel A. Bell carries his reasoning beyond Chan’s positions. Here it is no longer a question of conjugating Asian values or Confucianism with human rights and democracy, even if only in an “instrumental” fashion, but that of proposing the Chinese model as a universal one; not for the Chinese and Asian peoples alone, but for everyone.

Bell reached this conclusion after years of work marked by a rediscovery of the family, of communitarianism, of Confucian values and surpassing liberalism (Bell 2008a, b, 2007, 2006, 2003, 2000, 1999).

These statements of principle are acceptable: “The idea that a political system should aim to select and promote leaders with superior ability and

virtue is central to both Chinese and Western political theory and practice” (Bell 2015: 2). For a long time the ability of democracy to choose the best rulers has been based on “blind faith” (Bell 2015: 3). The crisis of the last few years has shaken this faith, and one may ask whether a meritocratic system might be better than democracy when choosing those who govern a country. This question cropped up following the economic success obtained by Singapore in the 1990s. The debate about meritocracy was undermined at the time by the fact that the Singapore model was presented as an authoritarian system. Furthermore, it was not presented as a “universal ideal” (Bell 2015: 3), but as a local proposal which was not sustained by any theoretical political argumentation.

The great success of China has brought the issue of meritocracy up again, if only because the Chinese system has been more successful in controlling the present crisis than the Western democratic one.

Like earlier practices in imperial China, the political system aims to select and promote public servants by means of examinations and assessments of performance at lower levels of government. Chinese-style meritocracy is plagued with imperfections, but few would deny that the system has performed relatively well compared to democratic regimes of comparable size and level of economic development ... And the world is watching China’s experiment with meritocracy ... In twenty years’ time, perhaps we will be debating Chinese-style political meritocracy as an alternative model—and a challenge—to Western-style democracy. (Bell 2015: 4)

Bell’s position is informed by a *preference* (we do not wish to call it a “prejudice,” as he does when referring to those informed by democracy), for the communitarian model, for the family and the superior virtue of the “well-educated” with respect to simple individuals who, as Chan also holds, do not always choose the best. In his argument Bell also passes from a functional preference to a metaphysical predilection for meritocracy. This system is capable of solving problems that democracy is unable to solve. Democracy itself contains flaws that have no correctives. The first is “the tyranny of the majority’: irrational and self-interested.” Majorities in democratic systems can “oppress minorities and enact bad policies.” The second flaw is “the tyranny of the minority’: small groups with economic power that exert disproportionate influence on the political process, either blocking change that’s in the common interest or lobbying for policies that benefit only their own interest. In theory, this flaw can be remedied by means of a citizen body that excludes wealthy elites, and China’s political system is a practicable alternative” (Bell 2015: 7). The third flaw is “the

tyranny of the voting community.” Voters may, in actual fact, take only their own interests into account and disregard those of foreigners, and, above all, those of future generations. Finally, the fourth flaw is “the tyranny of competitive individualists.” These people prefer conflict in order to impose their own interests. “Electoral democracy can exacerbate rather than alleviate social conflict and disadvantage those who prefer harmonious ways of resolving social conflict. A system based on consensus as a decision-making procedure can help to remedy this flaw, and China’s political model has some practical advantages in terms of reducing social conflict” (Bell 2015: 7).

Nevertheless, not even the Chinese meritocratic system is perfect. While it is preferable that the communities be governed by high-quality politicians, it is true, however, that the merit system is only “partially” good. Probably after recollecting some of China’s history, Bell indicates the weak points of the meritocratic system: “(1) rulers chosen on the basis of their superior ability are likely to abuse their power; (2) political hierarchies may become frozen and undermine social mobility; and (3) it is difficult to legitimize the system to those outside the power structure” (Bell 2015: 8).

Bell follows two strands to improve the system. In the first he proposes that the examination system seriously verify the intellectual abilities of rulers, that a greater number of women be included at leadership level and that peer-review be used when promoting politicians who are motivated by the desire to serve the public. The second strand regards the structure of the institutional system. In an institutional framework characterized by meritocracy, Bell would like to see the inclusion of democracy to avoid some of the gravest aspects afflicting the Chinese political and social reality. His opinion—founded on what we cannot tell—is that “electoral democracy at the top is not politically realistic in China” (Bell 2015: 8). He says that political polls show that people in East Asian societies view democracy in substantive rather than procedural terms; that is, they tend to assess democracy for its positive consequences rather than to value democratic procedure in itself (Bell 2015: 18). In short, the Chinese would not be interested in voting; the important thing is to do what is good *for* them. It is only too obvious, however, that the system presents certain distortions which are not open to adjustment. It is possible to fight corruption by independent auditing institutions, higher wages and moral education; the “problem of ossification of hierarchies can be addressed by means of a humble political discourse, opening the ruling party to diverse

social groups, and allowing for the possibility of different kinds of political leaders selected according to new ideas of political merit” (Bell 2015: 150).

The problem of legitimacy, however, requires an opening up to the explicit consensus of the people (Bell 2015: 150). This makes room for reconciliation between meritocracy and democracy. There are three ways to achieve this. The first, at the level of the electorate, would attribute greater weight to the vote of the educated. But this assumption is unrealistic, at least at present. The second would be to combine democracy and meritocracy at central political institutional level. The third way would be to follow the meritocratic criterion at central level and that of democracy at local level (Bell 2015: 152). Among other things, a democratic choice might be carried out initially, and later the meritocratic evaluation system be used for the career advancement of politicians.

This model has the merit of not straying too much from present Chinese institutional reality. But “it can also be defended on philosophical grounds” (Bell 2015: 9). And this is exactly what Bell tries to do in his work. The Chinese institutional reality, however, is even more complex. It is characterized by democracy at bottom level, by experimentation at intermediate level and meritocracy at the highest level (Bell 2015: 168–174). Nevertheless, there remains the problem of legitimizing the system and political decisions. According to Bell, referenda on some important issues might solve the problem of legitimizing particular choices and, in general, the political system as a whole (Bell 2015: 175–194).

Deng Xiaoping once stated that “China will never seek hegemony.” (Deng Xiaoping, May 29, 1978).<sup>4</sup> According to Bell, China should, on the contrary, follow the example of the USA and pursue cultural and political hegemony at world level (Bell 2015: 195–198). The USA, after the Second World War, tried to spread democracy by means of the National Endowment for Democracy; China should create a National Endowment for Meritocracy to spread its ideal Confucianism based on harmony.<sup>5</sup> But first of all it should reduce the gap between its ideal meritocratic model and the practical reality. It should change the name of the party because it has no longer anything to do with the Communist tradition: it is now a pluralistic organization comprising members of different classes and whose aim it is to represent the whole country. A more appropriate name might be the Chinese Meritocratic Union or, given the importance it attributes to democracy, the Democratic Union of Meritocrats (Bell 2015: 197–198).

In short, Bell thinks on a large scale and works on a project to spread Confucianism all over the world as a contrast to liberalism and liberal democracy.

The issue does not end, however, at the level of comparison and competition between different political, economic and cultural systems. The Confucian renaissance also gives rise to proposals for a world order. Political Confucianism holds that the Western and European international order of the Westphalian kind has definitively reached its sunset. Furthermore, the USA is no longer the sole leading actor on the global political scene. A multi-polar world has come to light between the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Other actors now tread the boards, and of these China plays a very active and dynamic role. Affected only marginally by the thirty-year-old conflict between the West and the world of Islam, China pursues a process of economic, political and cultural expansion all over the world. Therefore, it is worthwhile to try to understand the ideas the Chinese have about the world order.

The authors examined so far have focused on rediscovering and re-proposing Confucianism as a resource for the construction and legitimization of the Chinese social model. One cannot say, however, that in China today Confucianism encounters neither opposition nor competition. For some time now a liberal philosophical movement clearly inspired by Western thought has existed and operated. Organizations for Chinese human rights have referred to this tradition, present in China from the beginning of the twentieth century. Confucianism, on the contrary, is the official philosophy of the political elite in power.

We find the Confucian idea of world order in an essay by Zhao Tingyang, *La philosophie du tianxia* (2008). According to this, the historical process, under Western hegemony, has led to the creation of a global world that is physical, not human. The world is a geographical expression, but there are still no global institutions capable of governing it. This is because Western thinking and political practice have viewed problems in terms of state and internationalism without seeing that, if you seek to create a universal human world, it is necessary to adopt a global perspective. Think of the world as a world.

To build a human global world requires the use of a revised version of the Chinese *tianxia* model, where the expression means “everything under the Heavens.” The revision regards *tianxia*’s physical reference. In traditional Confucianism *tianxia* indicated the territory of China only;

now it needs to concern the entire planet. The institutions of the past were created for the land of China; now they need to be worldwide. The principles upon which they rest should not change, however. The central idea of *tianxia* is that of “rebuilding the world on the basis of family ties to make it a place to welcome all” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 14; cf. also Bell 2006: 243–251).

The *tianxia* institutional model, “everything under the Heavens,” includes different political bodies. It follows a precise hierarchy: “everything under the Heavens,” states, families. As such, it is the opposite of the Western European model, which is centered on the categories nation-states, communities, individuals. “The world, states and families need to be governed in a coherent way, in order to represent the many expressions of one, sole institution” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 17). This “coherent mode” means governing “from top to bottom, from the largest to the smallest, because the smallest political societies are always conditioned by the largest” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 17).

The neo-Confucian perspective is critical towards democracy and its principles. Democracy, since it is based on individualism, projects aggressively towards the outside. “Democracy—claims Zhao Tingyang—can, in fact, be distorted by power, money and commerce ... Alas, democracy does not necessarily lead—either theoretically or practically—to justice, goodness and peace” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 23).

The alternative is to construct worldwide institutions based on the Confucian model. At present (Zhao writes in 2008), “the world is disorientated. This is the problem with our epoch” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 24). “The physical world was created but we still have to create a humanised world. The *rebirth of the world* according to the *tianxia* perspective needs worldwide political reform” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 24; italics added). This might lead to a turning point where “all the *problems of the world* can be reinterpreted as *world problems*” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 24–25; italics added). Within this framework, the philosophical debate on *tianxia* can afford to rethink today’s problems and “become, *perhaps*, a source of inspiration for the worldwide institutional project” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 25; italics added).

The neo-Confucian model, owing to its all-inclusive capacity, does not claim to be the only source of values. It proposes being the only model at methodological, not value, level. “A just world—Zhao Tingyang concludes—may be created only if the two traditions, the Greek and the Chinese—*agora* and *tianxia*—can be joined in harmony” (Zhao Tingyang 2008: 25; italics added). From the encounter between the two cultural

traditions, once they have been renewed, institutions capable of giving peace and harmony to the world can emerge.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

At this point we can try to draw up a balance regarding what has been discussed here. Let us begin with the issue of human rights. At first sight a certain degree of convergence seems to exist as far as these rights are concerned. Every civilization has its own view of human rights; each, indeed, has its own idea of humanity. One notes, however, that, they differ considerably as far as their theological, metaphysical and sociological grounds are concerned. The European and Western perspective considers rights to be a “prerogative” of men and women as such. Men and women possess certain qualities “because of their very nature” (the illuminist view), because they are divine creatures made in the image and likeness of God (according to the Christian view). In the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, men and women are conceived as beings endowed with reason, freedom, autonomy (Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”).

Within the ambit of Confucianism we find two different interpretations. The first tends to claim the idea of the existence of a human nature (*ren*) upon which it bases its acknowledgment of human rights as universal qualities independently of social, cultural and religious contexts; the second considers human rights as a means by which to achieve the common good. On the contrary, the Western view seems abstract, because it fails to take into account the fact that the human being is in a relationship; is part of a context.

In general, these two positions seem to converge on the concept of “the dignity of the human being” operating within both “Western” and Confucian thinking. Whether rights be seen as a divine concession, as a “natural quality” of individuals or as an instrument by which to achieve the good life, what is at work here is basically the premise that men and women need to live a life worthy of human beings. If one looks at the content of life, however, one may notice that human dignity is conceived differently in different contexts: what for some is worthy of human beings may be indifferent or even unworthy for others.

From the point of view of the “conveyers” of rights, a difference between the two perspectives seems to emerge. The first relies on



individuals; they comprise the community from which those who exercise power emerge and to which they refer. The second rotates around the virtues of rulers, and the common people are expected to respond to the goodwill of those in power.

This divergence also emerges with regard to democracy. It may appear paradoxical, but all critiques of democracy refer to the Westminster model, quantitative democracy, an electoral system where “the winner takes all” and exalt the method of consensus whereby decisions are reached unanimously and where every head (of a tribe, a state, a family) has the right to argue until his/her demands are met. Something similar can be found in the European Union (EU) political model. The EU is a complex mechanism and its decisions have long been reached according to the consensus model, and now by majority based on the number of states together with the size of the population. Furthermore, some states can avail themselves of the clause whereby the decision taken does not bind them. The meritocratic proposals that emerge from the Confucian world provide general indications, but it is hard to understand what form of government might replace democracy. One has the impression that certain references and criticisms serve simply to combat the idea that individuals, concrete men and women, may express their opinions in the place of the wise, the leaders, the virtuous intellectuals. In short, from an internal point of view we cannot place ourselves within a community unless we pose a question about how a community comprising ordinary individuals may reach political decisions.

The data regarding the diffusion of “electoral democracy” (Freedom House 2015a) highlight the quest for legitimacy by personal and authoritarian regimes who avail themselves of forms of “plebiscitary democracy.” If one were to reason in terms of “danger,” the risk that democracy faces today does not stem from the Westminster model—which did not enjoy a great state of health even where it was invented—but from its manipulation and exploitation by dictators seeking legitimization, which they turn into a plebiscite in their own favor.

The human rights and democracy issue has long produced a state of tension between the West, the Islamic world, the Asian countries and above all China. Rawls’s proposal (1999) that the list of human rights be reduced to civil and political freedom also meets the approval of the Confucian philosophers. It permits dialogue between people, institutions and states which have different ideas concerning the origin and characteristics of rights and human dignity.

However, if there must be dialogue, it is not clear how seriously one can take criticism which considers Western society individualistic or, even worse, degenerate, because it allows individuals to be independent and free. We fail to understand the basis on which it may be claimed that it is wrong to build political systems on the idea of the pursuit of freedom and the happiness of individuals—as if it were possible to achieve the happiness of a community without considering the individuals who comprise it.

But this aspect of the matter needs to be understood too. Different ways of conceiving human rights and democracy conceal different types of social structure. In some societies individuals enjoy a certain degree of independence from their own social groups; that is, they do not depend on them completely. In other societies they enjoy less freedom, and the heads of groups (family, village, party) have the power to decide for them. Both in democratic and “decent” countries, in keeping with Rawls’s formula, the fundamental problem remains: the enormous issue about the unequal distribution of resources. The problem is whether real people, not those imagined by the ideal theories of philosophers, may be able to defend themselves from the aggression of the rich and powerful without having human rights, or only some of them (short list), or those stated in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (long list). This holds for the West, Asia, the USA and Europe; Russia and India; China and Japan; everywhere in the world.

These issues, viewed so far at a global level, need to be set in their local contexts. Cultural, religious and political pluralism do not act only between states and civilizations. Every kind of society has its own degree of pluralism. In recent decades, moreover, migration has caused cultural diversity to increase everywhere. This raises, once more, the issue of how individuals and groups with different religions, cultures and lifestyles can live side by side. None of the models followed to date has proved perfect. Religious, cultural and ethnic conflicts are on the agenda in several countries all over the world. But the construction of peace requires dialogue both within single political units and between states. The goal should be a quest for unity, without eliminating diversity. But it is clear that this is possible only if *all* the members of these new pluralistic communities seek a point of encounter: dialogue and peace, not opposition or conflict. Dialogue is even more urgent between states if we wish to avoid the current state of world war (the “third world war,” as Pope Francis calls it). But everyone can see that, today, conflict prevails over dialogue in many different areas of the world.

## NOTES

1. The activities of this group may be followed at <http://www.hrichina.org/en>.
2. It is practically impossible to provide references, as the issue is so vast. My discussion will, therefore, follow a number of lines which, in my opinion, seem very important when seeking to discuss human rights, democracy and the world order.
3. de Bary analyzes the contributions of prestigious intellectuals such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200), Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929).
4. Deng had already expressed this position in his address to the United Nations in 1974. This was the politics of the China of the previous decades, led by Mao and Zhou Enlai. It is proposed again, at least formally, today as well. During the eighteenth congress of the Chinese Communist Party, in fact, it was repeatedly stated that China does not seek hegemony (People's Daily Online, November 15, 2012). It is difficult to say whether Chinese foreign policy still adheres to this principle. China's economic and cultural activism at world level, in particular in Africa and Latin America, leads one to suppose a new phase in the presence of China within the world's geopolitical competitive arena: no longer an actor playing a secondary role but a star. All the data available confirm this impression.
5. Bell goes beyond theoretical enunciation. In Appendix I to his book, he draws up a Harmony Index (HI), which contrasts with some of the indices devised by different foundations and associations, marked by harmony within the family (parent–child relations and relations between spouses; trust in the family and various other family relationships); harmony within the country (peace, trust and equality in society; government relations, diversity in society); harmony in the world (world peace; integration in global institutions; economic interaction); harmony with nature (general relationship with nature; local relationship with nature). Based on these variables and related indicators, Bell draws up a social and human Harmony Index. China is not located at the top of the list. It rates, however, higher than its direct competitors, the USA and India.

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# Afterword: Communication and the Consilience of Eastern and Western Ideas

*Piet Strydom*

It is well recognized today that the rise of the sleeping giants, China and India, particularly due to their economic significance, entails that a geopolitical shift to the East (which was on the cards for a while) is being consolidated—with the implication of the inevitable decline of the global hegemonic power the West has exerted on and off for some four centuries. What receives less attention, however, is the intellectual shift that has been in the making since the 1960s and is now acquiring a compelling material foundation. It needs to be addressed upfront as it is an essential factor in the rebalancing of global relations. By and large, the incontrovertibility of this intellectual shift is, as yet, by no means clearly seen by Western academics, not to mention appreciated. Likewise, ignorance about a series of roots of Western thinking in that of the East is rampant. Among these academics also count the social theorists, including theorists of different persuasions and hues. Considered at close quarters, it is apparent that such lack of attention and ignorance is but one side of the ambivalent, if not paradoxical effect of, the hegemony of Western academic ideas. While having

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457

disadvantaged Western scholars from the start and throughout by curtailing the reach of their vision and imagination, their counterparts in the East benefited from this same set of conditions by precisely having been encouraged to familiarize themselves with those ideas to some extent or another—in many cases quite thoroughly.

The editor of this anthology, who is himself an example of a scholar who has devoted much of his time and energy to mediating between his own Indian traditions of thought and Western ideas, is to be commended for his indefatigable bringing together of almost 20 Asian and Western scholars with a view to taking this mediation a step further. The authors hail from more than a dozen countries as far flung as Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Taiwan, the UAE and the USA. The significance of the resulting contributions presented here is that it does not simply announce, draw attention to and explore the topic of the relation between social theory and Far and Near Eastern thought in a timely manner, but also, more importantly, makes a meaningful contribution to the problem of diminishing and bridging the gap between the Western and Eastern sides as well as a variety of distinct traditions of thought within both these two rather rough-and-ready categories.

It is here that the core conceptual meta-problematic of this volume becomes apparent—namely, *consilience* in the sense of linking and, in certain instances, synthesizing elements, cognitive structures and knowledge that derive from a number of different and even disparate sources. On the Asian side, a variety of intellectual traditions with social-theoretical implications or potentials is characterized, discussed, set in relation to other Eastern and Western traditions and often contrasted with positions within the latter. This varied set includes such venerable traditions of thought as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and neo-Vedantism. On the Western side, mainstream social theory as well as minority traditions such as critical theory and Foucauldianism receive attention, but also philosophical and scientific directions that possess social-theoretical significance or implications such as American pragmatism, French postmodernism and neuroscience. The anthology's predominant presentational strategy of comparing and contrasting, which in itself is both informative and thought-provoking, is periodically interspersed with more in-depth enlightening investigations which often include the discussion of individual thinkers from both sides, for example Confucius, Nagarjuna, Thiruvalluvar, Sankrityayan, Sarkar, Mukherjee, Alatas, Weber, Dewey, Habermas and Deleuze.

Chapters that look beyond individual traditions and the comparison and contrast of selected traditions by raising questions and visions of unfulfilled possibilities, potentials and thus universals, while relatively few, are by no means lacking.

That great emphasis is laid on such terms as “dialogue,” “conversation” and “debate” is by no means surprising since consilience is possible only in the medium of communication. As an achievement concept, it invokes a process that unfolds in and through communication and, as such, it is bound to take time and, therefore, to involve analytically distinct communicative phases and levels. As the process unfolds temporally, it generates distinctive structural or cognitive properties relative to each of the phases while marking the different levels achieved. If, among other things, writing an Afterword demands that it be of assistance to the reader in conceptually making sense of and interrelating insights gained from the material included in the anthology, then this is the appropriate place to point it out. Four concepts are of central importance here: *consilience, communication, time and structure-formation*. What could be helpful in reading the chapters in this book, then, is to constantly keep in mind the meta-problematic of the volume, to conceive of dialogue, conversation and debate in terms of the communicative process to which they belong and, finally, to maintain an awareness of both the process’s temporal flow and related structural features.

Besides cultivating and maintaining a sense of the directing and guiding meta-problematic of the volume, the most important step to take is to see the terms conversation, dialogue and debate in relation to communication. Each of these terms indeed refers to something that demands recognition in its own right, yet none allows an adequate grasp of what is at stake in communication as the process in which the achievement of consilience is pursued. To be able to conceptually envisage such an achievement, it would be necessary to identify the particular structural or cognitive properties of Eastern and Western ideas that admit to being linked and synthesized. Contrary to its current popularity due to Heidegger and Rorty in particular, “conversation” enters at the lowest end in so far as it is but informal spoken exchanges of views between people that typically remain without communicative commitments and hence consequences for social organization. The limitation of “dialogue” is apparent from a consideration of dialogical philosophy. The latter replaced the reflection model of the epistemological subject-object relation with the communication model of reciprocal understanding to which



is central to the I–Thou relation. This focal concern with the ego–alter ego relation occludes attention to the full structure of communication that embraces the first person, the second person and also the third person in the sense of both the observational reference to the commonly shared objective world and the always virtually present finite as well as infinite public audience embodying epistemic acceptability and cognitive validity and thus representing the demand for public justification. For its part, the term “debate” seems somewhat more adequate to the extent that it refers to formal discussion and argumentation involving identifiable participants and having a public dimension. Its inherent limitation, however, is indicated by its etymological root in the Latin *battere*, meaning “to fight,” which clearly detracts from the achievement of consilience. If one shifts from a descriptive to a theoretical perspective, though, while correspondingly recognizing that contestation and conflict could and often do facilitate or lead to learning, then the term “debate” becomes more appropriate. But it is the case, alternatively, that learning in public contexts is better seen in terms of discourse—discursive learning, whether “double contingency learning” or “triple contingency learning” (Strydom 2009: 251–254), being an inherent feature of public discourse. Of course, the achievement of consilience, including the consilience of Eastern and Western ideas, calls for the latter type of complex, both transformative and integrative, learning.

Maintaining a critical awareness of the limitations of such terms as conversation, dialogue and debate is only one way in which the reader could reflectively engage with the chapters in this anthology. Another still more important one is to adopt a model of communication that allows the distinction of temporal phases and cognitive properties associated with the communicative process. This is of decisive significance for various reasons. The first is being able to assess in more precise terms what has already been achieved in the intellectual rapprochement of East and West. Related to this is the capacity to take a self-referential and self-critical look at what one has contributed to the processes so far. Ultimately, with the achievement of consilience as the goal of the process at the forefront of the mind, a conceptual awareness of the phases and related cognitive properties of communication puts one in a position to identify not only the optimal contributions made by others, but also to make similar careful and considered inputs into the process.

Different models of communication are available, but for present purposes a particular less complex model that seems most appropriate here is

proposed. It is a model of the cognitive structuring and upgrading of a pursued communicative process in the course of its phase-like unfolding (Strydom 2009: 200–101). It proceeds from the assumption that the development of mutual understanding and the resolution of conflict in a collectivity or between collectivities gives rise to commonly pre-supposed cognitive structures or properties which themselves undergo internal modification in the course of time, thus offering evidence of something akin to a learning process on the part of those involved. The modification of structures or properties in the course of the process involves an increase in the cognitive complexity attained by the discourse partners. In the different phases, such complexity lays down the parameters for the articulation of positions, the coordination of communicative contributions, strategies for arriving at a satisfactory collective outcome and the perspective for judging the appropriateness and justifiability of contributions and achievements. Accordingly, while the prevailing cognitive complexity at an earlier point in the process could be relatively low and therefore more or less restrictive, at a later point the increased complexity could open a new horizon and admit much more and more diverse contents than before. Needless to point out, the latter is essential for the achievement or, at least, the approximation of consilience.

Now, to be a little more specific, the proposed model of communication consists of four temporal phases and corresponding levels of cognitive structures or properties exhibiting increasing complexity. The first *functional* or *instrumental phase* is consumed by the need of the participants to deal with and overcome the problem of relating to one another. This is done without as yet taking into account all the relevant descriptions and facts bearing on the situation, not to mention the relevant normative or moral considerations. In the second *descriptive* or *analytical phase*, the participants focus on situational descriptions and relevant factual knowledge. In this case, the participants remain largely oblivious of the values, rules and norms they are implicitly pre-supposing so as to be able at all to interpret their situations and put forward the facts pertaining to those situations. The increased complexity of the third phase, the *particularist moral phase*, allows such values, rules and norms enabling interpretation to be articulated. Here, however, these cognitive properties remain caught up in the snares of confining ethnocentric or culturocentric worldviews which history has proved to be relatively difficult to decenter sufficiently. The biggest impediment in this case is the lack of cognitive complexity and fluidity that allows the public justification of positions couched in terms

that are acceptable across the board rather than only to a particular life-world, worldview and finite local audience. The final *properly moral phase* is characterized by the attainment of the necessary cognitive complexity and fluidity with its in-built capacity and demand for recognizing and maintaining precisely those universalistic cognitive principles—for example, objective truth, social justice, personal veracity—that, in the wake of the “cultural explosion” (Mithen 1998: 172) or “human revolution” (Stringer 2012: 116), came to define what it is to be human, irrespective of the diversity of particular values, rules and norms.

Considering the content of this volume, the cognitive properties identified above are richly interspersed among the chapters. For a study of this material to be profitable in the sense of leading one to a position enabling the recognition of a constructive contribution to the process of the communicative consilience of Eastern and Western ideas and the making of such a contribution oneself, it needs to be of a critical nature. This means that one has to be able to discriminate in terms of the phases of the communicative process, which of the cognitive properties are present in a chapter and which predominate. For example, is a given author engaged in the preliminary step of attempting to relate to the other? Does the author offer a description and facts relative to his/her own position for the benefit of informing the other? Do the author’s pre-supposed values, rules and norms that inform such a description and presentation of facts, whether remaining unreflected or explicitly called upon, have the effect of confining the account to his/her own life-world, worldview and local audience? Or is there evidence in the account that universalistic human principles are implicitly or perhaps even explicitly appealed to in keeping with the vision of an infinite human audience? To be sure, any one or more of these cognitive properties could be present in any given chapter, and even if a chapter targets only one set of properties, including exclusively from the lower levels, it could still make a valuable contribution. Ultimately, the evaluation of any contribution to this anthology, and indeed of the anthology itself, would follow, with due regard to the location in the communicative process, the *decisive criterion*—the one provided by the directing and guiding goal of the overarching process of the bringing together, mediation and fusion of Eastern and Western ideas, namely consilience.

In this lies the merit of this path-breaking anthology: that it not only provides a rich compendium of varied materials from East and West that encourages links to be made between the two collective minds, presents

the positions of both, highlights the values, rules and norms of each, compares and contrasts examples from both, actually establishes links between them and goes beyond particularistic stances by reaching toward commonly pre-supposed universalistic human values; but that it simultaneously also stimulates penetrating thinking about the very concepts and criteria that are needed to analyse and evaluate both the anthology itself and the actual process of rapprochement promisingly in train for some years already.

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# INDEX<sup>1</sup>

## A

*Absent Mother God*, 133, 143n9  
Adorno, Theodor W., 51–53, 56–59,  
61, 63–65, 132, 217, 418n1  
Advaita, 137, 143n13  
*Advaya*, 138  
*Adyashakti*, 139  
Aesthetics, 3, 16, 22, 25, 28n9, 43,  
85, 90, 136, 157, 169n31, 297,  
329–341, 423  
*Agama*, 138  
*Abimsa*, 136, 141  
Alatas, Syed Hussein, vii, viii, 4,  
343–357, 458  
Alterity, 128, 131–134, 140–141, 246,  
257  
Ames, Roger T., 110, 293  
*Anatta*, 15, 138  
Andreski, Stanslav, 347  
*Anekantavada*, 24, 30n16  
*Antara*, 130  
*Antarbhava*, 130  
Anthropocentrism, 3, 13, 90

Appadurai, Arjun, 25, 249  
Arendt, Hannah, 26n4, 121, 122,  
124n11, 285n3, 309, 409, 412  
Aristotle, 123n5, 132, 133, 192, 336  
Audience, ix, 65n1, 118, 404, 412,  
460, 462

## B

Badiou, Alain, 239  
Bangladesh, 344, 347, 350  
Baudelaire, Charles, 115  
Bauman, Whitney, 141  
Bauman, Zygmunt, 179, 209n6, 245,  
249, 265, 266n3, 267n7, 285n2,  
289, 293  
Beck, U., 4, 69, 310, 399, 400, 410,  
411, 413, 414, 416  
Bellah, Robert, 16  
Bell, D. A., 444–449, 453n5  
BenHabib, S., 361, 406  
Bentham, Jeremy, 122n3  
Berry, Thomas, 146

<sup>1</sup>Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

- Bhaskar, Roy, 2, 146, 151, 152, 293  
 Bian Que, 120  
 Blocker, Gene, 339  
 Bodyplacecommons, 276, 277  
 Bohm, David, 155, 160  
 Bondy, Egon, 88–94, 101n13,  
 101n14, 102n22, 102n25  
 Brain hemisphere function, 145–169  
 Buber, Martin, 84, 130, 135, 143n12  
 Buddha, 17, 37, 135, 136, 138–142,  
 181, 186, 210n11, 210n13, 262,  
 331  
 Buddhism, 2, 3, 13, 15–17, 38, 43,  
 88, 93, 101n15, 137, 138, 142,  
 147, 181, 183, 203, 243, 262,  
 292, 293, 307, 308, 310, 331,  
 332, 458
- C**  
 Cai Yuanpei, 338  
 Čarnogurská, Marina, 88–93, 95,  
 102n22  
 Chaosmos, 36, 242  
 Chatterjee, Partha, 20, 27n8, 28n8  
 Chinese civilization, 213–232  
 Chinese philosophy, 2, 74, 86–88,  
 91–93, 102n25, 102n26, 116  
 Christianity, 11, 12, 15, 16, 39, 43,  
 95, 112, 290, 291, 302, 307, 310  
 Cioran, Emil, 115  
 Civilizations, ix, xii, xiii, 17–19, 28n8,  
 44, 86, 134–136, 139, 192, 214,  
 216, 218, 219, 250, 251, 261,  
 262, 265, 281, 311, 318, 322,  
 450, 452  
 Clammer, John, 3, 11, 28n9, 289–311  
 Cognitive complexity, 461, 462  
 Cognitive fluidity, 461, 462  
 Cognitive properties, 459–462  
 Colonialism, viii, 19, 20, 37, 131,  
 265, 267n14, 290, 299, 351,  
 356, 366, 368, 430, 434  
 Communication, 5, 15, 23, 24, 27n7,  
 30n17, 72, 84, 85, 119, 157,  
 162, 255, 319, 324, 400, 402,  
 404–406, 413, 457–463  
 Communicative action, 100n5,  
 399–419  
 Communitarian democracy, 306, 445  
 Communitarianism, 308, 444  
 Complementarity, 87, 131, 148, 149,  
 152, 154–156, 159, 160, 165,  
 167n6, 168n19, 168n22, 192,  
 256, 291, 335, 428, 444  
 Complex integration, 2, 145–169  
 Comte, Auguste, 323  
 Configuration, 15, 19, 28n8, 56–58,  
 60, 62, 64, 65, 65n4, 80, 179,  
 218, 241, 282, 293  
 Conflict, 97, 138, 142, 192, 194, 203,  
 206, 216, 242, 252, 261, 296,  
 364, 365, 372, 385, 390, 393,  
 400, 401, 408, 410, 418n4, 446,  
 448, 452, 460, 461  
 Confucianism, 5, 12–16, 26n5, 87,  
 91, 94, 101n15, 116, 119, 147,  
 213, 222, 308, 309, 337, 384,  
 385, 392, 393, 440–444, 447,  
 448, 450, 458  
 Confucian welfare, 384, 395  
 Confucius, 2, 27n5, 87, 116, 119,  
 213–232, 442, 458  
 Conley, Tom, 235  
 Connell, Raewyn, x, xiii, 10, 22, 23,  
 30n15  
 Consciousness, 11, 15, 17, 36, 38, 40,  
 43, 52, 76, 93, 111, 113, 115,  
 118, 128, 136–139, 141, 142,  
 155, 162, 163, 177, 187, 195,  
 202, 232, 235, 240–243, 281,  
 289, 329, 338, 352, 356, 401,  
 405, 411, 412  
 Consilience, 5, 457–463  
 Conversation, ix, xi, xii, 1, 3, 5, 9–30,  
 39, 44, 159, 161, 162, 164,

167n6, 169n31, 214, 245, 246,  
253, 275, 284, 350, 459, 460  
Corporatism, 382, 388–394  
Corruption, 37, 278, 344–352, 355,  
371, 373, 388, 391, 446  
Corruption of sociology, 345, 346  
Corruption Perception Index, 347  
Cosmogogenesis, 243, 278  
Criminal tribes, 259  
Critical hermeneutics, 73, 86, 97

## D

Dalai Lama, 17, 43, 129  
Dallmayr, Fred, 11, 13, 26–27n5,  
26n4, 245, 308–310  
Dancing dualities, 130, 131, 135, 139,  
141  
Daoism, 88, 94, 95, 101n15, 116,  
147, 331, 458  
de Bary, Wm. Theodore, 440–442,  
453n3  
Debate, 3, 13, 75, 99n4, 100n6, 128,  
181, 205, 226, 232, 272, 280,  
289–311, 343, 346, 370, 382,  
384, 404, 410, 432, 445, 449,  
459, 460  
Deep Ecology, 295, 308  
Deheja, Harish, 16  
Deleuze, Gilles, 3, 58–60, 151, 214,  
233–247, 249–267, 274, 458  
Democracy, 5, 20, 28n8, 102n22,  
253, 254, 275, 279, 282, 283,  
301, 303, 306, 307, 368, 369,  
383, 384, 411, 437–453  
Deng Xiaoping, 440, 441, 447  
Derrida, Jacques, 27n7, 132, 149, 153,  
214, 217, 234, 308–310, 429, 430  
Descartes, René, 58, 85, 100n8, 112,  
114, 174  
De Sousa Santos, Boaventura, 21  
Deterritorialize, Reterritorialize, 240,  
241, 250, 258, 263

*Devas*, 240, 247n5  
Dewey, John, 3, 27n5, 146, 166,  
271–285, 458  
Dewey's Local, 275  
*Dharma*, 38, 142, 185, 221, 226,  
246n2, 331  
Dialectic, 2, 51, 52, 57–62, 79, 87,  
89, 143n13, 145–169  
*Dialectical critical realism*, 146,  
151–153, 165, 167n15  
Dialogic position, 86, 343  
Dialogue, 1–5, 9–30, 43, 77, 78, 84,  
90, 127–129, 131, 138,  
145–169, 205, 208, 213–234,  
245–246, 271, 272, 281, 303,  
306, 307, 309, 311, 339, 355,  
390, 403, 451, 452, 459, 460  
Dickinson, Emily, 111  
Discourse, 4, 5, 13, 14, 19, 21–23,  
27n7, 39, 40, 70, 81, 83, 84,  
100n5, 129, 130, 133, 137, 162,  
163, 179, 187, 189, 203, 220,  
222, 227–229, 284, 290, 302,  
306–308, 330, 334–338, 343,  
356, 361–363, 365, 366, 368–373,  
375, 382–384, 393, 399–401,  
416, 424–426, 433, 446, 460, 461  
Dowman, Keith, 142, 143n4  
Dualism, 2, 25, 27n7, 89, 112, 130,  
131, 133, 135, 136, 148,  
173–210, 236, 239, 245, 275,  
281, 282, 305, 335  
Dumont, Louis, 11, 18, 294  
Durkheim, Emile, 176, 209n3, 209n4,  
210n10, 258, 323  
Dynamic emptiness, 16–17  
Dynamic harmony, 16–17, 27n6  
Dzogchen, 139, 141, 144n21

## E

Ecological self, 308  
Ecology, 3, 22, 271–285, 295, 296, 426

- Ego, 2, 110–117, 121, 128, 134, 138, 142, 294, 441, 460
- Eichmann, Adolf, 121
- Empiricism, 204, 236–239, 241, 244
- Enlightenment, 12, 20, 86, 89, 112, 134, 139, 217, 293, 294, 306, 322, 331, 336
- Ethics, 2, 3, 24, 25, 39, 40, 50, 56, 62, 65, 86–93, 109, 111, 112, 114, 120, 121, 124n10, 132, 133, 215, 219, 230, 271–285, 294, 296, 297, 306, 338, 350, 369, 381, 385, 402, 413, 424, 425, 429, 443
- Ethnocentrism, 9, 18, 23, 25, 69–103
- Eupsychia, 243–244
- Eurocentrism, 23, 25, 53, 290, 330
- European civilization, 17
- Existentialism, 115
- F**
- Face of the other, 128, 132
- Familism, 385
- Flexicurity, 387
- Forst, R., 403, 418n3
- Fraser, N., 403, 409
- Freedom House, 437, 438, 451
- Freud, Sigmund, 113, 115
- Fukuchi, Gen'ichiro, 320–322, 324
- Fukuyama, Francis, 56
- Futures, alternative futures, 2, 35–46
- G**
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 2, 57, 74–78, 80, 84, 99n4, 99n5, 100n8, 339
- Ganeri, Jonardon, 138
- Gayatri Spivak, 141
- German idealism, 113, 338
- Globalization, 1, 14, 69–74, 95, 140, 141, 251, 265, 274, 283, 284, 290, 308–311, 317, 324, 383, 386, 387, 392, 425, 426, 432
- Global South, 2, 22, 23, 49–65, 276, 279, 344, 415
- Goethe, 12, 331
- Graham, A. C., 118
- Guattari, Félix, 3, 58, 60, 169n29, 234–236, 238, 240, 243, 244, 249–267, 274
- Gynocentric Iain, 127, 129, 135, 139–141
- H**
- Habermas, Jürgen, 9, 27n7, 30n17, 53, 62–64, 70, 75, 76, 78, 80, 84, 99n4, 99n5, 100n5, 100n8, 153, 179, 217, 230, 292, 306, 399, 401, 402, 404–408, 411, 414, 418n1, 419n6, 458
- Harmonious society, 88, 89, 384, 386, 395, 442
- Harmony, 4, 14, 16–17, 27n6, 85–87, 90–92, 101n16, 120, 121, 130, 161, 182, 203, 206, 223–225, 230, 363, 366, 377, 381–396, 440, 447, 450, 453n5
- Hegel, G.W.F., 50–53, 56–61, 64, 65, 88, 101n11, 115, 132, 146, 151, 152, 166n4, 337, 338
- Heidegger, Martin, 23, 26n4, 29n12, 63, 78, 85, 100n8, 133, 234, 253, 338, 459
- Hermeneutic, 1, 2, 23–25, 28n10, 29n12, 57, 71, 73–81, 83, 86, 96, 98, 100n5, 100n8, 153, 220, 278, 283
- Hinduism, 239, 293
- Holocaust, 124n11, 132, 293, 347
- Human rights, 5, 102n16, 139, 250, 299, 306, 345, 368, 406, 407, 410, 437–452, 453n2



Hungry ghost, 127, 128, 130, 140, 142  
 Huntington, Samuel, 134, 143n10

## I

Iain, Mc Gilchrist, 129, 142n3  
 Immanence, 96, 199, 236, 239, 278  
 Immanent transcendence, 73, 402  
 Inayatullah, Sohail, 36–38, 40, 43, 44, 46n1, 234, 238, 240, 243, 245, 246n1  
 India, 3, 4, 9, 16, 18–21, 54, 55, 135, 136, 139, 140, 181, 215, 216, 218, 222, 225, 226, 256, 259, 262, 265, 273, 280, 291, 308, 356, 419n8, 424, 431, 433, 452, 453n5, 457, 458  
 Indigenous position, 343  
 Individualism, 5, 11, 18, 26n3, 85, 90, 102n16, 110, 112, 122, 173–175, 178, 180, 196, 206, 208, 295, 306, 385, 391, 449  
 Intercorporeal field, 283  
 Intercultural dialogue, 90, 100n9  
 Interscalar ethics, 271–285  
 Irigaray, Luce (Great Mother), 133  
 Isha Upanishad, 137

## J

Janaka (King), 20, 21  
 Justification, 9, 15, 217, 226, 363, 368, 376, 403–412, 414, 415, 460, 461

## K

Kant, Immanuel, 86, 87, 112–114, 189, 192, 229, 231, 336, 338, 339, 402  
 Kashmiri Saivism, 11, 17, 27n7

Khaldun, Ibn, 44, 254, 255, 259, 350  
 Khmer Rouge, 122  
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 115  
 Know thyself, 111, 131  
 Krishna, Daya, 12, 14, 38, 226

## L

Laclau, Ernesto, 59, 60  
 Lampe, Martin, 112  
 Lanza, Robert, 141  
 Law Philosophy, 213, 291, 307  
 Learning, 1, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 60, 62, 65, 87, 119, 178, 202, 227–229, 261, 327n5, 352, 401, 404, 405, 413, 419n9, 432, 460, 461

## Legitimation

legitimacy, 35, 101n16, 370, 401–408, 410, 412–416, 419n9, 447, 451  
 process, 4, 370, 404, 406, 407, 409, 411–413, 416, 417, 419n9

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (von), 85–87, 242

Leopardi, Giacomo, 115

Levinas, Emmanuel, 84, 128, 132–134, 141, 214

Liu Gangji, 338, 340n17, 341n18

Li Zehou, 338, 339, 340n17, 341n20

Localism, 404

*Lokasamgraha*, 14, 15, 26n4

Loy, David, 27n7, 43, 310

Luhmann, Niklas, 319, 324, 326n2, 326n3

## M

*Mahamudra*, 139, 142

*Mahasandhi*, 139

*Mahavakya*, 137

Maitreya Buddha, 141  
 Mao Zedong, 122  
 Marx, Karl, 51–53, 56–58, 64, 65, 88,  
 101n11, 146, 151, 152, 186,  
 187, 246, 303, 338, 339, 370,  
 376, 401  
*Mayavad*, 138  
 Medicine, 119, 120, 219, 227, 230, 427  
 Meditative Verbs of Pluralizations, 17  
*Mei-Roku-Sha*, 322  
 Meontology, 132  
 Meritocracy, 5, 437–453  
 Middle East and North Africa  
 (MENA), 344  
 Mill, John Stuart, 112, 122n3, 123n3,  
 327n6  
 Mobility, 3, 249–267, 272, 284, 387,  
 391, 394, 446  
 Model of communication, 460, 461  
 Mohanty, J.N., 19, 24, 25  
 Monad, 85, 240–244  
 Montaigne, 357  
 Mukerjee, Radhakamal, 271–285  
*Mukti*, 241, 244, 245  
 Multi-topial hermeneutic, 1, 2, 23–25  
 Musil, Robert, 115  
 Myrdal, Gunnar, 345, 348, 353

**N**

Naess, Arne, 169n29  
 Name of the Father, 133, 135  
 Nandy, Ashis, 30n15, 41, 234, 235,  
 245, 392  
 Naturalness, 93, 330–332, 335  
 Neo-Confucianism, 13, 91, 93, 94,  
 100n6, 147  
 Neohumanism, 41–43, 234  
 Neo-Vedanta, 13  
 New Zealand, 344  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 115, 122n2,  
 133, 159, 164, 187, 307  
 Nigama, 135, 139

Nishi, Amane, 320–324, 326, 327n5,  
 327n6  
 Nomadism, 3, 249–267  
 Non-action, 117  
 Non-self, 117, 202, 237  
 Not-self, 132, 138, 139

**O**

Ontologies, 22, 24, 29n12, 74, 82,  
 89, 92, 93, 102n22, 132, 137,  
 138, 155, 191, 264, 271–285  
 Orientalism, 134, 329  
 Other, 36, 129–138, 149, 156, 157,  
 167n9, 179, 214, 223, 233, 235,  
 236, 293  
 Other Shankara, 137

**P**

Padmasambhava, 139  
 Panikkar, Raimundo, 23, 28n10  
 Patanjali, 136  
*Patipadasamucchaya*, 15  
 Place and self, 283  
 Planetary realizations, 21, 22  
 Plato, 28n9, 111, 112, 192  
 Political Confucianism, 448  
 Political philosophy, 442  
 Postcolonial Cosmopolis, 19–21  
 Post-dualist sensibility, 283  
 Postformal, 146, 162–165, 166n1,  
 167n6, 168n26, 169n31  
 Pragmatism, prophetic pragmatism,  
 26n5, 27n5, 39, 236, 371, 458  
 Prajna Paramita, 138, 139  
 Prakriti, 135, 136, 139  
 Praxis, 27n5, 46n1, 131, 152, 191,  
 236, 241, 244, 262, 298,  
 390  
 Pseudo-Culture, 42  
 Psycho-analysis, 113, 115, 289, 290,  
 292

Public, 14, 26n4, 55, 213, 230, 257,  
274, 277, 278, 283, 284, 296,  
301, 323, 337, 345, 347–351,  
355, 357, 365, 371, 374, 376,  
386–388, 391, 392, 400, 402,  
404, 405, 407, 413, 445, 446,  
460, 461  
*Purusha*, 10, 135, 136, 138, 139

## Q

Quantum physics, 145, 146, 154, 155,  
164

## R

Rawls, J., 406, 418n4, 442, 443, 451,  
452  
Reason, 38–40, 59, 64, 74, 78, 84,  
86, 89, 91, 92, 95, 99n1,  
102n22, 110, 112, 113, 120,  
132, 194, 214, 216–220, 227,  
229, 256, 281, 282, 290, 292,  
293, 305, 306, 321–324, 331,  
337, 338, 351, 357, 375,  
387–389, 392, 403, 407, 427,  
430, 450, 451, 460  
Regularity, 93, 330–332, 335  
Relativistic position, 345, 351  
*Ren*, 93, 155, 450  
Renaissance, 37, 38, 41–43, 91, 112,  
260, 441, 448  
Resolution of conflict, 461  
Right to justification, 403–405, 407,  
409, 410, 412, 414  
Risk society, 4, 399–409, 411, 416,  
418n2  
Roetz, Heiner, 87, 90, 101n11

## S

Sahajayana, 141  
Samkhya, 135–137, 139  
Sankhyayan, Rahul, 3, 249–267,  
458

Sanskrit, 128, 130, 138, 209n8, 236,  
241, 331, 432  
Sardar, Ziauddin, 41, 43  
Sarkar, Prabhat Rainjan, 38, 40–43,  
233–247, 458  
*Sat chit ananda*, 139  
Satpurananda, Kulavadhuta, 136, 142,  
143n17  
Scheler, Max, 114, 115  
Scholarship of integration, 146, 161,  
163, 165  
Schopenhauer, Arthur, 115  
Second-order observation, 325  
Self-description (of society), 3,  
317–327  
Selfhood, *see* Ego  
Selflessness, selfless, 117, 121, 122,  
124n11, 197  
Self Thomas Docherty, 131  
Sen, Amartya, 134  
Shambhushivananda, Acharya, 37, 38,  
40, 41, 43  
Shiva/Shakti, 131, 139  
*Shunya*, 138  
Sikong Tu, 334  
Singapore, 306, 344, 345, 348, 349,  
368, 377n3, 384, 392, 396n1, 445  
Sivaraksha, Sulak, 11  
Social well-being, 390  
Socrates, 111, 112, 151, 227  
Spivak, Gayatri C., 63, 141, 144n20,  
430  
*Sraddha*, 10  
Sri Aurobindo, 13, 26n3, 30n15, 293  
*Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, 9, 11, 14,  
26n4, 221  
Stirner, Max, 113  
Strathern, Marilyn, 19  
Su Shi, 331, 335, 336

## T

Taijitu, 145–169  
Tantra, Tantric, 2, 38, 43, 46n1,  
127–129, 135–137, 139–142,

142n1, 144n18, 144n21, 235,  
236, 238, 241–244, 246n3  
Tantric Kapila, 135, 136  
Taylor, Charles, 100n8, 112, 121,  
122n2, 123n3  
Temporal phases, 460, 461  
Thich Nhat Hanh, 15, 43  
Thoreau, Henry David, 24, 253  
*Tianxia*, 448, 449  
*Tian-Xia*, 14, 15  
Tibetan Buddhism, 243  
Touraine, Alain, 18, 408  
Transparency International, 344, 347,  
350, 413  
Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, 23  
Tu Wei-ming, 13, 15, 16

**U**

Uberoi, J.P.S., 12  
United Arab Emirates (UAE), 344,  
458  
Universalist position, 343  
Universal moral values, 351  
Utilitarianism, 112, 122–123n3, 327n6

**V**

Vajrayana, 128, 139, 142, 144n18  
Vedanta, 13, 14, 137, 138, 141  
Vital resonance, 334

**W**

Wallace, B. Allan, 141  
Wang An Shih, 350  
Weber, Max, xi, 9, 70, 88, 101n11,  
122n2, 178, 189, 190, 209n9,  
210n17, 354, 401, 458  
Wen Tong, 335  
West, Cornel, 38–41, 43, 46n1  
Westminster model of democracy, 451  
Wexler, Philip, 43  
Wholly, 127–144  
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 61, 63, 157  
World order, 13, 49, 439–450, 453n2  
World society, 412

**Y**

Ye Xie, 332, 340n5  
Yin/Yang, 131, 140  
*Yin-yang* theory, 2, 87, 90, 145–147,  
153  
Yoga, 11, 27, 135, 136, 293  
*Yogasutra*, 136  
Yub/Yum, 131

**Z**

*Zhuangzi*, 94, 95, 101n15, 102n25,  
102n26, 117, 118, 334, 340n15  
Zhu Liyuan, 339  
*Zhu-zi-xue*, 322, 326–327n5